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Problems of Ethnicity in the Interpretation of Written Sources on Early Rus'

As a historian, I have chosen to address the problem of ethnicity in the interpretation of written sources on early Rus' in this context. I am well aware that ethnicity is a cultural construct and a fairly politically loaded one, but it is also a construct that people of the ninth and tenth centuries would not understand, at least not with all the connotations we attach to ethnicity, loosely understood as self-identification of belonging to an ethnic group presumably speaking the same language.

On the other hand, the notions related to our understanding of ethnicity were not entirely alien to people of the early period of what was to become the Russian state. In fact it is quite obvious that then as now, it was felt not only relevant but important for people to think of themselves as belonging to a group and to ponder over the criteria by which they defined their group in relation to others. This will be readily understood from the quotes I will now present. These quotes are taken from the *Povest' vremennyx let* (The Tale of Bygone Years),¹ and are those which must probably be attributed to the compiler of the *Povest' vremennyx let* himself, working in the 1110s. Thus, other than the few excep-

¹ In the Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor translation (1953), *Povest' vremennyx let* (*PVL*) is called the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, a name which, however, had more appropriately been given to its predecessor, see next note. Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor were aware that such a predecessor existed, nonetheless. Although they were also aware that the *PVL* was frequently referred to as *The Tale of Bygone Years*, they decided to use the *Russian Primary Chronicle* as the English equivalent to *PVL*, presumably because doubt had recently been cast on the authorship of the monk Nestor of the *PVL*. They rightly thought that the otherwise often used title, the *Nestor Chronicle*, was inappropriate. However, their choice to use *Russian Primary Chronicle* has since marred much of the English language literature on early Russian history since the chronicle is by no means *primary*.

tions, they are not found in the predecessor to the *Povest' vremennyx let*, often referred to as *Načal'nyj svod* and preserved as part of the *First Novgorod Chronicle Younger Version*.² Therefore, it is primarily these two texts that form my point of departure in this paper.

I will start and end by drawing attention to what can perhaps be considered to be the most famous ethnic quote from the Old Russian chronicles. This is a text that is found in the *First Novgorod Chronicle* within a chronological framework between 854 and 920, while in the *Povest' vremennyx let*, it is placed, more exactly (if less correctly), under the year 859:

**First Novgorod
Chronicle Younger
Version 854–920**

И реша к себе: “князя
поищемъ, иже бы
владелецъ нами и рядил

**Povest' vremennyx let
859**

И ркоша: “Поищемъ
сами в себе князя, иже
бы володелецъ нами и

**Cross & Sherbowitz-
Wetzor translation,
slightly edited**

They said to themselves,
“Let us seek a prince who
may rule over us and judge

² The basis for the assumption that the *First Novgorod Chronicle Younger Version* (MSS from the fifteenth century) preserves an earlier chronicle source of the *PVL* is that, on the one hand, there is a clear textual interdependence between the much shorter text in the Novgorod chronicle and the *PVL*, while on the other, the *PVL*, in such shared text, sometimes directly contradicts the version found in the Novgorod chronicle. These contradictions concern first of all the role of the two Varangians Askold and Dir, who ruled in Kiev before the Rjurikovid dynasty took over, but also the respective roles of princes Oleg and Igor'. Concerning the role of Askold and Dir, the version in the Novgorod chronicle finds support in the Byzantine sources, while the changed role of Igor' in relation to Oleg may be explained by some of the additional source material available to the compiler of the *PVL*, notably the Rus'-Byzantine treaties. Of these and also of another source available to the compiler of the *PVL*, the *Chronicle of Georgios Hamartolos*, there is no trace in the Novgorod chronicle. However, because both *Načal'nyj svod* and the *PVL* are only found as inclusions in much later chronicles, several possibilities of cross influence have arisen between chronicles containing one or other of the texts, during their transmission in later chronicle writing. It is thus not always easy to define exactly which text elements in the *First Novgorod Chronicle Younger Version* derive from the *Načal'nyj svod*, and which may originate in secondary use of a *PVL* text. This problem has caused some disagreement among scholars. Some have even suggested that part of the extra text in the *PVL*, of which some elements are to be found in my quotations, was present already in a presumed predecessor to the *Načal'nyj svod*, but deliberately removed by the compiler of the *Načal'nyj svod*. This is, however, based on highly hypothetical assumptions concerning the stages in chronicle writing prior to the *Načal'nyj svod*. See Aleškovskij (1971), and the further discussion in Gippius (2005).

ны по <i>праву</i> ”. Идоша за море к Варягомъ	рядиль <i>по ряду, по праву</i> .” Идоша за море к Варягом,	us according to the Law.” They accordingly went overseas to the Varangian,
	<i>к Руси. Сице бо звахуть ты Варягы Русь, яко се друзии зовутся Свее, друзии же Урмани, Аньгляне, инеи и Готе, тако и си.</i>	<i>to the Rus’: these particular Varangians were known as Rus’, just as some are called Swedes, and others Normans, English, others also Goths, for they were thus named.</i>
и рекоша:	<i>Ркоша [Руси] Чюдъ, Словене, Кривичи и Вся:</i>	<i>The Chuds, the Slavs, the Krivichians, and the Ves’ then said to the people of Rus’,</i>
“земля наша велика и обилна, а наряда у нас нету; поидете к нам княжить и владеть нами”. ³	“Земля наша велика и обилна, а наряда въ ней нетъ. Да поидете княжить и володеть нами”. ⁴	“Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us.” ⁵

Here it is already obvious how important it was for the compiler or author of the *Povest’ vremennyx let* to explain in terms, which to us look like ethnic terms, who exactly it was that were called in to rule over the confederates, and who these confederates were. It was especially important for the compiler to find out how to relate to the terms *Varangians* and *Rus’*, just as it has been since then for his successor-historians.

But before I return to that, I will present some further quotes from the extensive introductory text in the *Povest’ vremennyx let*.

³ Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis’ (1950: 106).

⁴ Hypatian Chronicle (1908: col. 14). For the *PVL* text, the reference is to the Hypatian Chronicle on the presumption that it has been less corrupted in transmission than the Laurentian Chronicle, although the manuscript of the latter is approximately 50 years older.

⁵ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 59). The argument in the article is based on the Old Russian text and not on the English translation. Because the Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor translation is based on the Laurentian Chronicle, it may not render correctly the Russian text in the Hypatian Chronicle in every detail. Furthermore, the Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor translation is a literary rather than literal translation. This, however, hardly affects the argument. I have made one small change in the English translation by replacing “*Russes*” as a rendition of “*Русь*” by the more familiar “*Rus*”.

Apart from providing the early history of Rus' with a detailed chronological framework, which the compiler of the *Povest' vremennyx let* did not share with his predecessor, the most striking difference between the beginning of the *First Novgorod Chronicle Younger Version* and the *Povest' vremennyx let* is the extensive cosmographic treatise with which the compiler begins his chronicle.

In addition to placing Rus' in a biblical context, the author also attempts to give us something that we could perhaps call a geographical and ethnographical map of the territory. By the time the *Povest' vremennyx let* was composed, this map was included in the Rus' state. But not only that, the author also wanted to map the peoples and regions with which this Rus' state came into contact. For this reason, this text, abounding with lists of peoples or groups and ways of characterizing them, is far too large to quote in its entirety here.

In the sections chosen for this analysis, I have wished to include as many ways of characterizing groups and explaining their names as possible. In view of that, the reader should look for such keywords or criteria, which our compiler used to distinguish various groups from one another, such as *jazyk, rod, koleno, zakon, obyčaj, nrawy* – (roughly translated 'language, shared ancestors, tribe, law, habits and customs').

Povest' vremennyx let 859

Въ Афетови же части седить Русь, Чюдь и вси языце: Меря, Мурома, Всь, Мордва, Заволочьская Чюдь, Пермь, Печера, Ямь, Югра, Литва, ... Словене же ови пришедше и седоша на Висле, и прозвашася Ляхове, ...⁶

... Такоже и те же Словене, пришедше, седоша по Днепру и наркошася Поляне, а друзии Деревляне, зане седоша в лесехъ ... и инии седоша на Двине и нарекошася Полочане, *речькы ради*, ...

... Словене же седоша около озера Илмера, и прозвашася своимъ именемъ, и сделаша городъ и нарекоша и Новъгородъ. ...⁸

Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor

In the share of Japheth lies Rus', Chud', and all the *gentiles*: Meria, Muroma, Ves', Mordva, Chud' beyond the portages, Perm', Pechera, Iam', Ugra, Litva, ... the Slavs came and made their homes by the Vistula, and were then called Liakhs. ...⁷

... Certain Slavs also settled on the Dnieper, and were likewise called Polianians. Still others were named Derevlans, *because they lived in forests*. ... Other tribes resided along the Dvina and were called Polotians *on account of a small stream* called the Polota, ...

... The *Slavs* also dwelt about Lake Il'men', and *were known there by their characteristic name*. They built a city which they called Novgorod. ...⁹

⁶ Нупатан Chronicle (1908: col. 4).

⁷ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 52).

⁸ Нупатан Chronicle (1908: col. 5).

... Полянѡмъ же живуциимъ о собе и владеюцимъ *роды* своими, яже и до сея братья бяху Поляне, и живяху кождо съ *родомъ* своимъ на своихъ местехъ, владеюще кождо *родомъ* своимъ. И быша 3 брата ...¹⁰

... И по сей братьи почаша держати *родъ* ихъ *княжение* в Поляхъ, а въ Деревляхъ свое, а Дръговичи свое, а Словене свое въ Новегороде, а другое на Полоте, иже и Полочане.

... На Беле озере седятъ Вєсь, а на Ростове озере меря, а на Клещине озере седятъ Меря же. А по Оце реце, где втечетъ въ Волгу, *языкъ свой* – Мурѡма, и Черемиси *свой языкъ*, и Мордва *свой языкъ*,

се бо токмо *Словенскъ языкъ* в Руси: Поляне, Деревляне, Новѡгородьци, Полочане, Дръговичи, Северо, Бужане, зане седятъ по Бугу, послеже же Волыняне.

И се суть *инии языце*, иже дань даютъ Руси: Чудъ, Вєсь, Меря, Мурѡма, Черемись, Мордва, Пермь, Печера, Ямь, Литва, Зимегола, Корсь, Нерѡма, Либь: си суть *свой языкъ* имуще, от колена Афетова, ...¹²

Полянѡмъ живуцимъ о себе, якоже ркохомъ, сущий от *рода Словеньска* и наркошася Поляне, а Деревляне от

... While the Polianians lived apart and governed their *families* (for before the time of these brothers [Kii and his brothers] there were already Polianians, and each one lived with his *gens* on his own lands, ruling over his *kinsfolk*), there were three brothers, ...¹¹

... After these three brothers, their *gens* assumed the *regime* among the Polianians. The Derevlans had a their *regime*, so did Dregovichians, while the Slavs had their own *regime* in Novgorod, and another *regime* existed on the Polota, where the Polotians dwell.

... At Beloozero are situated the Ves', and on the lake of Rostov, the Meria, and on Lake Kleshchino the Meria also. Along the River Oka (which flows into the Volga), *with their own language* the Muroma, the Cheremisians *with their own language*, and the Mordva *with their own language*.

For the *Slavonic race* in Rus' includes only the Polianians, the Derevlans, the people of Novgorod, the Polotians, the Dregovichians, the Severians, and the Buzhians, who live along the river Bug and were later called Volhynians.

The following *are other tribes* which pay tribute to Rus': Chud', Meria, Ves', Muroma, Cheremis', Mordva, Perm', Pechera, Iam', Litva, Zimegola, Kors', Narva, and Liv'. These *have their own languages* and are of *the race* of Japheth,¹³

...

Thus the Polianians, of the *Slavonic race*, lived apart, as we have said, and called themselves Polianians. The Derevlans,

⁹ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 53).

¹⁰ Hypatian Chronicle (1908: col. 7). This is the only case where part of my quotations from the *PVL* is shared with the *First Novgorod Chronicle Younger Version* (Живяху кождо съ родомъ своимъ на своихъ местехъ и странахъ, владеюща кождо родомъ своимъ. И быша три братья ... (Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis' 1950: 104).

¹¹ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 54).

¹² Hypatian Chronicle (1908: col. 8).

¹³ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 55).

<p>Словенъ же и нарекошася Древляне; Радимичи бо и Вятичи от Ляховъ. Бяста бо два брата в Лясахъ: Радимъ, а другый Вятко, И, пришедша, ...</p>	<p>likewise Slavs, named themselves Derevlians. But the Radimichians and the Viaticians sprang from the Liakhs. There were in fact among the Liakhs two brothers, one named Radim and other Viatko. And settled ...</p>
<p>Имяхуть [Slavonic tribes] бо <i>обычая</i> своя и <i>законы</i> отецъ своихъ и <i>предания</i>, каждо своя <i>норовъ</i>.</p>	<p>These Slavonic tribes preserved their own <i>customs</i>, the <i>law</i> of their forefathers, and their <i>traditions</i>, each observing its own <i>usages</i>.</p>

On this latter point, our compiler then exemplifies by contrasting his often highlighted Polianians to the surrounding groups of Slavonic speakers,

<p>Поляне бо своихъ отецъ <i>обычай</i> имяху <i>тихъ и кротокъ</i>, и <i>стыденье</i> къ снохамъ своимъ и къ сестрамъ, и къ матеремъ своим, и снохы къ свекровамъ своимъ и къ деверемъ велико <i>стыденье</i> имуще. ...</p>	<p>For the Polianians retained their ancestral <i>mild and peaceful customs</i>, showing <i>respect</i> for their daughters-in-law and their sisters, as well as for their mothers and fathers. For their mothers-in-law and their brothers-in-law they also entertained great <i>reverence</i>. ...</p>
<p>А Древляни живяху <i>зверьскимъ</i> образомъ, живуще <i>скотьскы</i>: и убиваху другъ друга, ядуще все <i>нечисто</i>, и браченья в нихъ не быша, но умыкаху у воды девица. А Радимичи, и Вятичи и Северо <i>одинъ</i> <i>обычай</i> имяху: живяху в лесе, якоже <i>всякий звер</i>, ядуще все <i>нечисто</i>, и <i>срамословье</i> в нихъ предъ отци и пред снохами, ...¹⁴</p>	<p>The Derevlians, on the other hand, existed in <i>bestial</i> fashion, and lived <i>like cattle</i>. They killed one another, ate every <i>impure</i> thing, and there was no marriage among them, but instead they seized upon maidens by capture. The Radimichians, the Viaticians, and the Severians had the <i>same customs</i>. They lived in the forest like <i>any wild beast</i>, and ate every <i>unclean</i> thing. They spoke <i>obscenely</i> before their fathers and their daughters-in-law. ...¹⁵</p>

To pin down the exact but often overlapping meaning of these keywords – *jazyk*, *rod*, *koleno*, *zakon*, *obyčaj*, *nравy* – in present-day terms is not easy, but they are by and large the same criteria we would use today.

However, if we see language as a major ethnic divider, it is only one of several used by our compiler and it is by no means the decisive one by which he distinguishes between various groups. Thus it is striking that those groups he most vigorously distinguishes between are the Slavonic speakers in the Dniepr region, where he undoubtedly relates most favourably to the Polianians, while

¹⁴ Hypatian Chronicle (1908: cols 9–10).

¹⁵ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 56).

showing his utmost disgust for the Derevlians on the basis of *obyčaj* or customs, while the slightly more distant Radimichians, Viatichians, and Severians fare only a little better.

One explanation for this which springs to mind is the fact that our compiler still lived in a multi-lingual as well as multi-cultural society, where the label Rus', applied to the individual member of this society, may not yet have been thought of as people sharing a common *language* or *mother tongue*.

What exactly prompted the compiler of the *Povest' vremennyx let* so seriously to involve himself into thinking about ethnicity or perhaps better group-discriminating parameters is difficult to say, although the inspiration for the cosmography as such undoubtedly came from his Byzantine sources. But for a chronicler who was intent on giving an account on the early history of Rus', another incentive may well have been the need he must have felt to disentangle the perhaps most serious problem he faced: the relationship between the terms Varangians and Rus'. There is no doubt that the early years of the eleventh century and the decades just before was the time of change as regards to the meaning of the term Rus'. This can be readily seen from two texts in the *Povest' vremennyx let* undoubtedly penned by our compiler. The first is found in the entry s.a. 6390 (882). Here, after we have read how Oleg had killed Askold and Dir and set himself up in Kiev, we hear that:

Povest' vremennyx let

И беша у него Словени и Варязи и прочий, прозвашася Русью.¹⁶

Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor

The *Slavs, Varangians, and others* who accompanied him, *were called Rus'*.¹⁷

Next, in the account of the Cyrillo-Methodian Mission s.a. 6406 (898), we read:

Povest' vremennyx let

Бе бо единъ языкъ Словенскъ: Словене, *иже* сядяху по Дунаю, ихъже прияша Угре, и Морава, и Чеси, и Ляхове, и Поляне, *яже ныне* зовемая Русь ...

Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor

There was at the time but one Slavonic race including the Slavs who settled along the Danube and were subjugated by the Magyars, as well as the Moravians, the Czechs, the Liakhs, and the Polianians, *the last of whom are now called Rus'* ... But

¹⁶ Hypatian Chronicle (1908: cols 9–10).

¹⁷ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 61).

А словенескъ языкъ и рускый одинъ. От Варягъ бо прозваиася Русью, а первее беша Словене; аще и Поляне звахуся, но Словенская речъ бе. Полями же прозвашася, занеже в поле сядяху, языкъ Словенский бе имъ единъ.¹⁸

the Slavs and the Rus' are one *people*, for it is because of the *Varangians* that the latter became known as Rus', though originally they were Slavs. While some Slavs were termed Polianians, their speech was still Slavic, for they were known as Polianians because they lived in the fields. But they had the same Slavic language.¹⁹

Apart from the noteworthy fact that Polianians was the only group of Slavs from all the territory which later came to form the Rus' state, that the compiler found fit to include in this attempt to define who was who in relation to the term Rus' and to the Slavonic language, it is obvious how difficult he found this enterprise: he knew that Rus' comprised or had comprised people of various ethnicity and he knew that his Polianians were now known as Rus'. But he also knew that this term earlier denoted the people he now knew as Varangians, which was precisely the point he tried to clarify.

The problems our compiler – the compiler of the *Povest' vremennyx let* – addressed in these sections of his text are closely related to the ones he addressed in my opening quotation:

**First Novgorod
Chronicle Younger
Version**

... Идоша за море к
Варягомъ

и рекоша ...

Povest' vremennyx let

... Идоша за море к
Варягом,

к Руси. Сице бо звахуть
ты Варягы Русь, яко се
друзии зовутся Свее,
друзии же Урмани,
Аньглияне, инеи и Готе,
такo и си.

Ркоша [Руси] Чюдъ,
Словене, Кривичи и Вся
...

**Cross & Sherbowitz-
Wetzor**

... They went overseas to
the Varangian,

to the Rus': these particular
Varangians were known as
Rus', just as some are called
Swedes, and others
Normans, English, others
also Goths, for they were
thus named.

The Chuds, the Slavs, the
Krivichians, and the Ves'
then said to the people of
Rus' ...

¹⁸ Hypatian Chronicle (1908: col. 18).

¹⁹ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 62–63).

Precisely in this text, it is clear that it was the compiler of the *Povest' vremennyx let* and not the author of the *Načal'nyj svod*, who was troubled by these questions. But why? Perhaps it was the confrontation with the new sources available to him, sources unknown to the author of the *Načal'nyj svod*. This applies first of all to the Rus'-Byzantine treaties, which our compiler included in his chronicle under the years 907, 911, 944, 971.

Presumably these treaties were originally composed in Greek, but they were now translated to Russian. In addition to the princes Oleg, Igor' and Svjatoslav, a considerable number of envoys and others (in whose name the treaties were concluded on the part of Rus') are listed in the treaties. The overwhelming majority of these – if not all – were, judging from their names, Scandinavians. This our compiler must also have known, after all links to Scandinavia were still close and as late as the second half of the eleventh century, the son of the ruling prince in Kiev, Mstislav Vladimirovič, had been given a Scandinavian parallel name: Harald. Nevertheless, the treaties exclusively label all persons on the Russian side, – members of the ruling dynasty, the Rjurikovids, as well as envoys – Rus'. The term for Scandinavians, known to the compiler of the *Povest' vremennyx let* and his contemporaries in Kiev, Varangians, is not mentioned at all in the treaties.²⁰

This must have posed a problem for our compiler, who was hardly Scandinavian, but still thought of himself as a Rus': a problem that needed explaining. As the only contemporary sources of the tenth century in Russian the treaties are sources of paramount importance. One respect in which they are of particular importance is as sources for the spreading of Christianity in Rus'.²¹

In both the 907 and 911 Treaties, all members of the Rus' delegation appear as pure pagans by swearing on the treaties by their pagan gods, Perun and Volos, and by their weapons. However, when the 944 Treaty was concluded, a substantial number of the many delegates from Rus' must have become Christians. Therefore, in the 944 Treaty, whenever it was felt necessary in the 16 articles, the text distinguishes between those Rus' who remained pagans and those who had converted to christianity. Moreover, it stipulates that 'the Christian Rus' shall so swear according to their faith, and the non-Christians after their custom'. The treaty text itself ends with an account on the Rus' ratification of the treaty in Kiev:

²⁰ The treaties in Hypatian Chronicle (1908: cols 22–28, 35–42, 60–61). See also Melnikova (2004: 5–27).

²¹ On this aspect, see Lind (2004).

Povest' vremennyx let

И наутрея призва Игорь ели, и приде на холмы, кде стояше Перунъ, и покладоша оружья своя, и щиты и золото, и ходи Игорь роте и мужи его, и елико *поганья руси*, а *хрестьяную русь* водиша въ церковь святого Ильи,

Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor

In the morning, Igor' summoned the envoys, and went to a hill on which there was a statue of Perun. They laid down their weapons, their shields, and their gold ornaments, and Igor' and his people took oath (at least, such *Rus'* as were *pagans*), while the *Christian Rus'* took oath in the church of St. Elias,

At this point our compiler must have felt that some sort of explanation was needed; this was not due the term *Rus'*, nor perhaps to the fact that so many of the *Rus'* were already Christians almost half a century before the official Christianization in 988. Rather he felt that he had, as a kind of service to his historically-topographically interested readers, to explain what this Elias Church was and where, in his early-twelfth-century terms, it had been situated. Therefore he added:

яже есть надъ Ручьемъ, конецъ Пасынъце беседы, и козаре: се бо бе сборная церкви, *мнози бо беша варязи хрестьяни*.²²

this is above the creek, in the vicinity of the Pasyncha square and the quarter of the Khazars. This was, in fact, the cathedral church, *since many of the Varangians were Christians*.²³

In doing so, he provided us with perhaps the most indisputable proof that, in his interpretation, *Rus'* in mid-tenth-century Russian usage was synonymous with early-twelfth-century usage of Varangians, that is, the Scandinavians. When we compare this with the various ways we have seen him juggling with these and other terms of an ethnical nature, the question arises as to which extent he understood any of these terms as being ethnical and how he understood himself in relation to them.

That is a very difficult question to answer, which of course leads us to the vexed question of the origin and later semantic development of first of all *Rus'*. Just like Varangians, who originally were people joined together by oath to act in some capacity,²⁴ it can hardly originally have been an ethnic term – at least if we accept, as we should that it is linked with the terms *Rootsi/Ruotsi* in the Estonian and Finnish languages where, at a fairly early but indeterminable point

²² Hypatian Chronicle (1908: col. 42).

²³ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 77).

²⁴ See e.g., Schramm (1983: 38–67).

in history, it became an ethnic term for Swedes. Its origin, however, was not ethnic, but rather functional with roots in prehistory. Still, we may find traces of its earlier and perhaps original meaning in later Swedish sources.

For instance, we find the following interesting text on an eleventh-century, now lost, Swedish runic stone, known as the Nibble stone (U16):

han : uas : buta : bastr : i ruþi : hakunar²⁵

which can be interpreted as ‘he was the best man in Hakon’s *roþ*’, that is in Hakon’s expedition.

A similar meaning seems to be contained in the regional Uppland’s Law in its section on what is called ‘ledung’ or levy organisation – the organisation of the region’s naval forces for either defence or expedition outside Sweden. Here we find the following text:

Nu biuþær konungär liþ ok leþung utt, biuþær utt *roþ* ok reþ, þa skal nämpnä hampn ok stampn ok styriman ok hasätä allä²⁶

which can be interpreted as ‘When the king orders out *liþ* and *leþung*, orders out *roþ* and *reþ* [repetition with synonyms, that is orders the navy to assemble] it is to be decided where the ships gather and who will be in charge of each ship’.

Therefore, *roþ* has obviously to do with Swedish warfare on sea. A trend in modern Scandinavian historiography claim that the royally led ledung-organisation of naval forces in Scandinavia is not older than the written records that describe them, that is, from the thirteenth century or later.²⁷ However, the fact that precisely this text contains both alliteration and assonance might suggest that it was transmitted orally before it was written down and could reflect a much earlier tradition.²⁸

²⁵ Larsson (1990: 154); Wessen & Jansson (1940–1943: 24 ff.). See also www.lansmuseum.a.se/lanet/runor/run1.cfm?in_runnr=u16. On Rus’, see e.g. Melnikova & Petruhin (1991) and Ekbo (2000).

²⁶ Holmbäck & Wessén (1933: 46, with footnote 30).

²⁷ Most extensively argued by Niels Lund in Lund (1996).

²⁸ Klaus von See has voiced the opinion that this use of alliteration, assonance and proverbs in Scandinavian medieval laws represents an attempt by later medieval clerics or jurists to imitate the old style. Among his examples are our *roþ ok reþ*. His reason for thinking so, is that sometimes, or at least once, alliteration is only found in younger MSS. If von See happens to be right, then our text at least proves that the original meaning of *roþ* was still both so familiar to medieval Swedish jurists that they could use it, and expecting to make themselves understood, and that they knew it was an ancient concept. A fact that von See mentions but does not reflect upon is that the Norwegian Frostating Law (IX, 22) has a parallel formula *gera róðr oc reiðu*. Cf. von See (1964: 84–86). I wish to thank Professor Niels Lund of Copenhagen University for this reference.

Based on this fact, most scholars today see the origin of the term Rus' in an early Swedish way of organising naval warfare in ships that were rowed, and further that it is a word connected with rowing and a with a presumed pre-historic form *rōþR* that forms the joint basis for Rootsi/Ruotsi/Rus'.

But if I were to venture an answer to the question of whether the compiler of the *Povest' vremennyx let* understood Rus' as an ethnic term either in its mid-tenth-century usage, or his own early-twelfth-century usage, I would suggest that he may have thought of the word as an ethnic term in the mid-tenth century, signifying Swedes. Or, if he did not make such a precise distinction, as Scandinavians in general. However, the compiler may still not yet have thought of Rus' in the early-twelfth-century usage as an ethnic term in our present-day sense. Instead I would cautiously tender the suggestion that it was at that time used as a religious term rather than an ethnic one, referring to all the inhabitants of the Rus' state who had adopted Christianity on the basis of Church Slavonic. Furthermore, it was via this stage that Rus' develops into an ethnic term for Russian speakers. If our compiler thought of himself in ethnic terms at all, I would suggest that he saw himself first of all as a Polianian. This suggestion is based on his often having voiced a positive evaluation of the Polianians in relation to all other groups who formed part of the Rus' state, Slavonic speakers or not, for instance in this last quotation:

бяхуть бо мудре и
смыслени, и нарицахуся
Поляне, от нихъ же суть
Поляне – Кияне и до сего
дни.²⁹

These men were wise and prudent;
they were called Polianians, and
there are Polianians descended from
them living in Kiev to this day.³⁰

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²⁹ Hypatian Chronicle (1908: col. 7), which admittedly is also to be found in the First Novgorod Chronicle Younger Version, cf. *Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis'* (1950: 105).

³⁰ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 54).

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