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VIKINGS IN THE EAST: SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCE IN KIEVAN RUS

The Vikings, referred to as Varangians in Eastern Europe, were known throughout Europe as traders and raiders, and perhaps the creators or instigators of the first organized Russian state: Kievan Rus. It is the intention of this paper to explore the evidence of the Viking or Varangian presence in Kievan Rus, more specifically the areas that are now the Ukraine and Western Russia. There is not an argument over whether the Vikings were present in the region, but rather over the effect their presence had on the native Slavic people and their government. This paper will explore and explain the research of several scholars, who generally ascribe to one of the rival Norman and Anti-Norman Theories, as well as looking at the evidence that appears in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, some of the laws in place in the eleventh century, and two of the Icelandic Sagas that take place in modern Russia.

The state of Kievan Rus was the dominant political entity in the modern country the Ukraine and western Russia beginning in the tenth century and lasting until Ivan IV's death in 1584.¹ The region "extended from Novgorod on the Volkhov River southward across the divide where the Volga, the West Dvina, and the Dnieper Rivers all had their origins, and down the Dnieper just past Kiev."² It was during this period that the Slavs of the region converted to Christianity, under the ruler Vladimir in 988 C.E.³ The princes that ruled Kievan Rus collected tribute from the Slavic people in the form of local products, which were then traded in the foreign markets, as Janet Martin explains: "The

fur, wax, and honey that the princes collected from the Slav tribes had limited domestic use. They could, however, be converted into valuable items through trade."⁴ There were two major trade routes through the Kievan region, one leading to the North, connecting to the Baltic Sea, and the other following the Volga River to the South, connecting to the Caspian Sea.⁵ The region in which Kievan Rus appeared is the home of the more productive farmland of the former Soviet Block. Another prominent feature of Kievan Rus is the democratic organization on a local level. Within the towns in Kievan Rus, there were democratic meetings in which all could attend and vote, called "veche."⁶

The Vikings, who had a reputation in Western Europe as barbarous invaders across Europe, came from the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. These invaders, sometimes called Northmen or Norsemen as well, were roaming the Northern seas by the ninth century and through the eleventh century. Each of these Viking groups would have their own legacy. The Danish Vikings conquered England as well as raided the coastal countries of Western Europe. The Norwegians, in addition to raiding Western Europe, are credited with the discovery of Iceland, Greenland, and North America, which they called Vinland. The Swedish Vikings made their way from the Baltic Sea down to Constantinople over the mainland of Eastern Europe, and may have founded the first Russian state, Kievan Rus. Eric Oxenstierna, a German scholar, points out: "The Vikings were the first people to visit four continents of this globe, a staggering fact, made all the more astounding when we take into consideration how far off the beaten track their Scandinavian homeland was."⁷ The four continents referred to here are Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. The Vikings had a democratic organization within their smaller groups, with towns and sometimes larger regions having large

meetings called "athing," which was actually similar to the Kievan "veche" in that all male citizens could participate.

T.J. Oleson from the University of Manitoba wrote of their descent from the north in their search for economic security: "In the last decade of the eighth century there emerged from the deep fjords of Norway and the sunny sounds of Denmark the last and most terrible of the Teutonic barbarians."⁸ The Vikings were both traders and raiders. The word "vik" was used by the Scandinavians as the word for a "trading site." This came from the Swedish word, "vika," which means "to yield or withdraw," which suggests that trading sites were meant to be peaceful. The Scandinavians who traded were said to go "a-Viking," and the trading tradition had more to do with the name Viking than the numerous invasions.⁹

The word Varangian was often used by the Slavs in Eastern Europe and Kievan Rus rather than Viking, Norseman, or Northman as in other parts of Europe. This came from Old Norse, in which the word "várar" is translated as "oath" or "pledge" and the word "væringi" is a "sworn brotherhood."¹⁰ The term Rus, spelled Rhos in Greek records, was used in many written records from both Western and Eastern Europe to describe the Vikings in Eastern Europe. The word most likely came from the Swedish word "Roðr," which meant "oar-way." This word would have been the root of the word used by the men coming from Sweden to describe themselves, "Roðs-men." The Finnish people of Ladoga heard this, and used the word "Rotsi" to describe the foreigners. The Finnish name for Sweden then, became "Routsi" and as the Slavs adopted the word, it was changed to "Rus."¹¹ There are other theories, however, as to the origin of the word. One of these theories says that the Swedes had come from the town of Roslagen, and this

was the word that the Finns adapted, and another theory declares that Rhos had come from the Greek word for “red,” given to the Scandinavians because of the red, weather beaten faces of the men.¹² Those searching for another root to the word that is not based in Scandinavia have looked to the River Ros, which is a tributary to the Dnieper, or the Rosh tribe from the Bible.¹³

H.R. Ellis Davidson, a British historian, reports that there was likely Swedish activity in the Baltic Sea by 675 C.E., though acknowledging there is not much archaeological evidence to prove this.¹⁴ Samuel Cross, a historian from Harvard, states that much of the conquest and organization of the Vikings occurred during the period between 750 and 800 C.E., when the Swedes set up their dominance on the eastern and southern Baltic coasts.¹⁵ The Swedes may have arrived in Constantinople from the Dnieper River as early, or late, as 838 C.E.¹⁶ The Greeks were aware of the Rhos in 839 C.E., at which time was the first written western account of them, but were talking about activity in Western Europe.¹⁷ Whenever they arrived, however, their motives were clear, as Samuel Cross explains: “The motive which had originally attracted Scandinavian warrior-merchants into the Russian area was trade, and similarly the background of Russian relations with Central Europe during the prosperity of Kiev was also commercial.”¹⁸

Archaeological evidence of the Vikings includes ships and swords, as well as graves found around Europe, including in modern Russia, that represent Viking burial traditions. A grave, for example, contained provisions for the afterlife including servants, dependant on social status. Rune Stones, which use the alphabet used by the Vikings, can be found throughout Europe and around the world.

Was Russia founded by the Swedish Vikings who visited and settled in the region? One realm of thought on the subject maintains that the local Slavs founded the first Russian state of Kievan Rus without outside help. This theory, referred to as the Anti-Norman Theory, was promoted by scholars in Soviet Russia in the twentieth century. It has been around much longer, as demonstrated by this story about an eighteenth century scholar who was presenting his research into the origins of Russia and had concluded that Kievan Rus had been founded by the Vikings, referred to here as Norsemen, and not the native Slavs:

On September 6, 1749, Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705-1783), the official Russian imperial historiographer and member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, was to deliver an anniversary speech on the origins of Russia, entitled “Origines gentis et nominis Russorum.” His talk was based on research published in 1736 by his older compatriot, Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer (1694-1738), who introduced sources like the *Annales Bertinaini* and works by the Emperor Constantinus Porphyrogenitus into East European scholarship. From these, academian Müller developed the theory that the ancient state of Kievan Rus’ was founded by Norsemen, and it was this theory that he began to propound in his speech.

Müller was never to finish this lecture. A tumult arose among the members of the Imperial Academy of Russian national background, who protested such infamy.¹⁹

Müller’s conjecture is known as the Norman Theory, and in this instance it was met with disgust, and one of the astrologists in the audience told the author that he had dishonored their nation by suggesting such a thing. Another scholar, Mixail Vasil’evic Lomonosov was called to investigate whether Müller’s theories were “harmful to the interests and glory of the Russian Empire.”²⁰ This committee, made up of Imperial Academy members, forbade Müller from continuing his research and confiscated his previous work. Eventually the scholar turned to the history of Siberia, which was not nearly so controversial. Harvard Professor Omeljan Pritsak presents the arguments of both sides

on the topics of word origins, and then gives his own interpretation, in which he states that both sides have weaknesses in their arguments. Pritsak gives an overview of the rival theories:

The Normanists believe (the word believe is used here to characterize the intellectual climate in question) in the Norse origin of the term Rus'. They consider the Norsemen - or, more exactly, the Swedes - as the chief organizers of political life, first on the banks of Lake Il'men and later on the shores of the Dnieper River.

On the other hand, the Anti-Normanists embrace the doctrine that the Rus' were Slavs who lived to the south of Kiev from prehistoric times, long before the Norsemen appeared on the European scene.²¹

For his research, Pritsak used the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, the *Annales Bertiniani*, Constantine Porphyrogenitos' *De Administrando Imperio*, and the works of Islamic travelers, such as Ibn Khurdadbeh. In the end, the author asks whether the whole argument of Normanist versus Anti-Normanist is outdated. He believes that it is. He writes that the Russian state came not from only the Slavs or the Scandinavians, but that it was a multiethnic community that evolved over the centuries.

N. Riasanovsky's "The Norman Theory of the Origin of the Russian State" challenges the Norman Theory:

The purpose of this article is not to add another opinion to the already enormous number of opinions on the subject of the origin of the Russian state. Its aim is rather to contribute towards the elimination of the fantastic discrepancy which exists with regard to this problem between the opinions of modern scholars on the one hand and the obsolete statements one can find in various textbooks and general histories, on the other.²²

The author states that the influence of the Vikings was 'negligible.'²³ He writes that there is no evidence of Viking influence on Russian law, language, literature, or religion. He argues that the use of the word "Rus" in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, compiled around the year 1113 in Kiev,²⁴ does not always refer to the Scandinavians, as he states is

often used argued by Normanists. The *Russian Primary Chronicle*, a compiled history of Russia from the twelfth century, is also known as the *Chronicle of Nestor*, the *Kiev Chronicle*, and the *Povest vremennykh let* (“*Tale of Bygone Years*”).²⁵ He writes that the Scandinavians who were in Russia left again quickly, or that they adapted themselves to the Slavic community and culture, which would make their influence ‘negligible.’

N. Riasanovsky cites Arabic sources, some of the Scandinavian Sagas, Russian Laws, and the *Russian Primary Chronicle* in his work. The *Russian Primary Chronicle*, he states, is the most important of these, which he mentions in his first footnote of the work, as he also discusses some of the prominent Anti-Normanists at the time this article was written, in 1947:

Especially valuable for the history of the controversy are the works of Schloetzer, Bayer, Krug, Kruse, Kunik, Pogodin, Thomsen, Beliaev, on the Normanist side, of Lomonosov, Kostomarov, Ewers, Gedeonov, Ilovaisky on the anti-Normanist side. For the present status of the problem see the works of Moshin, Vernadsky, Derzhavin, Grekov, Mavrodin. The *Russian Primary Chronicle*, and some Byzantine and Oriental sources constitute the most important primary material.²⁶

The rival theories on Kievan Rus’ origins seem to have gone through phases, where only one of them is acceptable at a time, and the other does not even enter the ring at these points. Part of the reason behind this is nationalism and political influences, such as the communist government defending the Anti-Normanist Theory because the leaders wanted to inspire their countrymen with the greatness achieved by their ancestors. Professor Pritsak seems to want to change this completely and combine the theories to try to eliminate some of the politics that separate these historians. The use of the same sources to defend opposing ideas and how they came to their conclusions is interesting.

Samuel H. Cross’ work, “Mediaeval Russian Contacts with the West” was read in

Washington, D.C. at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in 1934 (it was published the next year in *Speculum*). Cross was trying to bring prominence to Russia within the forum of medieval studies, as he begins his work “for the average mediaevalist Russia may very naturally seem a comparatively remote area on the border of Asia, connected with the west only through the Scandinavian immigration and by cultural and religious dependence on Byzantium.”²⁷ Cross does not focus solely on the Viking influence, he also discusses trade to the west, with Germany and how some rulers in Russia tried to arrange beneficial marriages for their children with the ruling class in western countries.

Cross discusses the works of T.B. Kendrick, whose *History of the Vikings* was written in 1930, and Charles Marshall Smith, who wrote *Norsemen of Adventure*, whose works described focused on the Vikings, or Norsemen, and both of these works discuss Russia in this context. He reports that for most of the nineteenth century, the nationalistic movement in Russia led to a tendency of Russian historians to discount the impact of the Scandinavians in the founding of their country. Anti-Normanists report that the native Slavs were the ones who gave rise to Kiev as the center of their first organized state. The Normanists link the governmental system in Kievan Rus to that which the Vikings used. They also find Viking origins in Slavic society in the form of words and other parts of the culture, such as religion and burial rites. Cross cites the work of Danish historian Ad. Stender-Petersen, who had written the *Saga of the Varangians as a Source of the Old Russian Chronicle* as further evidence of the Viking influence.

It appears that Cross ascribes to the Norman Theory, or at least does not ignore evidence of Viking influence. He discusses the Vikings using a trade route through

Russia, and settling along this route. By the end of the ninth century, these immigrants had become the ruling class along these rivers that comprised the trade route.²⁸ He discusses the influence of specific people found in primary sources, such as Princess Olga, the daughter of one of these immigrants, found in Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De Caerimoniis*, written in the tenth century, and her son Svyatoslav, who was described by Leo Diaconus. The Sagas are a source for Cross as well, as he relates part of the story of Harald the Severe.

Later work by Cross, such as his 1946 "The Scandinavian Infiltration into Early Russia," focuses on the same topic. This work discusses some trading practices and rulers in the area that would become Russia. Cross used some Arabic sources in this work, such as Ibn Khurdadhbih's *Book of the Routes and Realms*, written around 894 C.E. and another work of the same name by Wazir Al Gaibani around thirty years later. These works discussed the presence of Scandinavians in northern Russia, and that their 'infiltration' was gradual, not just a sudden burst of immigration.²⁹ In his discussion on trade, Cross reports that the Russians had been trading with Byzantium since the early ninth century, as well as Greek and Arabic contacts, although the primary trade items were not focused on.

In 1954, Frederick I. Kaplan wrote "The Decline of the Khazars and the Rise of the Varangians." Kaplan discusses the methods by which the Varangians gained power in the Russian region, one of which was their ability to sail across the sea, while the Khazars were able only to use their boats in the rivers. As other articles have discussed, the Varangians were in the region for commercial value.

Among the primary sources used by Kaplan are several sources on the Khazars, of

which he explains are few and that the historian must be careful while using them. He also used the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and Constantine Porphyrogenitos' *De Administrando Imperio*. For other sources, he uses the works of several historians, including Kerner, Macartney, Sanskjij, Vernadsky, Brutkus, and Eberhard. Many cities in Kievan Rus were either founded or conquered by the Vikings over the years, including Kiev and Novgorod, as P.G. Foote, and D.M. Wilson describe:

A number of towns are associated with the Vikings and some of them may have been founded by them: at one time or another, between the ninth and eleventh centuries, the Vikings controlled, for purposes of trade and military power, the towns of Staraja Ladoga, Novgorod, Kiev, Izborsk, Bjeloozero, Chernigov, Rostov, and the precursor of Smolensk. On the basis of these towns they developed and controlled the north-south commercial routes through western Russia from the Baltic to the Black Sea.³⁰

William Roos' article, "The Swedish Part in the Viking Expeditions," discusses the presence of Vikings from Sweden in addition to those from Denmark and Norway, was published in 1892. He states that most writing done on Vikings in Western Europe has ignored the presence of the Swedes. He wants to fill in the gaps left by previous historians on the subject of the Swedish Vikings. He tries to show that the Swedish Vikings were present in Western Europe and highlights some of the exploits elsewhere of the Vikings. Roos is focusing on Viking activity in Western Europe rather than Eastern Europe, but has pertinent information on the Swedes. He discusses the Swedes in comparison to the other Scandinavians in their time:

The Swedes here present several strong claims for consideration. Until the eleventh century they stand forward as the leading and most enterprising of the Scandinavian powers; as the earliest Vikings and the most extensive conquerors east of the North Sea - so Norwegian historians affirm.³¹

Roos explores the significance of why so many western coins have been found in Sweden

in archaeological digs. He discusses the trading that likely led to these coins being in the Scandinavian country. In this discussion, he writes that most of the coins were likely acquired through trade with countries to the west and that trade to the east was less likely to involve coinage. He also writes that most of the English coins probably came through tribute from the British or the spoils of plunder.

The trade route from the Baltic to the Mediterranean Seas is mentioned in Roos' work, although he writes that it was not the Swedes but the Danes who had control of the Vistula and Oder Rivers.³² Some historians dispute this theory, and relate that the Swedish presence was more dominant than that of the Danes, although Scandinavian presence is not disputed.. What he does credit to the Swedes, referred to here as Varangians, is: "The Varangian legions of Russia and the Byzantine empire were founded by, and composed mainly of, Swedes, and we know that they formed a proportion of the Thingalið forces in England."³³

In this article, William Roos used as sources Tacitus' *Germania*, which was written in 98 C.E. by the Roman author,³⁴ in which he states that he found the earliest reference to the Vikings, the Scandinavian Sagas, which are the traditional stories of the Vikings' exploits, Irish chronicles, which discussed the presence of Vikings in Ireland, as well as secondary sources. It is actually a bit difficult to decipher which sources are primary and which are secondary, as the article's footnotes do not include dates.

Another article discussing the significance of financial evidence is Grace Faulkner Ward's article "The English Danegeld and the Russian Dan." Ward writes that there were many raids by the Vikings into Russia, and that these led to the native Slavs paying tribute to the invaders, much like the tribute paid by the English. She writes that the

tribute was similar to taxes, and that there was a religious aspect for the Scandinavians. Ward writes, “among the Scandinavians there was an ancient tradition of a penny paid to each of the ‘men of Odin’ for guarding the land and for sacrifice.”³⁵ The tribute was often much more than a penny, though, as the city of Novgorod paid 300 grivni, the local currency, every year.³⁶

Edward S. Reisman discusses some aspects of both the Slavs and Varangians in “The Cult of Boris and Gleb: Remnant of a Varangian Tradition?,” which he wrote in 1978. Boris and Gleb were Slavic princes who were murdered and “became the first canonized saints of the infant Russian church.”³⁷ Reisman writes that it is his belief that the reverence given to these princes is rooted in both the dual-faith, called Dvoverie, that was present after the conversion to Christianity in Russia and the influence of the cult of Odin, the Scandinavian god.³⁸

He explained that the paganism of the Slavs differed from that of the Scandinavians in that there was no equivalent to the god Odin, who was the father of the gods, much like Jupiter (Roman) or Esus (Celtic). The Slavic god Perun was the god of thunder, and had many of the same qualities as the Norse god Thor. Each was equipped with a weapon with which he made thunder: Thor had a hammer and Perun had an axe. Perun also had influence over warriors.³⁹ In Scandinavian paganism, Thor was as important to the worshipers as Odin, and often it was his name that was invoked first. Reisman writes that the Varangians were faithful to Thor as they immigrated to Russia and they were able to see that Perun had many similarities.⁴⁰

The similarities between Slavic and Scandinavian beliefs extended into the reverence of fallen princes. The canonization of Boris and Gleb is similar to the

canonization of St. Olav of Norway. Olav was a king who also had priest-like influence and after his death, “the blood from his corpse had healing powers.”⁴¹ The Russian church would also canonize two Varangians, Feodor and his son Ioann, who were both killed in place of the sacrifice to Perun of Ioann, which had been planned by the Slavs.⁴²

The discussion of Varangian influence is linked to the state of Kievan Rus, and while Valentine Tschebotarioff-Bill’s “The Circular Frontier of Muscovy” is generally discussing Moscow and Muscovy, the author also discusses the fall of the Kievan Rus society. He writes that the frontier, in this case the western frontier, has always been important for Russia. He writes that the democracy that could be found in the Cossack communities at the time Muscovy was in power was based on that which was used in Kievan Rus. Democracy in the tenth and eleventh centuries in this society was unlike the government before or after Kievan Rus.⁴³ He writes that after the fall of Kiev, many things were lost to the new Russian state: “Gone was the easy access to the sea, the profitable trade routes, the prosperous commercial centers. Gone was the people’s participation in governmental affairs.”⁴⁴

The more democratic society of the Kievan Rus is unlike anything else created by the Slavs and more like the Vikings, who had democratic meetings often, in their home countries as well as in those lands they had conquered. The emphasis of trade in Kievan Rus’ society would reflect a Viking influence as well, as they would have been one of the main connections to Western Europe. The Vikings must have had an influence, although how much is unknown.

The Russian *Primary Chronicle*, which was compiled in the early twelfth century by monks of the time, reports that the Varangians demanded tribute from the northern

Slavs and their Finnish neighbors in 859 C.E., and were successful in their collection for only a short time before the Slavs and Finns paying the tribute revolted and succeeded in ejecting the Varangians. Problems arose for the Slavs after the victorious expulsion of the Varangians, as historian Samuel Cross described:

Finding themselves unable to preserve order, they were speedily obliged to invite their oppressors to return. The story continues that, in response to this plea, three Varangian brothers, Rurik, Sineus, and Trevor (whose names are readily reducible to the Old Norse Hroerekr, Signiutr, and Porvadr) migrated to Russia with their kinsfolk. Rurik settled in Novgorod, Sineus at Byeloozero, and Truvor at Izborst. Upon the death of his brethren, Rurik became sole ruler, and set up vassals to control the existing north Russian cities. Two of his retainers, Askold and Dir (equivalent to Old Norse Höskuldr and Dyri) crossed the portage from Lovat to Dnieper and established themselves as rulers over Kiev, the inhabitants of which had hitherto been tributaries of the Khazars.⁴⁵

This story supports the Norman Theory in that it not only demonstrates the presence of the Vikings, it says that the local Slavs had actually invited them to be rulers in the area. The princes of the Kievan Rus, the princes under Mongol rule, and most of the princes through the Muscovy period were part of the 'Rurickid' Dynasty, lasting until Ivan IV died without an heir. Samuel Cross goes on to report that Arabian records say that the Viking movement south, for settlement and trading purposes, was not based in quick invasions and these records do not dispute the Russian *Primary Chronicle* in the matter of inviting Rurik and his brothers back to the area:

The legendary date of the traditional calling of the princes thus harmonizes with the archaeological evidence as to the period of Scandinavian immigration. The Arabic sources indicate, however, not only that this penetration was a gradual process, but also that the Scandinavian traders were established in Northern Russia appreciably before the annalistic date of 859 and prior to the development of the Dnieper trade route, which took on its subsequent importance only in the two centuries following this date.⁴⁶

The Russian *Primary Chronicle* and these Arabian records are important primary sources,

which can be used to learn about local cultures as well as those of invaders, in this case the Vikings. In addition to Samuel Cross, some of the other authors quoted in this paper, including H.R. Ellis Davidson, P.G. Foote, and D.M. Wilson, also used the *Russian Primary Chronicle* in their research. Other Russian and Eastern European sources, such as the law codes of the time, can add to this knowledge, especially to compare to those of the Vikings, in order to find similarities that had been added to the laws of Russia and Eastern Europe after the Vikings became traders or invaders, or both, in the region. Among the things to look for in these sources would be actual mentions of “Vikings” or “Varangians” in the laws or, less directly, mention of laws concerning foreigners. Checking for similarities in laws of the natives and the Vikings could indicate aspects of their relationships.

In addition to these primary sources there is archaeological evidence of the Vikings in the region. Ships and swords, in addition to graves in Viking tradition can be found around Europe. These prove where the Vikings went and what they did where. A grave, for example, contains objects used by or needed by the dead in life. Like the Egyptians, the Vikings gave the dead provisions for the afterlife and sometimes gave the deceased, according to position in life, servants who would not have otherwise died at the time. The Vikings left more direct evidence in the form of Rune Stones, which can commemorate fallen Vikings, battles that took place, or other things that happened using the Runic alphabet, which includes some letters that resemble some Roman letters and is mostly created with straight lines. These can also be found throughout Europe and in other places around the world. These stones can be difficult to date, however, compared to such carbon datable items such as wood, clothing, and food.

These authors have explored several different primary sources, two of which will be delved into in the remainder of this text, along with two of the Icelandic Sagas in which the main characters travel to Russia. Most of the authors whose works have been explored have made an argument for either the Norman Theory or the Anti-Norman Theory. The sources themselves have biases built into them by their authors. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* has inherent biases toward the native peoples, as well as toward Christian figures, because it was written for their benefit. The law codes, as will be demonstrated, have biases built into them concerning foreigners. The sagas are biased as well, as they were written to glorify certain figures' actions and lives. These sources will be explored with both the Norman and Anti-Norman Theories in mind, although not trying to disprove either. The intention is to demonstrate that it was not only the Slavs or the Varangians that organized the society of Kievan Rus, but that both groups had impact toward the evolution of the state in the region.

The *Russian Primary Chronicle* hereafter *Chronicle*, which has been used in the research of many scholars above, was compiled in the twelfth century by monks. Nestor, the traditionally recognized author, was one of these monks. This work is also known as the *Chronicle of Nestor*, the *Kiev Chronicle*, and the *Povest vremennykh let* (“*Tale of Bygone Years*”), is one of the primary sources explored further below. Some of the law codes in place in the period covered by the *Chronicle* are also investigated.

The *Russian Primary Chronicle* serves two major purposes. One is to relate the history of Russia and the other is to relate the history of Russian Christianity. The figures who had converted to Christianity are discussed in greater detail than those who had not. Like many historical documents, the *Chronicle* is the story of the leaders of Russia

through time, and not the story of the peasants.

The dates given for the events described in the *Chronicle* such as the following set of numbers, 6368-6370 and 860-862 (C.E.), are from two different calendars. The first is the date according to the Biblical beginning of time, as calculated by the Byzantine system.⁴⁷ The second set of dates is from either the Gregorian or Julian calendars used today. According to the Byzantine system, the world was created 5509 years before the birth of Christ. However, if 6368 corresponds with 860, and 860 is the number of years from the birth of Christ, then if 860 is subtracted from 6368, then the difference should be 5509, but it is 5508. This means that if the dates are not off on purpose, then the biblical count includes a year zero, unlike the calendars used today.

This is not the only inconsistency in the dating in the *Chronicle*, as Samuel Cross points out in the introduction of his translation of *The Russian Primary Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* gives the date 852, or 6360, as the beginning of the reign of Emperor Michael,⁴⁸ while the Columbia Encyclopedia reports that his reign began in 842,⁴⁹ ten years earlier. Cross refers to Shakhmatov, who found an explanation for the inconsistency by explaining that through an error in the only chronological reference in Russia in the twelfth century as the *Chronicle* was compiled.⁵⁰ Cross relates that the inconsistencies such as this all occur before 945 (C.E.)⁵¹

In an early passage, the *Chronicle* states that the Slavs were unable to rule themselves and found princes of Varangian, or Viking, origin to bring law to the region:

6368-6370 (860-862). The tributaries to the Varangians drove them back beyond the sea and, refusing them further tribute, set out to govern themselves. There was no law among them, but tribe rose against tribe. Discord thus ensued between them, and they began to war one against another. They said to themselves, "Let us seek a prince who may rule over us and judge us according to the Law." They accordingly went

overseas to the Varangian Russes: these particular Varangians were known as Russes, just as some are called Swedes, and others Normans, English, and Gotlanders, for they were thus named. The Chuds, the Slavs, the Krivichians, and the Ves' then said to the people of Rus', "Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us." They thus selected three brothers, with their kinsfolk, who took with them all the Russes and migrated. The oldest, Rurik, located himself in Novgorod; the second, Sineus, at Beloozero; and the third, Truvor, in Izborsk. On account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of Rus'. The present inhabitants of Novgorod are descended from the Varangian race, but aforesaid they were Slavs.⁵²

The year before the first of either of these dates that the *Chronicle* reports that the Varangians had imposed tribute upon the Slavs and other native peoples. This leaves the question of why, if the Varangians had only been around for a year, did the natives go directly to them as law enforcers. Why did they choose three brothers rather than one prince, as they had thought before their trip overseas? Another question for this entry is why did "the Russes" immigrate with the brothers when they were asked to rule.

Perhaps this story of the Varangians being invited to rule is not even close to what happened, but that the locals wanted nothing to do with the Varangians. The Varangians may have simply taken over the region and later the story emerged in order to defend their position of power. As can be seen in later years, the leaders, descended from Rurik, were constantly fighting to take tribute, and even those tribes who had paid a father for years may not be willing to give tribute to his son after his death. Rurik's rule, which lasted at least ten years, including the two years when his brothers were also in power in their cities, is largely unaccounted for.

The *Chronicle* states that two men, Askold and Dir, had come with Rurik and decided to go south from Novgorod. They took over Kiev, with the help of other Varangians, and ruled at the same time as Rurik.⁵³ After Rurik's death, the date is

unclear because there is a nine year heading to the entry, one of his relatives took over until his son Igor' was old enough to rule. Oleg led his newly acquired troops south and took over Kiev from Askold and Dir:

He then came to the hills of Kiev, and saw how Askold and Dir reigned there.... requesting that they should come forth to greet them as members of their race. Askold and Dir straightway came forth. Then all the soldiery jumped out of the boats, and Oleg said to Askold and Dir, "You are not princes nor even of princely stock, but I am of princely birth." Igor' was brought forward, and Oleg announced that he was the son of Rurik. They killed Askold and Dir.... Oleg set himself up as prince in Kiev, and declared that it should be the mother of Russian cities."⁵⁴

At this point, all the people who came to Kiev with Oleg were referred to as Russes, whether they had come from Varangian or Slavic heritage. This took place in the range of years given as 6388-6390, or 880-882 (C.E.). The declaration of Kiev as the "mother of Russian cities"⁵⁵ is an important step toward the organization of the state of Kievan Rus. The following years consisted of Oleg conquering and receiving tribute from various tribes. Eventually, he made his way to Greece and the Byzantine Empire, where he would make peace with Byzantine Emperors Leo and Alexander.

The first treaty between Oleg and the emperors in 907 C.E. was really less about creating a peaceful relationship with a basis for law enforcement. The 907 Treaty states that the "Greeks," meaning the Byzantines, would pay the Russes tribute and those Russes who go to Byzantine Empire to trade will be given a month's provisions and those who are not there to trade do not get these provisions, and that the prince, Oleg, was in charge of keeping his countrymen from attacking Greece and Constantinople. This treaty, unlike the later one, mentions the gods Perun and Volos (or Veles) who were revered by the Russes, rather than the Christian God.⁵⁶ Some of the differences between the text in Samuel Cross' translation of the *Chronicle* and Daniel H. Kaiser's copy of the

907 and 911 Treaties can be attributed to multiple meanings of words or the author's way of forming the translated sentences.⁵⁷

At first it seems that the second treaty was actually written by the Byzantines, as the people are referred to as both Greeks and Christians, until it says the words "you Greeks,"⁵⁸ which would show that the Russes were the authors, showing that there was input from both sides in the creation of the treaty. Much of the treaty, reproduced unofficially within the *Chronicle*, is a list of laws pertaining to the actions between the two peoples. Another translation of the treaty, which may be a more accurate copy, includes basically the same information, but states that it is an official copy of the treaty.⁵⁹ With this treaty, in 911 C.E., Oleg had apparently finished creating his empire, it seems, as the *Chronicle* states: "Thus Oleg ruled in Kiev, and dwelt at peace with all nations."⁶⁰ Each of these treaties included many names of representatives from Kiev, and these names were given in the *Chronicle* in their Varangian forms, although they are also given in the Slavic forms in the official versions presented by Daniel Kaiser.

Igor', Rurik's son, took control of Kiev and the tributaries in 913 C.E., and took measures to maintain the tribute payments. At the same time the *Chronicle* relates, and shows its Christian focus, "began the reign of Constantine"⁶¹ Igor' began to have problems from within his realm quickly, as the Derevlans did not wish to pay tribute after Oleg's death. The Derevlans, who were based in a region southwest of Kiev, would soon be forced to pay a higher tribute to Igor' than they had been paying to Oleg. The prince battled the Byzantine Empire and Greece for years, sometimes losing. The *Chronicle* relates that Igor' fought the Byzantine Empire from 935 until he made peace through a treaty in 945. During this time, Igor' had to call for reinforcements after his

retreat to Kiev, and sent for the mercenary services of the Varangians: “Upon his return, Igor’ began to collect a great army, and sent many messengers after the Varangians beyond the sea, inviting them to attack the Byzantines, for he desired to make war upon them.”⁶² As this is at the end of the period noted before this excerpt of a passage that covers the years 935-941, it likely happened in the last year listed. The *Chronicle* does not explain why it took another three years for Igor’ to return to battle with the Byzantines in 944, but there were Varangians among his troops, and this campaign was victorious, as the Russes gained the most benefit from the treaty created afterward.

The Varangians mentioned at this point are not the same Varangians as had been called “Russes” in the earlier passage, because they came “from beyond the sea.”⁶³ This demonstrates that there was further contact between the Varangians than those who came with Rurik and his brothers. The earlier passage states that there were different names for different groups of Varangians, though it neglects to specify which of these alternate groups came as mercenaries for Igor’. Much of the 945 treaty is similar to the 911 treaty, although there seems to be more focus on the trading relations and less focus on the law enforcement in the later treaty.⁶⁴ Within this treaty, the Varangians are mentioned in their relationship to Christianity.⁶⁵ On his way home, Igor would be killed by the Derevlans.⁶⁶ Igor’ had been married to Olga in 903, since she had been “brought to him from Pskov.”⁶⁷ At the time of his death, Igor’s son Svyatoslav is described as a boy.⁶⁸ The lengthy description of Olga’s life after her husband’s death is likely due to her conversion to Christianity (and later sainthood) as she was the first of the Russes to do so during her visit to Greece:

6456-6463 (948-955) Olga went to Greece, and arrived at Tsar’grad. The reigning Emperor was named Constantine, son of Leo. Olga came before

him...He conversed with her and remarked that she was worthy to reign with him in his city. When Olga heard his words, she replied that she was still a pagan, and that if he desired to baptize her, he should perform this function himself; otherwise, she was unwilling to accept baptism. The Emperor, with the assistance of the Patriarch, accordingly baptized her.⁶⁹

Many of the entries into the *Chronicle* that include the Varangians discuss the use of Russian leaders, who had descended from the Varangian Rus', of other groups of Varangians as mercenaries. Their use as warriors for Igor' has been shown above, and later they were used by Vladimir, Svyatopolk, and Yaroslav.

Vladimir, another individual focused on in the *Chronicle* for his baptism into Christianity, was Igor's grandson. One of three brothers, Vladimir was out for revenge against his brother Yaropolk, who had killed their brother Oleg and the two remaining brothers had also been fighting for the hand of Rogvolod's daughter Rogned as their wife. This passage comes from the entry from the years 6486-6488 (978-980):

Vladimir then collected a large army, consisting of Varangians, Slavs, Chuds, and Krivichians, and marched against Rogvolod. At this time, the intention was that Rogned should marry Yaropolk. But Vladimir attacked Polotsk, killed Rogvolod and his two sons, and after marrying the prince's daughter, he proceeded against Yaropolk.⁷⁰

Because Vladimir had a friend in one of Yaropolk's top men, there was not a battle when they met, there was to be a meeting between the brothers. Yaropolk went to meet his brother, and although he was warned that he was about to be killed when he got there, he entered the meeting: "Yaropolk came accordingly before Vladimir, and when he entered the door, two Varangians stabbed him in the breast with their swords, while Blud shut the doors and would not allow his men to follow him. Thus Yaropolk was slain."⁷¹

During Vladimir's reign, one story that focuses on a Varangian man who lived in Kiev is included in the *Chronicle* that discusses the religion of the realm. This particular

Varangian was a Christian, while his neighbors the Russes were still pagans. The story relates that the pagans killed this Christian man and his son. The appearance of this account emerges directly before the discussion of how Vladimir decided which religion he and his country should convert to, when he decided that the religion of the Greeks was the best of the four options he was presented with, and converted to Greek Orthodoxy.⁷²

Later, Vladimir's son Yaroslav would call upon the Varangians to join his army against his own father, to whom he was refusing to pay tribute. Vladimir had threatened to attack Yaroslav, but illness gave his son time to prepare: "6523 (1015). Vladimir was desirous of attacking Yaroslav, the latter sent overseas and imported Varangian reinforcements, since he feared his father's advance."⁷³ As Yaroslav built his army, Vladimir died of the disease that had slowed his attack, and his death was kept a secret from Yaroslav.⁷⁴

Another of Vladimir's sons, Svyatopolk, used Varangians as mercenaries as well. The Varangians were sent to kill his brother Boris, who had been with his father when Vladimir died and had already been stabbed by other messengers of Svyatopolk whose heritage was not specified. The Varangians are later described as "desperate murderers, godless wretches that they were"⁷⁵ were then directly responsible for the death of Boris, who would later become St. Boris. Within the same year, the Varangians Yaroslav had collected to fight his father were causing problems for him in Novgorod:

While Yaroslav had not yet heard of his father's death, he had many Varangians under his command, and they offered violence to the inhabitants of Novgorod and to their wives. The men of Novgorod then rose and killed the Varangians in their market place. Yaroslav was angry....he summoned before him the chief men of the city who had massacred the Varangians, and craftily killed them. That same night news came from Kiev sent by his sister Predslava to the effect that his father was dead, that Svyatopolk had settled in Kiev after killing Boris, and was

now endeavoring to compass the death of Gleb, and she warned Yaroslav to be exceedingly on his guard against Svyatopolk.⁷⁶

The following year, Yaroslav gathered an army of forty-one thousand soldiers, of which the chronicler specified that one thousand were Varangians, to attack Svyatopolk in Kiev. The specification that one thousand Varangians were among Yaroslav's troops suggests that these warriors were different than the other forty thousand. These men were called for specifically from overseas, suggesting that they were highly sought after allies, perhaps because they were better warriors than the locals. It is possible also, that these mercenaries were called because Yaroslav knew that they would be available and he knew he needed more warriors, and the Varangians were just like the rest of the troops.

Svyatopolk heard of his brother's plan, and met him with his "innumerable army of Russes and Pechenegs."⁷⁷ When the two armies met, they stewed for months, staring at each other from opposite banks of the Dnieper River, and did not begin the battle until the temperatures were beginning to freeze the water. Yaroslav's army managed to push his brother's troops onto the ice, which then broke underneath them, and Svyatopolk fled and returned the next year. Yaroslav again gathered an army of Varangians, Russes, and Slavs and defeated his brother again.⁷⁸

Yaroslav's dependence on Varangian reinforcements in his military is revealed further in 1024 C.E. as they helped him fight another of his brothers, Mstislav and again in 1026 C.E. against the same foe.⁷⁹ The victories of Yaroslav mark the end of any mention of the Varangians in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*.

Some of the law codes put in place by the leaders of eleventh century have survived and give modern scholars an idea of how these leaders ruled over their realms. Daniel Kaiser's translations of the "The Russkaia Pravda: The Short Redaction

(Academy Copy),” “The Russkaia Pravda: The Expanded Redaction (Trinity Copy) The Law from the time of Iaroslav Volodimerich [1019-54]” and “The Russkaia Pravda: the Abbreviated Redaction (Tol’stoi copy) the Judicial Statute of Iaroslav Volodimerich” demonstrate the use of alternate spellings from those used by Samuel Cross for the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. Iaroslav Volodimerich from Kaiser’s translation is Yaroslav, Vladimir’s son, in the *Chronicle*. The Varangians of Cross’ translation are the Vikings in Kaiser’s text.

“The Russkaia Pravda: The Short Redaction (Academy Copy)” includes two articles that directly discuss laws as they apply to Vikings. The first of these law codes which mention the Vikings, the tenth overall, discusses the punishment for pushing or shoving:

10. If a man either shoves [another] man away from himself or pulls him toward himself, [then he is to pay the victim] 3 grivnas, if [the victim] presents two eyewitnesses; if the man [the victim] is a Viking or [some other] foreign resident, then let him take an oath [to prove his claim].⁸⁰

The reasoning behind this clause concerning Vikings and foreign residents may be that these people are mistrusted by the governing body or it could be the result of the idea that foreigners would be less likely to be able to produce eyewitnesses, as these eyewitnesses would have to go out of their way to help this stranger report the incident. Neither of these reasons explain why Vikings are specified in this clause, unless it is merely to include Vikings who had settled in the region as well as those identified as foreigners. If the clause does include Viking settlers, the second of the options as to why it is included is to the benefit of these men. The next article explains what is to happen when a slave is in the hands of someone other than their owner(s):

11. If a slave is hidden either with a Viking or with another foreign

resident, and they do not bring [the slave] forward within three days [after the slave's owners announce their loss], and [the slave's owners] learn [the slave's whereabouts], then on the third day [the slave's owners are] to take back their slave, and [receive] 3 grivnas for the offense.⁸¹

This passage does not specify whether the slaves described are required to have been stolen or whether they may have run away from their owners, but the word offense at the end may help explain to the reader that the slave was stolen. Later references to stolen slaves are in reference to a time when the owner of a stolen slave found the slave and are able to force the new owner of this slave to report on where the slave was purchased, and if necessary to a third party from which the slave was acquired.⁸² These two articles in relation to slaves give a more negative picture of the Vikings and other foreign residents, insinuating that they would steal a slave, while the native people are assumed innocent of theft, and that they may have acquired the stolen slave through legal means rather than an immediate accusation of theft.

“The Russkaia Pravda: The Expanded Redaction (Trinity Copy) The Law from the time of Iaroslav Volodimerich [1019-54]” also includes two clauses related to the Viking population. The second of the passages referring specifically to the Vikings is similar to the tenth article of the Short Redaction above, using the same number of eyewitnesses and the same fine:

31. If a man either grabs a man to himself or shoves him away from himself, or strikes [him] across the face, or strikes [him] with a pole, and [the victim] produces two eyewitnesses, the [the offender] is to pay 3 grivnas as a fine; if [the offender] is a Viking or some other foreign resident, then [the victim] is to produce all [the necessary] eyewitnesses, and the two of them take the oath.⁸³

The other, which appears first in the Pravda, explains how to deal with homicide:

18. On accusation of homicide. If an accusation of homicide is lodged against someone, and if [the accused] presents seven witnesses [who

testify to his good character], then [the accusation and the obligation to pay] the bloodwite are quashed; if [the accused] is a Viking or some [other] foreigner then [he need present only two witnesses].⁸⁴

This is similar in its treatment of foreigners to the earlier articles on the topic of pushing and shoving in that the Vikings and other foreigners are allowed to bring fewer witnesses for their defense. The difference in this allowance is that in the earlier article, the witnesses required to be presented by the Viking were there to be eyewitnesses to a crime, while in this article, the witnesses are there to defend the accused by saying that the accused has good character. The eyewitnesses would have to have seen an event and be willing to get involved, but the character witnesses would be friends of the accused and would not need to have been present at the scene of the crime.

Like these two, the third document, “The Russkaia Pravda: the Abbreviated Redaction (Tol’stoi copy) the Judicial Statute of Iaroslav Volodimerich,” has two articles that mention the Vikings. The first of these articles discuss the legal actions to be taken after a fight:

2. On a man bloodied [by a fight]. If a man comes to the [prince’s] court bloodied or bruised [from a fight], then he need not provide an eyewitness [to substantiate his complaint], but [the assailant] shall pay him a fee for the dishonor, as much as is [appropriate]; if there be no signs [of a fight] on him, he is to produce an eyewitness [to confirm his account] word for word. If [someone] strikes [another] with a sword or knife, but does not kill him, then [he is to pay] the prince a fee of 9 grivnas, and they shall judge [how much he is to pay] the complainant for the wound. If [someone] hacks [a man] to death with a whip, or shoves [him around] but there be no signs [of the attack], although there is an eyewitness, then if [the victim] be a boyar, or a free man, or a Viking who was not baptized, [the assailant] is to pay a dishonor [payment] according to their [the victims’][responsibilities before the prince]; if there be no witness, then they shall cast lots, and the convicted party shall pay the necessary fee.⁸⁵

Although this article discusses a form of fighting, as three of the previous four which have been discussed have described, this is different in a few ways. First, bloodiness

negates the necessity of bringing witnesses before the law, as it would serve as proof that the victim or complainant had been injured. Second, the fine imposed is related to honor in this passage, and an additional amount is given to the prince in order for the case to be heard. Interestingly, only one witness is required if the complainant is not bloody or bruised, while the offence would seem to be more serious than a shoving match.

The dishonor fee charged the assailant is dependant on the position of the victim, insinuating that the poorer population is not dishonored by involvement in a fight or an assault. The Vikings mentioned in the article, those who have not been baptized, is somewhat confusing, as it does not give any information as to the status of baptized Vikings. If the baptized Vikings fall under some other category listed, boyars or free men, it is not specified. A question that could arise from this part of the article is whether the baptized Vikings are considered to have a higher social position than those who had not been baptized. At this time, the Russes were Christian and had been since the reign of the contemporary ruler's father, Vladimir. This would suggest that baptized Vikings would be preferred to those who remained pagan, but they do not seem to be given a place of honor in this article.

The other article from this law code which mentions the Vikings is somewhat contradictory to the previously mentioned passages: "5. On false accusation. If someone shall falsely accuse another, and there are not seven character witnesses, then they shall dismiss the accusation, whether it be a Viking or any other [who was accused]."⁸⁶ This article states that unless there are seven character witnesses, the accused can get the case dismissed. The previous articles have related that it is not necessary for seven witnesses to come forward for every offense, so it seems that this article could allow most accused

men to have his case dismissed due to lack of witnesses. It also seems that according to this passage, it is necessary for both the victim and accused to bring character witnesses, since the accusation that someone had been falsely accused would otherwise be one person's word against the other's otherwise. The mention of the Viking being accused also having to bring seven witnesses undermines the previous law codes that had stated that Vikings do not always need to bring as many witnesses as natives. This would make them an easier target for false accusation, easier to convict, and it would make it more difficult for their claims to stand. This article, therefore, is not to the benefit of foreigners.

The law codes quoted here from Daniel Kaiser's book *The Laws of Rus' - Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries* were written during the reign of Yaroslav, or Iaroslav in the early eleventh century, who had according to the *Russian Primary Chronicle* been recruiting Vikings, or Varangians, as mercenaries for his army before and throughout his reign. This influx of Viking population during this period could help explain why the Vikings had these separate laws since they were there to help the ruler in his military campaigns.

Several secondary sources have put an emphasis on the Viking Sagas. These primary sources were carried as oral traditions for years before finally being written down in the eleventh through fourteenth centuries, making them more like legends, but they are the stories of the Viking adventures around the world. These would relate the general opinions of the natives to regions they were visiting/invading/conquering by the Vikings, and perhaps, the reactions of the people they encounter.

The Icelandic Sagas, of which there are many that will not be discussed further, are the written stories of individual Viking figures that had been oral traditions for

centuries before they were finally written down in Iceland. These sagas were not created in Iceland, they originate from all the Scandinavian countries, but because they were put on paper in Iceland, they are referred to as Icelandic. The sagas investigated below discuss the adventures of two figures, after which the sagas were named, who traveled to the region in which Kievan Rus was dominant. These sagas, *Yngvar's Saga* and *Eymund's Saga*, take place during the reign of Yaroslav, who appears in both the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and these sagas, and is the ruler at the time of the law codes discussed. They demonstrate the close relationship of Yaroslav to the Varangians who came to his realm as well as those who remained in their native lands.

Yngvar's Saga was originally written in Latin in the second half of the twelfth century and was copied into Icelandic in the early thirteenth century. The author of the Latin version, *Vita Yngvari*, was a Benedictine monk known as Odd Snorrason the Learned, who claimed that the story was based on an oral tradition.⁸⁷ The figure of Yngvar only appears in this saga, but this story is not questioned as to its authenticity like some of the other sagas are, although it contains mythical creatures. The adventure described in the saga involves a trip by Yngvar and his countrymen through Russia in the time of Kievan Rus and beyond this region, although Yngvar dies on the way back to Sweden, the story continues with the story of his son, Svein. One of the reasons for the credibility of *Yngvar's Saga*, according to Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, is that “there are at least twenty two runic inscriptions in Sweden commemorating men who accompanied Yngvar to the east.”⁸⁸ The alphabet used by the Scandinavians in this time period goes by the name “runes.” Runic of this period are usually found carved in stone, although examples have been found of runic inscriptions in wooden objects as well.

This saga begins with the genealogy of Yngvar's father Eymund, who went to Russia before marrying and siring Yngvar.⁸⁹ Once Yngvar was an adult, probably a young adult, he decided to go east, and took thirty ships to Russia, meaning Kievan Rus. There he met King Jarisleif and his wife Ingigerd, the daughter of Swedish King Olaf and stayed with them for three years.⁹⁰ Yngvar learned that there were three large rivers in Russia, and he wanted to explore the middle, largest river to find the source. On the way, he and his men met a giant and a dragon, both of which tried to kill at least one member of the group.⁹¹ On the return trip, Yngvar realizes he is about to die and asks one of the men to return his body to Sweden, and subsequently dies.⁹² The man who is asked to take the corpse back to Sweden was an Icelandic man named Ketil, who appears in *Eymund's Saga* as well. After this, the story of Yngvar's son Svein begins. Svein travels to Russia as well, and follows his father's route along the river, and killed the giant and dragon the other expedition had met.⁹³

The date of Yngvar's death is the only one included in the saga, that is 1041 C.E.⁹⁴ This date places the story within the reign of Yaroslav, son of Vladimir, called Jarisleif in the saga. Jarisleif is reported to be fighting his brother Burislaf, who is likely the prince Svyatopolk, Vladimir's bastard son as reported in the *Chronicle*. None of the adventures of Yngvar can be found in the *Chronicle*. No report of a Varangian prince staying with Jarisleif or exploring a river or the deaths of a giant or a dragon.

The authors of *Vikings in Russia: Yngvar's Saga and Eymund's Saga*, Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, suggest that Yngvar's father Eymund, whose last name is given as Akason, is the same as the figure of Eymund from *Eymund's Saga*, whose last name is given as Hringsson. Palsson and Edwards report that *Eymund's Saga* was

written much later than *Yngvar's Saga*, perhaps over a century later. They believe that *Eymund's Saga* was based on the figure of Yngvar's father. There are key differences in the two Eymund characters. The Eymund in *Yngvar's Saga* is from Sweden, while the other figure is from Norway. Yngvar's father had fought for Jarisleif in Russia, but returned after the battles to Sweden and then married, while the other Eymund remained in Russia after his battles, as a King who died childless.⁹⁵

There is some debate as to when *Eymund's Saga* was written, although neither of the popular options are very specific. Whether it was written in the late thirteenth century or the fourteenth century, this saga is much younger than *Yngvar's Saga*. *Eymund's Saga* was written anonymously as well, which leads to questions on the legitimacy of the story.⁹⁶ An inconsistency pointed out by Palsson and Edwards is that the man given as Eymund's father is King Hring Dagsson, who ruled Norway around the time. The saga states that Eymund is one of three brothers, the other two are named Hrærek and Dag. In alternative sources, Hring had a son named Dag and a brother named Hrærek, but not a son of the same name, and no Eymund appears.⁹⁷ Palsson and Edwards suggest that the character is a combination of two figures who appeared in other sagas, one of which being Eymund Akason from *Yngvar's Saga*. The other figure is found in the *Saga of Olaf the Saint*, Earl Rognvald. Both Eymund Akason and Earl Rognvald were cousins of Ingigerd, the daughter of King Olaf who married King Jarisleif/ Yaroslav.⁹⁸

Eymund's Saga explains that Eymund Hringsson and his third cousin Ragnar, they shared a great-great-grandfather, had traveled to England and returned to Norway before heading east.⁹⁹ As they discussed going east, Eymund told Ragnar what he had learned about Russia:

I've heard that east in Russia King Valdimar has died, and his kingdom is in the hands of his three sons, all good men. King Valdimar divided the kingdom between them unevenly, one son having a larger share than the other two. The one who inherited most is the eldest, Burislaf - the second is called Jarisleif and the third Vartilaf. Burislaf has Kiev, the best realm in all Russia, while Jarisleif has Novgorod, and Vartilaf Polotsk and all the region around. But they haven't yet come to an agreement about their territories, and the one who is least happy with his lot is the one who got the biggest and best share.¹⁰⁰

They then left Norway with "a large force of hard, handpicked men."¹⁰¹ When they arrived in Russia, they met with Jarisleif and Eymund basically offered to be mercenaries for him in his fight against his brothers. Payment to the Norwegians, as they are referred to in the saga, was agreed upon, although Jarisleif never fully paid the men.¹⁰² This would become a recurring problem. The story continues to describe several battles in which Eymund fought for Jarisleif, and eventually helped him defeat one brother, Burislaf, and make peace with the other, Vartilaf.

When the events in *Eymund's Saga* are compared to the events in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, many similarities appear. The names are different in the two sources, such as the use of Jarisleif in the sagas for Yaroslav of the *Chronicle* and Burislaf for Svyatopolk, which appear above. King Valdimir, already dead when Eymund arrives in Russia, is King Vladimir, who brought Christianity to Russia. Vartilaf is more complex. Palsson and Edwards suggest that the third brother was added merely to create a trio of brothers. Historian Robert Cook, who studied *Eymund's Saga*, perhaps in greater detail than Palsson and Edwards, decided that Vartilaf is a combination of two figures, Bryachislaf, a grandson of Vladimir and nephew of Yaroslav, and Mstislav, historical brothers of Yaroslav and Svyatopolk. Cook came to this conclusion through comparison to events in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, believing that the name Vartilaf came from

the name Bryachislav, who ruled in Polotsk, but the other actions of the figure Vartilaf were similar to those of Mstislav, who would make peace with Yaroslav as Vartilaf did in the saga.

There are several differences in the accounts of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and *Eymund's Saga*, many of which come from the different points of view by the authors and intended audiences. For example, the lack of payment by Jarisleif/Yaroslav to the Norwegians/Varangians is left out of the *Chronicle*, but mentioned many times in the saga. This is a difference that can be explained by looking at it from the Russian point of view versus the Varangian point of view: to not pay someone for their services will not add to the greater glory of Yaroslav, but it would show that Eymund kept his side of the deal, demonstrating the importance of fulfilling his duty, although he eventually left Yaroslav in the saga after Svyatopolk was dead.

One of the first instances in the texts where they differ is when Yaroslav/Jarisleif received a letter. According to the saga, this letter was sent by Burislaf and demanded that Jarisleif give up “certain district and market towns nearby on the grounds that they were conveniently situated for raising revenue.”¹⁰³ In the *Chronicle*, Yaroslav receives a letter from his sister Predslava warning him about his brother. Whoever sent the letter, a battle followed in both texts.

In both versions of the battle, Yaroslav collects a huge army, in the saga Eymund had already offered to be mercenaries in exchange for gold and silver. This is the battle in which the *Chronicle* reports the brothers to have been in a standoff for three months. The *Chronicle* says that “Yaroslav collected one thousand Varangians and forty thousand other soldiers, and marched against Svyatopolk.”¹⁰⁴ Then “the brothers stood over

against each other on both banks of the Dnieper, but neither party dared attack. They remained thus face to face for three months.”¹⁰⁵ According to *Eymund’s Saga*, the battle was not quite so epic, the number of Varangians was less than one thousand, as messengers told Burislaf before the battle: “The messengers said that they had heard some Norwegian king had arrived with six hundred fellow-countrymen.”¹⁰⁶ The saga relates that Burislaf thought that the Norwegian king, Eymund, had given his brother the advice to fight. In this version, the standoff was not three months either: “they faced one another in a great forest, by a broad river on either side of which they made camp. Neither army outnumbered the other. King Eymund and the Norwegians pitched their tents away from the rest, and for four days all remained quiet, neither side attacking the other.”¹⁰⁷ The battle soon followed and Yaroslav was victorious.

After the battle, *Eymund’s Saga* says that “King Burislaf had fallen,”¹⁰⁸ while the *Chronicle* reports that Svyatopolk fled. While the saga reported Burislaf dead, this does not mean that the rest of the saga doesn’t correspond, since Burislaf would be reported dead three times before it was actually true. The following battle, described in the *Chronicle* and left out of *Eymund’s Saga*, is a battle lost by Yaroslav. The next battle was a victory, and is discussed in both texts, this is the second time Burislaf was said to have died was in a battle the same year, 1018 C.E. according to the *Chronicle*, and was documented in both texts.¹⁰⁹ Yet another battle takes place in 1019 C.E., and again Yaroslav defeated his brother, who once again escaped death during battle to flee.¹¹⁰

It is after this battle that Svyatopolk/Burislaf dies and does not return. The *Chronicle* relates his death in a religious fashion:

As he fled a devil came upon him and his bones were softened, so that he could not ride, but was carried in a litter....His servants sent back to see

who was pursuing them, and there was no one following their trail, but still they fled on with him...He could not endure to stay in one place, but fled through the land of the Lyakhs, pursued by the wrath of God. Upon reaching the wilderness between Poland and Bohemia, he died a miserable death. When judgment thus rightly fell upon him as a sinner, torments seized this impious prince after his departure from this world.¹¹¹

This account does not give many details as to the cause of his death beyond the idea that God was ready for him to die. *Eymund's Saga* relates the death of Burislaf in more detail, including the cause of death. The saga reports that Eymund and eleven of his kinsmen tracked Burislaf down and waited until he had made camp for the night:¹¹²

King Eymund had worked out during the night exactly where King Burislaf was sleeping in the tent, and hurried across to him, dealing him and a number of his followers their death blows. Then Eymund and his men ran off into the forest where they could not be found, taking with them King Burislaf's head.¹¹³

After Burislaf/Svyatopolk's death, Eymund continued to have problems collecting payment from Jarisleif for his and his men's services. This is when the third brother, Vartilaf, comes into play.

The oldest brother's death is followed in the *Chronicle* by two of the other brothers challenging Yaroslav's authority. First, which agrees with Cook's theory on the identity of Vartilaf, Bryachislav conquers Novgorod and Yaroslav went to fight his brother and Bryachislav returned to Polotsk.¹¹⁴ This event is not well documented in *Eymund's Saga*. At this point in the saga, Eymund goes to Vartilaf to become a mercenary for him instead of his brother, and Vartilaf agrees to the payment demanded.¹¹⁵ There is nothing in the *Chronicle* that defends this move, since neither Bryachislav or the Yaroslav's brother suggested by Cook, Mstislav, seem to have Varangians among their troops.

A battle between Yaroslav and Mstislav that appears in the *Chronicle* is absent

from *Eymund's Saga*. Both texts report that peace was made between the brothers, but in different ways. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* reports that after their battle, in 1026, “Yaroslav recruited many soldiers and arrived at Kiev, where he made peace with his brother Mstislav near Gorodets. They divided Rus’ according to the course of the Dnieper. Yaroslav took the Kiev side, and Mstislav the other.”¹¹⁶ In the discussion of how peace came about between Jarisleif and Vartilaf in *Eymund's Saga*, the queen plays a pivotal role, while she was not even mentioned in the *Chronicle*. Her importance may have been played up in the saga because she was the daughter of the King of Sweden. Eymund states that “Even though the king is commander of the army, she’s the one who’s really in charge.”¹¹⁷ The queen soon arrives and arbitrates the peace agreement between the brothers. The peace agreement in this text has different borders than those given in the *Chronicle*:

It was proposed on behalf of King Vartilaf that the queen should act as arbitrator, and she told King Jarisleif that he should have the best part of Russia, that is, Novgorod.

‘But Vartilaf shall have Kiev,’ she said, ‘the second best kingdom, with all its dues and taxes, twice as much as Vartilaf had before. As for Polosk and the lands belonging to it, they shall be given to King Eymund to rule over and he shall receive all the revenues intact, for we don’t wish him to leave Russia.’¹¹⁸

At the end of the agreement, a figure whom was suggested to be part of the inspiration for the figure Eymund, Earl Rognvald, is mentioned as the ruler of Ladoga Town, which would discourage the idea that these two men were one and the same or that one was part of the other. Neither Eymund or Vartilaf lived long after the peace agreement was made. Vartilaf died three years after the agreement, but the length of Eymund’s reign was not specified, except to say that “he lived to no great age and died peacefully.”¹¹⁹

If Vartilaf and Mstislav are the same man, he died at two separate times according

to the texts. The *Chronicle* reports the peace agreement to have taken place in 1026 C.E., and instead of living only three more years, Mstislav dies on a hunting trip eight to ten years later, in the article under the dates 1034-1036 C.E.¹²⁰

Although there are differences between *Eymund's Saga* and the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, the similarities demonstrate the Scandinavian's knowledge of the history of Russia as it relates to their own history. The shared knowledge between the two groups of people from these regions demonstrate long-term relations. There was interest in this history, although it was mostly in relation to a Scandinavian figure. *Yngvar's Saga* demonstrates that Kievan Rus was well known enough for young men to want to go and explore in the region, and in Yngvar's case beyond the region. This could also be seen as evidence that relations between Scandinavia and Kievan Rus were friendly, since it was not seen as dangerous to travel to the east for the Varangians. This could be due to familial relations, political alliances, or a combination of both. These sources would most often be used in a Normanist argument, especially *Eymund's Saga*, in which this Varangian king is a central figure in the defeat of Svyatopolk. *Eymund's Saga* relates an intricate relationship between one Viking king and one of the rulers of Kievan Rus that helped to shape the region, in the form of wars for several years and the resulting years as Yaroslav ruled.

This examination of the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, Kievan Rus law codes, and Viking sagas indicates that the Vikings/Varangians had a strong role in the formation of the Kievan Rus state. This Scandinavian influence in Eastern Europe is demonstrated by their involvement in the creation of leaders for the region and the laws that that dealt specifically with foreigners such as themselves. The influence of Viking leaders within

and outside the Kievan government effected how that government worked. Trade in Kievan Rus society was augmented by the Scandinavian ships that traveled from Eastern to Western Europe often, giving the region faster access to the Western European markets that gave Kievan Rus greater opportunity to succeed economically. The Vikings have been shown as mercenaries in some of the primary sources discussed above, which demonstrates their influence on the power structure and military dominance of the princes of Kievan Rus. The Viking support of the Kievan princes militarily and economically suggests that a middle ground can be found between the Norman and Anti-Norman Theories in that the Scandinavian presence can be acknowledged without giving them all the credit for creating Kievan Rus.

The Viking leader Rurik is almost always acknowledged as the originator of the line of rulers that dominated Kievan Rus' government, beginning with his own rule in the late ninth century to the death of Ivan IV in 1584.¹²¹ The similarities between the Viking "athing" and Kievan "veche" may demonstrate a merging of ideas on political administration between the two groups. The laws put in place by the Kievan Rus princes demonstrate special attention was paid to the Scandinavian foreigners in respect to how they were to prove their innocence or status as a victim, which differed from the proof required by local peoples.

The Vikings appear many times in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* as mercenary warriors, most often on the winning side of the battles in which they are involved. *Eymund's Saga* portrays the Vikings in the same way, and includes information on what they were supposed to be paid for this service. An interesting difference between the sources is that *Eymund's Saga* actually mentions a battle in which the mercenaries were

on the losing side, while this encounter is absent from the *Chronicle*. The numerous references to the Varangians in the *Chronicle* make them stand out from the local armies that were also present in the conflicts. Because they were most often on the winning side of confrontations, the Vikings were likely seen by Kievan princes as advantageous group to hire when they found it necessary to wage war.

The impact of the Vikings on the economy is not a focus in the primary sources, although a few references to trade and earning fortunes are present. The secondary sources point out that the Vikings were often not only mercenaries or raiders, but also merchants looking for markets. They were able to not only trade within Kievan Rus, but travel through the region to Constantinople, increasing river traffic and thus commerce within Kievan Rus, bringing more products in from all directions.

Comparisons between the sagas and the *Russian Primary Chronicle* reveal many similarities, not only in content but in how they were created as well. Each was likely compiled using oral traditions, independently of one another. Their differences can be easily found, in the names most obviously. The characters can be demonstrated to be the same people through the action of the stories, using first the most similar of the names, the most obvious are Valdimir/Vladimir and Jarisleif/Yaroslav, and the latter also has been seen as Iaroslav, and then finding the same relationships and actions which correspond between the sources. Their independence from one another reveals an intimate knowledge of the stories contained by the groups centuries after the events were reported to have happened, which exhibits the importance of the shared experiences for both societies.

The argument that the Vikings' influence was "negligible"¹²² as Riasanovsky

asserted is unrealistic in the face of the descriptions given of the Vikings in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and the law codes of the time. The Vikings formed the foundation of the ruling class that lasted five centuries, but that doesn't mean that the Norman Theory is correct. The Norman and Anti-Norman Theories should find the middle ground, which has been demonstrated here, that both the Scandinavians and the Slavic tribes of the region created Kievan Rus together.

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