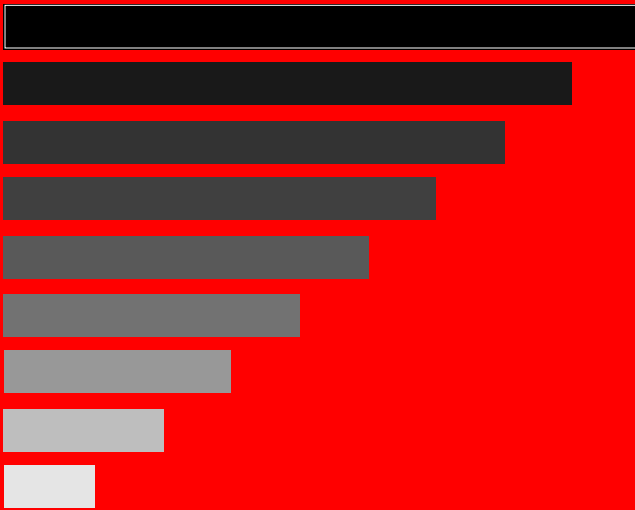




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Håkon Stang

**The Naming of Russia**

Oslo 1996



*A friend of Theodosius II from Sandane, Western Norway, c. 450 AD*

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## 0. Abstract

“...ибо у грек имя русь, или рось, задолго  
до Рюрика знаемо было...  
Tatiščev 1750, ch. 30.2 (1962, 286.

How did the name of Russia arise? For more than a quarter of a millennium, this has been fiercely debated. One position has been that **Rus´** reflects the Swedes, in Finnish *ruotsi*, from e.g. the *Roths-lagen* ‘rowers district’ around Stockholm, or more precisely from the word *rōþR, rōðz* for ‘rowers, a rowing expedition’. The opposing view has been that it is Slavonic, from a local river-name.

The present work pursues a novel approach: Norsemen and Slavs alike knew themselves to be peripheral in relation to the centre of the world, the riches, the power and the glory, of Byzantium and Baġdād. This centre **defined** the periphery, and its self-understanding too – including the concepts and names by which the peripheral and obscure could aspire to fame. What is more natural, then, than to seek the origin of the name *Rus´* – and its ‘alter egos’ ‘*Ros*, ‘*Rōs* – here?

Ours will be a three-tiered structure.

First, we lay an historical foundation, deep-down in antiquity, investigating an ideological arsenal that lay at the ready for potential users centuries before anyone thought of naming a state of Russia (chapters 1-7). Thus, the first third or so of this study explores the Greek-and-Roman twin concepts of *russ-* and ‘*Ros*, ‘*Rōs* as well as the migration-age professional warriors and proto-Vikings of Scandinavian origin to which these three concepts (and others too) were applied.

Second, we discuss what actually happened during a brief naming process (chapters 8-12). This part, then, focuses on how, why and by whom, those old traditions came to be dusted off and revived, after nearly 300 years in desuetude. What set the Byzantines going was the coming of a new band of Vikings from Old Ladoga to Byzance in 839. Basically, the newcomers fitted the old descriptions very well, in the eyes of the Byzantine beholders.

The third part (chapters 12-20) analyses later sources, such as may show up additional traces of the concepts from antiquity that played a part in the 839 naming of Russia. One ‘source’ here is the name *Rus´* itself, and *Ruotsi* too, as subjected to linguistic analysis. It turns out on the way that there is a third party on the scene up north, besides Norsemen and Slavs, i.e. Fenno-Baltic aborigines, primarily the Veps.

Each of our 20 chapters is divided into a number of subchapters. Throughout the study, Arabic sources provide a major contribution, even a set of ‘missing links’. One result then, in an age of European-Islamic confrontation, is to show how common understanding, of sources at our joint disposal, is a key to making headway with a long-standing enigma.

Another result is to shift the focus and locus of debate on this question away from the myopically provincial.

A third, macrohistorical eye-opener is perhaps a realization of the staying-and-swaying power of ideas: how pre-given mental maps condition our reading of the terrain – receiving new annotations, new sets, new actors, yet still, always, defining the scene for the future.

In the present work, transliteration of Russian follows the norm of the *Slavic and East European Journal*. Arabic follows H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Wiesbaden 1990, except that -k- is written -h-, -j- is -ǧ-, -g- is given as -ǧ-. Thus, Xazars in Russian, Ḥazars in Arabic and other non-Russian contexts.

I spell **Erul**, as the conventional *Erule* may be misleading as to pronunciation. Likewise, **Gepid**, not *Gepide*, **Vepts**, not *Vepse*. I also introduce the neologism **Fennic**, for Finnish in the wider sense; and I translate the classical Latin generic *Germani* by **Germanics**, to obviate confusion with the word *Germans*. Also, the *Slovenes* met with in the present work are the North Russian Slavonic tribe of Novgorod and its environs, and of course not those of ex-Yugoslavia.

For promoting this work in Russia, I thank the Institute of the Russian Cultural and Natural Heritage, St. Petersburg branch. For a grant towards meeting printing costs, the Norwegian Research Council. For books, Annette Møller Madsen, Grete Eide and Knut Heidem at Oslo University Library. For ways through the modern cybernetic quagmires, Magnus Taraldsen. For perusing my Latin and Greek, in particular Prof. Nils Berg. And for all her love and support, my Mona. Thank you for being the lovely persons you are.

The mistakes are of course my own.

# 1. Against Modernocentrism

“*Om Ordets Etymologi véd man endnu intet.*”  
(Steenstrup 1876-82, 66)

## 1.1. Through the Jamming Noises of Today & Yesterday

How did the greatest state on earth, Russia, get its name? For a quarter of a millennium or more this has been a moot point: The ‘Normanists’ have maintained that the name *Rus’* derives from the Fennic word *ruotsi* ‘Swede’, which in turn is seen as reflecting an Old Norse word for rowers; these ‘rowers’ having given rise to another name as well, that of *Ros-lagen* ‘the Rower Law area’ around present-day Stockholm. The ‘Anti-Normanists’ have suggested, mainly, that *Rus’* instead originated as a tribal name or toponymic<sup>1</sup> in the area of present-day Kiev.

This study will pursue a third venue, radically different from the two hitherto dominant ones. Our point of departure, literally (in departing from these longstanding views), is a basic tenet: The modern historian must, from the very outset, avoid one manner of ‘centrism’ – but not another one! He or she should consciously shun **modernocentrism**; yet equally strenuously pursue, vicariously so to speak, **altro-centrism**, seeking out what was of central concern to **others**, thus speaking – with **our** words, to **our** times (and later ones) – on behalf of **other** minds now dead and mute.<sup>2</sup>

The sole way of coming to grips with modernocentrism is by defining what is central to modern minds. And in matters of state politics (to which the question of the naming of the Russian state naturally belongs) the central concerns have long been the Siamese twin ones of ethnicity and territoriality. In fact, roughly, these concerns (as dominant intellectual themes of the times), and the debate on the naming of Russia, are of equally long standing. It is hardly a mere coincidence that **both** predominant opinions on the latter give acute expression to this twin/entwined modernocentrism, viz. **ethno-centrism** (*ruotsi* = ‘Swede’, or *Rus’/Ros’* as a self-appellation for the Polyane tribe of the Slavs) coupled with **territory-centrism** (the Stockholm area, versus the Kiev area).

Both Normanism and Anti-Normanism are themselves historical phenomena; meaning products of what has been going on in the minds of Germans, Swedes, Russians (etc.) – including contemporaneous state ‘needs’ and state conflicts – during only the last 250 years or so.

One instance: Hitler saw in the rise of the 9th-10th c. Russian state “a wonderful instance of the state-organizing faculties of the Germanic peoples among an inferior race”.

- 
1. The most common derivation has been from the name of a tributary to the Dnepr river, the **Ros’** (and its tributaries **Ros’ka** and **Rossava**). That this is phonetically unacceptable is argued in Mel’nikova & Petruhin 1989, 33, and by a number of Western specialists, e.g. Thulin 1981, 175-176.
  2. “Alterity has come very much to the fore in recent studies..”: Mason 1990, 1 ff with literature given.

Another: A map in *Vorgeschichte der deutschen Stämme*, III, 1185, published by the NSDAP Reichsamt für Vorgeschichte on the eve of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, turns all of Eastern Europe right east to the Urals into the *Hoheitsgebiet* of the Gothic emperor Ermanaric (died c. 375).<sup>1</sup>

The same propensity (albeit without reference to the Normanist question) was criticized by S. Tixvinskij in the theoretical journal of the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party:<sup>2</sup>

“Some historians within the federal and autonomous republics (of the USSR – HS) pursue a debate without substance (*bespredmetnyj spor*) on the ethnic history of their peoples, striving for maximum ‘ancientization’ (*udrevleniju*) of contemporary ethnoses.”

Unfortunately, even during the closing years of the Soviet era, there were plenty of instances of officially acclaimed historians engaging in ‘ancientization’ of the name Rus’ too, and then as a self-appellation of and for the Eastern Slavs; plus, intriguingly to any macro-historian, the reading back into time of traits peculiar to the Soviet state, e.g. when pre-Rjurik society is characterized as a *super-sojuz* of 15 or 16 autonomous republics!<sup>3</sup>

The question is: How to reach back **beyond** the strictures and structures imposed upon our eyesight, or our insight, by all the illusions belonging to later ages, including our own? How to hear the voices of the dead for all the jamming on the air?

## 1.2. Centre and Periphery in Altrocentrism:

What then does altrocentrism imply – in the present case? Basically one thing: adjusting to, indeed basing ourselves on, one central tenet. Namely that it is methodologically wrong to treat processes which occurred on the northern and eastern peripheries of Europe more than a thousand years ago as isolated, set apart, from the contemporaneous (Old) World. In a word, they occurred within a mental world context. Thus, the Viking onslaughts did not merely ‘take place’, radiating from a ‘centre’ or ‘centres’ in Scandinavia. It is equally unfounded to propose that a Slavonic ‘centre’ simply ‘arose’ at a junction of some rivers in Ukraina.

A ‘centre’, or a ‘centre of centres’, indeed existed, but neither here nor there: Norsemen of Scandinavia and Slavs of the Kiev area alike were doubtless well aware of the great world powers, the ‘superpowers’ of the times, down south, in the ‘centre’ of the world, Byzantium and the Caliphate, in relation to which they indeed were – or came to be – peripheries. It is this centre-periphery mindscape which is posited as fundamental, as a point of departure, for the present study.

The Viking raids may serve as an excellent instance of a periphery influencing a centre (Continental Europe, to which the much-raided monasteries of the British Isles also belonged); yet the Vikings did not set sail for the totally unknown, just as little as did Columbus. They weighed the pros and cons of alternatives; and when they chose to “go south, young man”, it was (in the way of a tautology) the south that

---

1. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 23-24 n. 32.

2. *Kommunist* 1986, 102.

3. Discussion forthcoming.

won out, as the centre of interest. 'Push' versus 'pull' theories of Viking expansion tend to obscure the common continuum: every mind constituted a pre-modern 'world-system', in which word of (and objects from) far-off lands represented a psychological force of gravity. From 500 years before these raids, archaeological finds attest to the influence of the Mediterranean (Roman) centre on a Scandinavian periphery. And with the Slavs of e.g. the Kiev area, known to authors of the Roman Empire as the *Antes* and the *Veneti* (cf. Fennic *venä-* 'Russian' still today), there is little reason to suspect that knowledge was a one-way thing; the Greek and Greek-influenced finds of Ukraina attest to the opposite.

If 'centres' arising in the north and northeast of Europe were in major part (mentally as well as economically) peripheries in relation to a 'world system', what is a natural corollary? It is that explanations of novel state or administrative concepts arising within such a periphery should not be sought only, or even primarily, within this periphery, but equally plausibly in a scrutiny of the given centre-periphery relationship itself. We should (as the 'periphery-dwellers' once did) look to the superior prestige of, not the local systemic periphery, but the centre.

Cases in point are the titles of the early rulers of the Rus': Besides *knjaz'* (from Old Germanic *konungaz*), there is *kagan* (reflecting the title of the nearest Muslim ruler),<sup>1</sup> and later on *car'* (from the Roman *caesar*). The relationship between Latin *rex* and Gothic *reiks* may also repay attention.

Or we may take the traditions to the effect that the privileges of the Slavs and their rulers were accorded them by Alexander the Great,<sup>2</sup> as well as<sup>3</sup> the 17th c. synopsis of Kiev on the (Novgorod) Slovenes campaigning with Alexander, the words of Peter the Great to Cornelis le Bruyn in 1703 on Alexander's war elephants near Voronež, and the early 17th c. manuscript '*On the beginning of the Russian land*', quoted i.a. by Karamzin in 1818, where Alexander 'recognizes' the princes Velikosan, Asan and Avexasan as rulers of the Slovenes by the Volxov, i.e. in the Novgorod area. The Saxons could wave a similar 'privilege' from Alexander in the face of all contenders.<sup>4</sup>

The altro-centrist imperative is, then, in our opinion, **the** basic imperative for any historian; and the more decidedly so the farther away the setting is from ours. It will bear stressing here that the systemic centre (and the peripheries) to be defined may possess some degree of fluidity. Thus, the geographical (physical) centre of the Byzantine world was Constantinople; or, more precisely, the person of the Emperor residing within the imperial palace in Constantinople. This was not however necessarily the cosmological centre. To Christians (or, within a religiously charged context) it was rather Jerusalem, well beyond the pale of Byzantium, as bound up with the person of Christ.

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1. cf. Rybakov 1982, 307-308, 328, 343, 416.

2. Schaeder 1957, 116-117, Pfister 1976, 254-277.

3. not noted by Schaeder or Pfister.

4. Pfister 1976, 254-277.

### 1.3. Historical-Mythological & Multidisciplinary Demand

The *altro-centrist* imperative directs us towards what we may term ‘the historical-mythological approach’: On the one hand there is historical input, meaning events (e.g., an attack by aliens on Constantinople); on the other, beforehand, there are the conceptions – the cosmology, the mythology – by means of which the input is defined; leaving us, posterity, third-hand so to speak, with the main output: written vestiges.<sup>1</sup> Meaning vestiges not of the events themselves, but of the way in which they were meaningful to, conceived of by, their contemporaries, in the light of another centre (or other centres) of the mind than ours. as a counterpoise to modernocentrism, let us stress the **before**-hand nature of cosmology:

When confronted with something novel, we perforce have recourse to the whole arsenal of our **past** experience when trying to come to grips with it. Was not this equally so in bygone ages? Did not people then reach back into an even more remote past in order to grasp what was new to them? The archaic bent of e.g. the Byzantine chancellery and Byzantine authors is well-known, and will be laid under possible contribution in this study.

Following the *altro-centrist* imperative and its contingent ‘historical-mythological approach’ we come to, third, the multi-disciplinary demand:

Ideally, any and every historical phenomenon should lend itself to scrutiny from more than one scholarly angle, indeed from a number of disciplines. To say ‘in the absence of one single piece of decisive evidence’ is to say the self-evident: If one such piece of evidence were in recognized existence, then either there would have been no problem for historians to waste their energy on; or (more plausibly) this sole piece of purported evidence, if singular and isolated, would be open to serious doubt.

So portentous a question as, in our case, that of how a world power got its name, can hardly be considered a question of e.g. phonetics alone; or of Slavonic philology; or of the study of chronicle tradition (concerning the *Tale of Bygone Years* by Nestor, in its many ramifications); or of Greek or Oriental philology (which might come up with new sources, or new interpretations of old ones); or of folklore (concerning oral tradition); or of archaeology; etc.

Pointers from one field are merely precisely that: pointers, towards other corroborative materials. Only with a number of such pointers, from diverse disciplines (or at least from a series of diverse sources within one discipline), can a position be authenticated – provided that other possible explanations may be dismissed. Only thus is a proposition verified – check-pointed.

The present author believes that an historian is under an obligation to explicate his position and human interest as an historian, his *pro*- position so to speak, his credo, what he wishes and longs for.

My wish is to catch hold of some magical moment or moments, in a time quite other than ours, to hear and behold others than us speaking and acting – and coming alive again, alive and understandable still today – enriching our lives by weaving a waft, beginning in the other end, with *them*, of which both they and we are a part.

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1. Plus of course other (archaeological, architectural, even anthropological) physical finds. These however must be interpreted in the light of written historical sources.

Only then, by understanding *them*, and indeed as many ‘*thems*’ as possible, can we best comprehend *ourselves*.

My conviction is this: What **was, is**. Meaning: Although camouflaged, or redefined into new shapes and sizes, by the ecology of society, what once went into the shaping and definition of the greatest state on earth should expectably still be around, to be seen and heard even now, in the form of legends, folklore recordings, etc., even in linguistics. It is not, cannot be, just a thing of the *past*, something that just “*happened – full stop*”.

Nor is the answer, to this question, to any question, to be sought in mono-causality. Just as little as a child can have but one biological parent, can any historical phenomenon have but one cause. Innovations result from a *meeting* of phenomena. So too in our case: Not a Norse solution, nor a Slavonic one, nor a Fennic one, nor a Greek one, etc.

Our theory then, on the contrary, is that the very inception of Russia would most plausibly be *expressed* in precisely this: the expression chosen. The name of Russia itself.

So, the classical question:  
What’s in a name?

#### 1.4. A Foretaste of Bygone Years

We begin with a caveat: This is a laborious work of reconstruction, in the absence of not merely ‘one single piece of decisive evidence’ but of sources galore. We may rest assured that, roughly a millennium ago, reports and chronicles were in existence, let alone live oral tradition, which would have rendered the present study superfluous. Indeed, we shall start off this study with a reference to one such missing Byzantine source. Surprisingly, it has merited next to no attention from historians to date; the probable reason being that it has been overshadowed by another passage in the same chronicle – a passage which has, for the past 250 years or so, led the whole bevy of Normanist historians off down a provincial (far-northern, peripheral, versus altrocentrist) path. We quote the passages in question, from the *Tale of Bygone Years*:<sup>1</sup>

*In the year 6360 [= 852 AD], Indikta 15,<sup>2</sup> when Michael began to rule as Emperor, the Russian land began to be named (thus). This we have gotten to know of because under this Emperor the Rus’ came to Constantinople, as it is written of this in the Greek chronicle. That is the reason we begin with this date, and set down the year.*

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1. ed. Lixačev/Romanov 1950, I, 17-18 (Church Slavonic original), 213-214 (Russian translation) – my translation into English, HS. Vasiliev 1946, 130 has the translation: “*The land of Rus was first known because under this Emperor (Michael) Rus attacked Tsargrad, as is written in the Greek chronicle.*” The interpretation of **pošli na** ‘went to, went against’ is problematic; it is however not decisive, as the ‘Rōs did ‘come’ to Byzance twice under this Emperor, as will be seen: in 839 and in 860; and Michael did not begin to rule in 860! I choose the translation *Bygone*, knowing that *vremennyx* admits of other interpretations.
  2. Same, II, 230-231: “The counting by indikts, or 15-yearly periods, was borrowed into ancient Rus’ from Byzantium...”.



*In the year 6367 [= 859 AD]. The Varangians from across the sea took tribute of the Čud', and the Slovenes, the Merja, the Ves', and the Kriviči...*

*In the year 6370 [= 862 AD]. They chased the Varangians back across the sea, gave them no tribute, and commenced ruling themselves. And there was among them no law, clan rose against clan, quarrel arose, and they began to conduct warfare against eachother. So they said unto one another: "Let us go find ourselves a prince who could rule us and pass justice." And they went across the sea to the Varangians, to Rus'. The Varangians were called Rus', in the same way that others are called Swedes, and others Norwegians and Englishmen, and still others Gothlanders – thus these too were called (...). And from these Varangians the Russian land got its name...*

The latter passage, of course, gave the Normanists their cue – turning their sights to Scandinavia, where they found the name of *Ros-lagen* designating the easternmost bulge of Sweden, closest to Russia. The conclusion proved irresistably facile (*Ros-* via Finnish *ruotsi* = *Rus'*). In adopting it, historians however reneged on their basic duties as historians, viz. 1) to sift all sources, and all portions of one and the same source (in this case the *Tale of Bygone Ages*) equally carefully, and 2) to apply the *altro-centrist* approach.

This abandon among historians (for as such it may be characterized) was in no mean measure engendered by assumptions of Germanic cultural, political and military superiority over the Slavs. Such assumptions were made explicit by 'the first Normanist', the historian Schlözer (himself of German extraction) at the Russian Academy of Sciences;<sup>1</sup> they were rephrased, and not very much more brutally, by a man who **made** history, and made it from precisely such assumptions: Adolf Hitler, as we saw above.

### *1.5. Another Foretaste: The 'Varangian' Question*

The *altro-centrist* perspective, on the contrary, would make for the following reading of the above passages: The man who penned them, the monk Nestor, working at the Cave Monastery in Kiev c. 1111, was endeavouring to explain events which **were** long bygone (whence the title) in terms meaningful to his contemporaries.

One such term is 'Varangian': The name crops up in Byzantine, Russian and Arabic sources from the first half of the 11th c., and not earlier;<sup>2</sup> the Varangians were very much in the limelight in 11th and early 12th c. Russia; and it may be safely concluded that what Nestor did was to 'explain' who the 9th-century Rus' were by adopting a 12th-century term, for the benefit of his 12th-century public. Yet historians, both Normanist and Anti-Normanist, have taken up on this anachronism (without recognizing it as such), and termed the question of how Russia arose – in the 9th

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1. 1771, 220-223, 501-503.

2. Apart from the (anachronistic!) mentions of Varangians along with others in the lists of peoples making up Russian armies, Varangians are mentioned apart, and as individuals too, under the year 980 and 983, Lixačev/Romanov 1950, I, 54, 56, 58, 251-252, 254, 256, and one Varjažko under the year 980: I, 55, 253, II, 323. Cf. Stang 1990.

c. – ‘the Varangian question’.<sup>1</sup> In like wise, the abovesaid ‘Norwegians’ and ‘Englishmen’ (but not *Svei*, a tribal name of long standing) are anachronisms, if applied to the 9th c.<sup>2</sup>

On this count alone, we may dismiss as inaccurate, to say the least, Nestor’s assertion that “*from these Varangians the Russian land got its name*”.

The preceding passage, on the Varangians taking tribute among the northern tribes in 859, has more often than not been taken to mean that this was not the case before 859, and that the ‘Varangians’/Rus’ put in their first appearance that year; which is in flagrant contrast to the insistence, in the first of the three passages quoted, that the Rus’ came to Constantinople (from North Russia, one would think) several years earlier.

Indeed, if anything, the 862 passage on Russia taking her name from these Rus’ should be taken to refer back to the 852 passage, which is the only one to give – or refer to – precise information: Nestor says expressly that knowledge on how (or when) the Russian land got its name is **not** Russian/Slav knowledge; it is culled, instead, from abroad: from the centre of the world system to which Nestor and all his contemporaries belonged. It is striking, too, that Nestor does not merely say that the Greek chronicle gives the oldest reference he knows to Rus’; he goes considerably farther, in averring that this year, when the Rus’ came to Constantinople, the very name of the Rus’ arose. One would think that the two phenomena might be in some way related: meaning (since there is no indigenous Slav/Russian tradition on what the name Rus’ meant, and on how it arose) that the name arose **in Byzantium**.

It is appalling tribute to the lack among scholars of, literally, circumspection (meaning looking around in all directions, or from all angles) and orientation (meaning looking towards the centre, or Orient, i.e. towards Greek and Middle Eastern sources) that just about no-one has bothered to take in earnest the sole bit of precise information Nestor does give on this subject. Even scholars investigating the chronology<sup>3</sup> of his *Tale of Bygone Ages* have not put store by focusing on **when** “Michael began to rule as Emperor”. Michael did **not** begin to rule in 852 AD.<sup>4</sup> By the simple expedient of rectifying the date of 852 to the year when he in fact did commence his

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1. Cf. Varangian Questions, *Scando-Slavica Supplementum 1*, Cph. 1970. Instances are legion. Svennung 1967, 44:2A, “Jordanes und Scandia”, 49: “Ibn Chordâdhbeh, um 820-912 [sic], lässt Schwarzfuchspelze durch warägische Kaufleute von den äussersten Ländern der Slawen bis ans Mittelmeer gelangen.” This is mostly a Russian usage, cf. e.g. Kočurkina 1973, 8: “Judging by the finds of coins, the oldest of which are from the 8th c.,... the Varangians first showed up in the Ladoga area..” It is found more intermittently in Western historians, e.g. Paasche 1977, 84-87.
  2. Cf. Stang 1986. Stender-Petersen 1954, 9 maintains that this enumeration of ‘Varangian peoples’ (sic) reflects the Byzantine view of the Varangian guard in Constantinople as consisting of Swedes, Norwegians, Angles (i.e. Anglo-Danes ousted by the Normans) and Gothlanders.
  3. e.g. Kuz’min 1968.
  4. Lixačev/Romanov 1950, II, 230 explains the ‘852’ mistake, adding: “In fact, Mixail acceded to the throne in 842.” This, as we shall have occasion to see below, is not wholly correct either.

reign, we should have bells, both Byzantine and others, ringing in the minds of most historians.

Another equally basic point of departure, for the present study as well as for countless precursors down through the last quarter millennium, is the Bertinian Annals of the Frankish court at Ingelheim, under the year 839. Suffice it that here the name Rus', or rather 'Rōs, in Latin Rhos, first surfaces – as a name for a group of visitors to Byzantium who are sent on along with a Byzantine mission to Ingelheim. At Ingelheim the Franks discover these men “who they say are being called 'Rōs” (*Rhos vocari dicebant*), to be Swedes.<sup>1</sup>

How now does this tally with the above insistence that Russia got its name at the start of Michael's reign? The very lack of attention paid by historians to this (seeming) discrepancy is eloquent testimony to the need for a new venue.

With an altro-centrist perspective, following an historical-mythological approach, and hoping to satisfy a multi-disciplinary demand for 'mutually assured construction', for inter-confirmation from as many angles as possible, we start off in the minds of the ninth century AD, in the middle of the world. We begin by looking backwards – to an age looking even farther backwards in time.

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1. Rau 1961, II, 42-45.

## 2. Byzantine Archaism and Princes of ‘Ros

*Non a Scandinavis datum est Rossis nomen.*  
(Bayer 1741)

### 2.1. A General Problem: Lack of Byzantine Sources

Following the methodological approach suggested above, we should seek the roots of a novel rule-related term **of** the periphery not necessarily **in** the periphery, but rather, preferably (in the absence of some such unimpeachable explanation) in the terminology of the centre: either in ‘centrist’ concepts (such as *kagan* or *caesar*) or in concepts coined by the centre to underscore the importance and prestige of some select *part* of the periphery.

Such latter terms obtain in no mean number. Suffice it to mention here the prestigious title of the ruler of Darband (the ‘Iron Gate’ in the Caucasus) from late Sasānid and early Islamic times – *ṣāhib as-sarīr*, ‘Master of the Throne’, in recognition of his strategic role in guarding the northwestern approaches to Iran and the due northern ones to Baḡdād.<sup>1</sup> (In Byzantine Greek sources, the word *trapesītis* has been recognized as a humouristic twist to *darbandī*, ‘man of the mountain passes’; other derivatives being the Slavonic and Scandinavian *drabant*, German *Trabant* and French *traban*.)<sup>2</sup>

Byzantine terms of equally ‘central’ importance were applied to the far-northern peripheries of the Byzantine world view. Yet when dealing with the long-dead Byzantines, we must take for our basis two facts.

For one thing, the paucity of Byzantine manuscripts preserved for posterity presents us with a major problem.<sup>3</sup>

Lists by Byzantine scholars of works which have subsequently been lost are indicative. One such source is the *Bibliotheca* or *Muriobiblos* by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Photios (c. 810-893): “The number of lost books reviewed is substantial. According to the dedicatory letter and concluding paragraphs Photios compiled the work for his brother Tarasius before setting out on an embassy to the Arabs (828-858).” It has been concluded that the list was actually compiled much later, and even that Photios did not visit Arab-held Mesopotamia at all; leaving posterity with the enigma: “Where did he find all the texts, a high proportion of which have since been lost?”<sup>4</sup>

This specific problem may have its specific solution: The works cited by Photios, seemingly prior to his leaving for ‘Irāq, are probably the fruit of that very journey. Photios’ travel is attested independently by Elias of Jerusalem, 879; by Mauri; and by Nicolaus Mysticus. He may have worked in a number of libraries, including the caliphal ones; but most probably he never visited Baḡdād or Sāmarrā, contenting himself instead with the Christian libraries..

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1. Minorskij 1963, 132.

2. Grégoire 1938, 280-281.

3. General discussion in e.g. Mango 1975.

4. Wilson 1983, 88, 93-94; also, Treadgold 1977.

A main reason for the *general* lack of literature preserved from the Byzantine era is the sack of Byzantium in 1204, during the Fourth Crusade.<sup>1</sup> This leaves us with a more roundabout option: taking recourse to what little is directly preserved, and piecing it together with what may be indirectly preserved or referred to, in the literatures of neighbouring peoples; and in particular, the rivals of Byzantium, the Arabs.

The words ‘indirectly preserved or referred to’ sum up a vast problem – the very one that called for this study: Mediaeval literature is full of allusions (as is good contemporary literature). It is also full of plagiarisms, reworkings, more or less masked quotations. This simple fact of life is of course not so simple at all to cope with for moderns, who will be prone to miss points which suggested themselves easily to the mediaeval writer and reader. These men of the pen were generally erudite enough – and large chunks of their erudition we do not have, in part because it is simply gone, yet in some part also because our scholarly specializations and interests today do not match theirs. To posterity, ‘allusiveness’ can spell elusiveness.

On the other hand, there is good reason to warn against jumping to conclusions, when finding wordings in one author reminiscent of another. Style was often stereotypical. It is on the strength of context and specificity that otherwise unacknowledged loans can be found out.

In sum, there is no short cut. With the partial exception of chronicles, we cannot go for the facts before we have understood, to the extent that this is feasible for us today, the rules of literature that once prevailed.

## 2.2. Byzantine Literary Atavism

The other thing we must take into consideration is that peculiarity of Byzantine literature, viz. its propensity for learned recourse to archaic nomenclature. Now this may be found in authors of other nationalities too; thus Rodrigues of Toledo, though inspired by the *Crónica mozárabe* from 754, describes the battle of Poitiers in the following terms:<sup>2</sup>

*Charles, otherwise called the Hammer, taking with him Germanics and Gepids, as well as Franks, who had remained, crushed Abderra[h]mān, who was out a-raiding.*

The said “Germanos et Gepidas” belong in the Migration Age, several centuries prior to Poitiers. Yet in Byzantine authors, suchlike is the rule, not the exception. Briefly, the writers we meet “are incorrigibly archaic in their language”.<sup>3</sup>

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1. same, 218.

2. “Historia arabum”, Hispaniae Illustratae, II, 1603, 170, in Melvinger 1955, 124 n. 1: “*Carolus autem dictus Martellus, Germanos et Gepidas secum ducens, cum Francis, qui remanserant, Abderraman se obtulit deuastanti.*”

3. same 64.

This archaism, common to writers of Greek and Latin alike, could go to really ridiculous extremes. Thus, Synesius of Cyrene (c. 370-412) even explains why there cannot be **new** barbarians:<sup>1</sup>

*Now it was not by walling off their own house that the former rulers prevented the barbarians either of Asia or Europe from entering it. Rather by their own acts did they admonish these men to wall off their own by crossing the Euphrates in pursuit of the Parthians, and the Danube in pursuit of the Goths and Massagetae. But now these nations spread terror among us, crossing over in their turn, assuming other names, and some of them falsifying by art even their countenances, so that another race new and foreign may appear to have sprung from the soil.*

By further point of illustration, there have been doubts that a number of Byzantine authors, some late indeed, were Christian, the tenor of their writings being decidedly ‘pagan’, regardless of the fact that Christianity had been enforced as state religion for centuries, ever since 313 AD. These doubts we may discount, and the reason why is most relevant to our enquiry:

“It would be quite wrong to see in this avoidance of Christian terms on the part of Malchus, Procopius, Agathias, and Theophylact Simocatta anything more than a literary affectation. Malchus was certainly a Christian.. Procopius also lets us see in a few places that he was a nominal, if not a fervent, Christian.. Agathias’ position is the same... Of Theophylact’s faith there can be no doubt... he speaks on other occasions like some pious monk...”<sup>2</sup>

Why then such ‘pagan posturizing’? “It was then for reasons other than religious ones that these authors spoke of *res Christianae* in the way they generally did. Indeed, their affectation is not confined to the field of religion... For similar reasons each new horde of barbarians that invaded the empire was identified with some extinct tribe culled from the pages of Herodotus or Tacitus, or else referred to simply as ‘Scythians’... The Goths were regularly identified with the long extinct Getae (Procopius and Agathias are here exceptions) – a practice alluded to in a typically caustic phrase by St. Jerome: ‘certe Gothos omnes retro eruditi magis Getas quam Gog et Magog appellare consueverunt’ (*Quest. Hebr. 10, P.L. xxiii, 1000*). In the tenth century, Leo Diaconus calls Bulgarians Moesians and Russians **Scythians** (*e.g. 9.6, p. 149 Bonn*). Agathias, while admitting some foreign names, feels that he must apologize for disfiguring his pages with them (2.27, p. 125.5).“

The above authors having been “thought of as heretics even”, the fact is simply “that in writing their histories they looked to the classics”.<sup>3</sup> This nuisance (to moderns) mars the pages not only of authors writing in Greek, but also in Latin. Thus, e.g., Ammianus Marcellinus (392-393 AD) “suffered from a sort of literary atavism.. Ammianus promises to straighten out the confused opinions of the geographers and to present the truth. Actually, he offers the queerest hodgepodge of quotations from

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1. *De Regno*, XI, in A. Fitzgerald, *The Essays and Hymns of Synesius of Cyrene*, Oxford 1930, 1, 27, cf. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 7.

2. Cameron 1981, 318-321.

3. same.

Herodotus, Pliny, and Mela, naming the Geloni, Agathyrsi, Melanchlaeni, Anthropophagi, Amazons, and Seres, as if all these peoples were still living in his time.”<sup>1</sup>

Even travelogues could and did abound in archaisms.<sup>2</sup> The very patriarch of Constantinople, Photios, never did visit Arabs or Muslims, nor even Nestorians, down in Baġdād in the 9th c. AD; instead of course, he travelled to the *Assyrians*, a word used by other writers too to denote the subjects of the Caliph.<sup>3</sup> Such archaism persisted right down to the very end of the Empire at the hands of Mehmet the Great in 1453.<sup>4</sup> In an early 14th c. Byzantine author,<sup>5</sup> Russians are still Tauroscythians – in the region of the fabled Hyperboreans, not far from Thule, the Mongols are simply Scythians, and Celts and Galatians, Chaldeans and Goths (Gotthi) are still around, as are *Parsos et Medos, Babylonios et Assyrios*...

In keeping with the above: What would the Byzantines be prone to do, in the face of real newcomers, such as those who put in an appearance in Constantinople itself in 839 AD? One thing for sure: They would scurry into the library, leafing through ancient sources (now generally lost), until they **found** what they craved: an ancient label, taking the newness out of the comers.

This in brief, is what happened, as far as can be ascertained judging by the sources to be marshalled in the present study: The Byzantine chancery came up with a label or two, the most apposite they could find, and stuck them to the eight-thirtyniners.<sup>6</sup> And they **stuck**.

### 2.3. Pagan Label plus Christian Addendum

The impression we get here is (like most attempts at characterizing the past) not quite correct or exhaustive. For to this heavy heritage from their classical and pagan past, a Christian addendum did accrue to the Byzantines, in the way of what we may term a geographically located eschatological fixture:

Their attention riveted on a threat from the extreme north, the Byzantines were predisposed, one might even say programmed, triggered, to try and identify ‘repre-

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1. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 19.

2. same, 460: “When Theodosius fell ill in the fall of 394, he summoned his son Honorius to come to Milan as soon as possible.. In describing their journey Claudian indulged in archaic names: Rhodope, Oeta, Pelion, Enipeus, Dodona, and Chaonia. Translated into the language of the time, it means that Serena hurried to Thessalonica and took the Via Egnatia..”

3. Hergenröther 1966, I, 343: Liutprand, Leg. ad Nicephor., p. 356 (post. Leonem Diac.) ed. Bonn, Theophanes Continuatus L.VI. p. 415.

4. Stritter 1770, III, 142-145, citing Byzantine historians from 1398-99, on Scythians dwelling “*from Sarmatia... all the way to the Assyrians*”, etc.

5. Nicephoros Gregoras, History of Byzantium: PG 148, 155-163.

6. The closest hypothesis to date is the long-forgotten (and long-discredited) one by Krug 1848, I, 211 ff, cf Mošin 1931, 135: *Rus*’ stems not from Finnish *ruotsi* but from Greek ‘*Ros* – ‘*Ρῶς*, in the Bertinian Annals *Rhos*); this in turn goes back upon Greek *ῥοῦσιος*, *ῥοῆς* (sic), signifying the same as *οἱ ἔρυθροί* ‘the Reds’, which the Byzantines used to call the Germanic peoples. Nestor supposedly found the term in the Greek chronicle and passed it on into Russian literature.

sentatives' of this threat among all new arrivals from the north with whom they came into contact.

Of the two terms which are of interest to us here (as they once were of interest to the Byzantines and, as we shall see, their Middle Eastern neighbours as well), one is of pre-Christian, the other of Christian (Biblical) origin. By sheer chance, they sounded quite alike; consequently, they could easily be associated with one another (as indeed they were). It seems that the use of these terms to designate far-northerners antedates both the Viking age and the genesis of Kievan Russia by half a millennium or more.

During the first period (the late 3rd to early 6th cc. AD) the pre-Christian **russ**-usage appears to predominate. During the second period (the mid-9th to late 10th cc.), the *russ*-usage is considerably supplemented, or contaminated, by the Christian **Ros** concept, of Biblical vintage.<sup>1</sup>

The beginnings of these Byzantine traditions leading (as our hypothesis goes) to the naming of Russia are to be sought in the era of the first mass appearance of far-northerners in the very heart of the Byzantine empire, in the age of the most intensive Byzantine relations with 'proto-Vikings'. On this score alone, the name of Rus' (if coined by the Byzantines) could reasonably reflect traditions bound up with some part of the Gothic presence. We note in particular the **Eruls**, i.e. bands of Scandinavian warriors, sometimes subservient, sometimes antagonistic, to the Goths. During the 3rd as well as the 5th-6th cc., these warrior bands raided both the western and the eastern parts of the Mediterranean world, razing even Byzantium and its environs.

## 2.4. 'Erul Theories' to Date

Mainly as a curiosity today we note the insistence by the great Russian historian Tatiščev that the Russians, meaning the Slovenes in Novgorod, got their earliest start from the Vandals, around 550 AD.<sup>2</sup> For other theories on an early Germanic (migration-age) background we move on into the 20th century.

An Erul origin of the name *Rus'* was actually inferred in passing by Klebel,<sup>3</sup> inspired by a passage in Markwart.<sup>4</sup> The latter conclusion has merited little subsequent

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1. Theories on the Greek origin of the name Rus' are not wholly new: Thus, Paszkiewicz 1954, criticized by Lovmjan'skij 1985, 163: "The long-forgotten view that the name *Rus'* is from Greek (Mošin) has recently reappeared in literature (Paszkiewicz). This name then would stem from the word *rusyj*, designating the colour of the hair, just like *Polovcy* from *polovyj*. Yet this view is gainsaid by linguistics ('*Rōs* is no originally Greek word), as well as by historical facts, which point to the wholly local origin of the name, and not to a Greek loanword, as this view would have it." Lovmjan'skij is misleading in ascribing such a view to Mošin, who writes (1931, 110): "Some for instance attempt to derive the Russian name from a supposed Greek form, not taking into account that a similar hypothesis was once defended by Krug – and vitiated already 75 years ago by Kunik and Gedeonov."
  2. Tatiščev 1962, I, 96, гл. 1: "В гл. 40 показано, что словене из Вандалии в Северную Русь около 550 лет по Христе пришли, гл. 17, н. 20, гл. 40, которые, всю Европу воевав, безсумненно письмо имели и с собою в Русь принесли..."
  3. 1939, 69.
  4. 1903, 382-391.



attention or discussion. It is worth quoting. Having identified the enigmatic *Rosomones* mentioned by Jordanes around 550 with the Eruls, Markwart sums up his position:

“Die abgekürzte Form Ros... muss sich nun in der Umgebung der Maiotis noch Jahrhunderte hindurch gehalten haben und wurde im Anfang des neunten Jahrhunderts, als die ersten schwedischen Wikingerscharen vom Norden her teils als Kaufleute, teils als kühne Seeräuber im Schwarzen Meere und in der Maiotis erschienen, auf die neuen Ankömmlinge übertragen, die in vielen Beziehungen eine so auffällige Übereinstimmung mit den alten Herulern zeigten.”

Markwart does not however venture to explain how the name *Ros-(omones)* arose in the first place, nor how it came to be preserved “in the vicinity of the Maiotis” (meaning the Sea of Azov). Ten years later he had come to reject this theory himself, concluding instead that the name had nothing to do with the Eruls or the Black and Azov seas, but originated in the littoral areas of the Baltic; here it is a fabulous passage on the **Hrws** (= Rosomones), to be discussed presently, that calls for his comment:<sup>1</sup>

“Ich habe früher bei diesem rätselhaften Volke, das sich durch seinen Wuchs von allen Umwohnenden abhob und angeblich keine Waffen hatte, an die Heruler gedacht... Seither bin ich jedoch auf Gründe gestossen, die dafür sprechen, dass die Hros samt den in ihrer Umgebung genannten Fabelvölkern nicht in der Nähe der Maiotis (Asowschen Meer), sondern in der Umgebung des baltischen Meeres zu suchen sind.”

A more recent theory, that the Rosomones were indeed Eruls (but without any reference to the question of Rus', Russia), will come in for discussion below.<sup>2</sup> Common to these theories is the endeavour to explain the name Rus'/Ros[omones] as an *Erul* term, or simply as a term *for* the Eruls (origin undecided); but not as a **Byzantine** term applied to them.

One hypothesis to be tested out in the present work is that part of the explanation of Russia's name may be sought here: The sole (historically and linguistically) unimpeachable solution does not reside upon the shores of the far-northern Baltic, nor in Novgorod or Kiev, nor for that matter by the Black or Azov seas, nor in the now long forgotten Eruls; but one seed may lie in a twin/entwined tradition from the twilight years of late pagan and early Christian antiquity on a periphery people of ‘central’ significance.

Roughly, the explanation is as follows: Two conceptions more or less coalesced, or tended to contaminate each other. On the one hand, there is the word **rus[s]-**, in Latin *russeus*, in Greek (derived from the Latin) ‘*rousos*, and for that matter, in Russian *rusyj*, meaning ‘reddish, ruddy-blond’.

Without addressing philology, let alone ancient history, Tatiščev in 1750 insists that the Varangian founding fathers of Russia were Finns, as the Finns “more than

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1. 1913, 273.

2. Gschwantler 1968.

any others”, fit the description of *rusyj*. He also suggests that the name may derive from a prince called **Rus** (‘Red’) or **Čermen**, **Čermny** (*sic*).<sup>1</sup>

More precisely, we have word of the Goths and the Scythians, the Langobards, the Huns and the Eruls in connection with ‘the Amazons’, with the Eruls giving rise to (Byzantine, eastern Syrian, Iranian, and subsequently also Arab) ideas that the menfolk of the Amazons were somehow precisely *reddish*, or more correctly, *ruddy-blond*. ‘Giving rise’ must be duly qualified. It is more correct to say that the Goths and Eruls fitted, glove-in-hand, a series of Byzantine preconceived notions, meaning literary *topoi*. As we shall see, blue-eyed and red-haired or ruddy-blond warriors, with gigantic bodies, too big to be carried on horseback (or with too small horses to cope with them!), were **literally in situ beforehand**, in the insistent mindscape of literature, before Goths & Eruls came along and, unwittingly, called their cue.<sup>2</sup>

The most fantastic ‘Erul theory’ to date regards not Russia but Iceland:<sup>3</sup> “The hankering of the Icelanders for being utterly unique sometimes takes on quaint expression. In 1959 a sensational theory was launched on the true origins of the Icelanders in a book with the bombastic title *Uppruni Islendinga*, ‘Origin of the Icelanders’. Here the Director of the Icelandic National Museum Barði Guðmundsson traces the people’s culture and character back to the year 100 B.C. and an East Germanic tribe called the Heruls. These had their origins in Scandinavia, but moved down through Europe and by the by established realms down by the Black sea as well as in present-day Hungary, where they enjoyed close contact with Hellenistic culture. Having battled Attila’s Huns, participated in the siege of Rome and the deposal of the last West Roman emperor, the Herul hordes headed north once more, but quickly came into conflict with Charles the Great and the Pope because of their pagan and Hellenistic culture. In order to avoid pesecution from the Christians the Heruls ensconced themselves upon the west coast of Norway and Denmark, but were soon forced to set out for Iceland...”

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1. 1962, I, 286, 291, ch. 30.2, 31.4).

2. Söderlind 1978, 40 ff. believes that Goths who survived the late 4th c. Hun invasion came to be called Rus’ by their Slavonic neighbours, reflecting Old Slavonic *rud(u)* or *rus(u)* ‘red, reddish blond’; cf. Thulin 1981, 175.

3. *Humanist* 5, Oslo 1991, 13 ‘Herulerne’ (*sic*).

## 2.5. The Big Biblical Blunder

On the other hand, as the other part of this ‘entwined tradition’,<sup>1</sup> there was that Biblical name ‘Ros.’<sup>2</sup> It first occurs in Genesis 46:21, as the name of one of the offspring of Benjamin.<sup>3</sup> Save for this rather barren mention, it is associated with Gog and Magog.

To the Byzantines, the Prophet Ezekiel, ch. 38, read as follows:<sup>4</sup>

1. *And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying:*

2. *Son of man! set thy face against Gog, (in) the land of Magog, the prince of Ros, Meschech and Tubal, and prophesy against him,*

3. *And say, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, prince of Ros, Meschech and Tubal;*

4. *And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords...*

15. *And thou shalt come from thy place out of the ends of the north, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army.*

16. *And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days...*

18. *And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come ...that..*

20. *the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.*

21. *And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God...*

In addition, the Revelation of St. John, ch. 20, 7-8, states that in the end of time,

*Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle – the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*

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1. A faintly similar theory was championed by Briem 1923: The word Rus´ has two inspirations. First, the Norse **drót** (sic) ‘armed retinue’, which in the genitive *drots-* passed into Finnish as *ruotsi*, and from the Finnish into Novgorodian Slovene as *rus´*. Second, the Slavs as well as the Byzantines on hearing this word came up with the nickname *Rus-*, meaning ‘Reds’, since the Scandinavians they met with in the East were indeed strikingly blond. Third, this in turn sparked life into an ancient name Ros, having been applied to tribes such as the *Rosomones* and the *Roxolani* (!) in the Black sea area, which was now applied to the Norse newcomers – in keeping with the Byzantine propensity for archaisms. The major archaism being, fourth, the Biblical one, in Ezekiel. Hence the dual terminology *Rossia-Rus*.
  2. Never suggested, there is also the Latin word **ros** ‘dew’, ‘moisture’, ‘water’, and the placename **Rosea** or **Rosia**, as well as **Roseus**: Smith 1968, 649. Also Isidor, Lindsay 1911, XIII, x, 9: “**Ros Graecum est, quod illi dronos dicunt. Alii putant ros dictum quia rarus est, et non spissus ut pluvia.**”
  3. Harper’s 1985, 885: ‘Rosh’.
  4. quoting the King James Church of England edition, but with “*the chief prince of Meschech and Tubal*” rendered, as it was in the Greek, by “*the prince of Ros, Meschech and Tubal*”; on which more below.

In the Ezekiel passages above, the “horses and horsemen” spring to mind. This would seem to contradict a tradition on far-northerners too bulky to ride horses. Such is however not the case. Trying to read verses 4 and 14 of Ezekiel as 4th-5th c. Byzantines would have been prone to construe them, we cannot subscribe to a facile interpretation Gog/‘Ros = horsemen.

The scene described by Ezekiel is expressly related to “the latter days”; meaning, to the Doomsday-expectant Byzantines, their present. The text says that “Gog the prince of ‘Ros” shall come with all his army, *including* horses and horsemen, and also (‘even’) “a great company” with bucklers, shields and swords. In the 4th-5th cc. AD, the Byzantines did indeed face the fiercest of horsemen, the Huns.

According to available information, the battle equipment of the Huns did comprise shields and swords, but not bucklers<sup>1</sup> (meaning small, round shields held by a handle or worn on the arm).<sup>2</sup> The handle on the inside of a buckler was protected by a hollow boss (a buckle, in Latin *umbo*) in the centre of the front side. Whereas the shields of the Huns (like those of the Scythians, the Persian infantry, and some Roman troops) seem to have been made of wickerwork, possibly covered with leather,<sup>3</sup> bucklers were standard gear of Roman and Germanic troops including those allies of the Huns – the Eruls.<sup>4</sup>

Further, on the one hand there is “thou”, Gog/‘Ros, and on the other “*many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses*”. If a far-northern people (such as the Eruls), identified with ‘Ros, did make its appearance in the company of a horse-riding people (such as the Huns), then the Byzantines would – irresistably – have found their cue. The cues they did give to contemporaries were dramatic enough at times: Starting off with razing the most famed Greek cities in 267 AD, they a goodly hundred years later joined up with the Huns in overthrowing Goths and Romans alike, and yet another century later, in 476, “penetrated into Italy and dissolved the western Roman Empire”.<sup>5</sup>

Two scholars have earlier seen the name of Russia as a derivative of these Biblical ‘prince of ‘Ros’ passages.<sup>6</sup> So did, long before (and not noted by them) Makarij, Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox church at the end of the reign of John II, Great Prince of Muscovy, and under his successor Ivan the Terrible.<sup>7</sup> None of these however made any reference to the Eruls or the traditions to be discussed in this study.

Were there any convincing reasons (convincing to the Byzantines and to posterity alike) for tacking this tradition onto the Eruls? That is what we shall inspect in the following chapter, along with the other main *clichés* that stuck to them thanks to classical authors.

With regard to the Biblical ‘prince of ‘Ros’ bit we note: The starting point for speculations here was a philological – and logical – blunder: As has been established

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1. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 253-254.

2. Webster’s New World Dictionary, 3rd College ed, N.Y. 1988, 181.

3. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 253, citing Aelian, *De natura animalium*, II, 16.

4. Procopius: see ch. 3 below.

5. Lewis/Short 1975, 850: ‘*Heruli*’ (*Eruli*).

6. Florovskij 1925, Sjuzumov 1940; the latter criticized by Solov’ev 1957, 134-135.

7. Tatiš’čev 1962, I, 288 (ch. 30.7-8).

by philologists in our times,<sup>1</sup> there **was** originally no ‘prince of ‘Ros’ whatsoever; for the Hebrew **roš** (whence the Greek *ros*) signifies merely ‘head, leader, chief’, cf. modern Hebrew *roš hašana*, Arabic *ra’s as-sana*, meaning the New Year’s feast (literally, ‘at the head of the (new) year’). Yet for the mediaeval Byzantines, and other Christians too, ‘the prince of ‘Ros’ was psychologically very much alive, somewhere up in the extreme north.

A far-reaching blunder indeed, if it can be substantiated that it in due time inspired the name of the greatest state on earth.

## 2.6. *The Small Biblical Blunder*

A caveat: The above introduction to Byzantine mentality may leave readers with an impression that these mediaeval Greeks were gullible slaves of Scripture. Not so! We owe it to their chancery: For in point of fact the chancery did make a distinction between the Biblical fiends and the newcomers; a very fine one:

The Biblical ‘name’ is ‘Rós, or in Greek script, ‘Ρῶς. The 839 newcomers were termed ‘Rōs; or in the Greek, ‘Ρῶς. The vowel is the very same; so was even the pronunciation, by Byzantine times, the sole difference being orthographic. Originally, the former (Biblical) ‘name’ was short, and the latter, long. By the time interesting us, this distinction was gone. Yet a distinction there is; and, as we shall see later on in this study, it is a most meaningful one.

To the extent that this term was used to designate the Northerners, it was generally the latter, non-Biblical form that was applied, and from as early an age as we can see, following the 839 visit; it is only from the second half of the 10th c. on that the Biblical form comes into prominence in some authors.

Does not this make for a contrary conclusion: that the Byzantines from the very start of their acquaintance with these ruffians discounted the Biblical interpretation? The answer is an emphatic no. Although they did distinguish the ‘Rōs from the (Biblical) ‘Ros, they were (as we shall see) ‘Biblically alert’.

So should we be, both matching and understanding their sophistication: To simply derive the very name ‘**Rōs** from ‘**Ros** would be in its turn, on our part, ‘a small Biblical blunder’.<sup>2</sup>

In sum: The Byzantines employed **three** name-forms of interest to the formation of our name, ‘**Rus-**, ‘**Ros**, ‘**Rōs**. Why?

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1. first by König 1916; yet unmentioned by him, also by Tatiščev, in his polemics against the view of the Metropolitan Makarij (1962, I, 129, ch. 9.1, 288, ch. 30.8): “В Езекии же рос в еврейской значит верхушку или голову, то оное греками не переведено и принято за имя существенное, от которого хотят произвести россиян... В еврейском языке рос значит главу, или верховность...”. Tatiščev however faults the Russian translator, not the Greek.
  2. Committed by e.g. the Byzantinologist Sjuzumov 1940, Thulin 1981, 182.

### 3. Eruls & Red Germanics

*We do not wish here to propagate a new theory on the rise of the Russian state or, more correctly, the name of Russia, which then would have to be called the Gothic one; yet we cannot refrain from stating that as the question now stands, it would in many respects be more fitting than the Normanist-Scandinavian [theory].”*

Vasil'evskij, Russko-vizantijskija issledovanija, 1893, ccxcix-ccc.

The subject matter of the present chapter is not primarily the Eruls ‘as such’ (*an sich*), nor the self-perception of these now distant folk (*für sich*); it cannot be, as what we have direct access to (in addition to some archaeological finds, plus Elder Runic inscriptions) is a series of literary mentions from antiquity. Precisely these do constitute our theme of research. What we are out to map may be termed ‘**transfers**’; meaning conceptions, paradigms, clichés if one will, which were either transferred from even earlier sources **to** the Eruls (such as the Biblical ‘Ros), or which arose in connection with the Eruls (or Erul-associated peoples) only to be transferred **from** the literature of late antiquity on to (as our hypothesis goes) the 9th-10th c. Rus’.

We are interested in whether the Eruls, or for that matter other Germanic peoples, according to literature were:

- 1) foot soldiers, exceptionally long-limbed or heavy-built,
- 2) exceptionally fleet, remarkably light-armed,
- 3) ruddy-blond and blue-eyed, or
- 4) otherwise reddish/yellowy,
- 5) ‘princely’ (cf. ‘princes of ‘Ros’),
- 6) living in marshes, or on a marshy isle,
- 7) seafaring pirates,
- 8) associated with the Amazons.

Following this main enquiry, we give brief treatment to such non-literary epigraphic materials as have been suggested to deal with the Eruls; ending with an attempt at approaching the question of what it was that constituted their identity and staying power. Who were they, in relation to e.g. the Gepids, or the *Germani*?

#### 3.1. Gross-Limbed Foot Soldiers

Before delving into the possibly pedestrian rôle of the Eruls, we note at once that here a classical literary **topos** makes itself felt. The historian Eunapius of Sardes (c. 345-420) refers to the Huns as the “*snub-nosed and weak people who, as Herodotus says, dwell near the Ister*” (i.e. the Danube); he is in fact garbling Herodotus V. 9. 5-6, who characterizes the horses of the Sigynnae tribe dwelling near the Ister as “*snub-nosed and incapable of carrying men*”.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 9.

This immutable classical ‘fact’ regarding a people near the Danube would be sure to be transferred and stick to any later people in the vicinity fitting the same bill. Living by the Black Sea like the onetime Sigynnae, the Eruls constituted a likely candidate for being characterized as a people “incapable of being carried by horses”.

Now grossness of limbs and stature characterized other northerners too, not only the Eruls. Thus, Sidonius Apollinarius attests to the tallness of the Burgundians (*septipedes patronos*).<sup>1</sup> The poet Pacatus’ *Panegyric on Theodosius XXXII*, 2, from c. 390, makes much of “*the threatening Caucasus and the iced Taurus and the Danube which hardens the gigantic bodies*” of, evidently, the Goths.<sup>2</sup> And Tacitus, as we shall have occasion to see in the sub-chapter on the ‘red-’n-blue’ below, is insistent that the Germanic peoples have “*great bodies, especially powerful for attack*”.

As early as 43 AD, Pomponius Mela asserts (III, 3) that the peoples of Germania “*are gigantic as to both mind and body*”. It is in him too that we find the oldest testimony to the horselessness of the mates of the Amazons (I, 19):

*Near the Maeotis... by the mouth of the river Tanais... among the Iksamatians the women cope with the type of activities that the men [otherwise] apply themselves to. The[ir] menfolk fight on foot and with arrows, the women, though, on horseback... The Maeotidans, dwelling in the land of the Amazons, are ruled by women. And to the north of them live the Amazons...*

The gross-limbed Eruls were clearly cut out for the rôle of the pedestrian warrior mates of the Amazons.

A note of caution: The Sigynnae of Herodotus are *not* the literary precursor defining a niche and a ‘need’ for identifying bodily grossness from up north. The point of his words is not that the Sigynnae are so big but that their horses are so small. The size relationship becomes relevant only in conjunction with another, more powerful tradition on big-built northerners.

Already the Greeks described the Thracians (cf. on Maximinus Thrax below!) as a people of huge bodily size, “a conception which subsequently was transferred to Getae, Scythians and finally, Goths.”<sup>3</sup>

The people called the Spali, whom the Goths had to vanquish on their way south according to Jordanes, is another case in point.<sup>4</sup> The name became something of a by-name for ‘giants’<sup>5</sup> (whence indeed *ispoliny* ‘giants’ in Russian).<sup>6</sup> It apparently

1. Schmidt 1969, 194, citing Sidonius Apoll. 11. Also, Perrin 1968, 387-390: Sidonius often visited them, expressing surprise at their exceptional stature – and comparing them to giants so big that a kitchen “could hardly contain them” (Carmen XII, *Epist.* VIII, 9.5).
2. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 45.
3. H. Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten*, Munich 1979, 460; cf. Wolfram, *Überlegungen* 495 n. 63 (Not found in Wolfram 1979, Indices!). According to Wolfram 1979, 460 n. 58, Ammianus Marcellinus criticizes this ‘transfer’ in his *Rerum gestarum libri XXXI*, Book XXVII, 4:2-3. This is not correct, cf. Rolfe 1972, III, 22-23.
4. Vernadskij 1964, 263-266.
5. Wolfram 1979, 41: “Als Beispiel für eine feindliche Auseinandersetzung nennt die ‘Origo’ den Kampf mit den Spalen. Ihre Herkunft ist unbekannt; ihr Name soll in einem slawischen Idiom soviel wie ‘die Riesen’ bedeuten. Eine derart freundliche ist eher für eine Fremdbezeichnung typisch, weshalb die Spalen wohl keine Slawen waren.”
6. Dvornik 1949, 279; Schwarz 1956, 87; Harmatta 1970, 48-49.

goes back upon Pliny the Elder, who writes of giants among the Scythians and also of the tribe *Spalei*.<sup>1</sup>

As for grossness of limbs and the likes, among the Gauts (or Göts) back in Scandinavia, a potential king would be sized up not by his height but by his posterior – or so Rolf Kráki's Saga will have it:<sup>2</sup>

*'It is the law of the Gøts', he said, 'that a great meet is held and to it all Gøts are summoned. A large chair is set forth at the meeting place and in it two men can easily be seated together; but that man is to be king who can fill the entire seat. I believe you will easily fill that seat.' Thereafter they parted and wished each other all well.*

*Now Thore journeyed off till he came to Gøtland to an earl, and the earl receiving him kindly, he stayed the night.*

*Whoever saw Thore said that he could be king of the Gøts on account of his size, in which few were his equals.*

Another Rolf is met with in the Saga of Harald Fairhair (para 24) by Snorri Sturluson:

*Ragnvald the earl of Møre was the dearest friend king Harald had, and the king cherished him highly. Earl Ragnvald was married to Hild, the daughter of Rolf Nevja [= 'the Nose']; their sons were Rolf and Thore... Rolf was a great viking. He was so gross-limbed that no horse could carry him, therefore he went on foot everywhere. He was called Walking Rolf. He often harried in the Eastern way...*

That no horse could carry Rolf smacks of popular fiction; and his frequent harrying in the Eastern Way may indicate an easterly source to the tale, with the time-honoured *topos* having simply latched onto a suitable 'carrier'.

In a word, Eruls and associated peoples, even historical personages from later ages, could and did fill a familiar rôle from pre-extant literature. There are in fact four distinct bodies of sources bearing on the infantry (non-horse-carried) **or** horseriding/cavalry rôle which was ascribed (or ascribable) to the Eruls.

**First**, we are beholden to Roman military expertise. The Roman strategist Vegetius c. 400 notes that for the 'pedestrian' (i.e. infantry) troops which are termed 'the light-armed', the long-limbed Germanic soldiers were much preferable to the shorter Romans – for being fleeter and more agile.<sup>3</sup>

**Second**, there is a spate of sources on such extreme bodily bulkiness characterizing the far-northerners that horses could not carry them!

In 521 AD, a king Huggleik (our modernized form!) or Hugilaicus (the most trustworthy spelling!) of the 'Getae' is surprised by the Franks and killed at the mouth of the Rhine while ashore raiding the Frisians. Three sources attest to his death – and

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1. *Historia Naturalis*, ed. Mayhoff 1906, I, 438.

2. Lund 1977, 59 (ch. 21); cf. Jones 1973, 43 n. 1.

3. Svernung 1967, 101: *Quid adversus Germanorum proceritatem brevitatis (Romana) potuisset audere?... Erant tamen apud veteres inter pedites qui dicebantur 'levis armaturae', funditores et ferentarii..., sed hi et velocissimi et exercitissimi legebantur...*



one of these (a *Liber Monstrorum*) to his stupendous bodily size; his bones being exhibited long after his death as a marvel.<sup>1</sup>

Who these *Getae* are, has been hotly debated – the Gauts of southern Sweden, or (less probably) the Juths of Juthland.<sup>2</sup> Did or did not he and his men answer to the appellation Eruls? One would think that Hugilaicus himself did not, as his being king of the Getae/ Gauts/ Juths was of higher status than being an earl among earls (cf. on Erul ‘warrior democracy’ below). Yet in *Beowulf* (line 2951), we do find that his adversary Ongentheow, king of the Swiones (= Svear, who later gave name to Sweden), is indeed characterized as an earl.<sup>3</sup>

There is good reason to believe that news of Huggleik and his men in the eyes of Byzantines and Orientals took on precisely the form of Eruls or ‘Reds’, or their close allies the Gepids (see subchapter 3.13 below), too gross-limbed to be carried on horseback; on which confer also the discussion in chapter 6.2 of Pseudo-Zachariah, from c. 555.

We may well ask: **why** this insistence on an entire people being too bulky to be carried on horseback? I believe there are at least two answers: One, the literary tradition on the horses of the Sigynnae above (which really stresses not the bulkiness of the men but the puniness of the horses!). Second, there is the Huggleik tradition – which stresses that the size of his bones – on exhibit at the mouth of the Rhine for decades after his death – was a wonderment for all men to see. Third, who but the Eruls were known to the *littérateurs* of the Mediterranean as ocean-faring pirates? In this capacity, their lack of *horses* as well as their ‘pedestrian’ rôle (while on their riparian rampages) would be most natural.<sup>4</sup>

**Third**, the *Getica* of Jordanes, likewise from the 550’ies, has a memorable passage attesting to the unsurpassed tallness and long-limbedness of the Eruls (a prime ‘capital’ of theirs when selling their services to the Byzantines and others):<sup>5</sup>

*The Suetidi are of this stock and excel the rest in stature. However, the Dani, who trace their origin to the same stock, drove from their homes the Heruli, who lay claim to preëminence among all the nations of Scandza for their tallness.*

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1. Knock 1978, 23: “In the mss. to the ‘Liber Monstrorum’, we meet *de Hunglaco Magtheno, De Glauco magno, De Hyglaco Getorum rege...*” In this text at this point, however, the greatest agreement is between R & B, who (sic) both produce the name as *Huiglaurus...*”
  2. Jones 1973, 30-31, 41-43.
  3. Thus, correctly, e.g. Rytter 1929, 121; yet Hall 1926, 107: “*Ongentheow there, the hoary-haired chief...*”
  4. In addition, I suspect a play on the association of their enemies the Goths with horses, cf. the usage ‘Goth = a breed of horses’, and the slighting tradition, cursorily referred to by a miffed Jordanes, that the Goths were bought free from captivity in Britain “or some other isle” at the price of a single horse: Martens 1884, 12-13 = Jordanes § 38.
  5. Mierow 1966, 56; Svennung 1967, 99-100: “*Suetidi, cogniti in hac gente reliquis.. eminentiores, quamvis et Dani ex eorum stirpe progressi, Herulos propriis sedibus expulerunt. Qui inter omnes Scandiae nationes nomen sibi ob nimia proceritate affectant praecipuum.*” An alternative translation: “*The Swedes are known for surpassing the others within this people as to long-limbedness, and likewise the Danes, who have come from their stock and who in turn expelled the Heruls from their home-seats – these who among all the nations of Scandia have won themselves a name for being the tallest...*”

Jordanes mentions one Goth “more than eight feet tall” (really a half-Goth, half-Alan) who became emperor under the name of Maximinus Thrax; his stature and endurance being decisive.<sup>1</sup>

**Fourth**, there is that third testimony from the 550’ies (after Jordanes and Pseudo-Zachariah, on whom more below), that of the historian Procopius from Caesarea, in his works *the Persian War*, *the Vandalic War*, *the Gothic War*, on the wars waged by Justinian the Great and his general Belisarius, whose secretary the author was.

The first time the Eruls literally impressed themselves upon the Persians during the wars of Justinian was in the decisive battle of Daras, in July 530. The extremity of one flank was held by Belisarius’ commander Bouzes “with a large force of horse-men and by Pharas the Erulian with three hundred of his nation”: Lurking behind a hill, the Eruls suddenly charge the enemy.

*The three hundred Eruli under Pharas from the high ground got in the rear of the enemy and made a wonderful display of valorous deeds against all of them and especially the Cadiseni. And the Persians... turned to a hasty flight.*

Here, the Eruls fight on foot. The sole mention of a horse-riding Erul on the Persian front is in connection with the death of Belisarius’ co-general Sittas while fighting the Armenians:<sup>2</sup>

*So it happened that some few of the Armenians and Sittas with not many of his followers came close upon each other... Both parties were horsemen... Suddenly someone from the Roman army, an Erulian by birth, who had been pursuing the enemy, returning impetuously from them came up to Sittas and his men. Now as it happened Sittas had planted his spear in the ground; and the Erulian’s horse fell upon this with a great rush and shattered it. And the general was exceedingly annoyed by this, and one of the Armenians, seeing him, recognized him...*

A note of caution: Another people, by the name of the Gepids, enter several times into Erul history – and vice versa. Isidor of Sevilla folk-etymologizes the name of these Gepids, which he casually transforms into *Gipedes*, from the Latin word **pedes** ‘foot’, cf also **pedester** ‘foot soldier’, even mentioning their preferred non-horseriding rôle. This tradition we shall inspect later.

Another ‘foot’ folk, the Swabi, are met with below (sub-chapter 3). And in Tacitus’ *Germania*, there is the tribe of the Chatti, “whose entire strength lies in their infantry”.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, in Tacitus, *all* the Germanics are characterized by much the same words.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between the Eruls and the *Germani* at large as to this and other *clichés* will be explored presently, at the end of this chapter.

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1. same, 74-75.

2. Wars II, iii, 21.

3. Lange 1967, 382-383; Forni/Galli 1964, 150 (ch. 30): “*Omne robur in pedite...*”

4. Lange, 148; Forni/Galli 1964, 81 (ch. 6): “*In universum aestimanti plus penes peditem roboris.*”

### 3.2. 'Nudes' and Slave-Holders

In 542, the Eruls and their associates produce a strong impression on the Persians down on the southern front, when the general Belisarius encamped “at the place called Europum, which is on the River Euphrates”<sup>1</sup> (meaning the border garrison town of Duro Europos). We again quote Procopius:

*But Chosroes, upon learning that Belisarius with the whole Roman army had encamped at Europum, decided not to continue his advance, but sent one of the royal secretaries... When Belisarius learned this, he did as follows. He himself picked out six hundred men of goodly stature and especially fine physique, and set out to hunt at a considerable distance from the camp...*

*Now when Belisarius had ascertained that the envoy was close at hand, he set up a tent of some heavy cloth... and seated himself there as one might in a desolate place, seeking thus to indicate that he had come without any equipment. On either side of the tent were Thracians and Illyrians, with Goths beyond them, and next to these Eruli, and finally Vandals and Moors. And their line extended for a great distance over the plain. For they did not remain standing always in the same place, but stood apart from one another and kept walking about, looking carelessly and without the least interest upon the envoy of Chosroes. And not one of them had a cloak or any outer garment to cover the shoulders, but they were sauntering about clad in linen tunic and trousers, and outside these their girdles. And each one had his horse-whip, but for weapons one had a sword, another an axe, another an uncovered bow...*

Chosroes' envoy, Abandanes, threatens Belisarius; who however dismisses him, and his threats, with a carefree laugh:

*And when Abandanes came to Chosroes, he advised him to take his departure with all possible speed. For he said he had met a general who in manliness and sagacity surpassed all other men, and soldiers such as he at least had never seen....*

The following year, 543, the Eruls likewise appear on foot – in contradistinction to the Romans (Byzantines) proper. Here, the Eruls under their Byzantine commander Narses invade ‘the land of Doubios’ in Persarmenia:<sup>2</sup>

*And first Narses with the Eruli and those of the Romans who were under him, engaged with the enemy, and after a hard hand-to-hand struggle, he routed the Persians who were before him... And then Narses urged his men forward... But all of a sudden the men who were in ambush... came out of the cabins along the narrow alleys and killed some of the Eruli, falling unexpectedly upon them, and they struck Narses himself a blow on the temple... And he died shortly afterwards...*

*Then, as was to be expected, great confusion fell upon the Roman army, and Nabedes let out the whole Persian force upon his opponents. And the Persians... killed a large number without difficulty, and particularly of the Eruli who had at the first fallen upon the enemy with Narses and were fighting for the most part without protection. For the Eruli have neither helmet nor corselet nor any other protective armour, except a shield and a thick jacket, which they gird about them before they enter a struggle. And indeed the Erulian slaves go into battle without even a shield, and when they prove themselves brave*

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1. Wars II, xxi, 1-8, Dewing 1914, I, 439-443.

2. Wars II, xxv, 2, 20-28, Dewing 1914, I, 481, 485-486.

*men in war, then their masters permit them to protect themselves in battle with shields. Such is the custom of the Eruli.*

This battle – and ‘the custom of the Eruli’ – must have impressed the Persians greatly. For, as noted by Procopius:

*this proved a disaster for the Romans so great as to exceed anything that had ever befallen them previously. For great numbers of them perished and still more fell into the hands of the enemy. And their weapons and draught animals which were taken by the enemy amounted to such an imposing number that Persia seemed as a result of this affair to have become richer.*

Although the Eruls have been characterized as a ‘Herrenvolk’ possessing slaves, the ‘slaves’ going into battle above without so much as a shield for protection were surely not slaves but young freemen.<sup>1</sup> That they did have slaves, in the sense of subservient people(s), is however certain enough; and the more so with the passing of time. With the establishment of an extensive state of their own on the Danube called Herulia, in today’s Czechia and Austria, 480-508, they necessarily came to rule over non-Erul populations – who could be utilized as agricultural slaves. Who?

“To the subjected ‘slave peoples’ belonged the Langobards.”<sup>2</sup> Then there were the equally Germanic Rugi. Furthermore, the mixed pre-Erul inhabitants of Noricum and Pannonia. It was only in 567 that the Avars brought in great numbers of Slavs.<sup>3</sup> Now the Slavs were slowly extending their settlements; and the gradual semantic change in the word Slavs (from *slava* ‘glory’)<sup>4</sup> to **slaves** may reasonably have taken place under Germanic (Gothic, Gepid, Erul) rule. How early? When at the turn of the 6th c. the Sclaveni crossed the Ister (= Danube), enslaving a great number of Romans, the Eruls came across them, defeating them and subsequently letting all they took captive return back across the river to their homes;<sup>5</sup> meaning the Eruls had more than enough slaves already.

Thus there were double grounds for the Eruls to be regarded as slave-holders. The said fighting custom of the Eruli ‘slaves’ or rather freemen made for an opinion – in Persia and adjacent parts of Syria and ‘Irāq – that the Erul menfolk were not ‘merely’ light-armed but even **un**-armed (on which the Pseudo-Zachariah tradition below).

There is even the assertion, in the *History of the Langobards* by Paul the Deacon, that the Eruls fought naked, without arms:<sup>6</sup>

*Rodulf directed his men into battle. Himself he stayed in the fortress, having no doubt in the hope of victory, playing checkers. For at the time the Herul armies were most expe-*

1. A point made by Schmidt 1969.

2. Wolfram 1987, 70.

3. same, 81.

4. A continuation and translation of *Hrēð* in the *Hrēðgotan* ‘Glory Goths’ (on whom Malone 1963, 175) of Ermanaric’s short-lived empire?

5. Dewing 1916-28, IV, 260-263 (Book VII, xiii, 24-26).

6. Waitz 1876, 66-67, cf. translation in Weimarck 1971, 25: “*Rodulfus suos in pugna dirigit; ipse in castris resedens, de spe victoriae nihil ambigens, ad tabulam ludit. Erant siquidem tunc Heroli bellorum usibus exerciti multorumque iam strage notissimi. Qui, sive ut expeditius bella gererent, sive ut inlatum ab hoste vulnus contemnerent, nudi pugnabant, operientes solummodo corporis verecunda.*”

rienced in the martial arts, and widely renowned for the butchery of many enemies. Whether in order to move more skilfully in combat, or because they were contemptuous of the wounds dealt them by the enemy, they fought in the nude, covering solely their genitals for the decency of their body.

The same is attested to in the Germanic peoples by Tacitus: “*They fight in the nude, or lightly clad in a small cape.*”<sup>1</sup> In his *Histories* too, we meet the Germanic auxiliaries of the Roman army fighting *more patrio nudis corporibus*.<sup>2</sup> And in Plutarch, the Cimbri (believed to hail from either the Maeotic Lake or the Northern Ocean) are thus described:<sup>3</sup>

*The most prevalent conjecture was that they were some of the Germanic peoples which extended as far as the northern ocean, a conjecture based on their great stature, their light-blue eyes, and the fact that the Germanics call robbers Cimbri...*

*...These Barbarians were so contemptuous and bold in following their enemies that, more by way of displaying their strength and daring than because it was necessary at all, they endured the snow-storms without any clothing, made their way through ice and deep snow to the summits, and from there, putting their broad shields under them and then letting themselves go, slid down the smooth and deeply fissured cliffs.*

### 3.3. Fleet and Light-armed

Another major reason for a general impression of Eruls as being light-armed is the *auxilium palatinum (numerus) Erulorum*, repeatedly mentioned in Roman military annals and considered one of the very best regiments.<sup>4</sup>

The characteristic qualities of a whole gamut of warrior nations are listed in the *Getica* of Jordanes, § 261; here, it is the Swabi (Swebi) who are expressly said to fight as foot soldiers:<sup>5</sup>

*For then, I think, must have occurred a most remarkable spectacle, where one might see the Goths fighting with pikes, the Gepids raging with the sword, the Rugis breaking off the spears in their own wounds, the Suavis fighting on foot, the Huns with bows, the Alans drawing up a battleline of heavy-armed and the Eruls of light-armed warriors.*

Being light-armed and being fleet are natural corollaries, as may be seen in the *Getica* of Jordanes, § 117-118, on the Eruls:<sup>6</sup>

*They [the Eruls] were a people swift of foot, and on that account were the more swollen with pride, for there was at that time no race that did not choose from them its light-armed troops for battle... And the said people... are called the Eruls: ...But though their*

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1. Lange 1967, 139-140; Forni/Galli 1964, 78 (*Germania*, ch. 6).

2. Wellesley 1964, 94 (*Historiae*, II, 22).

3. Perrin 1975, IX, 489, 525: *Caius Marius*, xi, 3-4, xxiii, 3.

4. Rappaport 1920, 1162 ff.

5. Mierow 1966, 126. On e.g. Swabi = Eruls, see ch. 3.14 below.

6. same, 84, cf. Latham 1851, xciv: “*Gens [Herulorum] quantum velox, eo amplius superbissima. Nulla siquidem erat tunc gens, quae non levem armaturam... ex ipsis elegerit. Nam praedicta gens... Heruli nominata sunt: ...sed quamvis velocitas eorum ab aliis saepe bellantibus eos tutaretur, Gotorum tamen stabilitati subjacuit et tarditati.*” On the **Gepids** as particularly slow, etc., see ch. 3.13 below.

*quickness often saved them from others who made war upon them, yet they were overthrown by the slowness and steadiness of the Goths.*

The nimbleness of the Eruls was, it seems, nearly proverbial. Thus, the poet Sidonius may say in passing:<sup>1</sup> “*Here the Herul running is surpassed.*” This was clearly not a case of mere **running**, straight forward or at top speed; it entailed swift and “*skilful movements*”, apparently “*contemptuous of the wounds dealt them by the enemy*”, in the words of Paul the Deacon above.

Was this mode of movement so important a military asset, hence also an economic one to its bearers, and so rooted in their pride and self-esteem, that it could conceivably be kept up by their descendants even long after the demise of their name?<sup>2</sup>

West and East European sources alike concur: In the words of a modern historian, the Eruls “*zeichneten sich durch grosse behendigkeit und gewandtheit aus*”,<sup>3</sup> they were characterized by great agility and dexterity. Perhaps surprisingly to us, long-limbedness (or ‘bulkiness’) and fleetness were not opposites but – to the Byzantines – merely two sides to a coin in military investment.

As will be seen below, the name *Rosomones*, attributed to the Eruls, has been etymologized as precisely ‘the fleet, rushing, impetuous ones’.

### 3.4. Ruddy-blond and Blue-eyed

*The Budini, a great and numerous people, have gleaming blue eyes and a reddish colour of the skin. They have a town, all out of wood, called Gelonos...*

Thus the words of Herodotus on the Budini, IV, ch. 108,<sup>4</sup> after his mention of the Androphagoi (‘man-eaters’) and Melanchlaini (‘black-robés’) and before discussion of the Sauromathians. These Budini, whom he is alone in mentioning, are located north of the Palus Maeotis. Who were they? That is quite immaterial to our enquiry. What matters is the subsequent literature – and interest in confirmative observation – this may have inspired. The Budini are not said to have “blue eyes and red hair”,<sup>5</sup> yet they may well have engendered more acute interest in peoples who did.

According to Strabo, 290, the Germanics differ from the Celts by both taller stature and a greater degree of blondness. This is seconded by Manilius:<sup>6</sup>

Of the Germanic peoples, Tacitus says:<sup>7</sup>

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1. Carm. VII 236: “*vincitur illic cursus Herulus...*”
  2. Loewe 1896, 70-73 cites descriptions of a little people turned Tatars, in Aludža [or: Aluča] and three other villages on the mountainous coast east of Sevastopol’ in the Crimea: They are red-haired or blond, blue-eyed, tall – and when moving around would not walk or run but ‘hop’ from stone to stone, more or less sideways, in nearly a dancing fashion. Loewe argues that these are descendants not of the Black Sea Goths proper but of the Eruls, yet without a word on the *cursus Herulus* of antiquity.
  3. Schmidt 1969, 563.
  4. Mørland 1960, 280-281 (my trsl).
  5. Warner 1912, VI, 73.
  6. Astronomia IV, 715-716: Lange 1967, 95.
  7. Mattingly 1970, ch. 4, 104.

*For myself, I accept the view that the peoples of Germany have never contaminated themselves by intermarriage with foreigners but remain of pure blood, distinct and unlike any other nation. one result of this is that their physical characteristics, in so far as one can generalize about such a large population, are always the same: truculent-looking blue eyes, reddish hair, and bulky frames... especially powerful for attack, but not equally patient of hard work; little able to withstand heat... though by climate and soil they have been inured to cold and hunger.*

Again the great or “bulky” bodies. An acute observation by Tacitus.<sup>1</sup> – Or is it? It is indeed an observation by him – not merely of the Germans but equally so of literature. It is in part a *topos* taken from Herodotus.<sup>2</sup>

The wording “threatening and azure [‘heavenly-blue’] eyes, reddish head-hair and great bodies” – *truces et caerulei oculi, rutilae comae, magna corpora*.. is likewise reformed in slightly different phrasings by authors before and after his time. Thus Caesar, *De bello Gallico* I, 39,1 *ne vultum quidem atque aciem oculorum [Germanorum] ferre potuisse*. Or Horats:<sup>3</sup> “...*did not subjugate Germania with its heavenly-blue [= blue-eyed, HS] youth.*”

A slightly different colouring to this tradition is found in Juvenalis:<sup>4</sup> “*the azure Germanic eyes, the beautiful blond hair... thus is the characteristic of every one of them.*” The word used here is **flava** ‘yellow, blond’. It will bear stressing that ‘*rous*’ does not signify red but reddish-blond. As we shall see, the same *yellow-blondness* is attested in one of our Muslim sources.<sup>5</sup>

This *topos* is not confined to Germany; nor even to Europe. The equally far-off India is blessed with the same literary attention. Thus Pliny, *Nat.* 6, 88 on Taprobanes: *excedere hominum magnitudinem, rutilis comis, caeruleis oculis, oris sono truci*... Likewise, in his footsteps, Solinus 53, 11: *caeruleis oculis ac truci visu*; as well as Martianus Capella 6, 697: *homines ibi corpore grandiores ultra hominum [or: omnium] mensuram, rutilis comis, caeruleis oculis, truci oris sono*...<sup>6</sup>

We are in the presence of, again, a *topos*, a literary ‘transfer’ situation. To this very tradition belongs, evidently, a passage in Jordanes:<sup>7</sup>

*Cornelius also, the author of the Annals, says that in the farthest part of Britain the night gets brighter and is very short... The Silurs have swarthy features and are usually born with curly black hair, but the inhabitants of Caledonia have reddish hair and large loose-jointed bodies... All the people and their kings are alike wild. Yet Dio, a most celebrated writer of annals, assures us of the fact that they have been combined under the*

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1. Lange 1967, 101-104.
  2. Bringmann 1989-92, II, 68: “*The tribe, despite its being so big and numerous, has in its totality markedly light eyes and redblond hair,*” in Herodotus, weakened by Tacitus (choosing the *lectio difficilior* – *tamquam* instead of *quamquam*, cf also Lange 1967, 98): “...*all have, to the extent that it is possible, the same corporeal characteristic...*”
  3. *Epod.* 16.7: “*nec fera caerulea domuit Germania pube...*”
  4. Duff 1948, 92 (*Satire* 13, 164): “*caerula quis stupuit Germani lumina, flavam caesariem... haec illis natura est omnibus una...*” On *caesaries*: Lewis/Short 1975, 265.
  5. Al-Firdawsī, see ch. 7.12 on the Muslim sources, below.
  6. I here prefer Dick 1969, 346 to e.g. Gudeman 1916, 64-65 n. 5, who i.a. believes that the words on Taprobanes provide “eine Bestätigung der Urheimat der Indogermanen” (sic).
  7. Mierow 1966, 54-55.

*name of Caledonians and Maeatae. They live in wattled huts, a shelter used in common with their flocks, and often the woods are their home. They paint their bodies with iron-red, whether by way of adornment or perhaps for some other reason.*

The longevity of such *topoi* is demonstrated by the occurrence of the very same ‘observation’ as is given by Tacitus in Adam of Bremen, I, 6, only now regarding not the *Germani* at large but the Saxons.<sup>1</sup>

The reddish hair of the Caledonians is even ascribed by Tacitus to a Germanic immigration wave.<sup>2</sup> And the Caledonian body painting also mentioned leads us on to one or more cogently compelling reason for the ‘redness’ of our ‘Germanic Scythians’.

### 3.5. Hair Dyed Ruddy-Blond

The ‘redness’ of Scandinavian, Germanic or for that matter other warrior tribes need not reside exclusively in the *natural* colour of their *hair*. On the contrary, red hair is not at all prominent in Germans or Scandinavians generally – though quite common among the Danes, bespeaking their once close ties with the (Celtic) British Isles.

For this redness, three or four other possibilities obtain: dyeing of the hair (for battle); red clothing, perhaps also body painting; and red standards, shields or other markings, or simply the byname ‘Reds’. The first two are amply attested.

We commence with the dyeing of hair prior to warfare. During the war against the Alemanni in 376, Roman spies observed a group of Alemanni warriors who, according to Ammianus Marcellinus 27, II, 2, were bivouacking by a river – some bathing, some colouring their hair red “*according to their custom*”.<sup>3</sup>

Tacitus (*Histories* IV, 61) informs us of the Batavian ruler Julius Civilis who in 69-70 AD led a great Germanic and Gallian rising against the Romans; before setting out, he dyed his hair red and let it grow, vowing to cut it only after the Roman garrisons had been annihilated.

For his mock ‘Germanic triumph’, the young Emperor Caligula had not only Gallic prisoners-of-war plus renegades conform to his idea (and that of his age) of ‘Germanic’ looks but also forced others exceptionally **tall** of stature to do so as well: They had to colour their hair **red**, comb it **forwards** (i.e. so as not to have it lie flat across the skull in Roman wise), learn to speak Germanic (!), and affect fittingly Barbarian names.<sup>4</sup>

Probably basing himself on written sources,<sup>5</sup> Silius Italicus lauds the ‘victory’ in 70 AD of the 19-year old Domitian over the ‘golden-locked Batavian’, *auricomus*..

1. Buchner 1960, 169.

2. *Agr.* 11: Lange 1967, 96.

3. “[Iovinus] videbat lavantes alios, quosdam comes rutilantes ex more...” Cf Ploss 1959, 413 n. 17.

4. Suet. Cal. 47: “... *ad curam triumphi praeter captivos ac transfugas barbaros Galliarum quoque procerrimum quemque... coegitque non tantum rutilare et summittere comam sed et sermonem Germanicum addiscere et nomina barbarica ferre.*” Cf Ploss 1959, 411 n. 9 – on Cyprian ‘the Gallian’ also (5th c. AD).

5. Ploss 1959, 413, suggesting Tacitus as his source. For other Latin sources here also, I am beholden to the incisive article by Ploss.



*Batavus*, meaning Iulius Civilis who, as we noted above, had dyed his hair red. That the verb *rutilare* used of Iulius Civilis produces a state of being ‘golden-coloured’ is important. We must caution against misconceptions arising from our (moderno-centrist!) use of the English terms red and yellow. The point of our ‘*rous/russeus*’ tradition is rather the ‘fiery’ golden-blond or yellow-reddish on the scale in-between.

This point is driven home by the ancients. Thus, Martial has a verse on the ‘Batavian foam’ or ‘Chattian foam’ (= soap) which “*sets the Teutonic hair aflame*”.<sup>1</sup> The same is indicated by Pliny the Elder (28, 191).

Then there is the testimony by Cato the Elder, citing Charisius: “*Our women, he says, anoint their hair with an ash unction, in order that their locks become reddish.*” Likewise, Servius:<sup>2</sup> “*We read in Cato about the hair of our grown women that they rinse it with yellow ash in order that it become reddish.*” This **cinis flavus** ‘yellow ash’ (and our misleading red-versus-yellow dichotomy too) is further qualified by the 2nd-3rd c. Serenus Sammonicus:<sup>3</sup> “*Black hair turns blond, into a reddish appearance, by the use of ash unction.*”

In the early 3rd c. AD, Tertullian deplores the habit of Roman ladies: dyeing their hair yellow(-reddish) with saffron. By this they were shaming their own nation. They ought to remember that they were neither Gallic nor Germanic by birth, and that they thus were changing their fatherland with the colour of their hair...<sup>4</sup>

Ovid mentions the same custom.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Valerius Maximus:<sup>6</sup> “*...all diligently redden their hair...*”

Next, there is Clemens of Alexandria on the hair of Celts and Scythians alike:<sup>7</sup>

*Among the [diverse] peoples, the Celts and the Scythians wear their hair long, without however having it well-kempt. The abundant hairdo of these barbarians has something terrifying about it, and its red colour is like a threat of war. This colour has something in common with blood.*

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1. Epigr. VIII, 33, 20; XIV, 26. Cf Ploss 1959, 413 n. 16.
  2. Peter 1914, I, 92, fragment 114: “*Cato in originibus: Mulieres, inquit, nostrae capillum cinere unquitabant, ut rutilae essent.*” Same, commentary by Servius on Verg. Aeneis IV, 698: “*In Catone legitur de matronarum crinibus: Flavio cinere unctitabant, ut rutilae essent.*”
  3. Same, IV, 55: “*...ad rutilam speciem nigros flavescere crines unguento cineris...*”
  4. Tert. *De cultu fem.* 6, cf Ploss 1959, 413 n. 18: “*Video quasdam et capillum croco vertere. Pudeat eas etiam nationis suae, quod non Germanae aut Gallae sint procreatae; ita patriam capillo transferunt, male ac pessime sibi auspiciantur flammeo capite.*”
  5. *Amores* I, 14, 45-46, cf Lange 1967, 103: “*Nunc tibi captivos mittet Germania crines;/ Tuta triumphatae munere gentis eris.*”
  6. Ploss 1959, 414-415, citing *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium lib.*, II, 1, 5 (incorrectly named by Ploss as *De matrimoniorum ritu et necessitudine officii*): “*...quo formam suam concinniore efficerent, summa cum diligentia capillos cinere rutilarunt.*”
  7. Paedagog. III, 24, 2: Mondésert/Matray 1965, III, 55. Wood 1953, 219 translates: “*...among the various nations, the Celts and the Scythians wear their hair long, but wear no other ornament. The flowing hair of these barbarians strikes terror in our hearts and their fair hair suggests war, for it is a colour akin to blood.*” The colour of the hair in the Greek is not ‘fair’ but *έρυθρός* ‘red’.

Finally, we recall the vow of Achilles by his golden-blond hair – much akin to that of Julius Civilis at the other, western end of Europe.<sup>1</sup> To Achilles and his hair we shall later return.

Other instances of hair-vows have been recorded from Germanic and Celtic, Greek and Roman culture – and analysed in conjunction with Indian materials on Rudra, the red ‘raging god’ of Hinduism seen as a parallel to Wotan/Óðinn (literally, ‘the raging’), a byname of whom is *Rauðgrani* ‘Redbeard’.<sup>2</sup>

Judging by these materials, dyeing the hair red for warfare was originally a Celtic custom – plausibly inspired by natural red hair among the Celts.<sup>3</sup>

One ‘coloured’ people, both early and apposite, is found in the *Geography* of Ptolemy (2, 11:9): Northerly neighbours to the Burgunds by the Vistula (or Weichsel) are the *Ἐλουαίωνες*. This name has been interpreted as ‘the Yellow ones’, or perhaps ‘those with the yellow shields’; both appear strictly speaking to be misnomers, as this is not just any sort of yellow hue: Old High German *elo*, *elwes* translates as ‘fiery yellow’, in German *lohgelb*.<sup>4</sup>

The Vistula is where the Eruls once passed by, on their way to the Azov Sea. Is there a nexus between, at least a linguistic one, between the *Ἐλουαίωνες* and the nickname by which the Eruls were later known: the Eluri?

That hair colour was sometimes considered **the** sign of ethnic or group identity is seen in Isidor of Sevilla’s *Etymologies*.<sup>5</sup>

*About the wont peculiarities of peoples.*

*Now several peoples lay claim as it were to their proper insignia not only in the clothing but also in the body and otherwise. Thus we see the [forelock] tufts of the Germanics, the braided hair-whip and the dragon’s blood colour of the Goths, the scars of the Brittons. The Jews circumcise the prepuce; the Arabs perforate the ears; the Getae with their heads uncovered have their hair golden yellow; the Albani have white hair that glistens.*

Here, the Getae with “their hair golden yellow” are set apart from the Goths; indicating that under the first the Eruls may be subsumed (the original Getae having long since passed into oblivion, leaving but their name behind). Both they and the Goths are marked by their **red** colour.

The Greek word used for dyeing the hair, colouring it yellow, blond, reddish, is *ξανθίζω*. We shall follow in the tracks of ‘the blond people’, the *ξανθὸν γένος*.

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1. Sommer 1912, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, III, 1262, Ploss 1959, 420.
  2. Ploss 1959, 409-420; Gschwantler 1971, 174-175.
  3. In a BBC radio programme on P4 on Jan. 2, 1996, at 15.30 PM, Scottish customs on Hogmanay (= New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day) were referred: It is traditional still in our days for men to absent themselves shortly before midnight, only to return with a piece of coal or other symbolic ‘gift’ for the household for the new year – only *redhaired* men being barred from this.
  4. Gutenbrunner, *PBB* 60, 1936, 347-349.
  5. Lindsay 1911, II (Book XIX, xxiii): “**De Proprio quarundam gentium habitu: Nonnullae etiam gentes non solum in vestibus sed et in corpore aliqua sibi propria quasi insignia vindicant: ut videmus cirros Germanorum, granos et cinnibari Gotorum, stigmata Brittonum. Circumcidunt quoque Iudaei praeputia pertundunt Arabes aures, flavent capitibus intactis Getae, nitent Albani albetibus crinibus.**”

### 3.6. Body Paint & Red Clothing

Second, there is the artificial colouring of more than the hair. One thing is body painting; this however is mentioned only in the *Germania* of Tacitus, and then in the case of the Harii tribe.<sup>1</sup>

More widely attested, there is red-coloured clothing. Already in the Homeric *Odyssey* there is the ‘scarlet tunica’ of royalty, “*scarlet red, thickly flossed and wide was the tunica borne by the king*”.<sup>2</sup>

“In prehistoric times, red was the costliest of all colours, and red apparel is from time to time mentioned in Norse literature in connection with kings or persons close to a king”;<sup>3</sup> witness the *þátrr* (verse) from the *Flateyjarbók*, on skaldic bards:

*One sees from their clothes/ And the lovely rings/ That the king-born knows them./  
Furs in red colours/ With beautiful fur lining/ ...*

Thus too, the Oseberg queen was clad in costly, imported garments, many of them red; and the name of the king in this realm in Vestfold at the time, c. 835, is perhaps equally telling: Gudröd the Fine, also known as Hunting-king by Snorri. The horse in the tapestry woven by the Oseberg queen too, is red; as are another horse plus diverse garments.<sup>4</sup>

According to the sagas, both scarlet and purple-red were costly and prestigious colours in the Viking Age and the high Middle Ages of Norway, much used by kings and jarls, but also by several individually named knights and grantees, and even by the king’s guardsmen.<sup>5</sup>

Red as a preferred colour of **military** clothing is attested in, again, the *Etymologies* of Isidor, who provides the valuable information that a brand of soldiers under the Roman consuls were named the **Russati**:<sup>6</sup>

*The russata, which the Greeks call Phoenician, and we call purple, was introduced by the Lacedaemonians for concealing, through its likeness with the colour of blood, the wounds of those who were wounded in battle, so that the spirit of the enemy should not rise. These were used by soldiers under the Roman consuls; and for this reason they are called russati. These were hoisted up in front of the Commander-in-Chief as an admonition and a sign of the coming fight.*

Other readings of *russati* are **russa**, **rossati**, **rusati**.

As Isidor says, the word has a dual meaning – – the fabric, and the men wearing it. These **russati** then were ‘flags’, or standards, even vestments (unfolded tunicas) hoisted on high before battle. They were sported by Roman army units, as well as auxiliary troops (such as the Eruls).

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1. Lange 1967, 483, on ch. 43, arguing that by *tincta corpora* black is meant.
  2. e.g. in the Fourth Song, verse 115, Nineteenth Song, verses 225-242 : Wilster 1878, 45, 85.
  3. Christensen et al. 1993, 227.
  4. same, 239, 242-243.
  5. Monclair 1994, 53-61, *KLNMI*, 311 ‘baldakin’, II, 70-71 ‘bomull’, VIII, 470 ‘klede’, XIII, 635 ‘päll’, XV, 404 ‘skarlagen’.
  6. Lindsay 1911, II, Lib. XIX, xxii, 10 (De diversitate et nominibus vestimentorum).

This is a practice attested on a wide scale,<sup>1</sup> and nowhere explicitly, let alone exclusively, connected with the Eruls. Only in Paul the Deacon do we hear that, after the defeat of Rodulf's Eruls, the victorious Langobards divide the spoils – including his *vexillum*, or banner; and after that time “*the Eruls had no king at all [ruling] over themselves*”.<sup>2</sup>

It is hard to believe there is no connection between these **russati** ‘red soldiers’ and a given ‘red’ warrior-people called the **Rus[si]**. Of this, however, Isidor says nothing.

On a mural in Dura Ṣālīḥiyya on the Middle Euphrates in ‘Irāq, hastily investigated in 1922 and subsequently defaced by hostile Bedouin, we see “the easternmost soldiery of Rome ever found depicted.”<sup>3</sup> The scene is from 229-230 AD, with 21 soldiers headed by a tribune, plus a standard-bearer (signifer), all facing the viewer. The tribune is conducting a sacrificial ritual. What interests us here is the standard, or *vexillum*, which is red (and without any inscription on it), and also the kilts worn by the men, “all edged along the bottom with pink, which may have faded from the red or purple *clavus*”.<sup>4</sup> Are these heavily bearded fighters such **russati**?



*The Dura Ṣālīḥiyya scene.*

1. Du Cange 1972, 244, cf. Kramer et al., 1913, I, 60-61.
2. Waitz 1876, 67: “*Tunc Langobardi... inter se praedam dividunt. Tato vero Rodulfi vexillum, quod bandum appellant, eiusque galeam, quam in bello gestare consueverat, abstulit. Atque iam ex illo tempore ita omnis Herolorum virtus concidit, ut ultra super se regem omnimodo non haberent.*”
3. Breasted 1924, 100.
4. Same, 94-96.

Several sources from the Empire allude to such military clothing: Under Claudius and Nero, there is *russea tunica*<sup>1</sup>; in a letter, the Emperor Valerian is cited as referring to *tunicas russas militares annuas*,<sup>2</sup> while in another author, the same emperor speaks of *tunicas ducales russeas quatuor*.<sup>3</sup> This clearly says that **russ[e]us** was a semi-technical term. (It was also used for smaller pieces of fabric, i.e. bands.)<sup>4</sup>

As indicated by Isidor, the term may first have been military *jargon* for ‘blood-coloured’; this we may find corroborated in Tertullian:<sup>5</sup> “*Now coloured [blood-]red, in the hope of his own blood, shoed with the Gospel’s preparation [for martyrhood].*”

Isidor is right that the Lacedaemonians, the Spartans, were famous for these red fighting tunics, which were a national uniform of theirs by the fourth if not the fifth century BC. Likewise, the taxiarch officers of Athens were recognized by their bright red tunics or cloaks.<sup>6</sup> The red tunics of the Spartans were clearly considered ‘robes of honour’ after death. Thus, according to Aelian,<sup>7</sup> the most valorous dead were buried in their red cloaks, whereas others of the slain were laid to rest among olive branches.<sup>8</sup>

It turns out that in Roman times the word *russ[e]us* was in quite common use for another prime military item as well: horses. We are told that horses were classified according to the following colours: *Colores hi praecipui, badius, aureus, albineus, russeus, murteus, cervinus, gilbus, etc.*<sup>9</sup> And as we shall see, from the military, the usage *russeus*, or rather *russata*, spread to the horse-races.

From Latin, the word was adopted into Greek, as ‘*rousios*, first attested in Carthage from the 1st century AD;<sup>10</sup> another form being (and found in the plural only) ‘*roussatoi*.<sup>11</sup>

Red, or rather deep-red, purple, is also the colour of royalty of old;<sup>12</sup> we recall the name of the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenetos, literally ‘Born-in-the-Purple’. Despite Byzantine displeasure, and sometimes even prohibitions against the wearing of purple by anybody but the Emperor, this connotation of royalty through

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1. Forcellini 1839, III, 687: Petronius, *Satyricon*, 27.

2. Same: Trebellius Pollio, *Vita M. Claudii Gothici*, 14.

3. Same: Flavius Vopiscus, *Vita M. Aurelii Prob. Aug.*, 13.

4. Same: references to *fasciae*.

5. Cf same: Tertullianus, *Corona militis*, 1 - “*Nunc sanguine suo russatus, spe calceatus...*” On his neologism *paratura*: Lampe 1961, 1471. Kroymann 1954, 1040 lists readings *rufatus, rufatu*, and twice *russatus*. What we surely find corroborated is the unfamiliarity of two scribes with *russatus*. I prefer Kroymann’s punctuation: “*Nunc sanguine suo rufatus spe, calceatus de euangelii paratura...*”

6. Hanson 1993, 140-141.

7. Dilts 1974, 82: *Varia Historia* VI.6, Hanson 1993, 56.

8. Plutarch’s *Life of Lycurgus*, xxvi, 1-2 (Perrin 1967, I, 286-287) on Spartan burials: “*They simply covered the body with a scarlet robe and olive leaves..*”

9. same: Palladius Rutilius Taurus, *De veterinaria medicina*, 4, 13.

10. Liddell/Scott 1948, II, 1575: *Anthologia Graeca* 5.386.

11. same: Joannes Lydus, *De mensis*, 4.30, ed. R Wüsch, Lpz. 1898.

12. Cf. Syriac Alexander Legend, Budge 1889, 120: “*Alexander.. gave his crown to Ptolemy and arrayed him in his purple robe..*” Or Nagel 1978, 88 n. 1: purple burnus of royalty.

their clothing is plausibly a **main** reason why the Eruls were known as the ‘Reds’ – and also a main reason why people down south would be prone to identify the Eruls with ‘the **princes** of the North’. Quite possibly, the northerners would opt for a hue or hues of red both close enough to and separate enough from the Imperial colour to get the *risquée* message across with impunity.

Is there anything to bear this out? We turn to the eloquence of a grave older than that of the Oseberg queen by perhaps 350 years.

The site is Sandane, Nordfjord, Norway. The grave is a 4,5 m long coffin or vault made of upright stone slabs, inside a giant man-made tumulus of sand. Inside this vault of slabs a chieftain had been laid to rest upon a bearskin. He wore but one ornament: a gold solidus struck in the name of Theodosius II (403–450). This emperor is known to have minted very many such coins as payment for the Huns not to attack Constantinople; a number of such coins having been found on Øland in south Sweden.<sup>1</sup>

Quite as interesting as the coin is his apparel: tightly fitting breeches in thin red-brown wool, and two tunics, the innermost of which was woven from the thinnest possible carmine-red wool, with small silver buttons upon the hems; the second one was somewhat coarser, with redbrown as the main colour and with squares out of thin yellow and green stripes. This big red mantle was swathed around him; his spear and shield, bow and arrow were by his side – in addition to a so-called *think-ring*, an object rare indeed, one such lying in a London museum and of indeterminate Middle East provenance, the other known example being from Afghanistan.

The bright-red carmine colour on this chieftain’s inner tunic has been produced by Polish *cochenille* or *kermes*; both these dyes being made from insects living in East Europe, the Ukraine, Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey, as well as in the southern Mediterranean. The chieftain’s costume was custom-made somewhere outside, i.e. to the southeast of, Scandinavia. So prestigious did this clothing become that this very type of tight-fitting breeches plus tunic continued to be the most important clothing items of peasant men in Western Norway right up to the 16th century, i.e. for more than a thousand years.<sup>2</sup>

Now besides clothing proper, could not the Eruls, and perhaps other mercenaries too, have been ‘red’ in other ways also? What personal accoutrement was closer to a fighter’s heart than his shield?

We recall the words of Tacitus on the Germanic tribes: “*Only the shields do they mark off in the most carefully chosen colours.*” Thus, he says (ch. 43), the Harii sport black shields.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Plutarch says the Cimbri had “gleaming white” ones.<sup>4</sup> “In more recent times the Frisians had brown, and the Saxons red ones; in Sleswig, a

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1. See coloured frontispiece drawing! In e.g. Magnus 1990, 135. For permission to reproduce the drawing we thank Søsna Magnus.
  2. Magnus 1981, 63-74; 1982, 22-25; 1983, 293-303; 1990, 132-135. Red colour for clothes was produced in Scandinavia too, from the lichen *Ochrolechia tartarea*, called **litmosi** > English ‘litmus’: *KLNM* X, 362.
  3. Lange 1967, 141, 482.
  4. Perrin 1975, IX, 533: *Caius Marius*, xxv, 6.

shield was found coloured in red; in Gotland, fragments of another coloured in dark blue.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Viking age, white shields were used to signal pacific intentions; while red ones showed that one was out for war.<sup>2</sup> Red shields for war<sup>3</sup> occur in a number of sagas; they are, with one exception, wielded by kings.<sup>4</sup> Regarding red shields and their connection with royalty, traditions considerably older are probably being continued.

In the Elder Edda, the *Guðrúnarkviða inn forna* introduces us to an ideal of Guðrún, as woven into a tapestry: “*Helmeted/ hardy Huns,/ holding in hand/ swords and red shields*”;<sup>5</sup> and the *First Lay on Helgi Hunding-killer* offers a picture of the ford-and-ferry guardsman Sinfjotli wielding “*the red shield, / its rim made of gold*”.<sup>6</sup>

We recall the ‘*Ἐλουαίωνες*’ of Ptolemy: ‘Those with the yellow-flaming shields’?

### 3.7. The Red Circus Faction

Finally, the ‘Reds’ are the name of one of the so-called circus factions in Byzantium, the others being the Blues, the Greens, and the Whites. All are called after the colour of the clothing worn by their partisans.<sup>7</sup> Of these four groupings, the Blues and the Greens were the dominant ones, Whites and Reds being reckoned by historians to be very inferior. As has been established, there were in reality not four separate factions but merely two: The Whites being “the Blues of the [inner] town”, the Reds being “the Greens of the [inner] town”. These Reds would congregate under a red flag;<sup>8</sup> and they had their very own ‘place of reception’, when meeting with the Emperor, at the so-called Iron Gate.<sup>9</sup>

The words used for the Reds in Latin are *coccinus* and **roseus**, or **russati**.

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1. or: turquoise, Italian **turchino**. Forni/Galli 1964, 79, citing also *Ann.* II, 14,3 *fucatas colore tabulas*.
  2. Jansson 1944, 169.
  3. The obvious rationale, the same as we have seen above regarding red clothes for war, is indicated in the *Ynglingasaga* of Snorri’s *Heimskringla*, where Óðinn in a poem is called “the shield-colourer” – i.e. for colouring shields red with blood.
  4. Magnus Barefoot’s saga ch. 24 (two kings, plus the exception, the grandee Niklas Sigurðsson), Inge Haraldsson’s & Sigurd Munn’s saga ch. 11, Magnus Erlingsson’s saga ch. 40, Sverre’s saga ch. 54; the white war shields of king Olav Haraldsson being explained as expressive of his Christian missionary zeal: Monclair 1994, 78-79.
  5. Bugge 1965, 268, cf. Jónsson 1905, 378: “*hilmis þegna, / randir rauðar, / rekka búna, / hjördrótt, hjalndrótt, / hilmis fylgju*”.
  6. Bugge 1965, 184, cf. Jónsson 1905, 235: *slang up við rá / rauðom scildi, / rand var or gul-li.*”
  7. Forcellini 1839, III, 687: *Russata dicebatur una e factionibus aurigarum in Circo, quia russatis vestibibus utebatur*.
  8. Guillaud 1969, 420.
  9. same, 431: “La réception à la Porte de Fer ou Petite Porte de la Chalcé est faite par la faction Rouge avec la démarcation des Verts.”

The Reds did gain the personal favour of the Emperor Anastasius,<sup>1</sup> under whom the circus faction riots of 499 and 501 AD were said to have left 3,000 dead.<sup>2</sup> Yet Anastasius did not act out of love for these ‘Reds’.<sup>3</sup> He may have had the Eruls restore order – as they did during the Nika uprising in 532. Yet of a nexus between the ‘Reds’ and our ‘Rōs, or Rosomones, or Eruls, or anybody else outside the Circus, there is no written trace.

On the contrary, even when the ‘Rōs do crop up unequivocally in history (again), in the 9th century, the Greek written sources take care to differentiate them from the *Russati*. The latter were still a Circus faction under Michael III. Shortly after a description of the assault by the ‘Rōs on Constantinople, we hear that Michael was engaged in the horse races and not to be disturbed by another invasion, this time by the Saracens. While Michael sported the dress of the Blues, a boon friend of his is named as the Red (‘*rousios*’).<sup>4</sup> In Constantine Born-in-the-Purple, the Red faction is named *russae* in Latin, but ‘*oi leukhoi* ‘the White’ in the Greek (!),<sup>5</sup> which is probably a slip.

For explaining the naming of Russia, then, the Circus ‘Reds’ are a dead-end; but one deriving from a highly relevant phenomenon: the colour of the tunic. Their very name points back to the times when this had a signal military effect.

### 3.8. *The Name – and ‘Princes of Rōs’*

A plausible incentive to associate ‘Rōs with the Eruls may be sought in the very name **Erules** or **Herules** in Latin, **Eruloi** or ‘**Eruloi** in Greek, reflecting a proto-Norse word which nearly all scholars<sup>6</sup> see as signifying ‘men of high rank’,<sup>7</sup> not too far from ‘dukes, [independent] princes’, preserved in English **earl**, and in Scandinavian **jarl**. In the Widsith poem, from before 530,<sup>8</sup> there are four occurrences, three of which concern *eorlscype* ‘earlship’, in the sense of the conduct proper to a man of such high standing.<sup>9</sup> In Beowulf, as we have seen, the *eorl* designated not merely a prince but a king.

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1. Cameron 1976, 72: “The Reds at least had one very distinguished partisan: the emperor Anastasius.” (Malalas, *PG* 97, 393: Anastasius reserved his favours for the Reds so as to deal with the two main factions.) “The inferior position of Reds and Whites seems merely to have become more accentuated in some ways during the late Empire.”
  2. Riots fully recorded by Marcellinus, *Chron.* sub anno 501, with 3,000 dead, as the worst before the Nika revolt.
  3. Cameron 1976, 71: “The only emperor we know of who, for reasons of policy, deliberately withheld his favour from both Blues and Greens, could not risk appearing indifferent to the outcome of the races: *this* is why Anastasius supported the Reds.” Same, 302: Example of Anastasius imitated by Constantinus, who entered the Red grandstand in 763.
  4. John Skylitzes: Thurn 1973, 108. Thurn 1983, 144.
  5. *PG* 112, 608-609: Constantini Porph., *De ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae*.
  6. beginning with Zeuss 1837, 476.
  7. *KLNM* VII, 559-566; Heggstad 1975, 350: “1 earl; 2 free man; 3 personal name.”
  8. Malone 1962, 93.
  9. same, 36, 120, lines 12, 37, 40, 141.



That the Eruls called themselves just that is evidenced by a number of Elder Runic inscriptions in Scandinavia; here the form **erilaR** predominates;<sup>1</sup> on which more below.

Other, very much less convincing explanations of the name Eruls (etc.) have also been suggested;<sup>2</sup> they may now be regarded as outdated. We seem entitled to conclude that the Christians of Southern Europe, when informed of what the name signified, would see in them precisely ‘princes from the ends of the North’.<sup>3</sup> As the warriors felt themselves to be on a par with their titular leader within the framework of so-called ‘warrior democracy’,<sup>4</sup> the title of ‘prince’ could be extended to them all.

There may be a reference to this in the quotation by Procopius (*De bello Vandalico* IV, 6) of what the Erul leader in North Africa said to the Vandal king Gelimer, whom he and his Eruls vanquished on behalf of the Byzantines: There was no shame in serving or submitting to the Byzantines, for were not the Eruls themselves of princely birth and standing?<sup>5</sup>

*Now this Pharas was energetic and thoroughly serious and upright in every way, although he was an Erulian by birth. And for an Erulian not to give himself over to treachery and drunkenness, but to strive after uprightness, is no easy matter and merits abundant praise. But not only was it Pharas who maintained orderly conduct, but also all the Erulians who followed him. This Pharas, then, Belisarius commanded to establish himself at the foot of the mountain during the winter season and to keep close guard, so that it would neither be possible for Gelimer to leave the mountain nor for any supplies to be brought in to him. (...)*<sup>6</sup>

*...Pharas wrote to Gelimer as follows: “(...) Do you not consider that you are, even now, a slave to the most wretched of the Moors, since your only hope of being saved... is in them? Why would it not be better in every way to be a slave among the Romans and beggared, than to be monarch on Mount Papua with Moors as your subjects? But of course it seems to you the very height of disgrace even to be a fellow slave with Belisarius! Away with the thought, most excellent Gelimer! Are not we [= Pharas and the other Eruli], who are also born of noble families, proud that we are now in the service of an emperor?”*

The leaders of the barbarian *foederati* troops fighting in treaty relations (*foedera*) alongside the Roman armies, were called ‘counts’.<sup>7</sup> Terming themselves ‘princes’ would be an understandable show of oneupmanship.

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1. cf. Höfler 1971, 150 (whose interpretation is contested by Schmidt 1969, 564).

2. cf. Rappaport 1920, 1150-1151.

3. the recent theories of Gschwantler notwithstanding, on which see below.

4. Rappaport 1920, 1165.

5. Dewing 1916, II, 243, 259-261.

6. The happy plight of the Vandals prior to the siege is described, including their wearing gold and “the Medic garments which they now call *seric*”. Cf Viking-age parlance: *Serkmenn, Serkland*.

7. Cf. e.g. Dewing 1914, II, 103 (*The Vandalic War*, III, xi, 2-5).

Moreover, the title or nickname of ‘princes’ fit in well, in Christian minds, with the assertion by Ezekiel, ch. 32, 30:<sup>1</sup>

*There be the princes of the North, all of them...*

The other chief reason for such an identification resides, as noted in the preceding sub-chapter, in their red apparel. Together with both a natural ‘ruddiness’ and the custom of dyeing their hair before joining battle, this would more than suffice for earning the epithet ‘the Reds’.

### 3.9. Marsh-Island Dwellers<sup>2</sup>

*For according to the historian Ablavius, this foresaid people, dwelling as they do by the Maeotic marshes in stagnant places which the Greeks call **hele**, are called the Heluri.*

This is part of what Jordanes has to say on the name of the Heruli (or Eruli). And it is also the misunderstood or misrepresented half of a folk-etymology, or rather a pun. For what Jordanes did not manage to put across, but his great (12-tome!) predecessor Cassiodorus certainly did say, is that the Greek word *hele* ‘swamp’ gave rise not to the name Heruli but to the attendant word-play *Heluri!* Or, more precisely ‘*ele*’ ‘swamp’ and ‘*Elouroi*’ – versus the ‘**Eruloi**’ (the faint initial **h**- having disappeared). The Greek (more exactly Byzantine) *Etymologicum Magnum* says as much:<sup>3</sup>

*ἀπὸ τῶν ἐκέϊσε ἑλῶν Ἔλουροι κέκληνται. Δέξιππος ἐν δωδεκάτῳ χρονικῶν.*

Stephan of Byzance has a similar reference, under the entry ‘*Ἐλουροι*’:<sup>4</sup>

*Ἔλουροι Σκυθικὸν ἔθνος, περὶ ἧν Δέξιππος ἐν χρονικῶν ιβ’.*

We shall be coming back to the ‘**Ele**’ swamp and its ‘**Eluri**’ in connection with the *[H]elis* of Pseudo-Aethicus Istricus, the *Ellipalta* of Snorri and the *Hellespontus* and its *Hellespontians* in Saxo the Grammarian.

The other half of the ‘swampy heritage’ from Jordanes concerns the migration of the Goths (and not specifically the Eruls) prior to their advent down by the Black and Azov Seas. It is here that we meet with the ‘island’, or rather their dwelling **in Oium** – in modern German “in den Auen”, meaning either an island or a ‘water-rich region’.<sup>5</sup> We shall be returning to this passage in Jordanes in our Part III below.

1. Properly, these belong to the rulers and peoples crushed by God already, which is the theme of this chapter in Ezekiel; yet the ‘princes of the North’ expression would continue to exert an appeal to Christian minds bent on comprehending the North and the coming Doom alike, in conjunction with ch. 38 on the ‘prince of Ros’.
2. Martens 1884, 39 (§ 117): “Dieses Volk, ...welche die Griechen *ele* nennen, seinen Namen Helurer bekam...”. Skard 1932, 70: “difor vart dei kalla elurar”.
3. e.g. Latham 1851, xciv-xcv, Rappaport 1920, 1150.
4. same. Cf also *PG* 134, 1067 n. 73 to Zonaras: *Αἰρούλοις... quos alii Ἐλούρους vocant*. *Lexicon* ms. *Ἄλουργος Ἔλουργος δὲ ἔθνος, ψιλόν*.
5. Svennung 1963, 19 on the name Scandinavia: “Das zweite Glied *awjo* (*auio*), lebt im Schwedischen und Dänischen als *ø* fort (isl. *ey*) = ‘Insel’, im Deutschen als *Au(e)* = ‘Wasserland’, ‘wasserreiches Wiesenland’, ‘Insel’, ‘Halbinsel’ usw. (and. *ouwa*, mhd. *ouwe*, mnd. *ō*, *ou*, *ouwe* usw.), im Mittel-latein als *augia* latinisiert. (Mähkarawjo = Magerøya). Also Svennung 1967, 131-132 (*Geped-oios* ‘die Gepideninseln’ oder ‘-auen’).

The third ‘swampy heritage’ regards the Huns; Jordanes asserts that they arose from a union between “unclean spirits” and the so-called Haliurunnae sorceresses of, apparently, the Eruls; on these sorceresses Jordanes says:<sup>1</sup>

*The Gothic king Filimer, son of Gadaric the Great, himself the fifth Getic king after they left the Scandza island, advanced into the land of Scythia along with his people, as we have related earlier. Then he was informed that among his people were some sorceresses – he himself terms them ‘haliurunnae’ in his own tongue. He opined that they were not to be trusted, and consequently chased them far off from the army. There they had to roam about in the wilderness. Then unclean spirits beheld them, while they were a-wandering in the wilderness. They took them and laid down with them; and so they gave birth to this savage race. At first they kept out in the marshes...*

The Eluri, or Heluri, in Greek, *Ἀλιούροις*, is clearly, originally, a pun – branding the Eruls as ‘swamp-dwellers’. It occurs in several authors; the last mention being by Zonaras, on the use made of them by the Byzantine emperor in suppressing the Nika revolt in 532.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.10. Sea Pirates – the First Vikings?

The Eruls make their first major impression in our extant sources from antiquity in 267 AD, when breaking up against Greece from their seats by the Azov Sea. They occupy and sack Byzantium, Chrysopolis (now Skutari), Athens, Corinth and Sparta, victoriously traversing all Achaia with the sword. Their fleet, said to comprise 500 ships, effects a landing in the mouth of the Danube, ravages Crete, Rhodes and Cyprus – and Macedonia to boot.

Partly pushed back, the Eruls nevertheless put in their second massive appearance only two years later, in 269. This time, their fleet is said to be made up of 2,000 vessels. They again ravage Greece.

Few years later, in 286, Eruls sweep into northern Gallia, where the Emperor Maximinus himself has to take the field against them. Whether they and their Bata-vian allies fight on land only, or whether the Eruls are seaborne here, we are not told.

In the 5th century, however, it is as sea pirates that the western coasts of the moribund Roman Empire experience them. Erul maritime units strike terror into the inhabitants of the Atlantic coast of Gallia, continuing right down into the Iberian peninsula, in 409, in 456, and again in 459. Their point of departure, according to scholarly consensus, was the southern Baltic Sea.<sup>3</sup> It is barely 20 years later that Odoaker vanquishes Italy, putting an end to the West Roman Empire and taking the title of **rex Erulorum**, in 476.

The ‘proto-Viking’ rôle of the Eruls is reflected not only in their maritime onslaughts against the eastern- and westernmost parts of the Mediterranean *oicumene*; it apparently gave rise to the name Viking itself.<sup>4</sup>

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1. same, 71.

2. PG 134, 1233-1234: “*Ad quam comprimendam parte Barbarorum ab imperatore immisa, qui Heluri nominantur, ea magis etiam commota est...*” In the Greek, *ἰβιδ.*: *Ἀλιούρων*.

3. Rappaport 1920, 1150-1167, Schmidt 1934, 209 ff, 548 ff, Höfler 1971, 145.

4. Compare *KLNM* ‘Viking’, which takes no account of Widsith, on whom below.

When ‘Scandinavia’ is termed a *vagina gentium*, literally a womb spewing forth nations, the part of present-day Scandinavia closest to the Greek-Roman world, Denmark, is preferably meant. And Denmark indeed is a *vagina nominum gentium*: In northernmost Jutland there is **Thy**<sup>1</sup> (cf.: **Theu-tones**, and later *Deutsch, Dutch*); immediately to the south we find **Himmer-land** (: **Cimbri**); **Vend-syssel** (: **Vandali**), **Hard-syssel** (: **Charudi, Harii**, and in Norway the *Hordar, Hordaland*);<sup>2</sup> in southern Jutland, **Angeln**, (: **Angli**, alongside, in present-day Slesvig-Holstein, the Saxons); farther east, the **Holmerugi** (: **Rugi**, and in Norway the *Rogar, Rogaland*), and of course, out in the Baltic, the **Burgundi** (: *Borgundarholm*, now Bornholm).<sup>3</sup>

Where are the Eruls? The reason they are **not** found ‘as such’ in Denmark or the vicinity, under this name, is explored below. In a much later author, yet still a pre-Viking age one, a clue is however given. The Anglo-Saxon author Widsith names the **Wicingas** along with other peoples:

*Mið Wenlum ic waes [ond] mið Waernum [ond] mið Wicingum.  
Mið Gefþum ic waes [ond] mið Winedum [ond] mið Gefflegum...*

Here, these *Wicingas* are grouped together with the Vandals (*Wenlum*) the Varns (*Waernum*), and the Gepids (*Gefþum*, whereas the *Gefflegum* are a tribe in Jutland)<sup>4</sup>; hence, somewhere in the Western parts of the Baltic.<sup>5</sup> Widsith continues his enumeration of the peoples he has been with, at length and by alliteration, and after the *Israhelum & Exsyringum* (Israelites and Assyrians), the *Indeum & Egyptum*, etc., he turns to the following:

*Mið Moïðum ic waes [ond] mið Persum [ond] mið Myrgingum  
[ond] Mofðingum [ond] ongend Myrgingum  
[ond] mið Amoþingum. Mið East-Þyringum ic waes  
[ond] mið Eolum [ond] mið Istum [ond] Iðumingum.  
(Ond) ic waes mið Eormanrice ealle þrage...*

After the seeming Medes, Persians, and Moabites (*Mofðingum*), who all upon scrutiny are tribes in Southern Scandinavia and possibly Britain, the poet switches to the *Myrgingum*, a tribe in North-West Germany, south of the Eider.<sup>6</sup> They are followed by *Amoþingas* (from *Omd* in North Norway) and ‘East’ Thuringians, plus **Eols**, ‘Esths’, and *Idumingas* (Livlanders).<sup>7</sup> The collocation of these latter “with the most eastern Germanic tribes of the border, the Heruli and Thuringians, certainly looks

1. Young 1965, 112 on “king Hjalþrek of Ty”.
2. I am beholden to my friend Adler Holmboe, Dept. of History, Oslo University, for drawing my attention to Thy – *Theotones*, *Vendsyssel* – *Vandals*, and *Hardsyssel* – *Charudi*.
3. This is no attempt at a sweeping set of etymologies! Each possible nexus here must be investigated on its own merits. Many scholars have been party to this ‘Danish vaginal investigation’ already. There is of course more to this than is found in Denmark alone, cf. the Bosphorian Cimmerians, or the Vendil names in Sweden.
4. Malone 1962, 153.
5. Chambers 1912, 208, verses 59-60.
6. same, 159-161, 188, 204, 215, verses 84-85. Malone 1962, 183-186 has **Myr-** ‘mire, bog’, leaving the second part of the name unexplained. We suggest \***ginga** ‘walk’: giving an epithet ‘the Bog-walkers’, very apposite for the area between the Eider and Elbe rivers.
7. same, 128-129,

like a piece of genuine tradition accurately preserved”, has been one view – presupposing the emendation *Eorls*.<sup>1</sup> The more convincing interpretation is the *Elvaeones* or ‘*Ἐλουάωνες*’ of Ptolemy, mentioned above, a Germanic tribe on the lower Vistula.<sup>2</sup> The reading ‘Earls’ here is to be rejected.

Returning to the *Wicingas*, we take them to designate the bands out in the Baltic from whom the Eruls did their recruiting. The view is not new: “Certainly the name *wicing* is most appropriate to the Heruli, who were essentially sea-robbers.”<sup>3</sup>

We note that the corresponding word forms in Old Frisian are *witsing*, *wising*, *witzeng*, showing up the phenomenon of assibilant palatalization, the beginnings of which have been dated to around 400 AD,<sup>4</sup> bespeaking the ancientness of the word.

Strangely, this early (Migration-age) start of the ‘Vikings’ is generally not noted in discussions of how the word originated and what it means. The name *Wicingas* shows that they were indeed maritime folk, probably holing up in bays and inlets (Old Norse and modern Scandinavian *vík*).<sup>5</sup> What happened to them is found in two other sources:

First, Jordanes says that the Heruli under their king Rodu[u]lf were expelled from their former seats by the Danes. He and his following were received most honourably by the Emperor Theodoric in Byzantium. Our Gothic author is caustic:<sup>6</sup>

*Sunt quamquam et horum positura Granii, Augandzi, Eunixi [et] Aetelrugi, Arothi, Raumi, quibus non ante multos annos Roduulf rex fuit, qui contempto proprio regno ad Theodorici Gothorum regis gremio convolavit, et, ut desideravit, invenit.*

*Furthermore there are in the same neighborhood the Granii, Augandzi, Eunixi, Taetel, Rugi, Arochi and Ranii, over whom Roduulf was king not many years ago. But he despised his own kingdom and fled to the embrace of Theodoric, king of the Goths, finding there [the refuge] he desired.*

One comment runs:<sup>7</sup> “As the text stands, *quibus* refers to the seven peoples named just before. Yet Rodvulf was not their king but king of the Heruli.” This may

1. same, 216, verses 87-88, 250-252.
2. Malone 1933, 321-324, Malone 1962, 179.
3. Chambers 1912, 206, seconding Müllenhoff and others. Rejected by Malone 1959, 66-67, Malone 1963, 164-165, 209, whose arguments are however unconvincing: The Eruls c. 500 AD were not simply “victims, expelled from their proper seats by Danish invaders”, living “on the borders of the Roman Empire”. A band of them led by Roduulf were indeed expelled, according to Jordanes, who is acutely hostile to the Eruls (as he is to the Rosomones too). Yet quite possibly the Eruls were the invaders – before being driven off or electing to go south to the Emperor Theodoric. And after the Erul defeat at the hands of the Langobards in the first decade of the 6th c., many Eruls returned home – through Denmark.
4. Höfler 1971, 149 n. 101, citing Steller and Luick.
5. Cf *Viken* as an administrative area in Northern Bohuslän, on which more in ch. 18.7 below. Other interpretations in *KLNM* ‘Vikingar’.
6. Mierow 1966, 57; described also in Cassiodor’s *Variae*. Latin text, attempted reconstitution in Svennung 1967, 2. *Raumi* for *Ranii* is unfounded, cf same: “Codices: ... *ranii* vel *rannii*.”
7. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 431 n. 487, cf. Mommsen 1882, 154.

sound plausible enough – in particular when reading history backwards in time, from the vantage point of the Eruli in the 6th c. having ‘returned’ back home to the Ránii, if these are understood as Ránríki (Bohuslen). Yet I feel that what we do have here is two things, presupposing each other: Roduulf has boasted to Theodoric of having been king of not merely the Ránii but all the peoples enumerated (which is the *lectio simplicior*), in the sense of having dominated them, or more precisely their coasts (which may have been true), and of having ‘scorned’ this vast territory, while Jordanes, knowing the truth – that king Roduulf was chased by the Danes – heaps scorn upon him. That Roduulf could and probably did boast of such power, is probable enough not only in view of an understandable desire to impress Theodoric (and to keep him in the dark as to his real motives for coming), but also when the peoples in question are reviewed: Grenland, Agder, Telemork, Rogaland or the Rugi in northern Germany, the Hordes and the Ráni give a conspectus of the entire coast of Norway, from the southwest (Hordaland & Rogaland today) to Bohuslen (Ránríki). I.e., he was a maritime (or ‘Viking’) king, his power reaching little beyond his actual presence.

The late 6th and all of the 7th cc. AD are as yet impenetrably murky. One view is that the Danes came from southern Sweden. If the Eruls collected in the *víks* of southwestern Sweden, meaning present-day Bohuslen, and in the *víks* of Funen and Jutland (perhaps subsequently, after their expulsion from Bohuslen and prior to their expulsion from Jutland and the isles as well), then their sailing on to ravage the coasts of Gallia and Iberia may have been their ‘way out’. That they were ‘expelled’ by the Danes logically presupposes their being seafarers too (the other two forms of a defeat at the hands of the incoming Danes being subjection and enslavement, or physical annihilation, of which there is no word).

The other source shedding tenuous light on these events is line 6 of the heroic lay by Beowulf, where the Danish king Scyld Scefing is said to have *egsoðe eorl[e]* ‘terrified the Earls’.<sup>1</sup> Only one historian appears to have seen this while noting also the cultural contribution of the Eruls (though not connecting them in turn with the early *Wicingas* of Widsith):<sup>2</sup>

“Jordanes... says that the Eruli were driven out of Denmark by the Danes, and if we accept that the disputed *egsoðe eorle* (MS. *eorl*) of Beowulf 6 means that Scyld Scefing, the eponymous ancestor of the Danish Scylding (Skjoldung) dynasty, ‘terrified the Eruli’,... we have testimony that their reputation for martial violence was well established in and around their own northern territories as well as abroad, for it would be Scyld’s distinction not that he had terrified some puny collection of peace-lovers but a people of whom the whole north stood in fear. When this terrorization and expulsion of the Eruli took place we cannot say, perhaps towards the close of the fifth century. ...”

Eventually they would head back north, after their defeat by the Lombards c. 505, make their way through Slavic tribes and the lands of the Danes, and find a new

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1. Rytter 1929, 15: “*Often Scyld Scefing/Out from the inns/ Men harried, many/ He frightened his foes./ Terrified the Earls...*” Collinder 1954 has no mention of the earls at all in his very free rendering.

2. Jones 1973, 29.

home near the Gautar in Sweden. Perhaps, however, their most memorable contribution to northern history was not this unblest turbulence and commotion but their connection with the runic alphabet and runic inscription. Throughout Scandinavia there are inscriptions containing the word *erilaR* (*eirilaR*), which appears to mean ‘Erulian’, suggesting that the Eruli had such a reputation as rune-masters that their name became a descriptive title for such.”

Historians have hitherto been much too unaware of not only the existence and rôle(s) of the Erul ‘proto-Vikings’ but also of the mental continuum from their age to that of the (later) Vikings. The start of the Viking Age, conventionally set around 800 AD, or slightly before – with the first recorded Viking attacks on the British Isles commencing in the early 790-ies, is now placed around 750 instead, on material grounds, viz. the inception of towns (Ribe, Hedeby). Mentally, however, we may say, pushing back through the otherwise impenetrable 7th and 6th cc.: The preceding age of the *Wicingas* never ended.

The last Eruls “returned home” to dwell “alongside the Gauti”, probably in Ránríki = Bohuslen, c. 550. The two hundred years between c. 550 and 750 are no hiatus as to oral literature, or for that matter ‘Viking’ exploits.

### 3.11. *The Erul Inscriptions*

Of the Elder Runic (*fupark* alphabet) inscriptions in Scandinavia, the oldest is found upon a lance blade from Upper Stabu in Oppland, Norway and dated to 150-200 AD, or c. 180. A number of finds from Denmark (Slesvig, Funen, Jutland, plus Skonen in present-day southern Sweden) follow immediately afterwards, “around 200 AD”.<sup>1</sup> Wooden artefacts have naturally been lost, but inscriptions in wood must have been very much more prolific than those on stone and metal which have survived down to the present. Tellingly, our common Germanic word ‘book’ (Old Norse *bók*, Gothic *bóka* ‘letter’) is derived from “rune engraved in beech-wood” (*bøk*).<sup>2</sup>

This Elder Runic alphabet is itself a link between these far-northern inscriptions and the Mediterranean south where the presence of the Eruls is attested: According to the research,<sup>3</sup> this script – or very many of its characters – originated from Etruscan-based Alpine script(s) adopted and adapted by some of the first known Eruls.

The physical link between the Scandinavian finds and the Etruscan-Alpine script(s) was long represented by a small number of Elder Runic finds from South-Eastern and Central Europe, including one on a bone artefact from Maria-Saalerberg in Austria, tentatively dated to 166 AD “or shortly afterwards”,<sup>4</sup> and interpreted as

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1. Höfler 1971, 150.

2. Marstrander 1928, 172: “i bøk ristet runestav”.

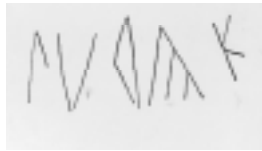
3. Marstrander 1928, Hammarström 1929, Höfler 1971.

4. Marstrander 1928, 188: “Les trois inscriptions runiques trouvées jusqu’ici hors de la Scandinavie, sont toutes rédigées en langue gothique. Cependant ces trois monuments détachés ne permettent aucune conclusion sur l’origine des runes... L’inscription de l’alène de Maria-Saalerberg est même contraire à la théorie gothique, car elle remonte.. au delà du IIe siècle.”

stemming from the Marcoman occupation of Virunum.<sup>1</sup>

In 1959, however, the closest one can possibly get to a missing link was found: the inscription, the oldest one on European soil to date ascribable to an Erul, detected through a new inspection of a Roman helmet from Steiermark.<sup>2</sup> Among the four different inscriptions on it, in four different versions of the north Etruscan alphabet, one reads :Ϟ ERUT. The obversely written Ϟ is a sign for *centuria*, a unit in the Roman army; while the obverse L in ERUT likewise should be taken to signalize an abbreviation – the full name being ERULUS in its Latin form.

A dating to the 2nd c. BC has been suggested.<sup>3</sup> More convincingly, it has been argued that the helmet was consigned to the earth during the great Pannonian rising in 6-9 AD.<sup>4</sup> This is in keeping with the opinion of Professor Gerd Høst Heyerdahl, that the origin of the runes is from around the birth of Christ, or only a few years or at the most a few decades later.<sup>5</sup>



*The oldest known Erul inscription.*

The helmet in question belongs to a hoard of 25 helmets in Steyermark, one of which in gold was evidently that of a leader, with an inscription which has been interpreted to mean that “*Harigast dedicates this helmet to [the god] Ty*”. In mediaeval Norse literature, a gold helmet renders its bearer invulnerable,<sup>6</sup> as do runes.<sup>7</sup>

Other inscriptions from Roman-held territory are rare, the following being listed:<sup>8</sup> *Eruli* (one instance), *Eroli* (do.), *Heruli* (two). In addition, there is a Roman *comes* (evidently of Germanic origin, and dead in 462) named *Herila*.<sup>9</sup>

Before leaving the theme we note a reading or two not from Europe at all.

In Junnar, Poona, c. 120 km northeast of today’s Bombay, two Buddhist votive inscriptions have been taken to attest to an Erul presence. One of them carries the *yavanasa irilasa gatāna deyadhama be poḍhiyo* ‘the Greek (literally, Ionian, here in the wider sense of ‘European’) Eril Goth’; the other: *yavanasa citi gatanam...* has been explained as ‘the Greek (= European) **HeldaR** the Goth’; *HeldaR* being the pro-

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1. same, 97, leading to his conclusion, same, 103, that the runes arose most probably in Marobodus’ realm among the Kvades and Marcomanni, under the influence of an Etruscan-based “Latinized Alp alphabet”.
  2. Egger 1960, 79-89, supported by Tollenaere 1967, 344, Höfler 1971, 154-156.
  3. Pittioni 1954, 175-176, 188-189.
  4. Höfler 1971, 156.
  5. Oral communication, Jan. 21, 1994.
  6. Boberg 1967, 70.
  7. same, 67.
  8. Rappaport 1920, 1150, citing *C[orpus] I[nscript.] L[at.]*.
  9. *CIL* VI, 31996.



to-Norse and even recognizably modern Scandinavian and German word for 'hero', **helt** or **held**.<sup>1</sup>

These readings have since been conclusively proven erroneous. We can now dismiss these 'Bombay Eruls',<sup>2</sup> thanks to a thorough investigation.<sup>3</sup>

The last inscriptions of great and indisputable relevance to our theme are the Scandinavian ones of the 6th-7th cc., opening with those proud words *ek erilaR*, literally, "I, the Erul" – or rather, **Eril**. The most plausible theory to date is that the forms *Erul* and *Eril* are not simply synonymous, but that the latter was used, most consciously and deliberately, to set off the rune-masters – as cultic leaders – from the rank-and-file Eruls.<sup>4</sup>

One such inscription, from Rossaland, south-western Norway, is dated to the 5th c.; another, from Bratsberg by the Oslo Fiord, to around 500 AD; a third, from Kragehul in Funen, to possibly a few years later; a fourth, in Lindholm, southern Sweden, likewise to shortly after 500; a fifth, in Järsberg, Värmland, south-western Sweden, to 500-550; another two, upon bracteates from Väsby and Äsketorp in southern Sweden, to the 6th c.; an eighth, from Veblungsnes, in Romsdal, west Norway, to c. 550; a ninth, from By, north-west of Oslo, to after 550.<sup>5</sup>

All these testify unambiguously to the form *erilaR*.<sup>6</sup> The clustering in both time and space is highly significant: The **Erils** by their stone inscriptions seem to delimitate, basically, an area enveloping the Skagerrak and Kattegat. The age: the twilight years of Erul power within, and bordering on, the Roman Empire, their abject fall – and their spectacular 'return' to Thule.

What were these rune-masters up to – staking out territorial claims for the Erul 'homecomers'? Hardly. Stake out claims they did, but as individuals of high repute who found, or made, themselves welcome in the communities where they so to speak set up shop – with an inscription as their 'advertisement', not of commercial wares in any latterday sense, of course, but of their power to master the holy writing and its inherent and attendant secrets, i.e. to mediate and communicate between the gods, in particular Óðinn – the 'inventor' of the runes – and men.

It is within this loosely delimited area, we shall see, that the 'home-comer' Eruls clustered. Naturally, they had rune-masters along with them, as part of their leadership. Yet returning home was something they did as a result of a military débâcle, at the hands of their previous subjects the Langobards; meaning plausibly that, al-

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1. Konow 1912.
  2. Wolfram 1979, 42 n. 6: "Hingegen müssen die zwei Weihinschriften in einem buddhistischen Tempel bei Junnar im Verwaltungsdistrict Poona nahe von Bombay endgiltig als Zeugnis für die gotische Südostwanderung ausscheiden. Die auf den epigraphischen Denkmal genannten beiden Männer sind nicht Goten."
  3. Wüst 1961, 141-189.
  4. Höfler 1971, 150-152: "Wenigstens im 5./6. Jh. ... muss von den nebeneinander vorkommenden Formen auf **-il-** und **-ul-** die erstere damals im Norden auf die Runenmeister 'spezialisiert' gewesen sein, was dem Prinzip der Bedeutungsdifferenzierung grammatischer Doppelformen entspräche."
  5. same, 150; Krause 1966, 154ff, 43f, 64ff, 69ff, 156ff, 263f & 238, 126f, 154ff.
  6. As does, seemingly, the name of the Roman *comes* mentioned above, **Herila**. The form **-ila** is however a diminutive, i.a. very common in Gothic.

though hardened veterans, they could not just grab any land of their liking up north. According to Procopius of Caesarea, they settled “*alongside the land of the Gauts*”. If this roughly equals Ránríki, i.e. the later Bohuslän, we are in a position to understand the **Eril** masters: Reduced to a rougher and more circumscribed existence, some of them ventured out – east to Värmland, south to southern Sweden, north past the later Oslo, west across the Fiord to Bratsberg, and even around the coast of Norway.

As newcomers, they boldly carved their claims in stone.

### 3.12. An Eponymous King

Only in stone? There is one intriguing reference in the 6th c. writer Iohannes Lydus,<sup>1</sup> which reads in our translation:<sup>2</sup>

*The myth relates in an obscure way that [H]Eriolos in Italy came to have three lives, the one from whom Evandros, the son of the soothsayeress Karmente, held back the realm in a most philosophical way.*

There is only this one reference to the said king Eriulus, or alternatively Herilus, in all of classical and post-classical literature.<sup>3</sup> And the reference *within* this reference is classical indeed, reaching back as it does to the founding fathers of Troy and their contemporaries, one of whom was Evandros. And for scholarly cover we cannot take recourse to literature on him and them which is now lost.

The explanation is rather: Here we are in the presence of just one more royal *heros eponymos*. This tradition is in early evidence among the Greeks; thus, the diverse Hellenic tribes (Achaïans, Ionians, Dorians, Eolians) all could lay claim to a king in their respective mythical beginnings, from whom they traced their equally respective names. Likewise, the latecomer Latins managed to procure for themselves a king Latinus, a founder of Rome, with whom Aeneas supposedly conversed. Now Aeneas claims to be contemporaneous with the destruction of Troy in 1184 BC (no bad dating work!), yet also to have subsequently meet with Dido the founder of Carthage (which we may date to c. 800 BC); while tradition will have it that Rome was founded in 753 BC.

King Eriulus is cut to the same type of order. Yet worse than with Aeneas, he is fitted with not merely three different chronological scenarios but, expressly, three different lives. Regarding these we can only guess. But so for sure did Lydus, or his informant(s), as we may take this king Eriulus to be a brainchild of his age.

In 5th and early to mid-6th c. Italy, the Eruls were prominently present. And both a writer steeped in classical erudition and the leaders of the Eruls themselves would know that the Erul name recurred down through the centuries. It is difficult to understand how Lydus would think up a ‘myth’ like the above of his own accord, and in that case to also pass judgment on it for being ‘obscure’. Rather, he is retelling a myth

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1. Wunsch 1896, 2-3.

2. Here, and regarding the traditions on eponymic royalty, I am as ever beholden to Prof. Nils Berg.

3. Stephanus 1835, IV, 2065: *Εριλυς, sive\*Εριλυς, Erylus, s. Herylus, rex in Italiam, ap. Joh. Laurentius...*

that was current in his day. We may infer: the royal myth of the Eruls – or Erils – themselves.

For a royal legend they were in need of, and certainly must have possessed. In the late 5th c. they had their own kingdom, Herolia, east and northeast of Italy. And from Herolia it was clearly into Italy that many of them poured for assignments. When Herolia had succumbed, and Lydus is writing after this date, the Eruls could justifiably say that their kingdom had been taken away from them; yet they had in a sense found another, that of Odoacer, who was called *rex Erulorum*.

With their spectacular history – and geography! – nothing would be more natural, nay necessary, for Erul ideologists than to try and bind it all together, in one single eponymous hero. Our thoughts go (as theirs must have done) to Óðinn, both god and king, king of the *Herela* host of the dead – himself having survived being hung, and doubtless hung for dead, for nine days in the tree of insight. Perhaps there is a link too, surprisingly, to a ‘Scythian’ Achilles, on whom more presently in our chapter 4.5.

What is sure too, and highly significant, is that the name of this king is pronounced **Eril**, according to Lydus. This is the name used, as we have just seen, by the Erul ‘ideologists’, the keepers of Óðinn’s invention, the runes. We take it to substantiate that from them Lydus had his myth.

### 3.13. A ‘Gothic People’ – or Something Else

The breathtaking span of time involved here, from around the very start of our era to the late 6th century, bids us answer that compelling question: Who **were** the Eruls, ranging from Thule and Widsith’s *Wicingas* up north to the Maeotic marshes, from maritime assaults on France and Spain to the land-locked ephemeral Herolia in the reaches of what became Hungary, from a helmet in the Alps of Austria from the days of Christ to a victory in the mountains of Algeria in the 540-ies?

The reason they survived is, following Höfler, and long before him Munch:<sup>1</sup>

They were not a ‘people’ in our modern sense at all. Neither were the later Vikings, the ones we meet in the Viking age. There is no reason why these folk should conform to latterday conventions of a ‘people’ as being an ethnically or geographically defined entity. Their extension through time and space points instead to their being:<sup>2</sup>

- a) a ‘war guild’ (Kriegerverband, Gefolgschaft) united in
- b) a self-defined warriors’ aristocracy (cf. the title Earls, princes) by
- c) a common cult of the god of battle fury, Óðinn,
- d) all swearing themselves in by oath to each other and to Óðinn directly,
- e) and (hence?) brooking no king as intermediary, but
- f) open to recruitment from a number of Germanic peoples,
- g) who as recruits were probably regarded as ‘slaves’ by outsiders.

The term **jarl** in Norse/Norwegian history takes on a fuller historical significance in this light – as an heritage from its namesake predecessors the Eruls, connoting a lead-

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1. Munch 1853, 52 ff., Höfler 1971, 144-149.

2. Cf. Höfler 1971, 142-146, *re* points a, c, f.

er basing his might on the maritime power inherent in raiding and/or trading *plus* a cultic function as an Óðinn-worshipper knowledgeable in the runes. Significantly, the *jarlar* in Snorri Sturlusonar are all strategically placed on the littoral.

Interestingly too, the word may not have originally meant ‘prince, count, near-king’ at all, but simply ‘man, man of standing’;<sup>1</sup> if so, the question is: **Why** did a semantic change take place? Did it not simply come with increasing social stratification in Scandinavian societies? This is a sufficient explanation.

Or did the meaning ‘take off’ because of added prestige to the title from the side of the Romans – who perhaps were conned into believing that there was more to the name than there was? The latter is improbable; the more so in that the very form *Erulus* in Latin (versus *ErilaR*) may have been influenced by the Latin word *erūs* ‘master, lord’ (also, and less correctly, *herus*,<sup>2</sup> cf. likewise Herulus), humorously even, as a diminutive, viz. ‘the small lords’.

For an understanding of their nature we turn to the *Germania* of Tacitus, ch. 14: Here, we are introduced to the phenomenon of young Germanic *nobiles*, when their own *civitas* grow dull because of longish periods of peace (*longa pace et otio torpeat*), travelling out to foreign *nationes* in order to join the action and try their luck. These *Gefolgschaften* were voluntary, based on tests of strength and prowess plus a life-and-death oath.<sup>3</sup> Recruitment surely could and did take on a trans-tribal character.

That they spoke a mutually intelligible tongue goes without saying. *What* tongue is another matter. Differences in language or dialect have probably not mattered much within their company. Having disposed of our ethnicity-based notion of group belongingness, we must not fall into the opposite pit, depriving the Eruls (or other *Gefolgschaften*) of any linguistic or ‘ethnic’ characteristics whatsoever. We are entitled to assume that the Eruls did have a linguistic ‘point of gravitation’ or kernel.

Of what kind? The Byzantines reckoned such tribes as the Gepids, the Vandals, etc., to the Gothic peoples.<sup>4</sup> The words of Procopius are surely representative (*De bello Vandalico*, III, ii, 2-5, iii, 1):

*There were many Gothic nations in the past, just as today, yet greatest and most important are the Goths, Vandals, Visigoths, and Gepaedes... And there were some who called these nations Getic. All these, while distinguished from one another by names, as stated, do not differ in anything else at all. For they all have white bodies and fair hair, and are tall and handsome... they are all of the Arian faith, and have one language called Gothic; and, as it seems to me, they all came originally from one tribe...*

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1. Rappaport 1920, 1150.

2. Lewis/Short 1975, 659.

3. Wenskus, 1992, 313.

4. Following a piratical attack upon Asia Minor by a Germanic tribe from the Maeotis, the Emperor Tacitus (-276) took the title **Goticus**, and had coins struck commemorating his **Victoria Gotthica** (sic); yet as Schmidt notes 1969, 222-223, this is not to be taken literally: “Which tribe they belonged to, we are not told. The sources refer to them as Barbarians or Scythians... Probably Erules or Boranis are meant; eastern Goths also took part.” Having mopped up the remnants of these invaders, his successor Probus likewise took the title **Goticus**, in 277.”

Or in the words of Constantine Porphyrogenetos (which seem to be but a paraphrase of Procopius): “*the Goths, Visigoths, Gepeds and Vandals, who differ from one another in name only and in nothing else, and speak one and the same tongue...*”<sup>1</sup> Definitions could be lax indeed; thus Jordanes: “*Now the Vandals dwelling about the Meotic Lake... associated with themselves the Alani, a Gothic people.*”

What of the Eruls? They are, with one exception, not subsumed under, or identified with, the Goths.<sup>2</sup> The exception is Zonaras, who does group them along with the latter, yet clearly as a separate entity; ‘Gothic’ here should be understood as a rough indication of geography – ‘Scythia’ alone being too vast – and also of the Eruls being somehow akin to, or relatives of, the Goths proper:<sup>3</sup>

*After Valerianus, his son Gallienus was empowered of the Roman Empire, and having been left in the Occident while his father was fighting the Persians, in order that he resist those who planned ill against Italy and were ravaging Thrace. He with not more than 10.000 [men] vanquished 300,000 Alamans by Milan. Thereupon he crushed the Heruls, this people which is Scythian, and Gothic. He also made war against the Franks...*

Also, the *Gothograikoi*, literally ‘Gothic Greeks’, who stayed on in Kyzikos from 267 AD, have been taken for Eruls.<sup>4</sup>

The reason that one and the same sea campaign of 269 AD could be ascribed to the Goths in one author, and to the Eruls in another,<sup>5</sup> is not that the Eruls were Goths, meaning a subdivision on a par with other subdivisions of the Goths, but that these two peoples were allies conducting joint operations, and that those on the receiving side perceived the campaign as a Gothic one, or as an Erul one, respectively, depending on their own (disad-)vantage point. The Goths moved overland, and the Eruls may have been perceived by some of the Greeks as simply their maritime branch.

An authoritative view on the Eruls has nevertheless been that their belonging to the East Germanic Gothic group is “unbestritten”.<sup>6</sup> Not so. While this is probably true of the Burgundians, judging from the few words they have left us,<sup>7</sup> the Eruls were predominantly North Germanic, in linguistic terms – to the extent that they were a ‘people’ at all.

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1. Moravszik 1949, I, 105 (ch. 25).

2. Only in modern historians! Thus, Rappaport 1920. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 75, cf. Alföldi 1939, 1486-1487: “In the third quarter of the third century, the Goths were the terror of Asia. They sailed from the Black Sea ports as far as Ionia; the Heruli took Lemnos and Skyros, the Borani pillaged Pityus and Trapezunt.”

3. PG 134, 1067-1068 (XII, xxiv): *Αἰρούλοις Σκυθικῶ γένηι καὶ Γοτθικῶ...* “*Post Valerianum, Gallienus illius filius, imperii Romani potitus est, a patre contra Persas abeunte in Occidente relictus, ut iis qui Italiae male cogitarent, et Thraciam vastarunt, resisteret: qui cum non amplius decem millia haberet, trecenta millia Alemannorum juxta Mediolanum vicit. Deinde Herulos etiam, gentem Scythicam, et Gothicam, profligavit. Gessit et cum Francis bellum.*”

4. Loewe 1896, 1 ff, 249.

5. Rappaport 1899, 70.

6. Rappaport 1920, 1151. Also, Braune/Ebbinghaus 1981, 2; and Marstrander 1929, 92-95, *versus* Bugge, von Friesen.

7. Pauly-Wissowa, II: ‘*Burgundiones*’.

Militating against their being Goths proper is their very name, ‘the Earls’, and for three reasons: No such word is attested for the Goths (an argument *ex silentio*, not carrying much weight in view of the paucity of Gothic linguistic materials preserved). It is, however, widely attested in North Germanic (Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon). Socially too, these earls do not fit in what we know of Gothic society as being very much more hierarchic.<sup>1</sup> Also, the Eruls hailing from<sup>2</sup> and keeping up relations with Scandinavia (‘Thule’), bequeathing the runes to them, and eventually returning home there to settle alongside the Gauti, is hard to reconcile with their being Goths proper.

The Eruls themselves *may* at times have reckoned themselves a sub-entity within a wider ‘Gothic’ grouping; and to non-Gothic outsiders in particular, be they Greeks or others, there may at times have been little reason to distinguish Eruls from Goths.<sup>3</sup>

It has in fact been incisively argued that not merely the ‘Gothogreeks’ but also the so-called Goths of the Crimea and the Caucasus were in reality not Goths at all, but Eruls.<sup>4</sup> This may provide an explanation for why the ‘Gothic’ tongue spoken in the Crimea until the late 1780-ies<sup>5</sup> was so aberrant from that found in Wulfila’s Gothic Bible.<sup>6</sup>

Doubtless, the Eruls were a brand apart. Yet their visibility *as such* in e.g. Greek eyes and minds was not consistent. More precisely, when seen at close range, as élite or auxiliary troops side by side with the Byzantine armed forces proper on the battlefield, or as Imperial guards in the capital, they were indeed called Eruls; as was the case, naturally, with their 5th c. state called Herolia. Yet in the far-away recesses of the Black and Azov Seas, whence the joint 267-269 AD expeditions were launched by the Eruls on the sea and the Goths overland, they were prone to be lumped with the latter. Thus, when the Greek Emperor Manuel I (1143-1180) called himself “Gotthicos” when restoring his domination of the Crimea,<sup>7</sup> the ‘Goths’ he

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1. U. Näsman, in Mortensen & Rasmussen 1988.
  2. cf. Mamertinus, pan. 7, on the 286 AD attack on northernmost Gaul, in Rappaport 1920, 1152: “*Chaibones Erulique, viribus primi barbarorum, locis ultimi*”.
  3. On the one hand there are ‘Goths’ attested as colonists in Lesser Asia after 386 (Wolfram 1974, 263); on the other hand (same, 264): “Whether the ‘Getae’ who according to Claudian, *Eutrop.* 1, 242 ff, ingressed into Asia Minor (especially Cappadocia) and Syria in 398 AD from the Caucasus, are to be understood as Goths, or more likely Heruls, must be left aside. Although it came to no battle, as the Barbarians soon returned back, the minister Eutropius entered the capital as a victor and had himself elected a consul the following year (autumn 398).”
  4. Loewe 1896, 249, recognizing but one really Gothic stock by the Black Sea: “Wenn die Vorfahren der sogenannten Gotogriechen höchstwahrscheinlich, die sog. Goten der Krim und des Kaukasus in Wirklichkeit Heruler gewesen sind, so ist doch dann am schwarzen Meere mit dem Namen der Goten wenigstens *ein* Germanenrest zurückgeblieben, über dessen wirklich gotische Abkunft.... keinerlei Zweifel aufkommen kann. Es sind dies die ‘Gothi minores’ ... “ – as referred to in Jordanes’ *Getica*, § 51, and dwelling in Moesia.
  5. Sources and discussion in e.g. Loewe 1896, 224-225.
  6. Streitberg 1971, Braune/Ebbinghaus 1981 et al. Indications of Goths and Eruls in neighbourly coexistence on the Crimea: see ch. 15.1-2 below.
  7. Loewe 1896, 218.

and the Greeks had in mind may not have been Goths but, primarily, the Crimean Eruls.<sup>1</sup>

One indication that the Erul name was perhaps thought of as belonging on a lower or ‘close-up’ level is the aforesaid pun ‘*Eluri* = ‘swamp-dwellers’; it occurs also with a different spelling, which in turn shows, to my mind, that the original pun was lost on some writers. We hear of one Timotheos, an Aryan bishop, who was quite a scourge down in Alexandria until exiled in 452 and put to death in 469 AD.<sup>2</sup> He is called *Αἰλουρος*,<sup>3</sup> ‘the Elurian’. And his place of exile is interesting enough: the far-off town of Chersonnesos, or (still today) Korsun’, in the estuary of the Dnepr, right before the river reaches the Black Sea. This has rightly been considered not an exile at all, but a ‘homesending’ – to his area of origin.<sup>4</sup> We are probably entitled to conclude that Eruls did dwell in and around Korsun’ too, in the swampy reaches of the lower Dnepr.

### 3.14. *The Gepids*

The nimbleness and fleetness of the Eruls has its opposite in another Germanic people. For more tardy than even the Goths, according to the *Getica* of Jordanes § 95, are the closely related Gepids; their ‘tarrying’ behind and making their homes by the mouth of the Vistula, while the other Goths moved on south in the direction of the Black Sea, may have helped earn them their humorous nickname:<sup>5</sup>

*Should you ask how the Getae and the Gepidae are kinsmen, I can tell you in a few words. You surely remember that in the beginning I said the Goths went forth from the bosom of the island of Scandza with Berig, their king, sailing in only three ships toward the hither shore of the Ocean, namely to Gothiscandza. One of these three ships proved to be slower than the others, as is usually the case, and thus is said to have given the tribe their name, for in their language gepanta means slow... For undoubtedly they too trace their origin from the stock of the Goths, but because, as I have said, gepanta means something slow and stolid, the word Gepidae arose as a gratuitous name of reproach. I do not believe this is very far wrong, for they are slow of thought and too sluggish for quick movement of their bodies.*

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1. Indications of Goths and Eruls in neighbourly coexistence on the Crimea: see ch. 15.1-2 below.
  2. Georgios Kedrenos, *PG* 121, 661-662: “*Timotheus, cognomento Aelurus*,” or in the Greek, *Αἰλουρος*. Other sources in Rappaport 1920, 1159. Loewe 1896, 211 sees in his cognomen evidence that the Crimean Eruls were not assimilated by the Crimean Goths; a view both natural and strange, as he subsequently concludes that these latter were really Eruls: same, 429.
  3. Theophanes, XX, 170-173, 469.
  4. Loewe 1896, 211-212, characterizing *αἰλουρος* as “ein Appellativum = ‘Kater’” (i.e., a heretic), yet also citing Victor Tununensis, *Chronicon, studio Canisii Noviomagi, Ingolstadii* 1600, 24: “*Timotheus cognomento Hellurus*”; plus Liberatus, *Ecclesiae Carthag. Breviarium* cap. 15, and Evagrius, *Hist. eccl.* II, 8: “*Timotheus cognomento Aelurus*”.
  5. Mierow 1966, 78 (cap. 94-95).

Seeming polarity to Erul fleetness aside, we now see how Isidor in his *Etymologies* applies the ‘pedestrians’ rôle to the Gepids (col. 337):<sup>1</sup>

*The Gipedes are pedestrians, because of fighting more on foot than on horse, and for this reason they are thus called.*

From this one might conclude that the rôle of pedestrian warriors (infantry) was indeed filled by the Gepids rather than by, or on an equal footing with, the Eruls. And there is a reason for this. Not that Isidor is a trustworthy source for assessing the historical rôles of Gepids, Eruls or other tribes; what he attests to is the existence of a rumour that some of the Germanic tribesmen were ‘pedestrians’. But did he stick it on the Gepids solely on account of a facile but false etymology? Not necessarily. For one thing, why should not more peoples have enjoyed such fame?

In the case of this specific people, in addition to its sluggishness, there was something more: Through the latter part of their common history the Gepids and the Eruls were closely entangled. When following the death of Attila in 453 the Germanic tribes rose against the Huns, the Eruls joined the call to arms issued by Arderich, the king of the Gepids. After their catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Langobards in 508 AD, most of the Eruls opted for the protection of the Gepids.<sup>2</sup> Only after being maltreated by them, did one part of the Eruls move across the Danube into Illyricum with Roman approval, while others ‘returned’ to Scandinavia, settling alongside the land of the *Gauti*.

When in 528 a number of the Eruls converted to Catholicism, the main body of them stuck to their Arian form of Christianity, plus surely paganism; and when the Emperor tried to impose upon the Eruls a candidate of his own choosing for their king, the ‘nationalist reaction’ was to move out from Roman territory across the Danube once again to settle among the Gepids. In 548 a war broke out between the latter and the Langobards; and Eruls fought as allies of the Gepids – only to be massacred by a Roman army assisting the Langobards and comprising Eruls of ‘Roman’ persuasion.

The ‘Gepid’ Eruls disappeared along with the Gepid realm.<sup>3</sup> Yet the Langobard victor Wacho prudently married the daughter of the last Gepid ruler, having two daughters by her; and then also the daughter of the last Erul king Rodulf: “*From her was born a son whom he called Waltari, who after Wacho’s death ruled over the Langobards as the eighth [king]. These were all [called] the Lithingi. Thus then among them was the stock of the nobles called.*”<sup>4</sup>

That the royal Erul blood was considered valuable to the Langobards is evident; moreover, through Rodulf’s daughter the Eruls could, and surely were intended to,

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1. Lindsay 1911, I, Lib. IX, ii, 92: “*Gipedes pedestri proelio magis, quam equestri sunt usi, et ex hac causa vocati.*”

2. Rappaport 1920, 1160-1161.

3. same, 1159-1163. Waitz 1878, 81: “*The Gepids became so diminished a people from this time on that they did not even have a king.*”

4. same, 69: “*Ex ipsa ei natus est filius, quem Waltari appellavit, quique, Wacchone mortuo, super Langobardos iam octavus regnavit. Hi omnes Lithingi fuerunt. Sic enim apud eos quaedam nobilis prosapia vocabatur.*”



feel that their lineage continued to exist and to rule. It is notable that ‘**all**’ the nobility took up the name of the *Liðingi* that she conferred on them from her Eruls.

In sum, Gepids and Eruls before their eclipse by the Langobards were closely entwined, and even *in* their eclipse too, as represented by Wacho’s spouses. No wonder that a topos or two probably pertaining to the Eruls, such as their being too big and bulky to ride horses, could alight on the Gepids as well.

### 3.15. From Germanics to Franks

That the Eruls were *not* a tribe, not an *ethnic* entity, may be reflected in the development one senses in the word **Germani**. From the times of Julius Caesar and Tacitus, it was used as a blanket term for all Germanic peoples. Or *was* it? How consistently? For how long? A full inventory of how the word came to be used, and also *not* used, is beyond the scope of the present study. Yet we may be enlightened by the words of Tacitus on the Germani in general, summing up the characteristics we have been through already, and perhaps adding something too:<sup>1</sup>

*...Very seldom do they utilize swords or heavy lances. They do however carry spears, or in their parlance, frameas... Even the horseman contents himself with shield and framea. Those who fight on foot also fling throwing-weapons.. They are nude, or lightly clad in a small cape. There is no showing-off in their weaponry. Only the shields do they mark off in most carefully chosen colours. Very few have hauberks, and helmets or iron hats are scarce.*

*Their horses excel neither in beauty nor in rapidity. ...They mainly fight on foot, and therefore fight in mixed order. For to such equestrian combat those pedestrian warriors are accustomed and educated who, selected from all the young fighting force, are placed in front of the army proper.*

The overall picture of the Eruls percolating down to us from the sources at our disposal is that they, longer and better than all other Germanics, kept up these mores and ways and traits,<sup>2</sup> thus coming to epitomize **the** Germanic warrior par excellence.

The last sentence above even suggests two rather vital things: What is meant by the famed *running style* of the Erul warriors, the *cursus Erulorum*. And also perhaps the very origins of their identity. First, the *running style* is clearly a way of halting and dodging, hitting and neutralising enemy cavalry (at least of the not very rapid Germanic type described above). Second, these *élite* youths would be very conscious

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1. Forni/Galli 1964, 77-81 (ch. 6): “...*Rari gladiis aut maioribus lanceis utuntur: hastas vel ipsorum vocabulo frameas... Et eques quidem scuto frameaque contentus est, pedites et missilia spargunt, pluraque singuli, atque in immensum vibrant, nudi aut sagulo leves. Nulla cultus iactatio: scuta tantum lectissimis coloribus distinguunt. Paucis loricae, vix uni alterive cassis aut galea. Equi non forma, non velocitate conspicui. ...In universum aestimanti plus penes peditem roboris; eoque mixti proeliantur, apta et congruente ad equestrem pugnam velocitate peditum, quos ex omni iuventute delectos ante aciem locant. Definitur et numerus: centeni ex singulis pagis sunt, idque ipsum inter suos vocantur, et quod primo numerus fuit, iam nomen et honor est...*”
  2. Rappaport 1920, 1166.

of precisely their military *élite* function and status. Going first into battle, as an example to others, is the very mark of a Germanic leader:<sup>1</sup>

*The kings they choose by nobility [of birth], the military leaders by [fighting] virtue. Yet the kings have no unlimited or capricious power, and the leaders exert influence through their example rather than by orders. For only if they in front of everybody's eyes go first into the fray, do they keep their pre-eminence through the admiration they generate.*

Norse words for such leaders are *herkonúngr* and **jarl**. And the basis for an 'Earl' organization is described as well:<sup>2</sup>

*If the society in which they are born grows sluggish through longlasting peace and quiet, young nobles very often go off on their own accord unto such peoples as happen to be at war; for quiet does not tally with the mentality of this folk, and it is moreover through dangers that they all the easier win power and fame; a great following they can maintain only through acts of violence and warfare.*

A permanent or semi-permanent organization somewhere out there in the fields of fame clearly catered to a *need*. One or several sets of bands of such restless young nobles hoping to themselves become **princes** through warfare and largesse, is neatly summed up in the name of the Eruls. And several bands is what we see, some west, others (the majority) east, some up by the Sea of Azov, others raiding the coasts of France, some joining the Romans, others fighting them, some joining the Gepids, others fighting them, etc.

If now the Eruls so to speak *embody* the *cliché* Germanic warriors, might we not expect that they sometimes figure simply under this name? Such indeed appears to be the case.

Of the joint Goth-Erul onslaughts of 267 and 269 AD, the names *Gothi* and *Germani* are both used. And one of the coins struck to commemorate the Roman victory carries the legend *Gotico Germanico*<sup>3</sup> – where the latter word must designate the Eruls.

By and by, moreover, as we have seen above, the *Germani* are listed *alongside* other and more specific peoples, or precisely tribes, including the Franks.<sup>4</sup> Thus, e.g., “*contra Germanos et Francos*”.<sup>5</sup> Who are these *Germani*? With the archaist propensity of the Byzantines for filling new wine into old bottles, new peoples into old terminology, we must wonder why this old one-time generic term crops up towards the

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1. Forni/Galli 1964, 83 (ch. 7): “*Reges ex nobilitate, duces ex virtute sumunt. Nec regibus infinita aut libera potestas, et duces exemplo potius quam imperio, si prompti, si conspiciui, si ante aciem agant, admiratione praesunt.*”
  2. same, 105 (ch. 14): “*Si civitas, in quae orti sunt, longa pace et otio torpeat, plerique nobilium adulescentium petunt ultra eas nationes, quae tum bellum aliquod gerunt, quia et ingrati genti quies et facilius inter ancipitia clarescunt magnumque comitatum non nisi vi belloque tueare; exigunt enim principis sui liberalitate illum...*”
  3. Rappaport 1920, 1157, citing *Corpus Inscript. Lat.* XI, 2635.
  4. Freculphi Lexovicensis Episcopi Chronicon, II, liber V, xiv, PL 106, 1245: “*...Hi enim adfuerunt eorum auxiliares, Franci, Sarmatae, Armoriciani, Burgundiones, Saxones, Ripariolibrones quondam milites Romani, nonnulli etiam Celtici, et Germani.*”
  5. same, 1547.

end of the Migration Age as something very much less, a term covering only one of many tribal (or tribe-level) groupings.

It is in this very age that the Eruls disappear from the scene.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, we never find the *Germani* alongside the Eruls. The inference suggests itself: The term *Germani* could be used to designate the left-overs after the tribal names proper had been listed; meaning, in particular, the ‘people’ that was the very epitome of classical ‘Germanic-ness’ (as described by Caesar and Tacitus).

This term did not however stay put with the Eruls. The reason may have been: Gone was the glory of this *Gefolgschaft* ‘people’ of ours – only to be superseded by, first, that of the Gepids, and second, that of the Franks. In Procopius we read:<sup>2</sup>

*These Franks were called ‘Germani’ in ancient times... And there are many lakes in that region, and this is where the Germani lived of old, a barbarous nation, not of much consequence in the beginning, who are now called Franks.*

There are no sources in which the Eruls or Gepids are identified with the Franks. There is only the assertion that in 488, the Eruls – together with the Franks and Saxons – “razed the provinces of Pannonia to the ground”.<sup>3</sup> In one source, however, they are indeed lumped together in such a way that posterity might be led into doing the same.<sup>4</sup>

Howbeit, the Franks did appropriate some of the topics and the lustre of their earlier rivals in the field. Thus, several sources attest to the belief that the Franks stem from Troy and, later on, the swamps of the Maeotic, where they found a city called Sicambria.<sup>5</sup> Now the Sigambri, after whom the town is named, were a powerful Germanic people living not in Pannonia Ulterior but between the Sieg, Ruhr and Lippe rivers.<sup>6</sup> One text, from c. 770 AD, which we shall presently inspect, has the following:<sup>7</sup>

*103. Francus and Vassus<sup>8</sup> had accomplished a treaty with the Albani... Prostrate and defeated, those Albani who had managed to escape from the enormous carnage returned to their proper place. Seeing themselves overwhelmed, and the land moreover being hard*

1. The last mention regards an attempt by a Sinduald at seizing power in Italy, 566-567 AD; the victorious Justinian II taking the title *Ἐρουλικός*.
2. Dewing 1919, III, 117-119 (Book V, xi,29 – xii, 8-9).
3. Wolfram 1987, 55; Eugippus, *Vita Severini*, c. 16, 1-4.
4. Ennodius, *De vita beati Antoni*, ccxl, § 12-14; Marquart 1903, 384.
5. Wuttke 1853, lv-lxi.
6. Lewis/Short 1975, 1695-1696.
7. Wuttke 1853, 77 (ch. 103): “*Francus enim et Vassus foedus apud Albanos patrauerant... Albani prostrati atque devicti, qui evadere potuerant a caede maxima, reversi sunt ad propria. Francus, ut diximus, et Vassus videntes se superatos, terram autem adflictam et vastatam in solitudinemque redactam, relinquentes propria cum paucis sodalibus sed viris expeditis pulsi a sede statim, Raetiam penetrantes ad invia et deserta Germaniae pervenerunt, laevaue Maeotidas paludes demittentes more praedonum pyr[r]atic[or]um et fero fisorum atque latronum degentes urbem construunt; Sichambriam barbarica sua lingua nuncupant item gladium et arcum, more praedonum externorumque positam.*” *Pyr-ratic[or]um is my emdation – HS.*
8. A name indicating the rise of vassalage by the mid-8th c., the count of Bavaria becoming the *vassus* of the Frankish ruler in 757 AD: Löwe, in Prinz 1981, 503.

*stricken and devastated, reduced to solitude, Francus, as is said, and Vassus, leaving their own place along with a few companions – men lightly burdened – were driven on from the[ir] seats right away. Penetrating Raetia, they came all the way to the roadless and desert Germania, leading [their soldiers] down to the left [into] the Maeotic Swamps. Living in the manner of piratical robbers and the ferocity of wreckers<sup>1</sup> and highwaymen, they built a town. In their barbarian tongue they called it Sichambria, meaning put in place by swords and bows, in the manner of pirates and foreigners.*

There is absolutely no reason for these people, fleeing Troy in the face of impending disaster and reaching Raetia (north of the Po, between the Danube, Rhine and Lech rivers), to swerve wildly off really far eastwards, to the Sea of Azov – were it not for a need to capitalize on the fame of these pirates out in the swamp. That Sicambria was built there is preposterous – and for that reason also highly indicative. Indicative too are the *virī expediti*, ‘men lightly armed, without baggage’; as well as, possibly, the Albani.<sup>2</sup>

Here, then, the Franks simply take over, and gloss over, the rôle of their predecessors. After the shattering defeat of the Eruls in 508, the tradition on them was reduced to shards for others to pick up. The Franks were billed as ‘swamp dwellers’ too, in their humble beginnings, just like the Eruls;<sup>3</sup> and *their* swamps, at the mouth of the Rhine, lay right next-door to the Batavians and the western Eruls who hit the Roman Empire in 286 AD. Were perhaps the Franks originally part of them, or did they somehow identify with them?

At times the Eruls simply go unmentioned.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes they may have passed under other names and identities.<sup>5</sup> Two or three such will be discussed in connection with what we take to be mariners’ lore from the Black and Maeotic Seas. Here, one ‘identity-pair’, one liaison between Goths-or-Eruls and another people, was legendary.

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1. **fisores**: properly, *fissores* would be expected, from *findere* ‘cleave’.

2. Properly, the natives of Albania, on the west coast of the Caspian Sea. Here, the Alani seem to be meant, cf. Wuttke 1853, lvi-lvii, lxvi-lxviii.

3. Zonaras, in *PG* 134, 1323-1324: “*Neque enim Romani generis sunt Franci, sed (ut in Var-ia Historia tradit Caesariensis Procopius) gens Germanica, quae olim circa Rhenum flumen et Rhodanum et paludes illorum locorum habitavit.*”

4. Cf Wolfram 1974, 275 on a coalition of Danube peoples, the Swabi (or Swebi), Rugi, Sciri, Gepids, und Sarmatians pitted against the Goths in order to avenge a Sciri defeat, according to Jordanes. The Eruls are not mentioned by him, “ihre Teilnahme ist aber wegen ihrer Beteiligung an dem Befreiungskampfe gegen die Hunnen und der darauf fus-senden Feindschaft gegen die Ostgoten sehr wahrscheinlich. Der Swebenkönig Alarich des Jordanes scheint vielmehr ein Heruler gewesen zu sein..” The return of the **Rugi** to presentday **Roga**-land) in Norway has been seen as something of an ‘Erulian’ phenomenon (same, 117). In Jordanes, a clear dislike of the Eruls – cf. also his equally clear dislike of the Rosomones – may account for their generally being passed over in silence; one instance being Jordanes’ words on Odoacer (**no** word on his Erul forces).

5. Cf. the *Brentorum rex, qui adhuc de Herulorum stirpe remanserat...* in the *Gesta Langobardorum* of Paulus Diaconus, c. 14, Waitz 1878, 85. On Brinta: Schmid 1992, 197.

## 4. Amazons, Achilles & Azov Islanders

*Die Hauptthätigkeit des Achill aber auf der  
Pontosinsel war ohne Zweifel die eines  
Beschützers der Seefahrt und Seefahrer im  
Schwarzen Meere.  
Roscher 1886-90, I, 58.*

### 4.1. A Maritime Association with Amazons?

The way in which a mariner people came to be associated with the Amazons is told by Philostratos, who treats us to a real ‘mariners’ tale’ on how the Amazons invaded the Black Sea island of Leuce (literally, ‘the White Isle’), consecrated to Achilles, only to be worsted by Achilles himself. The way this was done is most extraordinary; we quote Philostratos,<sup>1</sup> who in turn purports to be citing the immortal hero Protesilaos:<sup>2</sup>

*The story is known to all those who navigate the Euxine [= Black] Sea.*

*Mariners and shipwrights buying the products of the [Black] Sea in order to transport them to the Hellespont had the bad luck of being thrown up by a tempest upon the right bank of the Sea, in the territory of the Amazons. These took them prisoners, keeping them chained to rocks awhile, intending to take them beyond their river to the cannibal Scythians.*

*It so happened that one of the Amazons had pity on one of the prisoners, a young and very handsome man; this passion changing into love, she obtained by her offices with the Queen of the Amazons, her sister, that these foreigners were not to be sold. Relieved of their chains, these latter mixed with the Amazons, the mistresses of the land, and having learned their language they entertained them about the storm which had beset them, the dangers of the sea, the temple of Achilles and its riches.*

*The Amazons hence began to look upon these strangers as a fortunate encounter, as they were shipbuilders and mariners. Their land having construction timber in abundance, they had vessels made for transporting their horses which were to be used for vanquishing Achilles. These animals were indispensable to them, for from the minute they stepped down from horseback they belonged to the feminine sex and became women completely.*

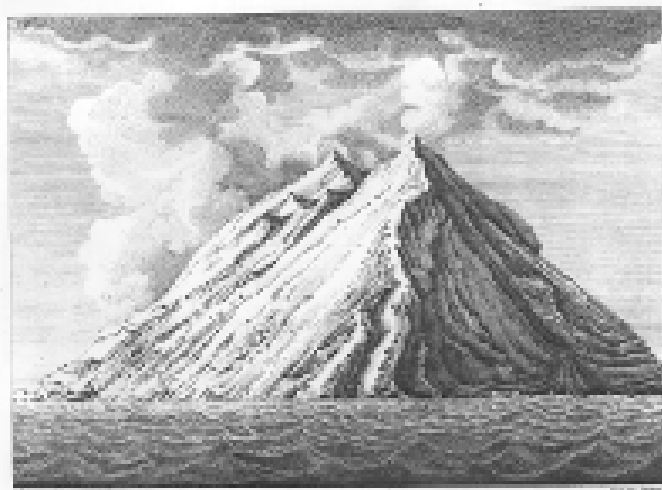
*In order to prepare for this expedition they began exercising in shooting, and in steering and manouvering a ship. When they thought themselves good enough at navigation, they embarked in springtime upon fifty vessels, issuing from the mouth of the Thermodon so as to go to the temple of Achilles in the isle of Leuce, some 2000 stadi away.*

*They arrived there, heaved anchor, and ordered their prisoners to cut down the trees which embellished the temple of the hero all around. But the axes, instead of cutting the trees, were deflected from them and hit the workers instead, some on the head, some on the nape of the neck, and they fell down without life.*

*Furious at this spectacle, the Amazons cried out and spurred on their horses at full speed against the temple. Yet Achilles went out to meet them, and advancing towards them with a terrible and menacing mien, like he once did against Scamander and the Trojans,*

1. Philostratos Heroic., pp 246-256, ed. Boiss: Koehler 1826, n. 404.
2. Koehler 1826, 576-578, 585. Same, 576: “L’expédition des Amazones dans l’île de Leucé se fit vers la CLIII. olympiade, l’an 168 avant notre ère” (sic).

he so terrified their horses that the bits lost all their power. So these animals balked, throwing the Amazons to the ground like some useless burden, and seizing them by the hair, fell upon them like wild beasts, hitting them with their legs, dismembering their arms, chest and entrails like wild lions. Their rage not yet stilled, they ran across the island and, having arrived at its high and cliffy ends, they took the sea for a plain and threw themselves onto it...



*Isle of Achilles, Leuce.<sup>1</sup>*

This island lies off the mouth of the Danube. Today called ‘the Reptile Island’, it was in antiquity named ‘the White’ on account of its many white and great buildings dedicated to Achilles, not because of its natural colour, which “rather is brown and reddish”. Its springs offered excellent drinking water. It is thus most suitable for a maritime base – were it not for the belief that nighting on the island was a dangerous provocation against Achilles.

There is nothing in the above pointing to Eruls, Goths or other Germanic seafarers;<sup>2</sup> which is, of course, the historical-mythological point: Here is a tradition, and not merely a literary one, told and retold by ‘all’ those who sailed the Black Sea. That the Amazons struck up an intimate relationship with a *mariner people* would be sure to gravitate towards, and stick to, the Eruls once they started plying the Sea.

#### 4.2. Red or Russian Isle?

On the 1497 map of the Black Sea by Fredutus from Ancona there is an *Isola Rosia*, on the 1514 one by Baptista Januensis from Venice we find *Isola Rossa*, whereas two

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1. “Dr. Tilesius ad naturam pinxit d 4 Maji 1805”: Koehler 1826, addendum.  
 2. The Isle of Helru on the map of Ptolemy is construed by Koehler 1826, 546, as “l’île d’Hélène”.

other maps sport *Rubra* and *Rubea* respectively. All these names may plausibly reflect a ‘Russian Isle’, understood also as a ‘Red Isle’. For the island was indeed named the ‘Russian Isle’.<sup>1</sup>

From where does this ‘Red’ or ‘Russian’ island come?

We **could** be in the presence of a **small** blunder, infinitely smaller than the one which produced ‘the Prince of Ros’ and his both scholarly and unscholarly progeny. For among ancient cartographers, we note Ortelius who in his map of the Pontus Euxinus places a small island called *Rhosphodusa* in the innermost part of the Carcinite Bay (northwest of the Crimea, and northeast of the Achilles’ Racecourse). It is the same island that he calls **Rossa** on his map of Europe.<sup>2</sup> The name *Rhosphodusa* in turn looks like a misreading of Pliny’s *Natural History*, where an island in the Gulf of Carcinites is called Spodusa:<sup>3</sup>

*Off the mouth of the Dnepr is the Island of Achilles mentioned above, which also has the Greek names of the White Island and the Island of the Blest. Modern investigation shows this island to be 140 miles from the Dnepr, 120 from the Dnestr, and 50 from the islad of Peuce. It is about 10 miles in circuit. The remaining islands in the Gulf of Carcinites are Cephalonnesus, Spodusa and Macra.*

On closer scrutiny, however, *Rhosphodusa* is no mere misrepresentation of a classical name; rather it is an erudite attempt at reconciling the Spodusa found in Antiquity with the realities of the Viking Age and later: This ‘Red’ as well as ‘Russian’ island has its background in the simple and capital fact that it came to be the collecting point and staging grounds for Vikings coming down the Dnepr and wanting to control the Black Sea.

### 4.3. Amazons, Goths and Germanics

In the Latin translation of the lost Greek *Treatise on the Twelve Stones* by Epiphanius (c. 394), we learn that “*in the northern region which the ancients used to call Scythia*” live the “*Gothi et Dauni, Uenni quoque et Arii usque ad Germanorum Amazonarumque regionem.*”<sup>4</sup>

Having been repeatedly garbled into Huns, the *Uenni* are still recognizable for what they must have been, viz. Fenni, Finns, alongside the *Dauni* = Danes. The peoples living the farthest-off are ‘the Germanics and the Amazons’. Interestingly, the Germanics once again do not comprise the Goths but are clearly deemed to be separate from them – and associated with the Amazons.

One reason for having the Amazons team up with the Eruli = Eluri (i.e., ‘swamp-dwellers’, meaning dwelling in the Maeotic swamps) would be their geographical proximity: The homeland of the Amazons was considered to be the shores of the

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1. same, 607-609.

2. same, 657, 787, citing Ortelius, *Theatr. Orb. Terrar. Ponti Euxini tab.* and same, *Theatr. oder Schawplatz des Erdbod: Europa.*

3. Rackham 1969, II, 191 (Book IV, xiii, 93).

4. *Collectio Avellana, CSEL 35, 753, cf Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 445.*

Maeotic [= Azov] Sea (or else in Lesser Asia).<sup>1</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus says, in speaking of the Cimmerian [= Crimean] Bosphorus:<sup>2</sup>

*Next, at a considerable distance, are the Amazons, who extend to the Caspian Sea and live about the Tanais [= the Don, HS], which rises among the crags of Caucasus, flows in a course with many windings, and after separating Europe from Asia vanishes in the standing pools of the Maeotis.*

An adjunct reason would be the ‘fact’ that the Amazons had staged fierce attacks on Greece itself, including Athens – just like the Eruls did in the 3rd century AD. Amazons battling Greeks is a favourite motif on Greek ceramics.

The Amazons were widely believed to be the womenfolk of the Goths.<sup>3</sup> And that Gothic women did make a martial impression on the Mediterraneans is evidenced by the triumphal procession of the emperor Aurelian in 274 AD, where a special detachment of Gothic women prisoners were paraded under a sign saying ‘Amazons’.<sup>4</sup>

Jordanes has several entries relevant to our enquiry. The first is a long sequel on the Amazons proper and their farflung military expeditions; the instructive point being to show up the military prowess of the Gothic race in general by underscoring that ‘even’ their women were far superior to most menfolk:<sup>5</sup> “*But say not ‘Why does a story which deals with the men of the Goths have so much to say of their women?’*” says Jordanes when driving home his message.

A thousand years later, and partly following Jordanes, Olaus Magnus was to elaborate on the ‘Gothic’ Amazons, in much the same spirit of national pride.

We further note the mention of ‘the men of the Amazons’ as swamp-dwellers, in Jordanes § 44-46, on a supposed war between the Egyptian pharao Vesosis and ‘the men of the Amazons’:<sup>6</sup>

*Then Vesosis made war on the Scythians, on those whom antiquity calls the men of the Amazons. For the women too conducted warfare, as Orosius states clearly in his first book. We on our part are wholly for the view that he then fought against the Goths. For we do know for sure that he warred with the menfolk of the Amazons. At that time these dwelled in the area of the Borysthenes, which its inhabitants call Danaper, unto the Tanais, right around the corner of the Maeotic swamp. (...)*

*The Danaper arises out of a great swamp, whence it comes forth like the child from its mother’s womb. (...) Between the Greek towns of Callipida and Hypannis it then flows into the sea. In front of its embouchure there is an island by the name of Achilles. And in between lie wide wildernesses, overgrown with forests and full of perilous swamps.*

In connection with the Amazons, Jordanes says, § 56:<sup>7</sup> “*Out of fear lest their progeny decrease, they were eager to sleep with the men of the neighbouring peoples...*” Such a tantalizing rumour would be sure to appeal to, and latch onto, a professional warrior-people like the Earls. (That it actually **did** latch onto them will be seen in the

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1. Pauly-Wissowa 1894 I:2, 1755; Matuzova 1979, 89.

2. XXII, 8: Rolfe 1972, II, 229-230.

3. cf e.g. Matuzova 1979, 73.

4. Wolfram 1974 58 n. 55.

5. Mierow 1966, 66.

6. Martens 1884, 14-15. Vesosis in King Alfred’s Orosius: Sweet 1883, 44-45.

7. Mierow 1966, 64. Martens 1884, 18.



Middle Eastern sources, beginning with a Syriac one in the mid-6th c., in ch. 6 below.)

Yet another contribution (if it be recognized as such) by Jordanes is his information on the *Haliurunnae*<sup>1</sup> witches or ‘sorceresses’. According to Jordanes, “*unclean spirits.. bestowed their embraces on the sorceresses and begat this savage race,*” meaning the Huns.

This story has been seen as “almost certainly patterned on the Christian legend of the fallen angels”.<sup>2</sup> The name *Haliurunnae* appears to be not merely a proper name but a foreign word to Jordanes; meaning foreign to his Gothic tongue. It comes across as a composite of, possibly,<sup>3</sup> the proto-Norse for ‘holy’ plus ‘rune[s]’, ending in the Latin feminine plural *-ae*. ‘Holy rune women’?

In his *Ynglingasaga*, Snorri says that the runes were used for most arts of sorcery, the most potent of these arts being *seiðr* – which was left for women to officiate in. And in Saxo Grammaticus, as will be seen below, a sorceress named Guðrún (‘rune of God’) uses the art of **galdr** (runic incantations) to great avail against Ermanaric.

The fall of the latter c. 375 set in train a process which, as this study will hopefully show, laid some of the ground for the dual names **Rossija** and **Rus´** adopted nearly half a millennium later.

#### 4.4. *The Volga = ‘Rōs*

The Danube, the Dnepr, the Don, and ‘the swamps’: there is but one great river missing here; and this one seems to give us the very name we are after, plus even more swamps.

It is in a geographical compendium by a Pseudo-Agathemerus, from the 3rd or 4th c. AD, that we find not the Biblical ‘**Ros**’ but the name with that very same accent that surfaces again in the 9th c.: In the Greek, ‘*Ρῶς*. The wording runs:<sup>4</sup>

Ξ. Περὶ ποταμῶν μεγίστων.

...Ἰαξάρτης μέν καὶ Ὠξός καὶ Ῥύμμος καὶ Ῥῶς καὶ Κῦρος καὶ Ἀράξης εἰς τῆ Κασπίαν ἵενται ὅλασσαν, Φάσις δὲ καὶ Θερμῶδων καὶ Σάγγαρις εἰς τὸν Πόντον. ...

X. *De maximis fluminibus.*

... *Iaxartes et Oxus et Rhymmus et Rhos et Cyrus et Araxes Caspio mari miscentur, Phasis autem et Thermodon et Sangaris Pontum petunt. ...*

In this chapter “On the greatest rivers”, then, we are told that the Jaxartes, the Oxus, the Rhos, the Cyrus and the Araxes mix their waters in the Caspian Ocean, whereas the Phasis, the Thermodon and the Sangaris flow into the Black sea, or Pontos. To

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1. which Marstrander 1928, 155, interprets as *helli-wunna* ‘furia + rage’, in connection with Óðinn, same, 167; also same, 165, on *purs* ‘troll’ – to be compared with the historian Olympiodorus (Ziegler/Sontheimer 1972, IV, 290) on the Goths being called *troullus* by the Vandals, allegedly for having bought wheat from them by the ‘troullus’ (a big vat) when suffering from hunger – i.e. possibly a pun.
  2. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 5, citing Maenchen-Helfen 1944-45, 244-248.
  3. Also Lange 1967, 168, citing K. Helm 1937: \**haljarūna* = Old High German *hellirūna*, Anglo-Saxon *hellerūne* ‘eine, die sich auf höllische, geheime Künste versteht’.
  4. Müller 1861, II, 502 line 1-3 (incorrect reference in Schramm 1973, 118 n. 307).

the best of our knowledge, the form *Rhos* occurs only in this text.<sup>1</sup> Why does it show up here? There can be no doubt that it designates the Volga, normally known, from the *Geography* of Ptolemy (V, 8, 13, etc.), as ‘*Pā*’. This was the name of the rhubarb, a much-appreciated medicinal herb from the Black Sea, ῥᾶ ποντικόν, which was traded on the banks of the Volga.<sup>2</sup>

In the opinion of one highly acknowledged modern scholar, the Greek form bears the imprint of having been borrowed from the Goths – in the linguistic stage termed Late Gothic, characterized by monophthongization: Thus, Late Gothic *Rōs* reflects an original *raus*. This in turn is explained rather perfunctorily, in one work, from Volga Fennic, from the Erza Mordvin *Ra(v)o*, Mokša Mordvin *Rava* ‘Volga’,<sup>3</sup> or in the determined form, in a more detailed study, from Mokša Mordvin *Ravś*; other possibilities also being discussed.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the original form, prior to its adoption by the Goths under, we may assume, Ermanaric, the Gothic *raus* was eminently understandable and memorable – to the Goths themselves, as well as to anyone taking the trouble of enquiring an explanation from them: *Raus* is Gothic for ‘reeds’, i.e. swamp thickets.<sup>5</sup>

Now Gothic *-au-* is used to transcribe Greek *-o-*.<sup>6</sup> This may be amply seen in the Gothic Bible translation by Wulfila.<sup>7</sup> Gothic *-au-* in fact corresponds to both *-o-* and *-u-* (i.e. the short vowels) in several cognate tongues; thus, Old Icelandic *ormr*, Old High German *wurm* (and English *worm*) – Gothic *waurms*.<sup>8</sup> There is now a near-consensus on how the Gothic diagraphs *-ai-* and *-au-* were pronounced.<sup>9</sup> In a word, or rather, in two: Gothic *raus* may correspond to both *Rus* (as in Latin *russeus* and Latin-based Greek ‘*rous*[*ioi*]’) and ‘*Ros* (in the Septuaginta). And in Late Gothic, *-au-* indeed corresponds to a Greek *-ō-* (orthographically long), resulting in *Raus* = ‘*Rōs*’.

This name-form for the Volga has been thought to be reflected,<sup>10</sup> some six centuries later, in the *nahr ar-rūs* ‘River of the Rūs’, or for that matter ‘River of the ‘Rōs’’.<sup>11</sup> This of course is theoretically possible, if the Greeks revived the name from Pseudo-Agathemerios or some other source no longer available to us, and the Arabs picked this up. Yet this specific transition remains purely conjectural; for if it did take place, it would and could most certainly be masked by a more facile explanation: the fact that the Muslims actually met the Rūs primarily by way of, and upon, the Volga – which consequently simply became, in Muslim eyes, ‘the river of the Rūs’.

What then of the ‘*Pō̄ς* in Pseudo-Agathemerios? Is it a blind alley? We shall see.

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1. The editor has emendated to ‘*Pō̄ς* despite his own note para 29: ‘*Pō̄ς* codd. et edit.
  2. Schramm 1973, 116, citing O. Schrader, *Reallexikon der indogermannischen Altertums-kunde* (ed. A. Nehring), Berlin 1923, II, 251.
  3. Schramm 1974, 11. 115-118.
  4. Schramm 1973, 115-118.
  5. Streitberg 1971, Index, 110.
  6. Jellinek 1926, 43.
  7. Streitberg 1971, e.g. 329 (Efesians I, 1): *Pawlus, apaustraulus Xristaus Iesus*..
  8. Jellinek 1926, 43.
  9. More in ch. 19.3.
  10. Kiessling, in Pauly-Wissowa’s *Real-Encyklopädie*, 2. R. I, 1914, 1-8.
  11. In Ibn Ḥawqāl. Arabic script lacks the distinction between *-ū-* and *-ō-*.

## 4.5. Amazons and ‘Whites’

Clearly relevant are the following passages in Isidor:<sup>1</sup>

*The Massagetae originate from the Scythians. And the Massagetae are said to mean the heavy, i.e. the strong, Getas... These are the ones who inhabit the northern parts between the Scythians and Albani. The Amazons those are called who live together without men...*

*In regions of Asiatic Scythia, peoples who believe themselves to be descended from Jason are born with white hair because of the eternal snows. And this very colour of the hair gives the people its name. Therefor they are called Albani. In their eyes is a blue, i.e. coloured, pupil, in order that they see better in the night than in the daytime. Moreover, the Albani were neighbours to the Amazons. The Hugnos were called Huns earlier, and later named Avars after their king. They first dwelled in the farthest-off [part of] the Maeotic, between the frozen Tanais and the savage peoples of the Massagets. Thereafter the wild peoples broke out upon fleet horses from the mountains [literally, cliffs] of the Caucasus, despite their having been pent in by Alexander’s fortifications, holding the Orient captive for 20 years, exacting an annual tribute from the Egyptians and the Ethiopians.*

The **Albani** were inhabitants of the Caucasian Albania (present-day Shirwān), mentioned by the classics.<sup>2</sup> And Isidor here is drawing upon Solinus, from shortly after 200 AD, who writes about a people of the same description (born with white or grey hair, with night vision, plus ferocious fighting dogs to boot) confronted by Alexander of Macedon in *India*!<sup>3</sup>

So **why** does Isidor come up with the story on their white hair and night vision in connection with the Amazons, even relegating these ‘Whites’ to an apparently far-northerly location (*inter Scythas atque Albanos septentrionalibus locis*)?

Isidor’s benightedness is boldly in evidence in the insistence that the Huns “later on” were called Avars after the name of their king. Part of his discourse has been taken from St. Jerome.<sup>4</sup> As Isidor’s Albani and Massagetae are bound up with the Huns, it is but natural to seek an explanation in a Hunnic context. The one given by Isidor

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1. Lindsay 1911, I, Lib. IX, ii, 63-66: “*Massagetae ex Scytharum origine sunt. Et dicti Massagetae quasi graves, id est fortes Getae... Hi sunt, qui inter Scythas atque Albanos septentrionalibus locis inhabitant. Amazones dictae sunt... In partes Asiaticae Scythiae gentes, quae posteros se Iasonis credunt, albo crine nascuntur ab adsiduis nivibus; et ipsius capilli color genti nomen dedit. Et inde dicuntur Albani. Horum glauca oculis, id est picta, inest pupilla, adeo ut nocte plus quam die cernant. Albani autem vicini Amazonum fuerunt. Hugnos antea Hunnos vocatos, postremo a rege suo Avars appellatos, qui prius in ultima Maeotide inter glaciale Tanaim et Massagetarum inmanes populos habitaverunt. Deinde perniciosus equis Caucasi rupibus, feras gentes Alexandri claustra cohíbente, eruperunt, et orientem viginti annis tenuerunt captivum, et ab Aegyptiis atque Aethiopiis annum vectigal exegerunt.*”
  2. Strabo’s Geography II, 491 ff, Pliny’s Natural History VI 15, 29, 39, Ptolemy’s Geography V, 12, cf Oxford Classical Dictionary 1972, 34: ‘Albania’.
  3. Mommsen 1958.
  4. Epist. 77.8, cf Anderson 1932, 19: “... *ab ultima Maeotide inter glaciale Tanaim et Massagetarum inmanes populos, ubi Caucasi rupibus feras gentes Alexandri claustra cohíbent, erupisse Hunnorum examina.*”

himself is most apposite: the invasion of the Near East, supposedly all the way to Egypt and Ethiopia and believed to have lasted twenty years.

The climax of this invasion must have been the 395 breach of the Caucasus by the Gog-&-Magog. To this Isidor obliquely refers with his *feras gentes* pent in by Alexander; and just like in the Near Eastern (Syriac-and-Muslim) tradition, the Huns are said to have erupted into the Near East after having cohabited with these fiends. The Huns-plus-Eruls, Agog-Magog, Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ twosome is what Isidor reproduces.

Isidor's cerebrations here are easily understandable: He knew both St. Jerome and Solinus. He knew of the Amazons, and also a tradition on their male neighbours being red or ruddy-blond (*russi*) and blue-eyed. He knew that the Amazons lived not far from the Albani. He knew that Alexander had confronted the Albani – and also the (Gog-Magog) savages up in the Caucasus. And so he combined the two – or rather, the three of them, telescoped into two: the neighbours of the Amazons being so blond as to become white.

#### 4.6. *An Erul Ideal – Achilles?*

Well established in the second half of the 3rd c. AD as mariners upon the Azov and northern Black Sea littorals, the Eruls were able to sack the major towns of Greece only decades later. We are entitled to believe that they appropriated more than mere booty. If anything on the 'cultural side', these warriors would be receptive to that ideal epitomizing their warrior way of life: Achilles. For this, there are several reasons.

First, there is his irascible temperament – and his looks. In the very opening lines of the Iliad, he is criticized: “*You ever enjoy the quarreling, the warring and the noise of battle. If you are endowed with exceptional strength, then this has been given to you by a god.*”

Although clearly a hero, Achilles was also seen as a god<sup>1</sup> – of, as it seems to posterity, the sun or lightning;<sup>2</sup> the latter being a sure success with e.g. Germanic warriors.

His colours and predilections are not particularly Greek. We are informed that he in his tent keeps “*a red-hued woman, the daughter of Brises*”; whereupon “*the light-blue-eyed virgin Athene... pulled his light-yellow locks*”.<sup>3</sup> Achilles' helmet too, is adorned with “*hair-strands of gold, which Hephaistos fashioned for him in their thousands*”.<sup>4</sup> In blondness and 'hairiness' he is clearly not alone. We repeatedly encounter “*the hair-fair men of Achaia*”;<sup>5</sup> while Menelaos is “*the one with the hair of gold*”.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Koehler 1826, 665-666.

2. Pauly-Wissowa, I, 222: ‘*Achilleus*’, citing authors.

3. Wilster 1878, I, 11 (First Song).

4. Same, II, 118 (Nineteenth Song).

5. Same, I, 33 (Second Song), 103, 112 (Seventh Song), 114 (Eighth Song), 128 (Ninth Song), etc.

6. Same, I, 49, 53 (Third Song), 76-78 (Fifth Song); also, *Odyssey*: same, I, 37 (Third Song).

Not only is his hair golden;<sup>1</sup> he lets it grow, vowing not to cut it – in the way of later Germanic tradition from Julius Civilis to king Harald Hairfair – consecrating it first to the gods and then, when they do not fulfil the wishes of his father, to his fallen comrade Patroklos.<sup>2</sup> The expression *Achillean hair* designates “des cheveux de la plus belle couleur blonde”.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Achilles is big of build, Homer dwelling upon e.g. the “enormous fist” of this “crushing giant”;<sup>4</sup> as well as, more generally, his “gigantic body”.<sup>5</sup> Achilles is “the hero with the rapid footstep”, “the foot-agile”.<sup>6</sup> This latter trait in particular recalls the Eruls. They would be sure to be enthusiastic about a warrior hero who is “like [the war god] Ares in strength of arm, like the lightning in fleetness of foot”; the latter trait having been reinforced by a bone from the long-dead giant Damysos, buried under the Pallene mountain-range, once ‘the quickest of all giants’.<sup>7</sup>



*Nude foot warriors fighting Amazons.*<sup>8</sup>

Warriors particularly strong and courageous were given the name of Achilles: “*sicut virum fortem plerumque Achillem vocamus.*”<sup>9</sup> Thus in his attack on Persia, Alexander the Great designated Achilles his ally;<sup>10</sup> and in a lost work, Alexander is said to have sacrificed to Achilles as his ancestor.<sup>11</sup>

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1. Same, I, 1, 197; II, 23, 141 (Twenty-third Song).
  2. Same, II, 23, 140-160, Roscher 1884-86, I, 12.
  3. Koehler 1826, 679, citing Martial IX, epigr. 83, v. 10.
  4. Wilster 1878, II, 69 (Sixteenth Song).
  5. Same, II, 94 (Eighteenth Song).
  6. Wilster 1878, I, 9-12 (First Song); “the foot-agile” and “hero with rapid foot-steps” are recurrent epithets: Same, I, 134 (Ninth Song), II, 57 (Sixteenth Song), 110, 112 (Nineteenth Song), 150 (Twenty-second Song), 159 (Twenty-third Song), etc. The diverse epithets for his fleetness are given in Roscher 1884-86, I, 12.
  7. Roscher 1884-86, 24.
  8. Illustrations in LIMC 1981, I:2, 440-532.
  9. Koehler 1826, 679, n. 1046, citing Serv. in Virgil. *Ecl.* III, v. 79.
  10. same, 666.
  11. same, 666-667.

Pliny the Elder states that “*nude statues holding a spear, modelled after young men in the gymnasia, were called Achillean*”.<sup>1</sup> This nudity tallies perfectly with that of the Erul freemen. The emperor Maximin, and Hoamer the cousin of the Vandal king Ilderic, were both called Achilles, Hercules, and Ajax alike.<sup>2</sup> And Procopius has this to say on an equestrian statue of his great employer the emperor Justinian:<sup>3</sup>

*...The figure is habited like Achilles, that is, the costume he wears is known by that name. He wears half-boots and his legs are not covered by greaves... He has neither sword nor spear nor any other weapon...*

Another episode, from 475-476, “may or may not be taken to show that ‘the costume of Achilles’ was considered to be specifically an imperial dress”.<sup>4</sup> We may rest assured that an imperial costume, and hence these ‘Achillean’ ones, would be red.

One trait holding special appeal to a male ‘warrior league’ public would be Achilles’ dealings with the Amazons – as represented first and foremost by Penthesilea who came to the aid of Troy, there to be both killed and mourned by Achilles.<sup>5</sup> Another would be his conducting large-scale piracy, giving rich booty, to keep the Greek forces from leaving for home and to awaken their fighting spirit.<sup>6</sup>

What must have been decisive for eventual Erul ‘adoption’ of and identification with Achilles was, over and above all this, his address. He did of course die in Troy – but only the mortal part of him; for antiquity knew full well that what was immortal in Achilles continued to reside in the far-off reaches of the Pontos Euxeinos, the Black Sea. He was “the ruler of the Pontos” – the words for ruler used being *Pontarch[is]*.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, and quite regardless of their name, all five of the most famed Black Sea haunts of Achilles were clear candidates for Erul control: First, the settlement of Achillea controlled the Cimmerian Bosphorus from its eastern side, the strait leading from the Maeotis (Azov) into the Black Sea; its inhabitants being termed Achilleotes or Achillites in Ptolemy.<sup>8</sup>

Second, as we shall see, the settlement of Myrmekion on the opposite (i. e. Crimean, western) side by and by came to be considered his very birthplace. According to this view a Scythian, Achilles was expelled from Myrmekion and all of Scythia on account of his cruelty and intemperance.<sup>9</sup> The narrow sealane between

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1. *Natural History*, 34: 18.

2. Koehler 1826, 679, n. 1047-1048, citing *Capitol. Maximin. IV*, and Procopius, *De Bello Vandalico* I, ch. 9.

3. Dewing 1940, VII, 35: *Buildings*, I, ii, 7-11.

4. same, VII, 396-397.

5. Pauly-Wissowa I, 1758-1759: ‘*Amazonen*’.

6. Roscher 1884-1890, I, 36-37: Thucydid I, 11, and others.

7. and not *pontarchos*: Koehler 1826, 633, 639, 643.

8. same, 673, citing Ptolem. *Geogr.* V, ch. 9.

9. Leo the Deacon, in Part III, ch. 13, 4. Cf Koehler 1826, 608: “La mythologie et l’histoire grecque n’étant plus cultivées sous les empereurs byzantins, nous ne pouvons pas être choqués de trouver dans leur historiens des assertions come celle de Léon le diacre, qui nous raconte qu’Achille étoit né en Scythie à Myrmécium, qu’à cause de sa cruauté il fut expulsé par les Scythes, et qu’il s’établit dans la Thessalie.”

Achillea and Myrmekion was the sole way out for the Eruli = ‘Eluri’ dwelling in the Maeotic ‘swamp’.

Third, the island of Leuce (literally, ‘the White’) dominated the approaches to the Danube, as well as any and all shipping along the northwestern littoral of the Black Sea. It was all the more important for being a most necessary landmark – without it, mariners would easily miss the mouth of the Danube, extremely lowlying as it was. This island was also called ‘The Isle of the Blest’. Upon this island too, ‘the running-course of Achilles’ was supposed by some to lie, the *Δρόμος Ἀχιλλείους*.<sup>1</sup> The same name applied more often, and properly, to the next item on our list:

Fourth, the sandy peninsula jutting out into the sea just south of the mouth of the Dnepr (the classical Borysthenes) and northwest of the Crimea was a natural vantage point for control of the sea-lanes between the Dnepr and all of the Black Sea littoral including Greece, and for staging sea-borne attacks. In one of Ptolemy’s maps it is, for some reason unknown to us, called *insula Helru*.<sup>2</sup> This is the **dromos** (running-course) of Achilles; again,<sup>3</sup> the same expression *Δρόμος Ἀχιλλείους*. Here, says Pomponius Mela, Achilles celebrated one of his victories.

Fifth, the isle of Berezan at the mouth of the Dnepr, just across the bay from the *dromos* of Achilles just mentioned; it too was clearly dedicated to our hero, and was called “the Isle of Achilles”<sup>4</sup> – by the inhabitants of Olbia further upstream, who evidently indulged in a cult of him both out on this island and in the town itself; one of their inscriptions, dedicated to “Achilles the *Pontarchis*” (= Lord of the Black Sea), lauds a local notary for having organized a ‘running course [competition]’ (**dromos**) for young boys, in his honour.<sup>5</sup>

Sixth, there is the cape known well into the 19th c. in Turkic as Kinbourn or Kilbourn, with **Kil-** designating Achilles, i.e. ‘the Cape of Achilles’, just east of the mouth of the Dnepr. According to Strabo, this cape is “a naked place”, called ‘the Grove Dedicated to Achilles’.<sup>6</sup>

With the exception of the ‘Isle of the Blest’, Leuce, down by the Danube, all the localities mentioned pertain to the region called Tavro-Scythia. And even Leuce has a pointer towards Tavro-Scythia and beyond, to the haunts of the Eruls: The temple of Achilles upon this island was turned towards the Maeotic, meaning situated on its eastern shore and looking in ‘his’ direction. In this temple, bloody traditions later ascribed to the ‘Tavro-Scythians’ – the sacrifice and immolation of human victims – took place.<sup>7</sup> A number of authors insisted that here Achilles was buried; others said, instead, that it was on the island of Berezan’ (item 5 above).<sup>8</sup>

That at least three of these said localities have been termed the **dromos** of Achilles, or been the site of competitions in running devoted to him, and that both Achilles

1. more precisely, by Arrian: Diller 1952, 104 – despite the protests of Koehler 1826, 547.

2. on the Peutinger chart, construed by Koehler 1826, 546 as ‘the isle of *Helena*’.

3. Pauly-Wissowa I, 239: ‘Achilleus’.

4. Koehler 1826, 627-632.

5. same, 634-636.

6. Jones 1969, III, 227, nn. 7-9: Not to be confused with the Tendra peninsula mentioned as item 4 above.

7. Philostratos, *Heroic.*, 244, line 14: Koehler 1826, 558.

8. *ibid.*

and the Eruls were so markedly ‘fleet of foot’, renowned for their ‘running’, can hardly be coincidental. The Homeric Achilles being chronologically first means only that the Eruls in their capacity as fleet-footed, ‘running’ troops based by the Maeotic Sea would naturally gravitate towards, latch onto and, if possible, sponge off, his fame – as the ‘runners’ of the blue-eyed and ruddy-blond ‘Scythian’, more precisely ‘Tavro-Scythian’,<sup>1</sup> Achilles.

Like Achilles’ Island, the Achilles’ race course may itself have served as a gathering-ground for Erul raids, being associated with them in the same way that, as will be seen, the 9th c. Rus’ Vikings came to be.

From the historian Arrian we hold a *Periplus of the Pontos Euxeinos* from the early 130-ies AD, and also a pseudo-Arrian work under the same title. Based upon a voyage by Arrian himself from Trapezunt to Sebastopolis,<sup>2</sup> his *Periplus* testifies to the early ‘rooting’ of legends on Achilles in the far ends of the Black Sea.

There are other ties of Achilles to Scythia in literature too,<sup>3</sup> clearly reflecting popular conceptions that he was ‘a Scythian’. There are even clear indications that parts of the legend on Achilles’ death were borrowed from ‘Scythians’, meaning those neighbours of the Goths and Eruls, the Alans (ancestors of today’s Ossetians, where parallels are found).<sup>4</sup>

The poet Lycophron was probably taking up on an ancient theme when having one of his Trojan war heroes address him “*O Achilles, thou who art king of the Scythians!*”<sup>5</sup> The continued existence of Achilles in the present tense is attested to in the insistence of Black Sea seamen that they, in times of distress, could chance to behold him out at sea as a shingly blond young man.<sup>6</sup> That he too was a mariner is furthermore expressed in the tradition that he conquered “*twelve cities at sea and eleven on land*”.<sup>7</sup>

We can but speculate that one ‘victory’ caught the fancy of professional warriors like the Eruls: that over death. Already in Homer, Odyssevs meets Achilles in Hades as ‘king over the dead’.<sup>8</sup> Later on, he was perceived of as ever present on his Isle of the Blest, training for war with such comrades-in-arms as had proved themselves worthy when alive:<sup>9</sup> a Black Sea analogy to – and perhaps precedent and inspiration for – the **Valhalla** ideal of later ages. He embodies the rage of the war god<sup>10</sup> – who

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1. on which see again Leo Diaconus, ch. 13 below.

2. Lexikon der alten Welt, Zurich/Stuttgart 1965, 332: ‘Arrianos, 2’.

3. Pauly-Wissowa, I, 239-240.

4. Thorðarson 1972.

5. Koehler 1826, 552, 735 n. 201 (given as note 202 – which is missing): Lycophr. Cassandr. v. 192-201.

6. Roscher 1884-90, I, 62, citing *Max. Tyr. Diss.* 15, 173 and in Koehler 1826, 569-571, 574.

7. Pauly-Wissowa I, 239-240.

8. Eleventh Song, verses 467-540: Wilster 1878, 144-146.

9. Koehler 1826, 580-582.

10. Roscher 1884-86, I, 13: “An Kampfeslust dem Kriegsgotte gleich... durchbricht er... löwenmutig... die Reihen der Feinde, alles vor sich herscheuchend und vernichtend... da ihm der Ruhm das Höchste ist (19, 240; 20, 503; 9, 413). Als echtes Naturkind kennt er in Hass und Liebe keine Grenzen. Furchtbar sind die Ausbrüche seiner Wut und seines rasch auf-  
lödernden Zornes.”



in later ages is named for precisely that trait: **Óðinn**, the Raging One. When moving around as a spirit, in rarefied and more shadowy form, Achilles is even accompanied by a violent wind, which carries and sustains him aloft, along with other deceased heroes<sup>1</sup> – as is Óðinn and his *Ásgarðsreið* outfit of the dead.

In a narrative on how the Thessalians venerated Achilles, we find the nudity, the *wapentake* and the so to speak ritual rage:<sup>2</sup> Having arrived at his grave-mound, the mariners beat their shields “*as if in warfare*”, then ran around the tomb, nude and armed, invoking Achilles with loud cries.<sup>3</sup>

Being next to invulnerable, Achilles is really in little need of bodily protection; thus he lends his hauberk to his chum Patroklos, meaning that Achilles himself fights unprotected but for his weapons, in the manner ascribed to the Eruls later on.<sup>4</sup>

As élite mercenaries or allies of the East Roman Empire, the Eruls would be sure to note the Imperial veneration of this hero. Thus, in the Augustaeum square of Constantinople stood an equestrian statue of the Emperor Justinian, “*habited like Achilles, that is, the costume he wears is known by that name.*”<sup>5</sup>



*The Justinian equestrian statue, dextera elata.*

1. Philostratos, *Heroic.*, 78, line 7.
2. *same*, 234-244, in Koehler 1826, 665.
3. *ibid.*: When however the Thessalians reneged on their duty of venerating him as a god, Achilles took his revenge, i.a. by wrecking their fishing of purple quails. The quails were used for producing red colour for dyeing clothes. Whether there was a connection between this dye (or the quails) and Achilles we cannot ascertain.
4. Rappaport 1920, 1166.
5. Procopius, *Buildings* I, ii, 5-12: Dewing 1940, 32-37, 395-398.

The commentary on the *Dionysius Periegetes* by the Byzantine author Eustathius (flourished before 1175 AD)<sup>1</sup> shows that the question of Achilles' 'Scythianness' interested the scholars of his time: "Eustathius even insists that in his age some allowed for the existence of two Achilleses, one of whom was a Scythian emperor."<sup>2</sup>



*Gold bracteate from Sletner, Eidsberg, Østfold in Norway,  
equestrian dextera elata.*

For Eruls, themselves identified by the Greeks with 'Scythians', identifying with this 'Scythian' hero cannot have been problematic. In honouring him too, they would be bargaining for safe passage upon the inclement Pontos from its very ruler; the tradition that the Ocean itself was "placed in a circle round the outer edge of Achilles"<sup>3</sup> would be sure to appeal to the ocean-faring Eruls too, strengthening the identification.

Yet the Greeks of the Byzantine Empire did not identify these northerners merely with Scythians; as will be seen in the next chapter, they had infinitely worse in mind. And that is probably the reason why the last tall tales to be inspected in this present chapter are told in an apologetic vein.

#### *4.7. Meoparots*

Historians were long defied by a text purporting to be a paraphrase in Latin of a Greek cosmography by one Aithikos from Iстриa (Aethicus Istricus, the Ister being a classical name for the Danube); one opinion being that it "leaves no doubt that Aithikos performed his journey before the Migration Age".<sup>4</sup> Instead, it has now been

1. Hammond/Scullard 1970, 424.

2. Karyškovskij 1960, 50, citing Eustathii Commentarii, in vers. 306, from SC, vol. I, 195.

3. Strabo: Jones 1969, I, 13.

4. Wuttke 1853, xcii.

reasonably established that the text was authored c. 770 AD. There are many unresolved problems, not least that of its authorship; the argument for Vergil of Salzburg<sup>1</sup> has met with serious misgivings, so have the purported traces of its author's Irish background,<sup>2</sup> an unknown monk at St. Gallen being suggested instead.<sup>3</sup>

Characterized as 'difficult',<sup>4</sup> couched in a purposefully enigmatic, obscurantist style, this text reflects a jumble of materials both bookish and oral from long before the 8th century – and perhaps able to shed some valuable light on a past little known.

For an illustration of the problems and the potential inherent in these materials, we choose that in the present context enigmatic word *Meoparotas*. It goes back upon a classical word, which is thus explained in the *Etymologies* of Isidor, Bishop of Seville:<sup>5</sup>

**On Boats.** *A mioparo means a very small 'paro'. It is a skiff made out of wickerwork which, covered by crude leather, presents a sort of boat. The Germanic pirates use such on the littorals of the Ocean or the swamps for the sake of speed. Of these the History says, "the people of the Saxons rely on the mioparos, not their [own] forces, because they [= the boats] are ready for flight rather than for war'.*

In our Pseudo-Aethicus text, the word has developed into an ethnonym, as well as a place-name; and confirmation is given of what Isidor has just said about the Saxons:<sup>6</sup>

53. *After [the model of] the exceedingly skilful Meoparots, the Scythians and the Griphs, the Tracontians and most unexpectedly the people of the Saxons conduct their work [towards achieving] the very same type of vessels...*

56. *... The maritime pagans dwelling in the Germanic Mioparus say that the ships made by the ordinary [people] are not so good, neither as to technical knowhow nor as regards the immensity of the waves or the maelstroms, nor for the purpose of seizing the vessels of others for booty, in the wise of the ships belonging to the isles of the Meoparots, to us inaccessible and unknown.*

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1. Löwe 1951, Bishop 1966, xvi-xvii.

2. e.g. Dopsch 1985, Richter 1985, 147-153, Wolfram 1987, 140.

3. Prinz 1981, 474-510.

4. Bishop 1966, xvi. Also, Löwe 1975, 16:

5. Lindsay 1911, II, XIX, i: "*De navibvs. Mioparo quasi minimus paro. Est enim scapha ex vimine facta, quae contacta crudo coreo genus navigi praebet; quales utuntur Germanorum piratae in Oceani litoribus vel paludibus ob agilitatem. De qualibus Historia 'Gens', inquit, 'Saxonum mioparonibus, non viribus nituntur, fugae potius quam bello parati'.*"

6. Wuttke 1853, 33-35: 53. "*Scithae et Griphae, Tracontae et Saxonum genus inopinatissimum a Meoparotis ingenio valde peritissimis opera faciunt ad similitudinem navium illarum...* 56. *...Et gentiles maritimi qui in Mioparo Germanico habitant dicunt a vulgi ingenio factas non esse tales nec in artis pericia nec inmissione[m] undarum aut aquarum gurgitibus vel aliarum navium praedam capiendo, quemadmodum in Meoparorum insolas a nobis inaccessibilis et incognitas.* 57. *...Vagiones naviculas in mare miro ingenio fabricatas... Turrículas ...conclusas esse gypsis bituminatis [dicit]... Et ob hoc vagiones nuncupati, [quasi] huc illucque veloci cursu vagantes et cito properantes qualesque in Troianica obsidione in Simoente fuerunt. Nam Albani, Meoti, Minazeti, Gangines, Tulchi has naves utuntur et eas **pirones** in barbarica lingua appellant. Utilioris enim quam dromones (sunt), atdamen in mediterraneo mare nusquam reperiuntur."* We read *quemadmodum* = 'quales'.

57. ...*Far-roving vessels are made with wondrous ingenuity for sea[far]ing...* [*He says that their*] *small turrets are sealed ...by bitumen gypsum ...And for this reason they are called far-roving, because they keep straying hither and thither, approaching at a rapid run, like they did upon the river Simoe during the siege of Troy. So the Whites, the Meotics, the Minazets, the Ganges-people [?] and the Tulxi use these ships, calling them pirnas in Barbarian language. Although they are more useful than the dromons, yet they are never found in the Mediterranean.*

The *Meoparot* name is of course an alias for, as we see, a Germanic community. People complain (to Byzantine authorities, or the Church?) because of their skill in pouncing on their victims as if from under the water, and ‘the next thing they’ll be using underwater dromons too,’ people say. The tortured Latin gets across the point that they are famed for piracy, braving high seas and maelstroms. Their piracy is described further on in the same treatise:<sup>1</sup>

36. *To the isles of the Meoparonitis (sic) Aethicus came... Besides, sometimes they were so fast in navigation that they, in secret craftily boring holes through the keels of trier ships or skiffs, making their ruin, slaying the navigators or effecting maximum damage, would remove everything that was in the place by violence.*

Interestingly, the verb ‘to bore’ a hole is *raufa* in Norse, and the derivative for a pirate is *raufari*.<sup>2</sup>

It can hardly surprise us that these pirates engaged in another type of piracy too, shanghaiing long-dead heroes from the heyday of antiquity to join them. We have seen what happened to Achilles and the originally landlubber Amazons. Likewise, Tacitus tells how the Frisians and neighbouring tribes prided themselves of Hercules and his Columns,<sup>3</sup> and even of Odysseus having founded a town on the Rhine.<sup>4</sup> Thus too, the *Meoparots* of Pseudo-Aethicus Istricus could – and evidently did – pride themselves on having of all things the best pupil or ‘client’ conceivable in history:<sup>5</sup>

*The ambushes of the Meoparots have effected the ruin of many. They complain that the ocean-going vessels of the cruel robbers will become under-water dromons. Now in the*

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1. Same, 21-22: “36. *Deinde ad insolas Meoparonitas Aethicus pervehitur... Nonnumquam etiam tam veloce sunt navigatione, ut latenter trieribus aut scaphis seu carinis dolose foramine pertunsis, earum ruinam et necem navigantium vel ruinam maximam faciant, et omnia quae inibi sunt violenter auferant.*”
  2. Heggstad 1963, 529. Cf. the **fisores**, literally ‘cleavers’ = ship-wreckers, below.
  3. Germania, ch. 34: Forni/Galli 1964, 161.
  4. same, 66-71: ch. 3.
  5. same, 23-24 (ch. 36 cont.): “*Meoparorum insidias ruina[s] multorum fi[g]eri. Gemunt naves maris praedonum crudelium sub latice fore dromones. Barbarica enim lingua Dromu vagiones **pirnas** nuncupant, id est aquarum praedones sub aqua degentes. ... Adserit Alexandrum magnum ibidem per obsid[i]um federa peraccessisse ob hoc tantum, in hac causa navalium industriam consideraret et astutiam. Et ultra quam credi potest de eo famosissimas fabolas inquirunt. Aiunt enim in ipsas colimfas ipsum Alexandrum introisse et in profundum maris descendisse usque ad inum, ut sciret oceani profundum et differentiam maris et abyssi sciret... In amicitia secum Alexander ipsos adplicuit et munera multa dedit eis, ibique aras magnas fixit, quae usque nunc Arae Alexandri magni dicuntur. Itemque ab ipsis Meoparis inventum dicit bitumen, unde Caspiae portas munivit...*”

Barbarian language the far-straying dromos vessels are called **pirnas**, i.e. robbers of the waters, living underwater...

It is asserted that Alexander the Great approached them through an agreement on the exchange of hostages, with the sole purpose of thereby getting to observe the industry and cunning of the mariners. More than can be believed is said about him in the most well-known fables. Thus it is affirmed that Alexander himself entered their very own diving places, descending right unto the very bottom, so that he got to know the depth of the Ocean and to understand the diversity of the sea and the abysses...<sup>1</sup> Out of friendship Alexander attached them to himself and gave them lots of presents, and there he erected big altars, which right up to now are called Alexander's Altars. Further, the Meopars[sic] are said to have invented bitumen, which fortified the Caspian Gates...

This is valuable information. These pirates were holed up in the vicinity of Alexander's Altars – a well-known fixture of antiquity, by the banks of the lower Dnepr, immediately up-river from the Isle of Leuce of Achillean fame, as we have seen. Alexander's dive (in a 'diving-place',<sup>2</sup> evidently a diving bell) to the bottom of the Ocean is one of the most popular ingredients in the legend about him. Here, then, these Germanic pirates have taken the honour for this venture for themselves, going to the extreme of having the world-conqueror chum up with them – aiding him with bitumen in the construction of his equally famed Iron Gate in the Caucasus. And bitumen is indeed a specialty of these folk – for waterproofing their infamous ships.<sup>3</sup>

The Meoparot name its inventor may have found most felicitous: Not only does the vessel get its corresponding ethnonym; in the most appalling wise (to any philologist) the very name combines the Maeotic (here, *MEO-tic*) and the *PA-ludes*.

#### 4.8. *Cananeos*

Moreover, in this very text we sense old acquaintances masquerading behind another newfangled name as well; that of the **Cananeos**. The name has eluded interpretation.<sup>4</sup> Are they the Biblical Canaanites? Definitely not, although there is most probably a play upon the name, for purposes of heightened interest and mystification.

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1. Smyth 1975, 175-176, paraphrases: "Für Aethicus ist der Ozean nur ein kleiner Teil, sozusagen der obere Zweig, des grossen Abgrundes... Diesen Glauben, Ozean und Abgrund seien miteinander verbunden, erhärtet ein Bericht über ein Unterfangen, das sogar dem Autor der Kosmographie unglaublich erscheint: Alexander der Grosse fuhr mit einem Unterseeboot (voll ausgerüstet mit einem Gerät, das sogar unter Wasser die Sonnenstrahlen einfangen konnte) zum Grunde des Meeres, um 'den Unterschied zwischen dem Meeresgrund und dem Abgrund kennenzulernen'..."
  2. *colimfas* – a barbarism from Greek \**kolymba* 'diving place', or *kolymbetra*: Liddell/ Scott 1975, I, 974.
  3. Wuttke 1853, 35 (ch. 57) et al.
  4. same, liii, lxxxiii suggests the **Kvens** (Finnish speakers in late mediaeval and early modern Northern Norway), wholly ahistorically and unfoundedly.

We turn to the text. The author first introduces the dog-headed people (*homines cenocefalos*), continuing:<sup>1</sup>

28. ...*The people in their vicinity call them Cananeos. For their women do not prefer anyone but the likes of them. This is a lewd people, whose history no-one relates save this author and the Germanic people who gather taxes, their negotiators asserting the same, namely that they upon this island promote seafaring through trading.*

*These pagans are believed to march forth [as warriors] barefoot. The hair they nourish with a daubing or with a grease giving off an excessive stench. Leading the most execrable life, they eat the unlawful [categories] of unclean quadrupeds... They [dwell] in marshes and [areas] abounding in reeds... They have no king. 29. Now all of their regions together are called Germania. These are the ones who have enormous bodies and enormous nations enured by the harshest of mores... One hundred districts are said to lie... from the Rhine river right unto the Ocean, the many isles, and the Maeotic marshes.*

Are these people then the Cynocephali of antiquity? A faint name resemblance, plus the Latin *canes* ‘dog’, might suggest as much. And dog-heads are in fact mentioned immediately before these *Cananeos*. Yet when taking the text at face value, we have to remain sceptical: “*The people in their vicinity*” are the ones who call them this. And those people were not Latin-speakers. Nor for that matter is the name Latin; nor could it aspire to be credible as Latin among users of that language (and then: whom?), even in this barbaric age.

A good ‘first’ explanation is rather: This is a neologism (like the Meoparots, and others galore in this text), from the Latin *canna*, plural *cannae* ‘reed, cane’; for this is precisely what their habitat is described as.

The above is a perfect description of, again, the Eruls – a name which, evidently, meant nothing to this author, let alone his late 8th century readers. Their bodily size is stressed, as is their marshy habitat, and their lack of a king. Their marching barefoot to war, literally ‘with their shins naked’, may reflect traditional ‘nude’ fighting – the more so in that they are deemed a ‘lewd’ people! – only tuned down for decency by our ‘philosophus’. Moreover, they eat the foul and ‘illicit’ things traditionally ascribed to Gog-Magog. Also, their obnoxious ‘daubing’ and greasing of the hair is

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1. Same, 16: “*Quos vicinae gentes circa eos Cananeos appellant. Nam femine eorum non praeferunt tantum horum similitudinem. Gens scelerata, quam nulla historia narrat, nisi hic philosophus. Et gentes Germaniae maxime vectigalia exercent, et negotiatores eorum hoc adfirmant, quod in ea insula crebrius navale commertio prouehunt, et gentem illam Cananeos vocitant. Iidem gentiles nudatis cruribus incedunt. Crines nutriunt oleo inlitos aut adipe fetorem nimium reddentes. Spurcissimam vitam ducentes, immundarum quadrupediarum illicita comedant... paludes et arundinosa (habitant). ...Regem non habent. 29. ...Nam et illarum regionum pagi omnis Germania est appellata. Eo quod sint inmania corpora inmanesque nationes saevissimis moribus duratae... Centum pagos dicit esse... a Reno fluvio usque oceanum, insolas plurimas et meotidas paludes...*”
  2. literally, ‘with uncovered shins’.

featured.<sup>1</sup> That the author had some source for real knowledge of them is undeniable.<sup>2</sup>

That “*all their regions are called Germania*” clearly refers to these ‘Cananeos’ and the dog-heads mentioned immediately prior to them. Now this is a very valuable allusion to the the Eruls and their Langobard subjects, the *hundingas*, literally ‘the dog-men’.<sup>3</sup> The Eruls we have seen to be more ‘wolfish’. And the areas which they recruited from comprised most of ‘Germania’. This would appear to indicate an era preceding the destruction of the Eruls at the hands of the latter, c. 508 AD.

Most interesting is the author’s coupling of these reed-dwellers to females “*who prefer the likes of them only*”, a reference to the *topos* of the Amazons only in a non-classical and non-offensive vein (as with the nudity, now reduced to the shins), and here without the express appellation. A further hint is provided when, in expressly mentioning the Amazons, he describes their use of bitumen and *multos dromos velocissimos*, i.e. “*lots of exceedingly fast runner-boats*”.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the ‘island’ of these folk is mentioned, cf on the ‘island[s] of the Amazons’ in later Arabic geographical and pseudo-historical lore (chapters 7, 12, 13) bound up with the Pontus.

Much the same description is subsequently applied to the ‘isle of Rifarrica’ (also called Rifargica), which likewise houses “*a people which is audacious and speedy, ... subverting towns and cities... They have no king, only warlords*”.<sup>5</sup> The name is best explained as a corruption of the *Rhiphaei* mountains<sup>6</sup> – which are given the same maritime twist as many of the other contents of this ‘Cosmography’.

#### 4.9. A Pun from the Azov Sea

The only thing we miss in the above is the *name* of the Eruls. None the less, with this author there is hope. We recall the word-play ‘*Eluri* = ‘*Eruli*’; and in the maze of mystificatory names we hear what the author has to say on the ‘*Eli*’ swamp’, in his paraphrase of the purported text by Aethicus from the Ister:<sup>7</sup>

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1. Sidonius Apollinaris laments having to listen to a Burgundian singing while the man was greasing his hair with butter, *Carm. XII ad V.C. Catullinum*: Ploss 1959, 418.
  2. There is little other reason for his mention of e.g. their special musical instrument, a harp, viz. the **nablium**, Wuttke 1853, 39: “59. ...*in nabliis Meoparotis*.”
  3. The *Cynocephali* of Paulus Diaconus, the *Hundingas* of Widsith, with the eponym King *Hundingr* in the Elder Edda, *Hundingus* in Saxo the Grammmarian, Lamissio = \**Hundgar* in Paulus Diaconus: Latham 1851, 212, Anscombe 1910, 79, Marquart 1912, 98, Much 1924, 109-110, 1925, 120-122, 125-127, and most incisively Malone 1962, 176-177: Widsith’s *Hundingas* “apparently an old nickname of the Langobards, later confined to the part of the tribe settled in East Holstein...”
  4. Wuttke 1853, 50 (ch. 67).
  5. same, 24-26: “37. *Deinde ad insulam Rifarricam stilum ponit idem sofista, ibique gentem audacem atque velocem et valido ingenio asserit [gi]gnaram in subversione urbium ac civitatum ... Regem non habent sed duces...*”
  6. suggested already by Wuttke 1853, li.
  7. same, 31: “44. *DE NAVIBUS... ...quae iste cachinno facta deridit, sicut de Heli[s] et germano suo Helispontum dictum scribant... et ab una insola in alias cernere possint in pontum similitudinem, et ob hoc mare adstrictum Helispontum vocant.*”

44. **On Boats.** ...Laughingly he derides what they write about the *Heli[s]* and its cognate [word] called *Helispontus*... Being able to see the similarity between an island here and in the Pontus, they for this reason called this constricted sea the *Helispontus*.

In the *Heli[s]*<sup>1</sup> we recognize the Greek word for ‘swamp, marsh’ giving rise to the *Heruli* > *Heluri* pun, plus of course the Pontus, the Black Sea. Coining the name *Helis-Pontus* for this sea is another pun – and an outrageous one, for mangling the *Hellespontus*.

In the Viking age, the Varangians passing by here to and from service in Byzantium had a similar name (on which see chapter 18.4-5 below). This too was a word-play, beginning with the very same ‘Eli, ‘the Swamp’; which in turn cannot be the result of pure chance.

“*This constricted sea*” where the said lewd people dwells is, judging by wording and context, the Sea of Azov, being both separate from, and more constricted than, the Black Sea. As to which ‘look-alike’ island was meant, we are left to guess.

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1. The Venetians and Genuese called the Isle of Saint George in the Dnepr *Elis* or *Helis*, the same name being used also for the river itself: Koehler 1826, 609.



## 5. Gog/Magog: Goths, Huns, Reds, 267-395

“For the later Byzantines there was an additional clue here, for Gog is described as being ‘prince of Rosh’, which in the Septuagint version is rendered by ‘Rhos’ – the same name as that borne by the Russians.”  
Mango 1980, 202.

### 5.1. An Early Vaticination

The earliest reference I can find to our theme of the fearful ‘Doomsday reds’ is in a poem, or *chrism*, quite unknown and of an as yet unknown date. Here, red or blond fiends are seen attacking Byzantium itself, and with a proper name too.<sup>1</sup>

Δις τρις ἀριθμῶν χιλιοντάδος νόει,  
ὅταν τέρμα φέρουσι σὺν ἑβδομον αἰῶνα,  
ξανθὸν γένος ὄρμηται πρὸς Βυζαντίῳ

.....  
Γότθων εὐρισμὸς υἰῶν τῆν Ἄγαρ, φεῦ μοι.  
ἄγε τρισαθλίσματος ὕδατος τοῦ ἀλφέως  
ὡ τῶν συμφορῶν τῆς νήσου τῆς Ἑλλάδος  
μᾶλλον δὲ τα πρώτιστα πάση τῆ κτίσει.

Two times three to the number of a thousand he computes,  
Until they bring the end with the seventh era.  
The blond people has set itself in motion against Byzantium.<sup>2</sup>

.....  
The Goths, sons of Hagar, are a broad multitude.  
Woe, utterly wretched [are] the waters of the Alfeios,  
[visiting] the vicissitudes [upon] the Isle of Greece,  
Yet even more for all of humanity!

The language is poor, full of syntactical and grammatical mistakes.<sup>3</sup> Yet the general eschatological drift is clear; and so is the place and event which these lines refer to. ‘The isle of Greece’ means the Pelopponesos, where the Alfeios is a river. The Goths are known to have attacked and harried the peninsula only once, in connection with the joint Erul-Goth onslaughts in 267 and 269 AD.<sup>4</sup>

So here, at so early a stage, do we have these peoples called, simply, ‘the blond people’. They are viewed in a most negative way, as harbingering Doomsday. Yet after this first attempt, ending in their being chased off by Aurelian, there is peace.

1. Istrin 1897, 321, citing a Munich ms. no. 154, fol. 345.

2. or, has anchored up very close to Byz.

3. E.g., following Nils Berg (oral comm.), indicative instead of conjunctive, accusative instead of dative and vice versa (*pros* governing the dative, if the verb meant ‘anchor up’, then this would have been correct), *evrismos* unknown, *Alfeios* not understood as a place-name...

4. I thank Prof. Nils Berg for his expert assistance in November 1996.

## 5.2. Beginning of the End, 378 AD

We go on to the catastrophic battle of Adrianople, “that terrible afternoon of August 9, 378, when the Goths annihilated two-thirds of the Roman army.”<sup>1</sup> For more than 110 years, ever since the days of Aurelian (270-275), Italy had lived without fear of barbarian invasions. Now, in the words of Ambrose, who had just lost his brother, there was consolation in the knowledge that he had been “*taken away that he might not fall in the hands of the barbarians... that he might not see the ruin of the whole earth, the end of the world..*”. This was the time foreseen by the prophets “*when they felicitated the dead and lamented the living*”; for, after Adrianople, “*the end of the world is coming upon us.. We are in the wane of the age.*”<sup>2</sup>

How did such fears come to alight upon the Goths?

Initially, the Goths were often ‘confused’ with the Getae<sup>3</sup> (wilfully, one would think, in keeping with erudite Byzantine use of anachronistic nomenclature – the Getae having been non-Germanic – Thracian – tribes on the Lower Danube and the Balkans, crushed in the 1st c. AD). Thus, Jordanes’ work is titled *De origine actibusque Getarum* (popularly called simply the *Getica*); being a poor paraphrase of several lost tomes, including a *volumina de origine actisque Getarum* by the Senator Cassiodor.

The Goths were moreover often called ‘Scythians’ by the Byzantines. The name Scythians designated not so much a people as the inhabitants of this hazily vast region, quite indiscriminately. Thus, even the maritime attacks in 255, 256 and 257 AD were undertaken by ‘Scythians’, according to the Byzantines, and the ruler of the Goths was defined as the “*king of the Scythians*”.<sup>4</sup>

This is the cue leading in turn to the identification of the Goths with the mythological ‘Gog and Magog’. This association is first met with as applied to the Scythians proper, in the *Antiquitates* of Josephus:<sup>5</sup>

*Now Japheth the son of Noah had seven sons. They inhabited the area which begins with the mountains of Taurus and Aman and which in Asia reach all the way to the Tanaïs river, but in Europe unto the land of the Gaziri,.. Its people call themselves by various names... Magog however instituted the Magogs named after him, whereas the Scythians were named by the Greeks.*

This given, the catastrophic Adrianople defeat of the Romans at the hands of the Goths in 378 was enough for the next logical move: identifying the Goths with Gog/Magog – all the easier for the near-homophony: Gog – Goth.

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1. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 1.

2. Ambrosius, *Expositio evangelii sec. Lucam* X, 10-14, in: *CSEL* 32, 458.

3. Instances of this usage are listed by Svennung 1967, B, 5-6, 9-10 – Procopius above and an item on Hugilaicus ‘king of the Getae’, cf. ch. 6 below, going unmentioned.

4. Wolfram 1974, 48, 68 et al.

5. *Antiquitates* I, vi, 1: “*Japheth autem, Noe filius, habuit filios septem. Habitaverunt isti regionem, a Tauro et Aman montibus incipientem et pertingentem in Asia usque ad flumen Tanaïm, in Europa vero terram Gazirorum. Gentes eius diversis se nominibus appellabant... Magog vero Magogas a se nominatos instituit, a Graecis Scythae sunt appellati.*”

Of course the names of Gog-Magog were not applied exclusively to the Goths. Yet the identification with the Goths may be called a long dominant one; and what is more, the Goths themselves adopted this equation, as evidenced by Isidor and Jordanes alike (*Getica* ch. 29). It was surely restricted to the learned few. Yet what we are interested in is precisely the bookish traditions, upon which later generations of Byzantines and others could – and did – draw.

This ‘Biblical-historical’ or ‘mythological-historical’ approach is foreign to most historians of today, including Normanists and Anti-Normanists alike. It is all the more contingent upon us, as written sources from such far-off times and climes should never be treated ‘on their own’, cut off from their ideological (mythological/religious) context. And in the minds of mediaeval men ideological pride of place was held by conceptions of Doomsday – including the half-human creatures near the ends of the earth, coupled with the divine chastisement, hailing from the extreme north, from the lands of Gog-Magog and the ‘Prince of Ros’, spelling the advent of the end of the world.

### 5.3. Rise of Chiliastic Fears, 390-ies

Whether the explicit identification of Gog-Magog with the Goths is a fruit of Adrianople or even of later developments, is as yet undetermined. Such an identification does occur in the author Commodian – who however has been dated variously, to the 3rd or 4th, or possibly even the 5th c. AD.<sup>1</sup> Here, as in other authors, the appearance of Gog-Magog is made to precede that of the Antichrist.<sup>2</sup>

What is clear is that in the 390-ies an eschatological wave swept over the Roman Empire. “*There is no doubt that the Antichrist has already been born; firmly established already in his early years, he will, after reaching maturity, achieve supreme power.*”<sup>3</sup>

In three generations’ time, the millennium would come, but only after the death of myriads in the horrors heralding Doomsday, the signs of which were becoming clearer day by day.<sup>4</sup>

In other studies, it has been argued that Islamic traditions on Ya’ğūğ-Ma’ğūğ were inspired by the impressions recorded by Christian authors of the Huns and their Erul allies during their invasion of northern ‘Irāq, eastern Anatolia in 395 AD; the puny and swarthy Ma’ğūğ being the Huns proper, whereas the Ya’ğūğ, blond, blue-eyed and “tall as palm-trees”, are the Eruls.<sup>5</sup> This very dichotomy in nomenclature

1. *Carmen apologeticum*, verses 809-810, cf. Bousset 1900, 119.

2. same, 195, also 80 on Goths = Gog in Ambrosius, *De Fide ad Gratianum*, II.16, cf Jerome *Proemium in Ezech. XI* (Malvenda I, 555); Afrem the Syrian (on Huns, not Goths), Pseudo-Afrem 4, Andreas (Revelation 20:8 applied to the Huns), Pseudo-Methodius, Adso (*PL* 101, 1289), Bede’s Sibyl (*PL* 90, 1183), Godfrey of Viterbo (ed. Usinger, X, 629), Ezra (*Syr. Apocalypsis*) 12. Also, Bousset 1895, 20-45.

3. St. Martin, *apud* Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogus* I (II), 14, 4, *CSEL* 1, 197, cf Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 3 n. 13.

4. same, 3 n. 14, citing Q. Julius Hilarianus, *De cursu tempore* (from 397), *PL* 13, 1097-1106; Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* XXXVIII, 7, *CSEL* 29, 330 (also from 397).

5. Stang 1989, 22-25.

is not fortuitous: The Huns proper were identified with the long-extinct **Massagetae**, making for their identification with **Ma-gog**,<sup>1</sup> whereas the Goths, and possibly in their wake and after their demise the Eruls, came to be named after and identified with the equally long-gone *Getae*, by dint of, simply, the crude similarity of names, **Gog – Goth – Getae**.

#### 5.4. *St. Jerome – from Complacency to Fear*

For a test and a taste of the change that took place in these years we take recourse to St. Jerome. Initially, he did not share the Doomsday fears and hopes of his contemporaries; thus, when reshaping the Commentary on the Revelation by Victorinus of Poetovio, he took care to excise its chiliastic parts.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, he rejected the identification of Gog and Magog by his contemporary St. Ambrose (340-397), *De fide*, II, 16, who, citing Ezekiel's apocalyptic vision of the hosts from the extreme north, concludes squarely: "**Gog iste Gothus est.**" This mild criticism of St. Ambrose by St. Jerome is from before 392 AD:<sup>3</sup>

*I know that a certain man has related Gog & Magog in the present place as well as in Ezekiel to the history of the Goths who recently were raging in our land. If so be it, then this is demonstrated by the very outcome of the battle. (...)*

*True enough, all who are backwards[-looking-in-time] usually prefer to call the Goths Getae rather than Gog & Magog. Thus these seven tribes... inhabit a part of the North.*

In his subsequent commentary to Ezekiel 39, likewise after 392 AD, St. Jerome writes:<sup>4</sup>

*Regarding [this] most difficult prophesy I only briefly call attention to the fact that a not unknown man of our times has said of this nation in a piece of writing to the Emperor: "This Gog is a Goth." In what way all that has been written about it can be reconciled with this is not for me to figure out, but for them who believe in this.*

Similarly, St. Augustine (*De civitate Dei*, 413-426) rejected the identification (by, again, St. Ambrose) of Gog-Magog with specific peoples, such as the 'Getae and Massagetae'.

Yet when the Huns erupted into the Roman east in 395, we note a sea change in the hitherto so complacent and equanimical St. Jerome. Now he fears that "*the Ro-*

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1. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 4: Huns called Massagetae by Themistius, Claudian, Procopius, and (evidently) the African bishop Quodvultdeus.

2. same, 4.

3. Hieronymus, *Liber Hebraicarum quaestionum in Genesim*, cf. Migne 1844-65, XXIII, 950: "*Scio quendam Gog et Magog tam de praesenti loco quam de Jezechiel ad Gotthorum nuper in terra nostra bacchantium historiam retulisse: quod utrum sit, proelii ipsius fine monstratur. Et certe Gothos omnes retro eruditi magis Getas quam Gog et Magog appellare consueverunt. Hae itaque septem gentes... aquilonis partem inhabitant.*"

4. same, XXV, 325: "*In prophetia difficillima illud breviter admoneo, quod vir nostrae aetatis haud ignobilis ad imperatorem scribens super hac natione dixerit: 'Gog iste Gothus est'; cui qua ratione possint omnia, quae in ea scripta sunt, coaptari, non est meum, sed eorum, qui hoc putant, disserere.*"

man world was falling”; this is “at the end of the world, when the empire of the Romans must be destroyed”.<sup>1</sup>

Four years later, he is convinced that the Huns are indeed the savage peoples, the *ferae gentes* Gog et Magog, pent in by Alexander of Macedon behind the iron gates of the Caucasus.<sup>2</sup> It is in his *Epistle to Oceanus* (77, 8) that we read:<sup>3</sup>

*The swarms of the Huns burst forth from the remote Maeotis Palus {Sea of Azov} between the gelid Tanais (River Don) and the vast nation of the Massagetae, where the barriers of Alexander confine the rude populations to the rocks of the Caucasus.*

His words are to be compared with Hegesippus, *De Excidio Jer.* V. 50. That Alexander built the Caspian gates against incursions of wild tribes is a very much older literary topos; thus Pliny, *Natural History*, VI, 13.

As noted by a modern historian, “if even the sober Jerome was inclined, for a time, to see in the Huns the companions of the apocalyptic horsemen, one can easily imagine how the superstitious masses felt.”<sup>4</sup>

As for the Ya’gūğ-Ma’gūğ being ‘raw-meat eaters’, Pomponius Mela (who flourished c. 40 AD) first introduced this *topos* in speaking of the Germanic peoples: “Their mode of living is so rough and crude that they even eat raw meat.”<sup>5</sup> The same was said of the Cimbri.<sup>6</sup> Yet there is more than tradition to this. When in 395 the Huns irrupted into the Caucasus they seem to have done so on account of famine.<sup>7</sup> This would to a large extent explain the revolting eating practices of Gog-Magog. This explanation is all the more reliable in that not merely ‘unclean’ foods are enumerated; so is grass. If reduced to subsisting on grass, the Huns must indeed have been starving.

In addition, of course, as to the revoltingly ‘unclean’ practices of the Gog-Magog, the Huns most probably did eat some raw meat, cf present-day *beef tartare* plus the testimony of Hans Schiltberger on the Tatars of the Golden Horde who, when on fast journeys,<sup>8</sup> “took some meat and cut it into thin slices and put it into a linen cloth and laid it under the saddle and rode on it... When feeling hungry, they took it out and ate it.”

This is faithfully reflected in Muslim word on the 395 Hun-plus-Erul invaders – plus, as we shall see, in North Russian traditions on the *syrojadcy* Veps.

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1. same, 4, citing his *Com. in Danielelem* VII, 8, PL 25, 531.

2. *Epistulae* LXXVII, 8, in Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 4 n. 24.

3. Bousset 1890, 55.

4. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 7-8.

5. Mela III, 3, 2, here cited from Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 15: *uictu ita asperi incultique ut cruda etiam carne uescantur.*

6. same, citing Norden 1921, 13-14

7. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 52.

8. Telfer 1879, 48.

## 5.5. Theodoret & Proclus

After St. Jerome and the chilling events of 395 AD, the identification stuck. It is ‘frequently met with from the fifth century on’.<sup>1</sup> Strange, perhaps, as the Goths fell victims to the Huns and their allies, including the Earls/Eruli; and one would by hindsight have expected that the fearsome label of Gog-Magog would have been transferred to these latter (as happened in the Islamic tradition); yet the notion Gog = Goth had evidently stuck; which is a good indication that it did so in connection with the 378 Adrianople débâcle at the latest.

Theodoret, in his commentary on Ezekiel 38: 10-12, probably from before 435,<sup>2</sup> insists that the Gog-Magog live not far from Palestine, reminding his readers that “in our times the whole Orient was occupied by them”; another reference to the 395 invasion by the Huns and their allies.<sup>3</sup>

In the first half of the 5th c., a Hun army irrupted into Thrace, threatening to occupy Constantinople. It was under the leadership of Attila’s uncle and successor, Ruga, whose name is variously spelled in our sources: **Roila** and **Rugila** (the *-ila* being a Gothic diminutive, a suffix of endearment), **Rougas** (in Socratis), **Rouas** (in Priscus), and **Roas** (in Jordanes).<sup>4</sup> According to the Byzantine church historian Socratis, he was struck dead by a bolt of lightning, while most of his army perished by a pestilence – and some from “*fire from heaven*”; upon the consequent retreat of his forces, the Patriarch Proclus (434-437) held a sermon:<sup>5</sup>

*‘And you, son of man, prophesy over Gog, the prince of Rōs, Misokh and Thobel. I shall judge him with death and with bloodshed, with inundating rain and stones of hail. Fire and sulphur shall I let rain over him, and over the many peoples that are with him. Thus I show my magnitude and my glory, being known in the eyes of many peoples. Then shall they see that I am the Lord.’ Because this occurred just as was said, Proclus was awarded the admiration of absolutely everybody.*

*The Emperor in fact by reason of his clemency both considered other [aspects of] the providence of God, and also chiefly this which I have now said.*

The Greek wording is Γογ ἄρχοντα Ῥῶς, Μισοχκαί Φοβελ meaning that Gog is considered a proper name for the *archont*, i.e. ruler, over ‘Ros, Mesoch and Thobel. The end of the passage is noteworthy, indicating that the Emperor was not much given to such apocalyptic speculations generally, but that this time he found the case pretty convincing. Why?

Not only were the Huns in general identified with Gog-Magog; here, of course, the very name of the Hun leader lent itself to an all-too-facile interpretation: ‘Ros – and Roas or Rou[g]as (how could the Barbarians be expected to get it totally right anyway?)

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1. Anderson 1932, 10.

2. Richard 1935, 106.

3. PG 81, 1204, cf Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 57.

4. PG 67, 833 n. 72. Cf also Marquart 1903, 373.

5. Socratis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Paris 1864 = PG 67, 834: “...Imperatori vero propter ipsius mansuetudinem, tum alia multa contulit Dei providentia, tum hoc praecipue quod jam diciturus sum.”

## 5.6. *Apocalyptic Blonds*

In a mesh of ‘prophecies’ written *after* the events they ‘foresee’ (so-called *vaticinationes ex eventu*), we hear of the fall of the West Roman Empire at the hands of heretics, Christians of the Arian persuasion, who are characterized as “*the blond race*”. Immediately after this, in both sources, the rule of the Antichrist is initiated, followed, in the Armenian one, by the very end of the world.<sup>1</sup> Despite the complexities involved in these sources, we shall try and review the relevant contents:

The one source is an Armenian “*Seventh Vision of Daniel*”. Here, mention is made of the rulers who shall take over after the last West Roman emperors – Orlgios being named, i. e. Olybrius, who ruled in 472, and Augustulus Romulus, deposed in 476, being referred to:<sup>2</sup> These new rulers shall be “*from another faith, that is, of Arianus*” – meaning the Arian Christianity which Goths and Eruls, etc., cleaved to.

In a Greek parallel, the *Apocalypse of Daniel*, this people who is going to take over the realm is termed τὸ ξανθὸν γένος, literally “*the blond race*”.<sup>3</sup>

The ruler who did take power, Odoacer, was termed *rex Herulorum*.<sup>4</sup> We may be entitled to see in “the blond race” mentioned here the Germanic troops he used in his short-lived takeover of the Western Empire, from 476 to 493 AD, when he was killed by the Ostrogoth (and previously Arian) Theoderich.

Thus, in the *Apocalypse of Daniel* just mentioned, there is a date staring up at us which tells whom this is all about; for the text says:

κρατήσει ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑπτάλοφον τὸ ξανθὸν γένος ἕτη ἕξι ἢ πέντε.

*This blond people shall seize power six or five years after Heptalofon.*

Now “six or five years after Heptalofon” is not as cryptic as it seems. Heptalofon is generally translated ‘the Seven-hillocked’ or, literally, ‘the Seven-crested’ – from birds’ plumage.<sup>5</sup> It refers to Rome, and by extension to the [West] Roman Empire. ‘After’ the Empire would then mean after 476 AD, when it came to an end. And after not six or five years but four, in 480, Odoacer was literally empowered – by the Senate in Rome, as Roman consul. His title from then on was Cons. Ital., Rex Erulorum.<sup>6</sup>

In another Greek version, entitled “*Vision of Daniel*”, the fall of the Langobard realm, towards the end of the 8th c., is referred to, as are the incursions of the Arabs in Greece, probably meaning in 778 AD.<sup>7</sup> Here, the Roman (Byzantine) army joins up with “*the blond race*” and beats off Ishmael (= the Arabs), who are then chased all the way down into ‘Ethrimbus’, meaning Yathrib in Araby. This is followed by

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1. Bousset 1896, 41-42, Istrin 1897, III, 304-312. See also below.

2. Armenian text, Bousset 1896, 42: “*Then woe to you, O you Seven-hillocked [city], when your king is a [mere] youth.*” Which is what Augustulus Romulus was.

3. Both sources discussed in Bousset 1896, 41-42, Istrin 1897, III, 304-312. See also above, ch. 5.5.

4. Rappaport 1920. Wolfram 1987, 40, et al.

5. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, VI, v, 2: Watt 1965, 214.

6. Ziegler/Strontheim 1972, III, 480: ‘Odoacer’.

7. Bousset 1895, 174-175, Istrin 1897, 266.

word on the victorious Greek emperor returning home to rule happily, his rule lasting 32 years – and his successor who, ruling for 12 years,<sup>1</sup> is “sent by the angel Michael”, going to Jerusalem in expectation of the Messiah. Then follows the coming of the Antichrist.<sup>2</sup>

All these sources, and later versions too, which we shall have occasion to treat in ch. 6.7 below, are made out in the form of apocalyptic vaticinations. A change will be noticed in the above, from the ‘blonds’ being dangerous heretics, even associated with Gog and Magog, to their ‘joining up’ with the Byzantines. In effect, this was just what did happen: By the 5th-6th centuries, the Eruls in particular made up some of the élite troops of the Empire.

### 5.7. *Isidor & Others*

In the 6th c., long after the fall of Attila’s realm, an author like Andreas of Caesarea could still insist that Gog and Magog were those Scythians in the North “called *Hunnica* by us”.<sup>3</sup> Yet otherwise, in this rôle, for the Huns proper the Goths – or Goth-associated peoples – were substituted.

Bishop Isidor of Sevilla (died 636) in his *History of the Goths*<sup>4</sup> echoes Orosius from 417 AD, the *Historiae adversus paganos* I, 16, ii,<sup>5</sup> as does Jordanes in the *Getica* para 29 and 68.<sup>6</sup>

29. *Some of the ancient writers also agree with the tale. Among these we may mention Josephus, a most reliable writer of annal, who everywhere follows the rule of truth and unravels from the beginning the origin of things; – but why he has omitted the beginnings of the race of the Goths, of which I have spoken, I do not know. He barely mentions Magog of that stock, and says they were Scythians by race and called so by name. (...)*

68. *Precisely those Getae who now are [called] Goths as well, [were the ones] whom Alexander declared should be steered clear of, whom Pyrrhos drew back from in fear, and whom Caesar shied away from.*

Most influential in mediaeval minds was Isidor’s *Etymologies*.<sup>7</sup>

*Magog, from whom one believes that the Scythians and Goths trace their origin... The Goths are thought to be named after Magog, the son of Japhet, on the basis of the similarity in the last syllable. The ancients preferred to call them Getae rather than Goths.*

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1. Bousset 1895, 39 is surely right in viewing this as taken over from the 12 years of rule always ascribed to Alexander in the Pseudo-Callisthenes tradition; while the 32 years of his predecessor may reflect the reign of Heraclius: same, 48, 179.
  2. Bousset 1895, 177.
  3. *Commentarius in apocalypsin*, ch. 63, PG 106, 416 c; Maenchen-Helfen 73, 5.
  4. rec. 2:1, cf. Pritsak 1981, 527, Mommsen 1894, 241 ff: “*Modo autem Getae illi, qui et nunc Gothi, quos Alexander evitandos pronuntiavit, Pyrrhus exhorruit, Caesar etiam declinavit.*”
  5. Sweet 1883, 49.
  6. Mierow 1966, 58, 76
  7. Lindsay 1911, I, Lib. IX, ii, 27 and IX, ii, 89: “*Magog, a quo arbitrantur Scythas et Gothos traxisse originem... Gothi a Magog filio Iaphet nominati putantur, de similitudine ultimae syllabae, quos veteres magis Getas quam Gothos vocaverunt.*”



There is also the reference to Ezekiel:<sup>1</sup>

*The [nation of the] Goths is most ancient as a people. Some surmise that their origin is from Magog, the son of Japhet, from the similarity of the last syllable, and conclude this rather from the prophet Ezekiel.*

Ezekiel crops up in other ‘Gothic’ sources too. One is the Asturian *Crónica de Albelda* from 881 AD, which addresses not only the Goths but the Arab invasion of Spain as well:<sup>2</sup>

*A word of God was spoken to Ezekiel, saying: Son of Man, set your face against Ishmael... The [nation of the] Goths are a most ancient people... whose origin is said to be from Magog... The land of Gog designates Spain under the rule of the Goths, into which the Ishmaelites have irrputed.*

Similarly, there is Godfrey of Viterbo (died 1190):<sup>3</sup>

*Got is the same as the people of the Goths. Likewise for all the people of the Ishmaelites [one says] Ishmael alone, as is said by the prophets: ‘Set your face against Ishmael’. Thus of all the Goths one says Got.*

*Got among the Teutons is the name for a god from their oldest origin. And since wise people and philosophers were called gods because of their excellence, I believe they have gotten this name from their oldest father Magog, the son of Japhet, as from their first god. And since the people of the Goths are derived from Magog, the son of Japhet, the son of Noah, their own chronicles aver that their people is the ancientmost there is... Moreover we adhere to this on the basis of the prophet Ezekiel. Their history book likewise asserts that they stem from Magog the son of Japhet, and Gothia and the Sithian people are named after Magog.*

This is of course a reference to Isidor, who was indeed a Goth.

In Godfrey there is also the explicit mention of Alexander the Great having shut the Goths off from the oicumene: “*Et exsurgent ab aquilone spurcissime gentes quas Alexander rex inclusit, Goth videlicet et Magoth. Hec duodecim regna, quorum numerus est sicut arena maris.*”

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1. cf. Svennung 1967 B, 23: “*Gothorum antiquissimam esse gentem. Quorum originem quidam de Magog, Jafeth filio, suspicantur, a similitudine ultimae syllabae et magis de Ezechiele propheta id colligentes...*”
  2. same, 26: “*Factum est verbum Domini ad Ezeziel, dicens: fili hominis, pone faciem tuam contra Ismael... Gotorum antiquissimam esse gentem, quorum originem a Magog... dicunt esse... Terra quidem Gog Hispania designatur sub regimine Gotorum, in qua Ismaelite ingressi sunt.*”
  3. Anderson 1932, 11, 109: “*Got quidem gens Gothorum est. Et sicut per omne genus Ysmalitarum solus Ysmael supra scribitur, cum dicitur per prophetam. Pone faciem tuam contra Ysmaelem, ita et pro omni Gothorum gente Got nominatur ... Got apud Teutonicos a primeva eorum origine dicitur deus. Et quia tunc homines sapientes et filosofi per excellentiam vocabantur dei, estimo, quod a primevo patre eorum Magog, filio Iafet, tamquam a deo eorum primo, hoc nomen traxerunt. Et quia Gothorum gens ex Magog, filio Iafet, filio Noe, orta est, affirmant cronica ipsorum Gothorum antiquissimam esse illam gentem. ...Et magis de Ezechiele prophete sumus id colligentes. Liber etiam ystorie eorum similiter affirmat, quia de Magog, filio Iafet, veniunt, et Gothia et Sithia gens a Magog nominatae sunt...*”

‘Goth’ and (consequently) ‘Magoth’ came to supplant Gog-Magog even in versions of the *Historia Alexandri Magni* by Pseudo-Callisthenes, where they head the list of barbarian peoples pent in by Alexander somewhere in the mountains of the north.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, in Jewish tradition Gog came to be glossed as Goth: “Magog est rendu dans le Talmud de Jérusalem par **Gothia**, ce qui se rapporte à l’invasion des Goths, qui la tradition juive identifie avec celle du peuple Gog et Magog. Le Talmud de Babylone rend Magog par **Kaudia**...”<sup>2</sup> This latter reading of the Babylonian Targum is however contested.<sup>3</sup> “Aussi, dans le Talmud de Jérusalem (*Megillah*, I, fol. 11) et dans le Targoum des Chroniques (*I Chron.*, I, 5), Magog est-il traduit par **Gethiya** ou **Gothiya**...”<sup>4</sup>

The prophecy of Ezekiel 39, 6 was deemed applicable not merely to the Goths in the Mediterranean world but also to Sweden, by Adam of Bremen I, 26.<sup>5</sup> Other sources might also be mentioned.<sup>6</sup>

### 5.8. Yellow Scythians, Red & Germanic Huns

In his *De generatione animalium*, V, 3, Aristoteles calls the Scythians ‘dirty-yellow’ as to the colour of their skin; this has been translated as ‘ruddy, reddish-blond’. Hippocrates likewise speaks of the Scythians as being whitish because of the cold, and dirtily yellow (*pyrrhon*). And finally there is Tacitus: “*truces et caerulei oculi, rutilae comae, magna corpora*”.<sup>7</sup>

This ‘Scythian’ tradition is attested in Chinese sources also with regard to the Wu-sun: “Of all the Jung of the western lands the Wu-sun look the most peculiar. Those of the present Hu who have cerulean eyes and look like Mi monkeys are their descendants.”<sup>8</sup> Whence the later Chinese belief that the Russians were the descendants of the Wu-sun.<sup>9</sup>

There were also ‘the Europoid ‘Tokharians’, depicted with their red hair and green eyes on the wall paintings in northern Hsin-chiang.<sup>10</sup> One theory is that the Chinese misinterpreted the name of the Tokharians, which according to this theory

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1. Müller 1846, III, 26c.

2. Neubauer 1868, 422.

3. Here, Magog is the country of the **qnty**’ – read by L Goldschidht as \*Qyty’ = Qitay, ‘China’, and by Klima as “the country of the kants” (Sogdian *kant*, meaning ‘town’, cf. Pandjikand, Tashkent, etc.) – Klima 1956, 596-597 n. 7: “Über die Form **gwty**’ im jer. Talmud (*Megilla* I., 71b): ich vermute darin den Namen der damals ihre Angriffe von der Krim aus unternehmenden Gothen..”

4. Lenormant 1882, 413-414.

5. Buchner 1960, 198-201.

6. Svennung 1967, “Zur Geschichte des Gothicismus”, 44: 2 B, 3-5.

7. Neumann 1855, 153-155.

8. Groot 1926, 123. Cf also Marquart 1903, 360 n. 1.

9. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 374 n. 112, citing Kiuner 1961, 68.

10. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 374.

means ‘the Red ones’ (from the red soil), and ascribed red hair to the people.<sup>1</sup> “Gen-giz Khan and his descendants had blond or reddish hair and deep-blue eyes”.<sup>2</sup>

What then of the **Karmīr xyōn** in a Middle Persian source, literally, the Red Huns? “Apart from the somewhat unusual position for an epithet, the Byzantines knew of Turks from the Altai and Oxus regions whom they called Kermixiones and ‘Ermixiones (Tomaschek, Pauly-Wissowa, s.v. *Chionitae*).”<sup>3</sup>

Remarkably, some of the skulls from Hsin-chiang studied by the Sino-Swedish Expedition in 1928 and 1934 point to Europoids of “the northern type”, thus from the Tibetan garrison town of Mirān (from the last c. BC to the 3rd AD) there is “one probably Tibetan with a strong Nordic admixture, one preponderantly Nordic”; an undated Charchan skull is “predominantly Nordic”, a Lopnor one from the first three centuries AD is “Mongoloid with some Nordic features”, while from the mass cemetery in the same area, datable by approximation to after 200 AD, there is a skull “of a Mongoloid with some Nordic features and another one which is Indoid with Nordic and weak Mongoloid admixture”.<sup>4</sup>

Over and above the Eruls, then, there were other grounds too for literary ‘belief’ in the existence of ‘Reds’ north and northeast of the Mediterranean and Near Oriental world.

Finally, are the Eruls, or for that matter other Germanic troops, visible among the Huns?

In his *Conclusions*, Maenchen-Helfen gives six ‘Germanic or Germanized’ personal names from among the leaders of the Attilanic Huns, viz. Attila himself, Bleda, Edekon, Laudaricus, Onegesius, Ruga,<sup>5</sup> commenting: “No Germanic names occur among the non-Attilanic Huns. If any Germans in the East, outside the Crimea, survived the Hun storm, they either were too few or in a social position too low to allow their names to appear among those of the ruling groups..”.

This is not quite accurate, according to our author himself who on the very same page among the (non-Attilanic) Bittugures lists but one name, “Germanic: Ragnaris”. In addition, among names ‘of unknown origin’ are listed a greater number which may prove relevant; thus: Adámis, Askán,<sup>6</sup> Gordas,<sup>7</sup> Sigisan?<sup>8</sup>, Skottas, etc.

Regarding such Germanic names among the Huns, two conclusions suggest themselves, the one not excluding the other: There may indeed have been truly Ger-

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1. Petrov 1963, 38.

2. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 374 citing *Yüeh fu shih chi*, ch. 25.

3. Bailey 1981, 110.

4. Hjortsjö & Wallander 1947, 74, 76, 77, 86, in Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 375.

5. same, 386-389: Ragnaris was the Germanic name of an Ostrogoth leader in the last campaign against the East Romans in 552-554; Laudaricus, called cognatus Attilae, reflects Germanic \*Lauðareiks. The other four names listed here “are Hunnic names in Germanic dress, modified to fit the Gothic tongue, or popular Gothic etymologies, or both”.

6. same, 413: “It might be Turkish \**as-qan*, “the qan of the As (Az)”, although the leader of such a small troop would hardly have been called *qan*. Besides, it is anything but clear who the as or Az were.” Might not the name reflect \**ans* + *gand*, ‘god + magic’ in proto-Norse, of an Erul leader?

7. same, 415: “Hunnish ruler near the Maeotis”.

8. same, 420: “Hun officer in the Byzantine army, about 491... might be Germanic.”

manic leaders (and hence also lower rank-and-file) among the Huns. On the other hand, several 'Germanic' names (such as that of Attila) bespeak the language or 'ethnicity' not of its bearer but of the person(s) who once told the tale.

### 5.9. *Red Jews*

For the sake of completeness, we note the traditions on red Jews, *die rotten Juden* pent in (by Alexander the Great) under the names of Gog & Magog in the Caucasus, whence they shall break forth to devastate the world. Whether these traditions are late,<sup>1</sup> or ultimately based on word of 'red' Huns, Eruls or Gog-&Magog, must be left in abeyance.

It has been suggested that the mention of these red Jews is to be explained by the fact that "there are considerable traces of erythreism among the Jews".<sup>2</sup> This is unconvincing. If Jews in general had a reddish streak in them (a dubious proposition!), then why spell out the evident, viz. 'the red Jews'?

Another explanation is found in the rise of the Xazar Jewish realm, with king Bulan converting to Judaism, along with much of his court and the pillars of society, around 780 AD. A Turkic people, the Xazars did indeed have 'traces of erythrism'. Yet is this enough to establish word of 'the Red Jews'? Possibly, the expression reflects more ancient history, viz. a recollection that parts of the pent-in peoples of Gog and Magog were indeed 'red'.

### 5.10. *A Renowned People*

Finally, it should be noted that not only the Bible played a rôle (or rather, cut out and **made** a rôle, to be filled by a real people or peoples); so did Church traditions. In Byzantium, Syriac theologians were immensely popular; one such being Jacob of Seruḡ:<sup>3</sup>

*King Alexander made haste and made the door/ Against the North, and against the spoilers and the children of Māgōg.*

Here we meet on the one hand '*the spoilers*' and on the other, '*the children of Magog*'. And the door is erected not only against these two peoples but also against the North. Yet the door shall not suffice:<sup>4</sup>

*And the Lord shall visit evil upon the world.. / And the nation that is within this gate shall be roused up./ And also the hosts of Agōg and the peoples of Māgōg shall be gathered together./ These peoples, the fiercest of all creatures... / in the seven thousandth year..*

Once again, this leaves us – or rather, left readers and thinkers in the Middle Ages – with the enigma of **two** groups of people: On the one hand there is a certain nation on the inside (to us, properly, on the outside, to the North) of the Gate; and on the other, there are **also** the hosts of Agōg-Māgōg, as Jacob says.

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1. Sources and discussion in Anderson 1932, 68, 72-74.

2. same, 72.

3. Hunnius 1906, 184.

4. same, 188-189.

As has been inferred long ago, this poem does reflect historical events: Jacob died in 521, and his poem may reflect not merely the events of 395-396 but also the 514-515 invasion by the Sabir Huns.<sup>1</sup> The poem continues:<sup>2</sup>

*A renowned people will stir up strife in the lands/ ...In abundance will they come to Palestine madly...*

Who was this ‘renowned people’? Or rather, who **became** it? Who literally filled in and fleshed out the rôle? For the same expression, ‘*a renowned people*’, occurs in a later age as well.

### 5.11. *Erul Apologetics*

The Pseudo-Aethicus Istricus text we have discovered to contain most valuable references to the Azov Sea Eruls. It also contains materials on the Turks (*Turchos, Tulchos, Dulchos*) dwelling near the Black and Azov Seas, meaning the Xazars. Now the Xazars came to be identified, by Greeks and Muslims alike, with the Gog-and-Magog Doomsday peoples (on which more in ch. 8 below). Peculiar to our author is the following introduction:<sup>3</sup>

*32. Other writings omit the Turks... He says that they are closed in by the Byrrichean mountains and the isles of the Taracontas and right to the bay of the Pontus by islands and littorals... They are people... from the stock of Gog and Magog... In the times of the Antichrist, this people shall wreak much devastation and be called the god of the days. Along with their offspring, the very worst, they are a race pent in behind the Caspian Gates. They have a [tall] stature, are sooty, foul, with acutely pointed [?] teeth ...*

After a review of other peoples also, who judging by the context likewise belong to Gog-Magog, our author sums up the scene:<sup>4</sup>

*39. These peoples Alexander the Great wished to shut in, and thus he did [with them] and the other 22 realms of Gog and Magog right unto the Breasts of the North, they and their progeny who are fleeter and worse than all other peoples of the universe under heaven. In this manner he placed that people in a siege, so that the breastworks of the mountains would obstruct [them]: For the Ocean Sea, the petty islands with their very small*

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1. Nöldeke 1890, 31.

2. Hunnius 1906, 195.

3. Wuttke 1853, 18: “32. *Turchos enim alia scriptura omittit. ....Dicit eos [esse] usque Euxinum maris[,] sinum insolis vel litoribus inclusos[, usque] Byrricheos montes et Taracontas insolas contra ubera aquilonis. Gens ... de stirpe Gog et Magog. ... Quae gens Antechristi temporibus multam facient vastationem et eum deum dierum appellabunt. Cum semine pessimo eorum prosapia reclusa post portas Caspiae. Habent enim staturam fuligine terrimam, crines corvini similitudine, dentes stertissimos...*”

4. same, 27: “39. *Ipsas gentes Alexander magnus recludere voluit sicut et alia XX et duo regna Gog et Magog fecit ad ubera aquilonis, quia et istae ex ea prosapia rapida et pessima sunt ultra universas gentes quae sub caelo sunt. Et ita et hanc gentem in obsidionem posuit, ut munitos montes obstrueret: sed mare oceanum, parvulas insolas [h]ac minima intervalla, sirtisque sablonem et mollia quaeque litora pela[i]gum [sic!] undique obductum, ob hoc obstruere non potuit. Sed maximam multitudinem gladio crudeliter interfecit.*” The word *rapidus* may mean not only rapid, but also violent.

*intervals in between, the sand, the sinking sands by which the ocean shore was surrounded from every side, could not obstruct [them]. Yet he did kill off the greatest possible number cruelly by the sword.*

What is all this talk about in-hemming sands, islands, etc? Again, this version of the Doomsday peoples is exceedingly maritime. That islands and so forth be thought of at all as hemming them in is highly original. Both the above passages do however say that all this was somehow insufficient; and so the mountains were needed too.

What is common to the islands and the mountain project for hemming in the fiends, is the the Erul reed-dwellers and pirates (Cananeos, Meoparotas); we recall that not only do they inhabit the islands, they also contributed the crucial bitumen (sic) to the *Portas Caspias* for penning in Gog-Magog up in the mountains.

Underlying these weird assumptions, then, an apologetic streak is to be sensed: Dreadful these pirate folk are indeed; yet they do actually serve a good purpose, staving off creatures that are even worse.

### *5.12. Ps.-Methodios: Apocalyptic Amazons & Reds*

We cap off this sequence with an excerpt from the probably most popular of all visions and vaticinations, the Apocalypse falsely ascribed to Bishop Methodios of Patara. Here we have it all:<sup>1</sup>

*Another Antichrist teacher instructs the Amazon Queen and the Indians of the Blacks, who are in the Caspian Mountains. These shall go forth in the age of Antichrist, just like the holy Hieronymus tells.*

*These Red Jews are called Gog and Magog and shall create lots of need in the world. And the Amazon Queen shall come to Antichrist.*

The ‘Indians of the Blacks’ refer to a conviction that Indians dwell not merely in India but in Ethiopia as well, and possibly under the leadership of a Prester John. ‘These’ Indians, up in the Caspian Mountains, are somehow clearly the same as ‘these Red Jews’. Although only the Queen of the Amazons is mentioned, we are entitled to feel the presence of the Amazons as a body - and of their partners: the latter are ‘the Reds’; only here they have been further perverted into Red *Jews*. Why?

By the time the Pseudo-Methodios text was composed, the Reds had lost their original historical rôle and meaning. The concept of an entire people somehow ‘red’, and coupled with the Amazons too, was however too appealing to popular fantasy to be simply discarded. Instead, new wine was filled into old bottles, a new concept into an old one: An easy hate object for Christians throughout the ages, the Jews could now be branded by a highly suggestive colour, very conducive to associations. Thus, after the battlefields of Goths, Eruls and others had been cleansed of the Germanic Reds, a newfangled spectre arose, ideologically charged: these Red Jews...

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1. Istrin 1897, 221.

## 6. Reds & Rosomones: From Afrem to Byzance and the Edda

*No name is involved in more difficulties. No history is more interesting."*

The Germania of Tacitus, by R.G. Latham,  
London 1851, lxii: 'Rōs.

### 6.1. Afrem

There exists an intriguing text from long before Jordanes which may have bearing on our subject, in the writings of the Syrian church father Afrem (306-373), who was immensely popular among his compatriots, and also, through translations, among the Byzantines.<sup>1</sup> It is in his commentary to the Book of Genesis, as preserved in a 6th c. manuscript, that we read:<sup>2</sup>

*The progeny of the sons of Noah... Japhet begat the sons: Gamer, Magog, Taugarma, Madai, Yavan, Eliša, Tobel, Mašek and Tiras. **Yavan became the father of the Yawnāye. The sons of Yavan: Eliša, Taršīš, Ketim and Rodanim. Ketim is the father of the Rōsāyē. Rodanim is the father of the Rōdāyē, that is, those who live on the isle of Rhodes.***

The words which here have been set by us in boldface are Afrem's own interpolations to the text of the Bible in Syriac, the Pešitta. The **Yawnāyē** are the Greeks (in modern Arabic still called the *Yunān*, from Ionians). Who the **Rōsāyē** were has been discussed by a Russian specialist, who concludes that actually real 'Russian' Eastern Slavs are meant, and that their name "in fact was known to the Syrians not only in the 6th but even in the 4th c."<sup>3</sup>

The inference of a Slavonic, 'Russian' identity here is mere speculation, wholly unsubstantiated. According to this specialist, the form *rōsāyē* reflects the Greek name 'Rōs in the Prophet Ezekiel. Yet this is hardly tenable. First, the Pešitta (the Syriac Bible) has the form **rešā** (i.e. without the philological blunder). Second, the choice of a Greek form by our Syrian prelate would be wholly unmotivated and most improbable. Third, the Greek form is always undeclined (plain 'Rōs, 'oi 'Rōs).

Afrem's use of the plural, a declined form, is remarkable. It demonstrates, along with the evident assumption by Afrem that his readers are in need of no further explanation, that a nation of 'Rōs-es' was considered well-known at the time of writing, living somewhere up in the north (which is where the descendants of Japhet are located).

On the other hand, the abovesaid Syriac ethnonym may be read in another way, since in the Syriac, long **-o-** and long **-u-** are indistinguishable in writing. Hence one must take into consideration the Greek forms of the Late Classic and Middle Latin word **russ(e)us** 'reddish, ruddy'.<sup>4</sup> There are three forms preserved in early inscrip-

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1. Duval 1907, 329-335.

2. Djakonov 1939, 87, cf. Tonneau 1955.

3. Djakonov 1939, 87-88.

4. Cf. Andreatis 1983, 311, '**rousos**: "blond", Late Greek '*rousios*, from Latin..'

tions:<sup>1</sup> From the 1st c. AD *roseon* (Carthage), from the 3rd c. *tou* 'rousseou' (also Carthage), from the 4th or 5th c. *tou* 'russeou' (Rome). The 'Red Faction' in Byzantium, rival to the Blue and White Factions active in the 'hippodrome politics' which culminated in the Nika insurrection in 530 AD, were known as 'oi 'rousioi'.<sup>2</sup>

As correctly inferred by the Russian specialist above, these *Rōsāyē* were doubtless a people contemporaneous with Afrem and entertaining relations with the Byzantines in the 4th c. AD. In this very age the Eruls had close and varied contacts with the Byzantines, with whom they subsequently entered into friendly relations as mercenaries. The words of Jordanes on the Rosomones, treated below, are from the same epoch. Diverse texts by Afrem have been treated by Scandinavian scholars, yet with no discussion of who the foresaid *Rōsāyē* might be.<sup>3</sup>

We may dismiss as uninformed the opinion of one scholar: "Indessen hat es fast den Anschein, als ob diese Urrussen ihre Existenz lediglich griechischen Bibeltexten verdanken, die seit der Septuaginta unter den Greuelvölkern der Prophetien Ezechiels ein Volk 'Rhos' kennen."<sup>4</sup>

## 6.2. Pseudo-Zachariah

Another Syrian source of the utmost importance has long been lain under contribution by historians. It is found at the very end of the *Church History* penned by a Pseudo-Zachariah from Miles in 555 AD, in an addendum probably written by another contemporary, whose name is likewise unknown. We give the standard translation, for what it is worth:<sup>5</sup>

*Inside the Gates [of the Caspian Sea] there are 13 peoples... Beyond them are the people of the Ammazarté and the Dog-people; to the northwest of them are the Amazons, women with but one breast apiece, dwelling apart, waging war with weapons and on horseback. Nought of male kind is found among them; rather, when they wish to have intercourse, they draw peaceably near to a people dwelling close to their country, congregate with them for one month, and (thereupon) retire to their own land. When giving birth, they kill the child if it be male; if it be female, they however let it live. Thus do they uphold their kin.*

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1. Liddell-Scott 1966, 1575.

2. Cameron 1976.

3. Kronholm 1971, Hidal 1974, Merras 1976.

4. Zöllner 1952, 113.

5. Ahrens/Krüger 1899, 253, cf. Brooks 1921-24, Czeglédy 1961, 242. The 'classical' translation by Ahrens/Krüger runs: "Innerhalb der Pforten (des Kaspischen Meeres) 13 Völker... Innenwärts von ihnen das Volk der Ammazarté und der Hundsmenschen; nordwestlich von ihnen die Amazonen, Weiber mit je einer Brust, die für sich allein wohnen, mit Waffen und zu Pferde Kriege führen. Männliches wird bei ihnen nicht gefunden, sondern wenn sie sich beiwohnen lassen wollen, so nähern sie sich einem ihrem Lande benachbarten Volke in Frieden, haben einen Monat lang Umgang mit ihnen und kehren (dann) in ihr Land zurück. Wenn sie gebären, so töten sie es, wenn es männlich ist; wenn es aber weiblich ist, so lassen sie es leben; und so halten sie ihren Stand aufrecht. Jenes Volk, das ihnen benachbart ist, sind die Heros, Männer mit langen Gliedern, die keine Waffen haben und welche Pferde nicht tragen können, da sie (grosse) Lieder haben. – Nach Osten ferner am Fusse des Nordens wohnen noch drei schwarze Völker."



*The people neighbouring on them are the Heros, men with long limbs, not possessing weapons and whom horses are unable to carry, because they have [such gross] limbs. – Further towards the East at the foot of the North dwell three black peoples.*

The name *Herōs* here is a *Verschlimmbesserung* without textual foundation. The original has the form **Hrws**. The *Ammazarté* are, literally, ‘thumbings’, people one thumb (or ell) tall. With the Cynocephali or ‘dogheads’ of the ancients, plus the Amazons themselves, and of course the Iron Gates of legend, we would seem to be in a fairyland<sup>1</sup> of little historical interest. Thus, the historical worth of this passage has been categorically rejected by one Soviet historian;<sup>2</sup> a conclusion shared by an American colleague insisting upon the reading *heros*.<sup>3</sup>

Markwart was the first to point out the possibility of a connection between the *Hrws* and the name of Rus’ and Russia.<sup>4</sup> He insisted upon the historicity of the Pseudo-Zachariah addendum above, finally locating the *Hrws* upon the Baltic.<sup>5</sup> Several Soviet historians have likewise taken these *Hrws* in historical earnest.<sup>6</sup> Yet in all these cases the text is treated in what may be called a consumerist fashion,<sup>7</sup> with the *Hrws* being so to speak snipped out of it and hauled off to the counter, without recognition and discussion of the mythological context in which they appear.

It is precisely this context which is important, insofar as the Syrians (and, following in their steps, the Muslims) peopled the far-northern periphery of their mindscape with thumbings and maneaters, dogheads and Amazons, ‘black tribes’ and Gog-Magog. Both the historical Bishop Zachariah and his ‘pseudo’, we know, plus the author of the addendum, were Syrians, the latter probably from the town of Amida close to the Byzantine-Iranian border.

The Byzantines were possessed by the same mesh of conceptions regarding the monstrous northerners pent up behind the Iron Gates by Alexander the Great. These notions were spread abroad by the extremely popular work of one Pseudo-Methodios. And in his *Etymologies*, 9, 2, 65-66, likewise popular in Byzantium, our Spanish Bishop Isidor (560-626) describes the neighbours of the Amazons as extremely blond, so fair-haired that they are called **Albani**.

Upon closer scrutiny this blondness turns out to be reddish. The *Hrws* of Pseudo-Zachariah in reality is not the proper name of a nation at all, but the result of a contamination: The Pseudo-Zachariah addendum, written on the border to Iran, goes back upon an Iranian – or perhaps Armenian?<sup>8</sup> – source now lost. Here, a Middle Persian rendering of the Middle Greek ‘*rous-* (ultimately from, as we have seen, the

1. Bivar 1983 presents a splendid case for the historicity of such ‘fairylands’.
2. Petruhin 1982, 1985.
3. Pritsak 1981, I, 6.
4. 1903, 355-387.
5. 1913, 264-277.
6. In particular Rybakov 1981, 1982. Also, e.g. Lebedev 1985, 196.
7. I prefer the Russian, not totally translatable, *potrebitel’skij podxod*.
8. Pigulevskaja 1952, 47, cited by e.g. Solov’ev 1957, 135, Thulin 1981, 182: orally transmitted by an Armenian from Amida held prisoner by the Huns; Schramm 1982, 34: “offenbar über einen armenischen Informanten”. I prefer Czégledy’s explanation, which is phonetically equally satisfying – and much more convincing, in view of the (Iranian-and-Syrian based) literary tradition of which it is a part.

Latin *russeus*) has been misunderstood by the Syrian scribe – possibly, we may add, under influence of the Greek (Biblical) Ros.<sup>1</sup>

How this contamination occurred has been demonstrated by the Hungarian Orientalist Czeglédy,<sup>2</sup> with recourse to the Arabic text of ad-Dināwarī. We quote Czeglédy:

“Die Amazonen und ihre Männer beschreibt auch Dinawari (ed. Guirgass, ch. 39) als ein einziges Volk. Bei ihm werden aber Rötlichkeit und rotes Haar (*umma mina l-nās ḥumra l-alwān wa-ṣuḥḥ*) als wichtigste Kennzeichen der Männer der Amazonen angegeben. Ein besonderer Name für dieses Volk wird nicht angeführt. Dinawaris Angabe erweist sich dadurch als besonders wichtig, weil sie die Vermutung nahelegt, dass sich im griechischen Original für ‘rot’, ‘rötlich’ das Wort ‘rot’ sich befand, das von Dinawari richtig übersetzt, in der Pehlevi-Quelle des Pseudo-Zacharias dagegen als Eigennahme empfunden und daher unter Weglassung der Endung -ioi als HRWS (= hrus) transliteriert wurde...

Von allen Dingen müssen wir aber die Frage beantworten, ob wir in diesem Volke nicht ein wirkliches Volk zu erkennen haben. Die Angaben des Pseudo-Zacharias, nach der die Männer der Amazonen dermassen lange Extremitäten haben, dass sie von Pferden nicht getragen werden können, zusammen mit anderen Angaben über ihre blauen Augen, bzw. rötlichen Zügen, könnte nämlich ebenfalls auf ein wirkliches Volk bezogen werden...”

Czeglédy is mistaken only in one regard: He insists on explaining the ‘redness’ of these gentlemen from the *History of Alexander* by Pseudo-Callisthenes. This is patently wrong. The reference here is to PsC II, 32, 1: “*From there we broke up and arrived in a barren land in which savages lived, like unto giants, of fiery-coloured apparition like lions.*” (There is also PsC III, 28, 1, on a lion-faced people.) There is nothing here to substantiate a link with the above passage; just as little as there is a connection here with that literary and mythological figure, the ‘Prince of ‘Ros’.<sup>3</sup>

As will be seen in the following, the ‘red’ mates of the Amazons are a novelty – inspired in part by literature indeed, only not by PsC – yet reflecting also real-life observation of a far-northerly people.

### 6.3. Rosomones of Jordanes

In the Gothic historian Jordanes c. 550 AD there is brief mention of the ‘tribe’ or ‘folk’ (*gens*) of the **Rosomones**: Being subservient to the Gothic emperor Er-

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1. Thulin 1981, 181 sees the Biblical ‘prince of ‘Ros’ as “the most probable explanation ... of how it got into Zachariah Rhetor’s text”. This, as the Arabic sources below demonstrate, is incorrect.
  2. 1958; 1961, 243-244, 247-249, cf. Pigulevskaia 1958, 75-97. Marquart 1903, 360 adduced ad-Dināwarī’s text on “the Amazons as a people red of hue, with reddish hair and blue eyes” (sic), yet without grasping its significance and the solution *Hrws* < ‘*rousioi*, ‘Reds’.
  3. as insisted upon by Mel’nikova & Petrušin 1989, 34 n. 60, citing the Prophet Ezekiel 38:2-3, 39:1: “The mention of a people Hros in the ‘Ecclesiastical History’ compilation by Pseudo-Zachariah (mid-6th c.) hails back to this Biblical tradition. Therefore the attempts to identify it with the ‘Russes’ – the Slavs, the Eastern group of the Antes, etc. – are unfounded.”

manaric, they betrayed him, thus causing his death and precipitating the downfall of the Gothic empire to the Hunnic onslaught in 375 AD (*Getica*, ch. 24).

The sole representatives of this tribe known to us by name from Jordanes happen to carry names recognized as Scandinavian – Sunilda and her brothers Sarus and Ammius in Jordanes, etymologies for which have long been established;<sup>1</sup> etymologies which indeed are incontestable in view of the mention in the *Snorra Edda* (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 46-48) of these same persons – Jörmunrekr, Svanhild, Sörlri and Hamðir – along with several others, unknown to us from Jordanes. Jordanes and Snorri (plus Saxo, on whom more presently below) are mutually complementary – demonstrating that the events in which the Rosomones played a pivotal part were still being remembered and bruited about orally some 850 years later (the *Snorra Edda* being penned c. 1220).

According to Snorri, Svanhild's father was Sigurðr Fáfnisbani ('killer of Fáfnir'); the subject of legend, he was "*the most renowned of all army-kings*" – a pointer in itself (more on this below) to the Eruls. His wife Guðrún, Svanhild's mother, was later wed by Attila the Hun; and Svanhild herself, by Jörmunrekr, Ermanaric. When Jörmunrekr/ Ermanaric killed Svanhild, the latter was avenged by her brothers Sörlri/ Sarus and Hamðir/ Ammius, according to both Jordanes and Snorri (plus Saxo). Indeed, Snorri and Saxo give us details (e.g., on Svanhild's relatives and on her suspected infidelity towards Jörmunrekr) which are lost to us in the perfunctory and bigoted digest by Jordanes, nearly seven centuries earlier.<sup>2</sup>

One analysis of the traditions regarding Ermanaric and his downfall tends to recognize Alans in the enigmatic Rosomones, but nevertheless stresses that the ones with the greatest grounds for hating Ermanaric and for betraying him were the Eruls.<sup>3</sup> It is further inferred that the tradition on Sunilda/Svanhild was originally Gothic, but came to be adopted and passed on by the Eruls. This 'Alan-Gothic' view is surely mistaken.

The Eruls certainly did hate Ermanaric, who had cruelly exterminated a great number of them, according to Jordanes. It has consequently been generally concluded that by the Rosomones the Eruls are meant.<sup>4</sup>

An intrepid variety of this line is to judge that the Sarus of myth, battling the Gothic ruler Ermanaric from the Amal lineage, is the same person as the historically

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1. cf. Brady 1943, 18-18, Dronke 1969, 195, Ploss 1966, 24-25. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 21-22: "Whereas Sunilda is unquestionably a Germanic name, the derivation of Sarus from Gothic *sarwa* 'weapon, armor', and of Ammius from Gothic *\*hama* 'to arm', is unconvincing. There is no satisfactory etymology of Rosomoni. Sarus occurs later as the name of a Goth.. The name can be compared with Sarosius or Saroes, who in about 500 was king of the Alans in the Caucasus.."
  2. We shall see later on to what extent there is enlightenment to be found in Snorri and Saxo on that much-discussed name – or nickname – the Rosomones.
  3. Brady 1943, 1, 3-10, 165, and especially 185-186. This opinion is shared by others. Thus, e.g. Wolfram 1980, 200: "Wahrscheinlich handelt es sich dabei wohl um den epischen Beinamen eines der von Ermanrich unterworfenen Völker, am ehesten der Eruler.."
  4. cf. Stender-Petersen 1953, 47, 213-214. One exception, generally overlooked, is Heinzel 1887, 516, who on exceedingly tenuous grounds takes them to be Slavs – discussed and dismissed by Gschwantler 1971, 168-171.

attested Sarus, who fought the Gothic Balt lineage, i.e. an Erulo-Gothic challenger to both main divisions of the Goths proper.<sup>1</sup> This interpretation has not been gainsaid by other scholars in the field.<sup>2</sup>

Quite another, expressly Anti-Normanist, view on “the ethnically undetermined Rosomones” is the following:<sup>3</sup> “In the name *Roso-mones* the second part corresponds to the Ossetian *mojne* ‘man, person’. Hence the word *Roso-mones* designates ‘Russian people’, ‘Ros-folk’.” In this, our Slavophile *akademik* is making use of one particular item suiting him from the theory of a Normanist historian;<sup>4</sup> a theory which has already been thoroughly invalidated.<sup>5</sup>

Such cerebrations invite serious misgivings. Utilization of Ossetian lexicology by Jordanes is not easily explained. In such a case, moreover, the form to be expected would be **rokhsa-** or **rokhsojnete**, cf. the **Roxolani**, properly *Rokhsolani* ‘white Alans’, from the composite *rokh*s ‘white’ + intermediary *-a-* + the plural form of the archaic word *mojne* ‘husband, man’.<sup>6</sup>

There may plausibly be some connection between the ‘White Alans’ and the half-legendary Albani (literally, ‘Whites’), neighbours of the Amazons, yet this remains to be proven;<sup>7</sup> and it is irrelevant to our topic.

Explanations to the term *Rosomones* may be put forth other than those on the Eruls, the Biblical Ros, and Ossetian lexicology. A derivation from the name of the ‘Savromatian’ king Rausimod mentioned by Zosimos has been suggested.<sup>8</sup> On purely linguistic grounds alone this is inadmissible.

Theoretically, Ros- may reflect Old (or rather Proto-) Norse *hross* ‘horse’, which with the genitive case ending *-a-* would make for an unattested *\*Hrossamannir*. In Jordanes, this would produce either a Chrosomones or, equally plausibly, Rosomones, as the Greek initial R- is a faint fricative. This in turn conjures up a picture of horse-riding nomads; which is credible enough in its own right, although it absolutely does not tally with what we know of the Eruls.<sup>9</sup> If however ‘riders’ were meant, why not say so, instead of the more cumbersome (and unattested) *Hrossamannir*?

Another, more more apposite suggestion has been that the name reflects the Gothic word *raus* ‘reeds’, as a reference to the swamps of the Maeotis – and to the nickname of the Eruli as the Eluri, ‘swamp-dwellers’.<sup>10</sup> The objection to this is that it leaves the *-mones* unexplained.<sup>11</sup>

The elusive Rosomones may however be approached in another way.

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1. Varady 1969, 217-218, 601.

2. Wenskus 1976, 14, Wolfram 1979, 29.

3. Rybakov 1982, 84-86.

4. Vernadsky 1946, 97-99, 278.

5. Stender-Petersen 1953, 85.

6. cf. Abaev 1949, 177-178, 1979, 299-300.

7. According to Bibikov 1981, 139, “it is important to note that the term Albani often is confused with the ethnonym Alani”.

8. Lukman 1949, 50-51.

9. on horselessness of *Hrws* and Eruls, see ch. 3 and 7.

10. Marquart 1903, 282-284.

11. Gschwantler 1971, 172.

## 6.4. Rosmo Mountains & Burgundians

More than a century ago, the Rosomones were explained as a derivative of the Old High German word **rosamo**, meaning ‘ruddy-brown, chestnut-coloured’, in the accusative case **rosomon**. In Norse, the word would be **\*rusma** (root form **rusman**); it is not directly attested, except in the composite **rosm hvalr**, whence modern *hvalross* ‘whale-**rus**’, this animal being so named for its ruddy colour.<sup>1</sup>

The spelling *Rosomones* itself presents no difficulty, as both Gothic and Latin words in **-u-** are rendered with **-o-** by Jordanes. The appellation *Rosomones*, preserved in our Gothic author, is Gothic in its form. We may compare the tribe of the Svear (whence Swedes, Sweden), named *Suehans* by Tacitus, with Goths his most likely informants. *Rosomones* comes across then as a Latinization of Gothic **\*Rusmunans**, with **-ans** being the tribal generic as in (the likewise Gothic) *Suehans*.

In this context, the ‘Rosmo mountains’ mentioned in the Old Norse *Lay on Atli* (Attila) have been focused upon. On linguistic grounds alone, it has been maintained that *Rosmo-* indeed signifies red.<sup>2</sup>

In this lay, Gunnar the king of the Burgundians, the brother of Guðrún, brother-in-law first to the dead Sigurðr and now to Atli, has been lured to his coming death at the hands of Atli; cornered, Gunnar quoths:<sup>3</sup>

*Late it is now, sister,  
to miss the Niflungs,  
Far to seek  
My folk,  
From the Rosmo mountains of the Rhine  
to reach my men.*

Some scholars have judged the *Rosmo-fjöll* and the *Rosomones* to be related;<sup>4</sup> others have rejected this.<sup>5</sup>

The problem has been treated to a discussion by a Norwegian specialist,<sup>6</sup> who rejects the connection, concluding instead that this **Rosmo-** reflects a lost **\*vrosmo-**, from **\*Wormaz(a)feltho**, meaning the mountains near the Mid-German town of Worms.

This is a rather forced conjecture. Bordering on the lower Rhine was the territory of the Burgunds, whose capital from 407 until its sack by the Huns in 437 was Worms. Yet ‘the Worms mountains’ are otherwise unattested. The same of course goes for that most unnatural-sounding construction ‘the Worms mountains of the

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1. Bugge 1883, 3-6, quoting Allens, *History of North American Pinnipedes*, Wash. 1880: “...It is everywhere of a yellowish-brown colour, except on the belly and at the base of the flippers, where it passes into dark reddish-brown or chestnut.” Bugge also cites the synonymous word *rostungr*, from **\*rostr** ‘rust’, cf. Latvian *ruste* ‘a brown-red or yellow colour, as in the wood of the alder tree’.

2. Walde-Pokorny 1953.

3. *Atlakviða*, 17: Bugge 1965, 286, Jónsson 1905, 406.

4. Bugge 1883, 11, Sejmund/Gering 1931, III, 350-351.

5. Jiriczek 1908, I, 57.

6. Holtsmark 1935, 1956.

Rhine': 'the Worms mountains' alone are conceivable, if only just so, but the additional qualification *of the Rhine* is superfluously non-sensical, with regard to Worms and the said mountains alike.

An identification of the Rosomones tribe with precisely the Burgunds has already been suggested by one scholar.<sup>1</sup> Who then were the Burgunds?

Certain 'Burgunds' are located alongside the Black Sea Goths before 257 AD in Jordanes, i.e. shortly before the mass appearance of the Eruls in 267. It has been commonly assumed that these Burgunds were nearly annihilated by the Goths, or by the Gepids,<sup>2</sup> c. 290 AD. The Byzantine poet Mamertinus in his *Panegyric* on Emperor Maximinian glories in how the barbarians are busy annihilating each other: "*The Goths almost completely annihilated the Burgundi, and in turn, for the defeated, the Alamanni and likewise the Tervingi took up arms.*"<sup>3</sup>

The Byzantine historian Zosimos mentions the *Uorougoundoi*, whereas his colleague Agathias lists the Hunnic tribes of the '*Kotrigouroi, Outrigouroi, Oultritsouroi, Bourougoundoi*'.<sup>4</sup> A most understandable opinion then is that "Mamertinus' Burgundi and Zosimos' Ourougoundoi are obviously the same people", meaning a tribe of the Huns.<sup>5</sup>

This is debatable. Or rather, it is quite thinkable (although wholly unprovable) that Mamertinus had Huns in mind when using the name Burgundi – just like he may have intended Alani when penning Alamanni. Yet the Tervingi are well attested as a Germanic (Gothic!) clan or group. And the *Burgundi* are, as a name, no mere misspelling for the *Ourougoundoi*; instead, they point back to the preceding presence of real and Germanic Burgundi upon the Black Sea littoral.

Hence, we cannot second the opinion ventured on the Burgundi in connection with their mention by Mamertinus: "To call them 'east' Burgundians as if they were a splinter of the 'west' Burgundians, somehow, sometime, somewhere chopped off from the mother folk, is sheer arbitrariness."<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, there were clearly *Burgundi* east and west.

Is it fortuitous that this was the case with the *Eruli* too?

For even a Mid-German localization of the Rosmo mountains does not free us from grappling once again with the Eruls: There existed not only an Eastern branch of the latter, with whom the Byzantines and the Goths of the Black Sea and Italy alike had to deal, and whose troops by and by made their appearance in Southern Germany as well.<sup>7</sup> There was also a western branch of the Eruls, albeit of lesser significance than the eastern ones. These western Eruls penetrated from the southern Baltic littoral to the lower reaches of the Rhine, first attacking the Roman Empire together with

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1. Gutenbrunner 1936, 347-349.

2. according to Jordanes, *Getica*, cap. 97; Mierow 1966, 78.

3. XVII, 1, Galletier 1949 or 1955, 65: *Gothi Burgundos penitus excidunt rursumque pro victis armantur Alamanni itemque Tervingi.*

4. Zosimos, I, ch. 31; Agathias, V, ch. 11.

5. Menchen-Helfen 1973, 453.

6. *ibid.*

7. Brady 1943, 185-186.

the Batavians in 286 AD, and subsequently entering into the auxiliaries of the Roman army along with the Batavians.<sup>1</sup>

What is the relationship between Burgunds and Eruls?

They were not **only** friends. Thus, Eruls as well as other tribes joined the Roman expedition against the kingdom of the Burgunds in 435, i.e. two years before the sack of the latter by the Huns. Is this what is referred to in the Edda lays? Here, king Gunnar is friend and brother-in-law of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, before killing him. Clearly, this enmity was a thing that needed explaining; which the Elder Edda does by a curse.

This is the curse of the gold. Sigurðr kills Fáfnir and Fáfnir's brother (Sigurð's own foster-father) Regin over this "*gold of the gods*"; then Sigurðr is felled by king Gunnar and the latter's adviser Högni over it; whereupon in turn Gunnar and Högni are killed by Atli over it; and Atli by his wife, Gunnar's sister and Sigurð's widow, Guðrún.

The secret of the whereabouts of this gold dies with Gunnar and Högni; the gold was hidden by Sigurðr, "*in the flowing Rhine*",<sup>2</sup> or in "*the mountains of the Rhine*";<sup>3</sup> and this must be the locality meant by the Rosmo mountains: either the mountains of the **rosma** 'redness', meaning the 'red gold', of the Rhine; or, preferably, where the Rosomones, led by Sigurðr, were cantoned; or both.

Whence that other name, Burgundy, Bourgogne in present-day France? We look to the Danish isle of Bornholm,<sup>4</sup> in the southern part of the Baltic, whence hailed the Eruls. The name of Bornholm stems from Borgundarholm, with *borg-* 'fastness, castle' and *holm* 'cliff' reflecting the nature of the island. The suffix *-und* (in the genitive, *-undar*) is met with in the names of islands and rivers; and the very same toponymic Borgund is preserved in Western Norway.<sup>5</sup> "Dass die Burgunden in ihrem Grundstock aus Bornholm stammten, darf wohl jetzt als Gemeingut der Wissenschaft angesehen werden."<sup>6</sup> We may compare with the tribe of the Rugi, Holm-rugi, from what is still known as Rogaland in Norway, who settled both on the southern coast of the Baltic (Rügen, etc.) and in the territory of present-day Austria.<sup>7</sup>

Was it the Eruls who introduced the name, and who constituted a beginning of the Burgundians?

There are four arguments militating for this: first, Eruls and Burgundians hail from southern Scandinavia, via the Baltic; which is where we find Borgundarholm – rallying-ground of the Eruls. Second, both the Eruls and the Burgundians crop up in the very same two places, by the Black and Azov Seas on the one hand, by the

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1. Rappaport 1920, 1152.

2. *Atlakviða*: Jónsson 1905, 409, Bugge 1965, 288.

3. *Völundarkviða*: Jónsson 1905, 152, Bugge 1965, 166.

4. Contested.

5. Communication by Dr. Ottar Grønvik, Oslo, 1996.

6. Schmidt 1934, 129.

7. same, 117-126.

Middle and Lower Rhine on the other. Third, the east Burgundians disappear roughly when the Eruls appear; while the west Burgundians appear when and where the early western Eruls have disappeared. Fourth, there is the *Rosmo*- name.

For another venture than the Worms one now opens up gracefully: The colour that came to be associated with the name of the Burgundians, *burgunderrot* ‘Burgundy red’, is indeed the German *rosamo*, ‘ruddy-brown, chestnut’. Since the name of the Burgundians has no etymological connection with this colour,<sup>1</sup> the logical inference is that it stuck to them for being historically associated with another, complementary identity of theirs.<sup>2</sup> As there are no red mountains by the Rhine, the *Rosmo*-mountains reveal themselves simply as this: the mountains of the *Rosomones*.

So why have two names, or three: *Burgundi*, *Eruli*, *Rusmunans*?

The eastern Eruls bore several names,<sup>3</sup> and ‘Burgundians’ according to this interpretation is the first one known to us, telling simply where they came from, while they were still relative newcomers. In the east, this name came to be superseded by the more high-sounding lump name Earls, serving as it surely did to weld together young men from very many different places (and not just Borgundarholm!) within a common identity. Finally, ‘the Reds’ would be a nickname given them by outsiders. In the west, when a kingdom was being consolidated, the need arose for a name differentiating it from the Eruls in general; hence, the Burgundians.

Nothing would be more natural than for such a ‘normalized’ realm to still keep taking in, and paying for the services of, the mobile, volatile élite ‘shock’ troops whom we are investigating – and over whom the Elder Edda’s Sigurðr was a leader;<sup>4</sup> and nothing would be more natural than for the Erul king and the local Burgundian king to fall foul of each other over the division of spoils – which the Erul king would be prone to define (as it is in the Elder Edda) as “*the gold of the gods*”.

It is in the best of Norse epic tradition for the doomed king Gunnar, beset by Attila’s men, to miss ‘his’ men, not in the sense of his Niflung dynasty only, nor in that of Burgundian troops proper, which is too sepid and obvious to merit poetic interest, but in the sense of the **Rosmo** troops, the Erul mercenaries under their leader Sigurðr, whom he had himself so tragically killed, thus also dooming himself.<sup>5</sup>

### 6.5. *Rosomones* = ‘Red’ or ‘Swift’ Eruls

An interpretation of the *Rosomones* name as meaning ‘the Reds’, then, is not new; it was argued more than a century ago. Here, ‘the Red ones’ or ‘the Blonds’ was indeed taken to refer to the colour of the skin or the hair, cf. *rosamo* and Old Norse *rosm-*.

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1. Perrin 1968, 92-97 (“Burgondes et Burgondions – Les origines d’un nom”).
  2. Walde-Pokorny 1966, I, 872-873 treats both *Rosmo-fjöll* and *rosamo* as colour names. On ‘Burgunds’: Wolfram 1979, 52, 97.
  3. on Eudosians (= Juthlanders), Saqsyn (Saxons), even Goths, for the Crimean Eruls, see below.
  4. cf. on Sigurðr as “*the most renowned of war-kings*” below.
  5. A parallel is given in the *Hamðismál* below, where Hamðir and Sörli kill their (half-)brother Erpr, only themselves to regret it and die.



Yet this redness was also felt to have been chosen for a nickname expressive of the perfidious nature of this *gens infida*.<sup>1</sup>

The latter inference is unfounded: There is nothing to substantiate that a red hue was ascribed to these folk *because* they were treacherous. On the other hand, their redness apparently did become a symbol and a byname for blatant unreliability and treacherousness (along with a like view of Judas as *rufus*, i.e. redhaired, cf. on the 'Red Jews' above).

Thus, the German poem on Wigalois by Wirnt von Gravenberg from the early 13th c. reaches back into time when characterizing the red knight who is Wigalois' opponent:<sup>2</sup>

*His beard and his hair  
Were red and fiery of hue;  
Of these [folk] I hear said  
That they carry hearts so false.*

This fits 'the Reds', if we by them mean the Eruls, perfectly. The treacherous and 'false-hearted' nature of the Eruls is underlined e. g. by Procopius of Caesarea (one good grounds for this being the killing of their own king by the Eruls "*for no apparent reason*").

The latest attempt to date at explaining the name of the Rosomones vindicates the 'red' interpretation, while introducing an additional, complementary 'rôle call':<sup>3</sup>

"The historical interpretation of the name Rosomones presents us with no small difficulties. Out of the explanations proffered in later years, two are best borne out by the frail material at hand...

According to the [one explanation], the Rosomones would be identical with the **gens** subjected by Ermanarich, their name like that of the Eruls signifying 'the swift ones', 'the storming ones'.

The other tenable etymology sees in the Rosomones 'the Reds'. This appellation might stem from their hair being coloured red, which is known in particular from warrior bands who swore allegiance to a godly ancestor and group leader. In this case too, a group thus defined is to be identified with the Eruls..."

The present writer agrees with the latter interpretation; yet not on its own. For the interpretation of *Rosomones* as 'the quick ones' is not irrelevant either; nor is it to be excluded on purely linguistic grounds.

One additional argument may be seen as militating in its favour; not merely the 'quickness' of the Eruls when fighting, but the possibly **holy** character of this trait: the verb *rasa* (and *rása*?) in Old Norse, still used today, means both 'to rush about' and 'to be angry, to rage'.<sup>4</sup> Another verb is just as apposite: *rúsa* means both 'to rush' and 'to inebriate, to excite by a stimulant', in Norse as well as in modern Scandina-

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1. Bugge 1883, 8-10.

2. same, 10, citing also later Nordic literature and fairy tales (e.g. Ridder Rød, 'the Red Knight', in Asbjørnsen & Moe's tale about Fugl Dam).

3. Gschwantler 1971, 164-176.

4. Heggstad 1963, 528.

vian (where *rus* signifies ‘state of intoxication’); in German, both meanings are likewise found in the verb *rauschen*.<sup>1</sup>

These two times two meanings may have been closely related on a higher plane as well: Their fleetness being the professional trademark of the Eruls, the question is – what did they utilize to induce the utmost degree of fleet and forceful agility?

This utmost ‘rage’ was induced by their drinking a heady mead or other stimulant, turning them into *berserks* (‘bear-apparitions’, or literally ‘bear-clad ones’) or *ulfheðnar* (‘wolf-pelts’, *heðinn* = ‘pelt’<sup>2</sup>); and the one whose brute force then possessed them was Óðinn, Woden, literally ‘the Raging’. A related name, perhaps used as a more personal honorific, is *ylfingar* ‘wolflings’.<sup>3</sup>

Another name is relevant to this: The *Herelingas* mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Widsith poem. They have long since been taken for Eruls.<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, the *Herelingas* are “the followers or subjects of *Herela*... the leader of the Wild Host (i.e. Woden under another name);” for: “The name *Herela* means ‘he of the army’ and obviously befits Woden in his capacity as leader of the Wild Host.”<sup>5</sup>

It is of course not correct to see in the name itself that of the Eruls. On the other hand, the Eruls surely reckoned themselves as *Herelingas*, the fighters of *Herela*; and the Latin form *Heruli* may have been found most apposite by their own leaders and their contemporaries alike, with its alliterative association to *Herela*/Óðinn and his army.

So much for the ‘raging’ interpretation of the Rosomones.

We may come closer to a solution of what the Rosomones name once signified by inspecting later tradition, as preserved in Snorri and Saxo. It will be seen (i. a. in ch. 18 below) that these materials support the interpretation of their name as primarily signifying ‘the Reds’.

## 6.6. *Svanhild and her Folk’s Hue*

Besides the philological interpretation of the name **Rosomones** (Jordanes) and of **Hrws** (Pseudo-Zachariah) as ‘the Reds’, there are some most intriguing references to hair colour(ing) among the Rosomones.

First, where Jordanes speaks of Sunilda and her brothers Ammius and Sarus (§ 129), Snorri Sturlusonar describes *Svanhild* – as does Saxo the Grammarian (on whom more below). We first quote Jordanes:<sup>6</sup>

*True, the Gothic king Ermanaric had prevailed over many peoples, as we have related above. Yet while he was contemplating the advent of the Huns, the faithless people of the Rosomones, which at the time was subject to him, succeeded in betraying him in the following wise.*

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1. Cf e.g. Hellquist 1948, 853: *rus*. Also, same: *rysk*, *rusk* = mad.

2. Malone 1962, 82.

3. Paff 1959, 227.

4. Matthaei 1899, 326, Marquart 1903, 380.

5. Malone 1959, 193-196, 1962, 170.

6. Martens 1884, 42. Slightly different wording in Mierow 1966, 87.

*When he, in rage over the treasonous flight of her husband, had let a wife by the name of Sunilda from precisely this people bind to wild horses and thus be torn apart, her brothers Sarus and Ammius avenged the death of their sister, thrusting their sword[s] in Ermanaric's side...*

This is to be compared with Snorri:<sup>1</sup>

*Once when he was riding home from a wood where he and his retinue had been hunting, King Jörmunrekk caught sight of Svanhild where she sat dyeing her hair. They rode her down and trampled her to death under their horses' hooves.*

*When Guðrún heard this, she egged on her sons to avenge Svanhild and, when they were making ready for the expedition, procured for them coats of mail and helmets which were so strong that no weapon could pierce them...*

The 'detail' of Svanhild sitting and dyeing her hair is of course not fortuitous. The reason it has survived all the way to Snorri (and us) is that it was meaningful, even crucially so: In dyeing her hair, Sunilda is demonstrating – in the eyes of Ermanaric at least – her solidarity with her menfolk, the 'Reds', who have evidently made off to join up with the Huns, or to stand aside while the Goths face the Huns alone. With the dyeing of the hair, an ancient custom signalling war, Svanhild (although a woman) may have been seen to signal not 'merely' solidarity with her folk but also her wish for hostilities. If so, no wonder Ermanaric flew into a rage.

In the Elder Edda too, we find a couple of references to Svanhild's hair and hue, showing again that this was remembered as being important.<sup>2</sup>

Second, in the German *Thiðrekssaga* there is yet another pointer: Here, Ermanaric's aide Sifka (or Middle High German, Sibiche<sup>3</sup>) avenges the dishonouring of his wife at the hands of Ermanaric by giving disastrous counsel to his lord. The unnamed wife has been taken to be Svanhild/Sunilda, her otherwise nameless consort on the other hand hereby receiving a name. And as pointed out long ago, in this High German version of Ermanaric's downfall, the forementioned Sifka is described in the most relevant of colourful terms:<sup>4</sup>

*Sifka – his hair is as red as blood, or as the petals of the rose, and curly [or: or as the grass which is called rosalite, and cascadingly locky]. His face is light of hue and red-freckled. He has a shining body, with freckles all over, he has got a red beard, and... .*

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1. G. Jónsson 1945, 172-173: "Þá leit Jörmunrekkur konungur Svanhildi, er hann reið ór skógi frá veiðum með hirði sína, hvar hon sat at haddbliku; þá ridu þeir á hana ok tráðu hana undir hestofótum til bana..." Young 1965, 116, has the misprint or mistranslation "drying her hair" (sic).
  2. *Guðrúnarhvöt*, Jónsson 1905, 448, Bugge 1965, 314: *.. inn hvíta/ hadd Svanhildar. / auri troddo / vnd íóa fótom...* "The white [or: light] hair of Svanhild/ Was trodden in the gravel/ By the hooves of the horses." Also, the *Shorter Sigurðarkviða*, Jónsson 1905, 365, Bugge 1965, 166: *sína mey*.
  3. cf. **Bikki** in other sources: Hamðismál, *Atlakviða*.
  4. Bugge 1883, 9, citing the Norse version of the *Þiðrikssaga*, ch. 186: "*Sifca hans har er rautt som bløð eða grasit oc karhojðadr* [or: *eða þat gras er heitir rusalitter oc liðaðiz allt i lokka*]. *hans andlit er leost oc rauðfrecnottr* [or: *rauðfrecnott*]. *oc biartan likama hævir hann oc allan freknottan, rautt skegg heuir hann oc hælldr sitt...*"

Third, in the heroic lay of the *Hamðismál*, too, there is an allusion to the colour of the skin. Here, when Guðrún's two sons Hamðir and Sörli ride off to avenge their sister Svanhildr, their half-brother<sup>1</sup> Erpr volunteers to help out, but is rebuffed; they quarrel, and he is killed. Now the primary meaning of the word *erpr* in other connections seems to be precisely 'reddish brown'.<sup>2</sup>

That this epithet is said for the sake of slighting and spiting is clear from the context, his two brothers being provocatively rude throughout. This remark on *his* hue in turn can only be meaningful with reference to *their* hue, or that of their whole stock. Were they *all* 'reddish-brown' (Erpr, his two brothers, and all their people)? Then there would be no bite to it, no slight. Or did they single him out, as being a bit off the ideal mark, to the darker side;<sup>3</sup> meaning that *they* are fairer red?<sup>4</sup>

There may also be a 'socio-racial' twist to this: *Erpr* sounds denigratory from the mouths of these haughty brothers, much like a thrall's name (cf. *Karkr*, etc.); and he is indeed branded as "*the son of a friðla*" – a woman of inferior status. Now thralls (and their offspring) were considered to be ideally of a darker complexion, whereas the 'Earls' were, equally ideally, fair red.

There is nothing *socially* objectionable in being the "*son of a friðla*"; Norse literature is full of such offspring rising even to claim the throne. Yet in this context it is clearly a slur – on their mother's relationship with Erp's father.<sup>5</sup> Erpr appeals to his half-brothers as a relative, a *frendi*, they reject him, both in this capacity and as not up to their mettle. The latter is understandable if their outfit is pre-defined as exclusive, open only to young men of high birth, or to specialist fighters, or to the two combined; which apparently was the case with the Earls.

## 6.7. *Rôle(s) of the Elder Edda*

The heroic lays of the Elder Edda are great and highly concentrated drama; highly 'concentrated' too, telescoped, is time. Thus, at first sight the Gothic emperor Jörmunrekr (Ermanaric, c. 350-375) is a contemporary of the Hun Atli (Attila, 433-453), and even of the great Ostrogoth king Þjóðrekr (Theodoric the Great, c. 456-

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1. In the *Guðrúnarhvöt*, Sörli, Erpr and Hamðir are all sons of Guðrún and Jónakr: Bugge 1965, 311, Jónsson 1905, 443.
  2. Walde-Pokorny I, 146. From **erpr** probably **iarpšcamr** in *Hamðismál*: Bugge 1965, 318 n.; and modern Jörpeland, from *jarpr* 'brown': Aschehoug & Gyldendals *Store norske leksikon*, Oslo 1988, 7: 711 'Jörpeland'.
  3. cf. Malone 1962, 144 on the early (1st c. AD?) Gothic hero Erpamara: "...we have seen that the simplex *amara* was used by the Goths as a personal name, and this fact makes it possible to presume that the hero's true name was Amara and that the prefixed *erp* was nothing more than an adjectival epithet, eminently in place if the hero was dark rather than fair in physical type..."
  4. Snorri quotes the poem by Bragi the Old (c. 800-830 AD) in honour of king Ragnar Sigurðssonar of Denmark, where Erpr is contrasted with his "raven-black brothers": Storm 1874, 78.
  5. In other lays, *Atlakviða* and *Hamðismál*, as well as the prose *Dráp Niflunga*, one Erpr is the son of Atli, i.e. Attila: Bugge 1965, 290, 317, 264, Jónsson 1905, 373, 453, 373.

526). Upon closer scrutiny, these leaders are portrayed in the Edda not as primarily interacting contemporaries of each other, but as party to the heroic and tragic feats and fates of the main protagonists;<sup>1</sup> this goes to show how secondary (in various degrees) these otherwise prime movers of history really are to the Edda poets, in comparison.

The protagonists around whom most of the heroic lays revolve are already known to us: Sigurðr-the-Killer-of-Fáfni, his wife Guðrún, and their children: Svanhild (in Jordanes above, Sunilda), Hamðir (Ammius), and Sörli (Sarus). A lesser, originally distinct tradition comprises the lays on the *yfling* ('wolfling', descendant of the wolves) Helgi-the-killer-of-Hunding (Hundingsbani) – the very names showing up the conflict between 'the wolves' (meaning the Eruls) and 'the dogs' (the Langobards); for safe measure, Helgi is expressly stated to be a close relative of Sigurðr.

One message then is that just about all the 'leading characters' in the Edda are kin of a kind, belonging to one and the same geographically wide-flung royal or semi-royal clan. Who are these people? How did they come to occupy this singular position in Norse literary tradition on – and from – the Migration Age?

According to our researches above, on the Rosomones, they belong to the Erul leadership. And the reason they came to occupy and keep such a position in the minds of posterity, is easily explicable:

The Eruls were originally and primarily Scandinavians; they were regularly replenished by recruits from most of the tribes left in, as well as those having emigrated from, Scandinavia; and following the defeat of the Eruls under their king Rodulf in the early 6th c., a large party of them elected to 'return home', to the shores of the Baltic,<sup>2</sup> and to Funen, as it seems, and then to Bohuslen, wherefrom the *Eril* rune-masters spread out. These rune-masters did more than bequeath us their proud "I the Eril" inscriptions; it was in their best proper interest to impress their local and more or less new audiences up in Scandinavia with the flashing, dashing heyday glory of the Eruls down south.

This explains recurrent use of the epithet *suðrönnr* 'southern', of Sigurdr and his folk, plus some others.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Þjóðrekr occurs in the *Shorter Guðrúnarkviða*, as one of Atli's officers, having lost 30 (sic) men; yet this is a mere background, showing up Atli's power – or simply a trace of, for once, German influence in the Edda (on which e.g. Storm 1874, 87-88); the person he relates to is Guðrún.
  2. Their 'return' may explain much of the desolation wrought around the Baltic, from the Åland archipelago to Sconen, c. 530-550 AD. The 'plague of Justinian' has been one attempt at an explanation – which does not explain burnings of houses on the littoral, the erection of fastnesses, or why the population is decimated on the coast but thrives in the inland, e.g. Mid-Sweden and Trøndelag in Norway; also, the plague probably never made it that far north, according to recent researches. All this will have to await further study.
  3. e.g., *Shorter Sigurðarkviða* (on Sigurðr), *Second Helgakviða* (on Sigrún), *Völundarkviða* (on three *valkyrja* maidens, one the daughter of king Kíar of Valland = the Byzantine emperor), *Atlakviða* (on Attila's envoy Knefauðr): Bugge 1965, 248, 199, 163, 283, Jónsson 1905, 348, 275, 148, 402. Also Bugge 1965, 266, 275, Jónsson 1905, 376, 388 *lit Par Sigurðr/ á suðrvegi* (*Guðrúnarkviða en forna*), and on a king Saksi, *sunnmanna gram* (*Third Guðrúnarkviða*).

It also explains some apparent ‘names-dropping’: Thus, “*the daughter of Kíar(r)*”, diverse weapons “*from Kíar(r)*”,<sup>1</sup> reflecting ‘Caesar’,<sup>2</sup> meaning the Byzantine-Roman emperor.<sup>3</sup> In high prestige, clearly, is everything from these ‘Romans’, or in Norse, the *Valar*.<sup>4</sup> One enumeration of articles coveted by relatives of Guðrún (i.e., the Eruls) includes “*reddish-golden helmets... ensilvered saddle-fabrics, Byzantine-red cloaks*”.<sup>5</sup> In another there is “*finely wrought Byzantine embroidery and Byzantine sways*”,<sup>6</sup> etc.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Hyndluljóð*, the primogenitor of one Ottar heimski is named Suan enum rauða (Svan the Red, whose son is Sæfari, i.e. ‘Seafarer’). This Ottar has “*fought for the gold of the Valas*”, like his apparent contemporary Angantyr (the Ongen[d]beow of Widsith and Beowulf);<sup>8</sup> other ancestors being berserks, “*all of them descended/ from Jörmunrekr, / the in-law of Sigurðr - / hear my say - / the people’s hero/ who Fáfnir killed.*”<sup>9</sup>

In a couple of the Elder Edda lays we have snapshots of Svanhild’s brothers setting off to avenge her. Thus, when despatching her sons, Guðrún takes forth ‘kingly’ apparel.<sup>10</sup> And so, “*The tunicas flapping, / The swords a-ringing, / Forth they fared / In clothes so fair.*”<sup>11</sup> Such ‘kingly’ and ‘fair’ clothes are proper to the Earls.

In a rare glimpse, the Langobards appear as well, being depicted as allies of Guðrún and the fallen Sigurðr – as indeed they were, historically, of the Earls:<sup>12</sup>

*In then stepped,  
Like to kings,  
The Langobard fighters,  
Heads red-flaming,  
Hauberks short,  
Helmets whole-cast,  
Swords a-sheathed,  
Tunicas reddish.*

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1. *Völundarkviða, Atlakviða*: Bugge 1965, 163, 283.
  2. Mundt 1994, 119-120 observes the parallel to Old Slavonic *cesar’* > *car’*.
  3. Malone 1963, 134-135.
  4. For once I take exception to Fritzner 1954, III ‘vala’ = ‘Frankish’ (and e.g. to Paff 1959, 208: ‘Wal-land’).
  5. *Atlakviða*: Bugge 1965, 282, Jónsson 1905, 402: *hialma gullroðna, silfrgylt söðulklaedi, serki valrauða*.
  6. *Shorter Sigurðarkviða*: Bugge 1865, 258, Jónsson 1905, 366: *valarípt vel fáüð/ ok Vala mengi*.
  7. *Oddrúnargrátr* has *völsko sverdi*: Bugge 1965, 279. Whether in this case Frankish swords are meant, and not ‘Roman’, I cannot say.
  8. Malone 1963, 135, 188-189.
  9. Bugge 1965, 154, Jónsson 1905, 178, 182.
  10. *Guðrúnarhvöt*: Bugge 1965, 312, Jónsson 1905, 445: *kumbi konunga*.
  11. *Hamðismál*: Bugge 1965,
  12. *The Second Guðrúnarkviða*: Bugge 1965, 269, Jónsson 1905, 379-380: “*inn gengo þál jöf- from glíkir; / Langbarðz líðar, / höfðo loða rauða, / stuttar brynjor, / steypða hialma, / skalmom gyrðir, / höfðo skarar iarpar.*” Mortensonson-Egnund translates 1985, 174: “*Inn så kom dei, / kongar jamlike, / med brune lokkar, / langskjegga kultar, / sverdi i slire / og stutte brynjor, / ruvne med hjelm / og raude kappor.*”

Again, *jarpr* ‘reddish, ruddy-brown’, the same word as the name *Erpr* above. And the heads of these longbearded fighters sport hair which is “*red like flames*”. As long as the Langobards were subjects of the Erul state, Herolia, they would have to fight for their masters – and in their manner and likeness: meaning, as stated here, with hair and clothing coloured **red**.

We conclude: The heroic lays of the Elder Edda provide valuable pictures of and from the heyday of the Eruls, having been spread among a Scandinavian public by the 6th c. *Eril* rune-masters.

## 6.8. Earls of the Elder Edda

If the Eruls were indeed so famous, should we not expect some mention of their name in Norse literature too? That is just what we do find, in a series of places in primarily the Elder Edda.

First, in the prose *Death of Sinffjotli*, Sigmundr and his son Sigurðr Fáfnisbani are depicted as follows:<sup>1</sup>

*Sigmundr and all his sons surpassed all men as to strength and stature, stamina and resourcefulness. But Sigurðr was the very foremost, and all men in the tales of old call him the topmost and the greatest of all army-kings.*

The latter word does not designate a ‘stationary’ king who owns a territorial army, but the mobile leader of a mobile armed force, a real ‘Viking’ leader; an Erul *par excellence*. We note what the poet and his public noted too, the same as was remarked in Roman assessments of the Germanics in general, and the Eruls in particular: tall stature, greatness of bodily build (*voxtr*).

Second, in the *Thíðrikssaga* (probably from the early 13th c.), where Sigurðr appears under the historically more correct name of Sigfrið (< *Sigfröðr*), there is the name of his paternal origins: His father Sigmundr rules **Jarlungaland**, in what became southern France. Characterized by a scholar as “a meaningful construction with *jarl* ‘earl’, ‘noble warrior’,” this name has nevertheless been taken for a mere misunderstanding of a \**Karlungaland*, meaning the Carolingian realm.<sup>2</sup> This is most implausible. If informed that Sigmundr was from ‘the Carolingian land’, the Norse author would have said so, or rejected this as anachronistic.

Third, the *Rígsþula* provides a picture of the three classes of men as ideal types. The thrall is “*swarthy*”; the free-man is “*reddish and ruddy*”; whereas the **earl** is characterized by “*blond hair/ and bright[-red] cheeks*”.<sup>3</sup>

Although this fits hand-in-glove with our research on the Eruls so far, it should perhaps be dismissed as merely an ‘ideal type’. Or should it not? How come the ‘earls’ seem to be singled out as a major group? In none of the Nordic countries were they, in historical times, a group at all; in pre-unification (9th c.) mainland Norway,

1. Bugge 1965, 203, Jónsson 1905, 280-281.

2. Paff 1959, 185-187; cf. Lukman 1952, 186-189.

3. Bugge 1965, 142-146, Jónsson 1905, 187-194: *hörfi svartan... rauðan ok rjóðan... bjartir vangar...* Helgason 1985, 37 translates, incorrectly, “*glorauðe vangar*,” i.e. “*glowing-red* [or: ember-red, fiery-red] cheeks”. In another context, *jarl setti svá rauðan sem blóð*, literally “*the earl became blood-red*”: Heggstad 1963, 529.

which seems to have had most of them, there were just a very few – soon reduced to a single one. Is the above mention a vestige from a much older age and usage, when the Eruls indeed counted, as a group?

Fourth, there is more in store: precisely a usage regarding the *earls* which hitherto has escaped the historians, although conspicuously aberrant in comparison with that of the Viking age.

We turn once again to Svanhild and her folk. The *Hamðismál* is but one of several heroic lays in the Elder Edda telling the story of how she is avenged by her brothers. Here, these two brothers of hers, Hamðir and Sörli, are given a generic name:<sup>1</sup>

*It was reported  
To Jörmunrek  
That earls were a-coming,  
Down on the road,  
Helmeted, grim...*

Towards the end of the *Guðrúnarhvöt*, when *Guðrún* is bent on bringing terror and death to *Atli* and his men, she eggs on her own folk, exhorting them to add wood to the fire of revenge, with the words:

*Stuff now, earls,  
The house full of tinder...*

The end stanza of this lay has been taken by some to be a comment by the poets, while others believe it to be *Guðrún*'s words; it runs:<sup>2</sup>

*For all the earls  
Sorrow shall abate,  
For all the girls  
Worry shall decrease  
When compared to  
The words of this lament.*

Finally, in one of the opening stanzas of the *First Guðrúnarkviða*, solace is proffered to the grieving *Guðrún* by her supporters:<sup>3</sup>

*Forth stepped earls,  
Full of wisdom,  
Her anger harsh  
They tried to heal...*

In all these contexts, the earls appear in the plural, as the generic name of a group. First above, the two sons of *Guðrún* are termed 'earls' by their Gothic opponents; and

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1. Bugge 1965, 319, cf. Jónsson 1905, 455: [20] *Segja fóru jarlar/ Jörmunrekki/ at sé nir váru/ seggir und hjalmum,/ ræðið ér of ráð,/ ríkir eru komnir,/ fyr mátkum hafð mönnum/ mey jóum tradda.* The 'earls' go missing in the fine translation by Mortensson-Egnund 1985, 208.
  2. Bugge 1965, 315, cf. Jónsson 1905, 449-450: [20] "*Hlaþit er, iarlar!/ eikicavstinn,/ latiþ þann vnd hilmil/ hestan verþa!*" And the end stanza: "*Iörlum öllum/ oþal batni,/ snotom ollom/ sorg at minni,/ at þetta tregrof/ vm talit veri.*"
  3. Bugge 1965, 242, cf. Jónsson 1905, 338: [2] "*Gengo iarlar/ alsnotrir fram/...*"



characterizing two young brothers, out on their own to avenge their father, as ‘earls’, is widely at variance with later usage.<sup>1</sup> Second, then, Guðrún’s supporters or warriors are termed ‘earls’ as a group. Third, “*all the [young] girls*” are contrasted to, on the male side, “*all the earls*” – clearly signifying **all** the menfolk.

This testifies to a whole people (or ‘semi-people’) called the Earls; the ‘semi-people’ we have learned to know as the Eruls.

## 6.9. Red Vikings

Is there any legacy in the Viking age from the Erul ‘Reds’ and the Wicingas attested in Widsith?

We note that quaint word *rauðavíkingr* ‘[exceptionally] wild viking’. Literally: a **red** Viking. Likewise, *rauðarán* ‘robbery by violence’ (i.e., against the resistance put up by the victim).<sup>2</sup> And of course, the equally descriptive and to our study relevant word *rauðagalinn* ‘red-mad’; meaning, clearly, very mad – as mad as the Reds when out a-raging in the holy frenzy of Óðinn?<sup>3</sup>

We would expect to find other traces too of this legacy, if such it were; which is what we do, in two ways: First, we recall that imposing name of Óðinn, now that we are into the question of his names: *Rauðgrani*, literally ‘Red-beard’.<sup>4</sup> No name could be more fitting and rallying for his fighters, the ‘Reds’.

Second, as names go, there are the sagas;<sup>5</sup> third, mediaeval ballads: Is it from his mother or father, or from old Óðinn himself, that Saint Olav got “*his red beard*”?<sup>6</sup>

Finally, how **red** is this ‘redness’ which we are discussing? We do have some pointers, the most relevant ones for our study being found in, again, the Elder Edda. Here, as with the Latin and Greek words which we habitually translate as ‘red’, we note that the word **rauðr** could and often did entail something wider in the eyes of the Norse beholder. Thus, “*red gold*”, “*red rings [of gold, for money]*” is a recurrent

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1. There is but one instance of this later usage in the Elder Edda, in the prose preamble to *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*: Bugge 1965, 171-172, Jónsson 1905, 243, 246.
  2. Olaus Magnus (1555 AD), 1982, Fifth Book, ch. xi, derives the word from “*Rethe, a Ruthenian Viking.*”.
  3. Heggstad 1963, 528.
  4. same.
  5. e.g., in Snorri, Harald Granrauði (= ‘Redbeard’, in *Ynglingasaga*), Audun Rauði (Inge’s saga), Gaut Rauði (Olaf’s saga); and of course, discoverer of Greenland, Eirik Rauði (Olaf Tryggvasson’s saga). There are also Rauðr (Harald Fairhair’s saga), Rauðr the Strong (Olaf Tryggvasson’s saga), Rauðr (Saint Olaf’s saga). Instances of other colour epithets in Snorri: Halfdan Svarti (‘the Black’), Halfdan Hviti, Trond Hviti (‘the White’), Olaf the White (King of Dublin). Cf also red apparel of e.g. Arnljot Gjelline & Karl Mørske (St. Olaf’s saga), and the expression *rauðkápamaðr* “*man clad in a red tunic*”: Heggstad 1963, 529. In the Icelandic *Landnámabók* there is Illugi Rauði, etc.
  6. Blom 1982, 46-47.

theme.<sup>1</sup> In several places, this is qualified further, as “[glowing] ember-red gold”,<sup>2</sup> and even, when lying buried in the Rhine, as “the fire of the river”.<sup>3</sup> This latter conception, and the specific association of gold with the Rhine, was used in kennings by late 10th c. Norse poets.<sup>4</sup>

This was also an ideal reflecting (or reflected in) the sacred: The goddess Freya’s holy hog Gullinbusti, literally ‘Golden Bristle’, is said to “glow” too;<sup>5</sup> as does Vidofnir, the cock of gold atop the Mima Tree.<sup>6</sup>

Judging by some passages in the Edda, the overriding ‘glowing’, ‘gleaming’ ideal is that of the sun<sup>7</sup> – which, as we know, in the eyes of the beholder may appear as yellow, red, or golden; or in a word, *fiery*.

We are now in a position better to understand the words by Martial on the Bata-vian or Chattian foam: It would seem to be no mere poetic license, but rather an acute expression of users’ sentiments, that this ‘hair-gêl’ “set the Teutonic hair on fire”.

### 6.10. The Reddish (‘Rous’) Saviour

‘Redness’ was not confined to a fading (?) memory of the Eruls. To the Byzantines as well as to generations of Russians up towards more modern times, such ruddy-blondness or redness took on new historical poignancy; as did the *Vision of Daniel*.<sup>8</sup>

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1. Bugge 1965, 164, 167 (*Völundarkviða*), 197 (*Second Helgakviða*), 212, 214, 215 (*Regin-smál*, *Second Sigurðarkviða*), 223, 225 (*Fáfnismál*), 254 (*Third, or Shorter, Sigurðarkviða*), 280 (*Oddrúnargrátr*), 283, 288, 290 (*Atlakviða*), 294 (*Atlamál*), cf. Jónsson 1905, 149, 272, 298, 300, 303, 311, 316, 358, 398, 409, 412.

Gold as being red has survived in ballads, e. g. *Lita Kari* in Blom 1982, 53-57: “*min rø-daste gullkrona / den vil eg gjeva deg;*” likewise, *Tora Liti*, same, 95; or *Draumkvedet*, same, 116-133.

2. Bugge 1965, 223, 294, 347, Jónsson 1905, 311, 418, 216: *et gjalla goll/ ok et glóðrauða fe.* (*Fáfnismál*), *okr mun gramr goll/ reifa glóðrauðu* (*Atlamál*), *allr hann vid gull glóir* (*Fjölsvinnsmál*). Mortenson-Egnund 1985, 1454-146 “det raude gullet/ då hadde han eine”, “av det skiraste strålande gull” (*Fáfnismál*), and also “med gudegullet glitra og skein” (*Sigrdrífumál*) are all inaccurate.

3. *Regin-smál*, Bugge 1965, 213, Jónsson 1905, 298: *lindar loga.*

4. Storm 1874, 79.

5. *Hyndluljóð*: Bugge 1965, 153, Jónsson 1905, 176. Cf. also the *dyrkalf* in the *Second Helgakviða*, Bugge 1965, 198, Jónsson 1905, 273.

6. *Fjölsvinnsmál*: Bugge 1965, 347.

7. A woman warrior is *gullbjart* “gold-shining” (*Hárbarðsljóð*). Sigrún is “golden-bejeweled, sunny-fair” *gullvarið, solbjart* (*Second Helgakviða*). Cf. *baugvariðr* (do., Fritzner 1954, I, 118). Guðrún is “more than golden” *gulli gædda* (*Fáfnismál*); Guðrún is mother “to the maiden/ more cloudless clear/ her name is Svanhildr/ a spark of the sun”, *sv mvn hvitari/ enn in heidi dagr/ Svanhildr vera./ solar geisla* (*Shorter Sigurðarkviða*), and “thus was Svanhildr/ in my halls/ like the most gleaming/ spark of the sun” *sva var Svanhildr/ i sal minom./ sem væri sæmleitr/ solar geisli* (*Guðrúnarhvöt*); : Bugge 1965, 101, 199, 225, 256, 314, cf. Jónsson 1905, 275, 316, 363, 448. On *solar geisli* as a by-name for Svanhildr, who in Faroese ballads is called *sólaljóma*: Bugge 1965, 422 n.

8. Loretto 1961, 188 n. 4.

“Es gab daneben auch eine andere Deutung, die das [‘Rws] als [‘rousioi], rötlich, rotblonde deutete, und dieses ‘blonde Volk’ wurde gleichfalls mit den Russen identifiziert wobei man aber – in Kombination mit einer Prophezeiung aus der ‘Visio Danielis’, einer dem Propheten Daniel zugeschriebenen apokryphen Schrift – dieses blonde Volk als Retter aus der äussersten Not betrachtete. Die in Russland später populäre Auffassung, das Volk der Russen sei ausersehen das von der Türken eroberte Byzanz wieder zu befreien, hat hier ihren Ursprung.”

The latter idea has been made the object of special study.<sup>1</sup> It was elaborated upon by and by; yet it originated early enough: We recall “*the fair-haired peoples*” from the fall of the West Roman Empire.

During the Crusades in particular, the idea of a “blond king from the West” coming to aid the Christians, was rife in Byzantium.<sup>2</sup> This idea was made available to, and popular among, the Russians by a translation into Slavonic – where the ‘red race’, or ‘red people’ in the Greek *Vision of Daniel* changed into ‘the red beards’ (*rusye brady*).

Only decades before the rise of Russia, apparently, the very same expression, the ‘fair-haired peoples’, crops up anew; the commentator does not seem to be aware of the rôle cut out for them long before.<sup>3</sup>

“In about 820 a Sicilian prophet was content to adopt Pseudo-Methodius, but introduced a new touch, namely that the last emperor would be revealed in Syracuse. He would send his emissaries to ‘the inner regions of Rome and tame the fair-haired nations and together they will pursue Ishmael’. In Rome the emperor would find buried treasure, enough to pay his troops, and then he would march by land to Constantinople. Then the Antichrist would appear, etc. An interesting feature of this prophecy is that it assigns to the Germanic peoples a rôle in the eschatological scheme. The ‘fair-haired nations’ were destined to play an important part in later Byzantine prophecy, sometimes identified with the westerners, at other times with the Russians.”

This provincial apocalypse has been seen to reflect historical events and expectations, including the rise in the status of Constantinople.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, there is the *Life of St. Andrew the Fool*, “which I would be inclined to attribute to the early eighth century, although it is usually dated to the ninth or tenth”.<sup>5</sup> Here, we are introduced to three foolish youths in Jerusalem; on one of whom we are told: “*He will build big ships and go to Rome, and he will enlist the fair-haired nations*”. The three will fight. “*All three kings will be killed, and the blood of the Romans will run in streams, and none of them shall survive.*”<sup>6</sup>

Third, we also give a paraphrase of a ‘typical’ prophecy from the late 13th c. reflecting historical events (these being entered in brackets):<sup>7</sup>

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1. Schaeder 1929, 30.
  2. Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber, VIII, 536 n. 1; Istrin 1897, 267.
  3. Mango 1980, 207.
  4. same, 208-209.
  5. same. See below!
  6. same, 210-211.
  7. same, 212.

*.. An infant will now reign in the city [the young Alexius IV]. He will lay his hands on the holy sanctuaries and give the sacred vessels to the sons of perdition [Alexius was forced to confiscate Church plate to repay the Crusaders and the Venetians]. The fair-haired nation will rule in Constantinople sixty-five years [actually fifty-seven].*

Quite possibly, this ‘fair-haired saviour syndrom’ did gain inspiration from the presence of the Eruls, serving as they did (and as the ‘Rōs Varangians did centuries later) in a dual capacity – as élite troops out on the borders, and as the trusted guardsmen of the Emperor. Yet whence the inspiration is really immaterial. What we and posterity are concerned with is a literary continuum, a *topos* that has proved durable indeed.

### 6.11. Byzantine ‘Rōs = ‘Rousioi, ‘Reds’

Finally, there are the sources attesting to the Byzantine usage ‘Reds’ for the Northerners/‘Russians’. The ‘redness’ of the Russians according to popular terminology is expressly mentioned by the two Byzantine authors Herodian and Moscop:<sup>1</sup>

*[The] ‘Rōs in the vernacular tongue are [called the] ‘Rousos.*

A gloss of unknown date in a manuscript on Mount Athos implies the same:<sup>2</sup>

*κατὰ τὸ ἔρρα ἐν μηνί Ιουλίῳ εἰς τὴν βῆλον ἐκ τοῦ ξανθοῦ γένους ἤγουν Καζᾶκοι λεγόμενοι ἕως ρ μονόξυλα τῶν ἀριθμῶν ὄντα ἕως ἑξοὶ χιλιάδες Ρούσοι ...*

*In the year seven, one hundred, thirty and one, in the month of July, on the 9th, from the blond people came they who are called the Kazaks, there being towards a hundred boats in number, [with] six thousand Reds [‘Rousos].*

What year is this? Literally: “seven, hundred, thirty, one”. Is this 1731? Or, if the six thousandth year of Creation has been left out, then are we in 6731 = 1223 AD? Or 7131 = 1623 AD? The name of the Kazaks nudges us closer to our own age. We opt for 1731. The main point is that here, in a clearly rather late (pre-modern) source, the classical expression ‘the blond people’ is still going strong – and being identified with ‘the Reds’, the word used for the Russians.

In an inventory of possessions belonging to the Russian monastery on Mt. Athos in 1142, there are books, furs, hats, and towels, all called ‘ρούσιος. And in the acts confirming the return of this monastery to the Russian monks, it is called *μονή τῶν ‘Ρουσσῶν* in 1169, and in 1182 *τῶν ‘Ρουσσῶν* – “meaning that in popular parlance the forms ‘Ρουσος and ‘Ρουσσος were in use”. In the subsequent acts of 1188 and 1194, the literary form *τῶν ‘Ρῶς* was employed. Yet to this very day the said monastery is popularly termed ‘Ρουσικό.<sup>3</sup>

This usage is not confined to a monastery alone. In the folksy (demotic) New Greek tongue there are still *ἡ Ρουσία, ὁ Ροῦσος, ἡ Ροῦσα, ρούσικος, ρουσσικος*, particularly in expressions such as *ρούσικο βούτυρο, ρούσικο στᾶρι, ὄμιλεῖ ρούσικα*. It has been concluded that “these forms too are an heritage from the Middle Ages,

1. Stephan/Hase 1842-47, VI, 2457.

2. Istrin 1897, III, 273, citing the Athos Iverskij monastery ms. no. 167, fol. 580.

3. Solov'ev 1957, 137.

where we note them in Liudprand, Constantine Born-in-the-Purple and the Mt. Athos acts.”<sup>1</sup>

Alongside the main forms *οἱ* ‘*Pō̄ς*, and more rarely simply ‘*Pō̄ς*, the Emperor Constantine Born-in-the-Purple, c. 950 AD, attests to ‘**the Reds**’ as well:<sup>2</sup> τῶν ‘*Ρουσικῶν* *καρὰ βίῳ*. This evidently was “closer to the popular pronunciation”.<sup>3</sup>

We conclude with his near-contemporary, the author-traveller Liudprand (highly esteemed by the Normanists!) who treats us to a description of the maritime attack on Constantinople by Igor’ (= Norse Inger, Ingvarr) in 941 AD; the outward ‘characteristic’ of their appearance here is their (red) hue, which is confirmed by the word **Rusios** = ‘*οἱ* ‘*rousioi*, ‘the Reds’:<sup>4</sup>

*In the direction of the North dwells a people whom the Greeks call **Rusios** on account of a characteristic pertaining to their outward appearance, whereas we on account of their place of domicile term them Northmen (**Nordomanni**). The king over this people was Inger, who came sailing to Constantinople with more than a thousand ships.*

Liudprand also mentions *Rusorum naves*, “the ships of the Reds”.<sup>5</sup>

That this, and not the literary ‘*Rōs*, was the vernacular form is attested in sources from those great rivals and observers of the Greeks, the Muslims. As will be seen in a later chapter, a number of the Arabic authors (Ibn Rusta, Ibn Faḡlān, Ibn Ḥawqāl, al-Mas‘ūdī, Ibn Miskawayh, al-Hamadānī, Ibn al-Aṭīr, al-Idrīsī) mention not *ar-Rūs* (Byzantine ‘*Rōs*) but *ar-Rūsīya*, which renders Greek ‘**οἱ** ‘**rousioi**.

Finally, we note that this ‘Reds’ usage proved persistent indeed, far beyond the so-called Middle Ages. Even during the unsuccessful intervention by Russian troops in the Peloponnes in the 1770-ies, called the Orlofiká by the Greeks, the Greek ‘man in the street’ in town upon town took up the cry:<sup>6</sup> “The Reds are coming!” – in a word (the Greek one): the ‘*Rousos*.

In literature, this vernacular form was replaced by the erudite, ‘classical’ ‘**Rōs** only in the 19th c.<sup>7</sup>

## 6.12. The Cappadocian Testament

We began this chapter with the *Rōs* or *Rous* met with in two early Syrian authors, Afrem and Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor. In both cases a Greek source was suspected; and in the case of Ps.-Zachariah, the name **Hrws** was found to clearly reflect the Reds, ‘**οἱ** ‘**rousioi** in the Greek. The context in which they occurred was that of i.e. the Amazons, those martial women of Alexander-legendary fame.

Now the Amazons are traditionally conceived of as located by the Thermodon River in, or somewhere to the North of, the Caucasus. One should expect more sourc-

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1. Same, 134 n. 1, citing for Neo-Greek usages *The Great Greek Encyclopaedia*, XXI, Athens 1933, and the *Elefterodakis Encyclopaedical Lexicon*, XI, Athens 1931.
  2. *De cerem.*, 673.
  3. Solov’ev 1957, 137.
  4. *MGH*, *Scriptores*, III, 227.
  5. Same, 331.
  6. Communication by Egil Danielsen, Oslo; no written source found or given.
  7. Andreotis 1983, 312.

es, then, Greek or otherwise, attesting to a presence of such war-like women and their ‘red’ neighbours alike in the vicinity of the Caucasus. Before inspecting the Middle Eastern, particularly Arabic, sources, we note one relevant Byzantine source placing the Reds (no Amazon consorts mentioned) clearly and squarely where we first found them.

Of unascertained date, the piece of literary fiction termed *the Cappadocian Testament* purports to be the sum-up by Alexander the Great himself of his exploits and will. Here, we naturally find a list of the peoples whom he had the opportunity to vanquish; and in his ‘own’ words (and my translation – *HS*):<sup>1</sup>

... Λογγιβάρδους. Λεβεσειτιανούς. Εβρίδας. Δελματισίους. Αβασγοίς.  
'Αλανούς. Αρμενίους. Ρουσίους. ὄχλους Σαραχηνῶν. Σύρους. ...

... Longobardians, Lethesentians, Ethridans, Dalmatians, Abasgans, Alans, Armenians, Reds, and a great multitude of Saracens and Syrians. ...

The Longobardians, Alans, and Saracens are important for a rough attempt at dating this little work; the two former peoples making it into the limelight in the 5th-6th cc., and sliding out of it again by the 7th-8th. The Ethridans cannot be very much other than a misrepresentation of Ethribans, meaning the people from Ethrib = Yathrib, the pre-Islamic name of al-Madina in Arabia. The learned and archaic name ‘Yathribans’ points of course to the Muslims, from the 7th c. onward, and is an early synonym to, by and by superseded by, ‘the Saracens’.

The word for the Reds is ‘**Rousious**, the *-ous* ending being used throughout for most of the peoples enumerated. The geographical context given is Middle Eastern, or more precisely Caucasian: The Abasgans (on the southern shore of the Caspian, with Abaskun), the Alans (north of the Caucasus), the Armenians (**in** the Caucasus), plus the Saracens and Syrians.

It would be tempting to see in the Reds simply the Russians, whom as we recall the Greeks in ‘vulgar parlance’ called just that, ‘*oi rousioi*. Yet what would be decisive for **that** eventuality is the age of the text. And everything here points to a pre-9th century authorship; meaning that here too we are in the presence of a part of the heritage that the 839 Viking visitors to Byzance gave a novel actuality, a new lease on life.

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1. Trumpf 1959, 255 (line 24 plus footnote: same spelling in all mss.).

## 7. Muslim Tradition from Eruls: Reds, Amazons, Whales

“The future lies in research into the Arabic sources...”  
Hannestad 1970, 166.

### 7.1. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (c. 685),<sup>1</sup> on Non-Horseriders

*Thereupon he headed away from their country, travelling until he ended up in a town of great extent upon the shore of the sea. Its inhabitants were a large-bodied stock... So the Two-horned ... exterminated them and razed their town, Blessing of Ḥurāsān.*

*Thereafter he proceeded from their land till he ended up in Ḥurāsān, seeking out humans in their far-flung locations in order that they adore none save God most high. Thus he advanced with his troops until he found himself in a land called **S.d.r.ḥā**. Its inhabitants were giants with such long tongues (that) no-one among them had ever been seen horse-riding upon the back of steeds. [fol. 57a]*

### 7.2. Al-Ḥasan on Men of Amazons

*He had gone out with his folks to[wards] the city of \*Amazunās, the Queen of the Women, on a visit to her... [63a].*

*...They kept on travelling... until they entered into a spacious land: In it (dwelled) a tribe with blue eyes and hairy necks, possessing intrepidity and strength. The stature of the average man among them was one hundred ells. [64a]*

### 7.3. Al-Ḥasan on Maritime Amazons

*From \*Amazunās, queen of the women, to Alexander. To the point:*

*...I reckon you to have been deluded as to us on hearing that we're women. Yet we're not like the women of your locality; with regard to intrepidity we're stronger than your men, we're in greater in strength, we're stronger than your comrades and more agile with (our) feet in warfare.*

*We're not aspiring to travel to you, nor are we inviting you so that we may meet you, because of the ardour of (crossing) the mountain...*

*We've told you about our situation and our matter, and about our sending (ourselves) to one of two islands among the islands of the sea. There we are, in a multitude which is not to be computed and which nobody knows but He who created us. Among us are six hundred thousand virgins who are champions ready for death and for combatting our foes.*

*We don't have men among us. Our men are (from) behind the ocean; they are eight hundred thousand warriors. We have a festive occasion each year in this city which is to the rear of this mountain, in it we sacrifice to our deities; and upon the littoral of this ocean we have a place of departure, [69b] we decamp from it, and when it's the day of the feast we abide in that place for one predetermined month of the year.*

*Among us are violent warlords. So whoever wishes to combat us, we'll combat him! And if he vanquish us by the plentitude of those who accompany him, we assign our men to (the job of fighting) him: They're the most vehement of the earth's inhabitants as to strength. So they mutilate (the nose and eyes of) our enemy with a vengeance! We possess*

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1. *Br. Lib. ms. Add. 5928, fol. 57a, 63a, 64a, 69 a-b, fol. 70a, in Stang (forthcoming).*

swords, knives and cutlasses. This is our letter; we're informing you (of) some of our circumstances! Greetings of peace!

#### 7.4. Al-Ḥasan on Big Red Amazons

[70a] Their women are stronger than the menfolk, these [women] have a great stature and burdensome bodies. The features of the faces are reddish, red-blond and blue. Every single woman among them has a single breast, like the breast of a woman, and the other is like the breast of a man. Every woman among them has hung upon her lots of knives, firmly fastened upon her forearm, both her loins and both her thighs; and if one of them is felled in warfare her hand doesn't fall on anything but a knife. Their knives are poisoned. So they slash whosoever has felled [one of] them, and her killer dies.

#### 7.5. Morisco ms. from Ibn An'um (d. 763)<sup>1</sup> on Non-Horseriders

Thereupon we moved on from them and went in the direction of the land of Ḥurāsān. Lo, its inhabitants were a people of giants, having long spears (so that) no detachment from among them had ever been seen (riding) upon the backs of horses. When we entered their land they offered their fealty to us and presented us with a great gift. So we accepted that from them. Their sovereign (malīk) was called M.r.ġ.ā'n. Their menfolk had no mouths....

#### 7.6. Aragon-Arabic ms. (Date Unknown),<sup>2</sup> on Reds

When he terminated the building of the Dam between them and those peoples [of Ya'ġūġ-Ma'ġūġ] he left them and came to a people of red colour and red hair, where the menfolk and the women live apart from each other, and together only three days a year. Whosoever wishes to marry is obliged to do so during these three days. If a woman gives birth to a male, she relinquishes it to the father during these days, having weaned it from her breast, a female child she however keeps herself.

He thereupon left them and went to Farġāna. There he beheld people with (great) bodies, and beautiful too. They conceded fealty to him. Then he travelled from Farġāna to Samraqand.

#### 7.7. Nihāyatu l-'Arab, Cambridge Univ. ms. Qq. 225, on Reds

So Alexander travelled through the land of the Byzantines according to the wish of God the exalted and sublime, until he went out from it into the land of the Slavs in the Ocean. So [there] he saw a people with red faces and ruddy hair, having [bulky] bodies and strength of bodily build. Their king received him kindly, pledging him his fealty.

He [sc. Alexander] called him and the inhabitants of his kingdom to the profession of the unity of God the exalted and sublime and to the belief in Him. So they responded to him. Then he journeyed in their land, and along with him was their king, who was setting in order for him the stopping-places [for rest and sleep] all his way. Thus he traversed his country in 18 months, [subsequently] crossing over to the country of the Ḥazars in the Ocean...

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1. Gomez 1927, 24 (my trsl. – HS).

2. Robles 1888, 79.



## 7.8. Aš-Ša‘bi, c. 700,<sup>1</sup> on Reds near Gog-Magog

[It is related from aš-Ša‘bī that he said:]

The Two-horned travelled to the region of Ya’ğūğ and Ma’ğūğ. So he got to see a nation with reddish hair and blue eyes. A great throng from among them gathered unto him, saying to him: ‘O victorious king, behind this mountain there are nations whom no-one computes save God. They have ravaged our homeland, eating our fruit and our grain.’

Said he: ‘How do they look?’ Said they: ‘They are small, bald, with broad faces.’

Said he: ‘How many kinds are they?’ Said they: ‘They are numerous nations whom none but God most high computes.’

Said he: ‘And which are their names?’ Said they: ‘As for those who are close of them, they are six tribes, Ya’ğūğ, Ma’ğūğ, Tāwīl, Tārīs, Mansak and Kumārā. Each tribe of theirs is like all the inhabitants of the earth. As for those who are far from us, we do not know their tribes and they have no way of reaching us. How would it be if we make up your expenses on the condition that you dam them in and put an end to their matter with us?’

Said he: ‘What’s their nourishment?’ Said they: ‘Every spring the Ocean casts up to them two fish. The distance between the head of each fish and its tail is a journey of ten days or more.’

With some misgivings one may second an observation regarding aš-Ša‘bī:<sup>2</sup> “In this case the story on Alexander’s expedition to the north is intimately connected with local northern circumstances. Blue-eyed, red-blond (*rusye*) men indeed peopled the north, schools of fish indeed appeared periodically in the northern seas.”

True, but this is leading us astray. We must recall: This text is from well before the Viking age. How then did aš-Ša‘bī get to see these folk up on the shores of the Baltic or the North Atlantic? The answer is: He didn’t. This is ancient history-turned-theology – first bottled in 395-396 AD.

The above commentary is also mistaken as regards the ‘schools of fish’. The Arabic is not to be misunderstood: There is no reference to mass appearances of fish in the plural, but to two different individual fish; and not two herrings but, clearly, whales.

## 7.9. Ad-Dīnawarī, c. 895,<sup>3</sup> on Red Amazons

Having completed the erection of the Dam sundering them off from those peoples (of Gog-Magog), he left them and came upon a people of red colour with ruddy hair, among whom the men and the women dwell apart from each other and solely for the duration of three days yearly together. Whosoever among them wishes to marry, is obliged to do so during these three days.

If a woman gives birth to a child of the male gender, she hands it over to the father after having weaned it from her breast during these days; a child of the female gender she however keeps by her.

He thereupon left these and went to Farğāna. There he beheld people of a great bodily build, and handsome too, who subjected themselves to him. From Farğāna he went to Samraqand...

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1. Wüstenfeld 1876, III, 53-54: ‘as-Sadd’.

2. Kovalevskij 1956, 59-60.

3. Nöldeke 1890, 40-41.

Here, the same geographical context as above, with Farḡāna and Samarqand (cf the Aragonese Arabic ms. above), in al-Ḥasan and Ibn An‘um degenerated into **M.r.ḡ.ā’n** and **S.d.r.ḥā**. So we expect the same people to show up, too bulky for horses. And they oblige: the ‘people of a great bodily build, and handsome too, who subjected themselves to him’. The point of their being so big, that they could not ride horses, has been suppressed.

### 7.10. *Al-Mas‘ūdī, c. 910,<sup>1</sup> on ‘Reds’ a Greek Name*

*[Regarding] ar-Rūs, the Byzantines call them Arūsīya, which signifies ‘the Reds’.*

### 7.11. *Al-Mas‘ūdī on Whaling<sup>2</sup>*

*Behind them [the people Kašak, the Cherkess – HS] an enormous people follows. Between them and the area of the Kašak there is a huge river, like the Euphrates, falling into the Sea of the Byzantines, which is called the Sea of Maeotis. The capital of this people is called Iram of the Columns. They have prodigies of nature, their doctrines are pagan. In this land, regarding this sea, there is an unusual story about a fish which comes to them every year and which they utilize. Thereupon it returns, directing itself unto them a second time, and they once again utilize it, whereby the meat has already grown out again in the spot where they took a part of it the first time. The story about this people is widely circulated in that land of pagans.*

A commentary on al-Mas‘ūdī’s text above runs:<sup>3</sup> “From the narrative it becomes clear why we in another place hear about precisely **two** fish – this refers to the recurrent passage of the fish up and down the river.” This is incorrect. There is no mention of a river; and the two whales are well enough known from other sources.

One such is Olaus Magnus, 1555:<sup>4</sup>

*There is an island called the Faroe isles, the inhabitants of which are nourished (exclusively) by whales which are cast by the wind upon its shores... The big whale Balena is often pursued by another whale called Orka, during the time of its mating (in spring)..*

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1. Birkeland 1954, 40.

2. Pellat 1962, II, 231.

3. Kovalevskij 1956, 59-60, 58.

4. Granlund 1976, I, 175.



*Olaus Magnus: Whale stuck ashore being cut up.*

For comparison we adduce a classical text which has not as yet been properly evaluated in its historical-mythological context.

### 7.12. *Ibn Faḍlān on Reds, Rūsīya, 922<sup>1</sup>*

*Tekin told me that in the land of the king [of Bulḡār] there is a man of exceedingly great bodily build. So when I arrived in this land I asked the king about him. He said: 'Yes, he was in our land but died. He is not of the inhabitants of this land, nor even of the number of humans. His story is as follows: Some of the merchants went out to the river Atil, as was their wont. This river rose, its waters overflowing its banks. Of a sudden, before I had time to be informed, a flock of merchants appeared to me, saying: 'O king! Upon the waters a man has come floating. If he be from a people near us, then we have no possibility of living in these parts, and there's nothing for us but to emigrate.' (...)*

Who was this man? The king of Bulḡār had written to his trading partners three months to the North, the Wīsū – meaning the Veps. They in turn inform him in a letter (the first piece of Veps literature attested to ever) that the man must belong to the Ya'ḡūḡ and Ma'ḡūḡ; from the contextual information given, e.g. on their living beyond the Ocean and lofty mountains, it is clear that inhabitants of North Norway are meant. (On this, more in para 16 below).

Later, Ibn Faḍlān goes on to describe the Rūs:

*Said he: 'I beheld ar-Rūsīya when they arrived for their matters of trade and halted by the river Atil. I never did see people with more perfect bodies than theirs. They are like unto palms, ruddy, red of face, white of body... As regards their women, they have a little box fastened to their breast, out of iron, or bronze[?], or gold, or wood, in accordance with the means of their menfolk. Each box has a ring, to which is fastened a knife, likewise fastened to the breast...*

*They are the dirtiest of God's creation; they do not clean themselves of their excrements nor of urine, nor do they wash themselves after sexual intercourse, nor do they wash*

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1. Togan 1939, 69-82.

*their hands after eating, nay they are like ...donkeys... It is mandatory among them to wash their faces and their heads each day in the dirtiest and uncleanest possible water ever...*

It has unfortunately escaped scholarly attention so far that Ibn Faḍlān – like a number of Arabic authors later on – writes not of ar-Rūs but **ar-Rūsīya**.<sup>1</sup> The former term reflects Byzantine (equally) non-inflected *Rōs*; whereas the latter reflects the, equally Byzantine Greek, ‘oi **rousioi**, literally, ‘the Reds’.

Our author confirms this – and his – reading of the name by entering the observation immediately after this name that the Rūsīya are indeed “*ruddy, red of face, white of body*”.

In his text, Ibn Faḍlān gives the impression of actually being on the lookout for ‘reds’, even trying to find whether other peoples too conform to this given anticipation; thus, before his above meeting with ‘the Reds’, his observation on the Middle Volga Bulḡārs:<sup>2</sup>

*I’ve seen none among them of red exterior; nay most of them are sick, and some of them are even killed by the colic, so that it [the colic] even occurs in sucklings.*

The other grain to be winnowed from the words of Ibn-Faḍlān is the assertion that these ‘Reds’ are “tall as palmtrees”. This is at variance with the rest of this otherwise most carefully couched ethnographic report. Of course these folk by the Volga were **not** as tall as palm-trees. So why mar a scrupulously correct dossier by such gross exaggeration?

The answer, I believe, is that Ibn-Faḍlān knew his classics. The fear apparently instilled in the Bulḡārs by the lone giant who had come floating down from the North, and their eagerness to emigrate, is only understandable on the background of Muslim apprehensions regarding Gog-Magog – which surface explicitly in the subsequent words on these fiends as dwelling north of the Wīsū. (The eagerness of the Bulḡārs to show Ibn-Faḍlān the remains of this giant I take to result from their avid interest in subsidies from the Caliph for manning the northern periphery of Islām against such northern fiends as be.)

The little box with a knife appended, which in turn is fastened to the (one) breast is as close as Ibn Faḍlān gets to the *topos* of the slashing-dashing Amazons.

The ‘tall as date palms’ *topos* is refound i.a. in the words on Gog-Magog by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, in the Br. Library ms. Add. 5928 fol. 22b-23b:

### 7.13. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī on Gog-Magog<sup>3</sup>

*Beyond were creatures out of the creation of God most high and great, a milling throng, nations of wondrous physique and terrifying apparition.. Their necks [22b] are like the napes of camels, they have horns like the horns of bullocks, upon their bodies there is hair and fur, feathers and psoriasis..*

*So the Two-horned wished to see and look at them and to traverse their land.. He entered in between the two barriers and came out into the land of Gog and Magog.*

1. e.g. Togan 1939, 82 n. 1: “Rūsīya, den Rūs zugehörig, die Russen. Rūs und rūsīya sind bei I[bn] F[aḍlān] offenbar Synonyme....”
2. same, 78.
3. Br. Library ms. Add. 5928, fol. 22a-23a).

*He was in the midst of them, he saw their gang and reached the farthest and nearest parts of them. (Verily, they were) a tribe of wondrous physique, repugnant apparition and horrifying shapes, nations varying among themselves and species which were (more) interrelated.*

*Among them were men and women like tall palmtrees...*

*Their sustenance is a thing called **tannīn** which they ask for with the rain in the spring-time, requesting it in the way that humans request the downpour of rain. So when they cause it to rain, they take its meat, cut it into strips, preserve it and eat from it the whole year of theirs until the next year. Hence when it rains they grow fat..*

*They twitter like the twittering of pigeons, they howl like the howling of jackals... They don't know what's right from what's forbidden, and don't comprehend a whit of speech. They eat what crawls upon the earth of serpents, scorpions and vermin.*

*When the Two-horned beheld them, touring their land and criss-crossing their locality: there they were upon the shore of the Ocean and (with) a towering, slippery, bleak and smooth-faced mountain with neither ascent nor climbing-place, which surrounded their locality... And it is said that the length of their land is two years, (whereas) its width is a journey of four months.*

Here are the men and women “tall as palmtrees” who, as the text by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī makes clear, are only one species of the heterogeneous Ya'ǧūǧ-Ma'ǧūǧ. This description may be compared with that of Ibn Faḍlān regarding the Ya'ǧūǧ-Ma'ǧūǧ according to his Bulǧār informants.

The above is not to be dismissed as free fantasy. Thus, regarding the ‘hairiness’ of the Ya'ǧūǧ-Ma'ǧūǧ, we do meet with a *gentem* ‘*capillatos*’ = the Goths.<sup>1</sup>

The other thing to be noted from al-Ḥasan is the description of the **tannīn** – which here denotes, as in al-Mas'ūdī and other authors above, the whale; and not in the Pontos or Maeotis = the Black and Azov Seas, but in the North Sea. With al-Ḥasan we are long before the onset of the Viking age; the traditions he gives us here date, as does the testimony of Pseudo-Zachariah, to the age and far-northern home of the ‘proto-Vikings’, the Eruls.

### 7.14. Ibn Faḍlān on Ya'ǧūǧ-Ma'ǧūǧ Whaling

That Ibn Faḍlān knew his classics (including al-Ḥasan) is evident from his travelogue, in which we find a description of, clearly, North Norwegians under the guise of Ya'ǧūǧ-Ma'ǧūǧ, along with, again, the classical whale. Scholarly attention having been riveted on his eyewitness account of the Viking ship burial on the Volga, the importance of the following passage in Ibn Faḍlān has hitherto gone generally unnoticed.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Svennung 1967, 44.2a, 139 n. 415a. These *capillati* have also been explained by their having ‘Scythian furs’ for clothing: Wolfram 1979, 459. The expression *capillati* further designated the long-haired Frankish aristocracy. And originally it is used as the name of an Alpine tribe in Pliny the Elder. Cf also the individual fame of Ragnar Lodbrog, literally ‘Ragnar with the furry trousers’, possibly bruited very far abroad, cf Liebrecht: “Die Ragnar Lodbrogsage in Persien”, in: Benfey 1856, 561 ff.
  2. Togan 1939, 72-73.

*I then brought him to my place [of residence] and wrote [regarding him] to the inhabitants of Wīswā, who live three months away from us, asking them of him. They then wrote the following to me:*

*‘This is a man from the Ya’ğūğ-and-Ma’ğūğ, who dwell three months away from us. They are naked, between them and us lies an ocean, upon the coasts of which they live. They are like quadrupeds, and copulate in that way. God the lofty and sublime every day makes a fish come out of the Ocean to them. Thereupon one of them comes with a knife and cuts off from it as much as is needed for him and his family. Yet when he cuts off more than is needed for their nourishment, then he gets stomach aches; his family too attracts stomach pains and often he and they perish together. Yet when they have received as much as they need, then it [the fish] turns around and returns back into the sea. And in this way they live every day...*

Of course the North Norwegians (and other northerners) were not naked – although the Erul ‘models’ for the Ya’ğūğ-Ma’ğūğ were reputed to be so. Nor did the northerners subsist on one singly fish lying patiently for them to cut in, returning miraculously back into the sea afterwards, somehow unwounded. Again, this is a literary topos: the seasonal appearance and return into the sea of the *tannīn* (or whale) – chased by the other whale.

### 7.15. *Al-Firdawsī, 1050,<sup>1</sup> on Red-’n-Yellow*

The ‘greatest of all’ among Persian poets, al-Firdawsī, has relevant information for us in his epic, the *Šāhnāma*. Here, al-Iskandar is up in the Caucasus fighting the **Hrūm** (= Byzantines); at least, that is what his text says. It has been speculated that the name of **Hrūm** given here may originally reflect the **Hrws** attested in Pseudo-Zachariah, unintelligible to Firdawsī and his readers.

Both very confused and to the point is the insistence by our poet that the “**red-haired**” and “**yellow-faced**” ones (sic) put up a din before joining battle, slapping their faces and banging their shields and weapons. Yet the ‘confusion’ here is only apparent, although natural enough to nonplussed Orientals. In the way it would be prone to be interpreted by the non-initiate, this din and shouting, banging of shields and weapons reflects the ancient custom of the **vápentak** ‘consent, signalled by the troops hitting their shields with their weapons’ – or in Anglo-Saxon *wapentake*.<sup>2</sup>

### 7.16. *Amīr Ḥusraw, 1299-1300,<sup>3</sup> on Underwater Reds*

*Some stanzas follow on the trek for the Water of Life. The poet says that he does not intend to go into details on this, as another one (i.e. Niẓāmī) has already told of it. Coming out from the Land of Darkness, the army comes out into a desert and there suffer desperately from hunger. Seeing no escape from distress, Iskandar at night supplicates to God. The heavenly messenger Surūš appears, carrying a wondrous branch? of grapes, the fruit of which does not let up however much is eaten from it. He bids Iskandar march against the iniquitous tribes of Ya’ğūğ and Ma’ğūğ...*

1. Werner 1912, VI.

2. Described in Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 11, *Historiae* V, 17, 3, Caesar, *de Bello Gallico* VII, 21,1: Forni/Galli 1964, 98.

3. Paraphrase by Bertel’s 1948, 85, 93-94.

*Returning to Iskandar, the poet narrates that, having traversed the entire earth, the Shah now hankered to travel the seas. Upon the shore of the western Ocean (dar'joj mağrib) a large tent is erected for him. He convenes his grandees there and gives a speech to them... The travellers at last arrive in such a place in the Ocean that to penetrate further is impossible. The travellers panic, yet the heavenly messenger Surūš appears and extends his aid to them. Iskandar descends in a glass cage to the bottom of the Ocean. The descent takes one hundred days. Once again Surūš appears and shows him the wonders of the Ocean: Squids, tortoises, people of the sea with red faces and great beards yet without hair on their heads. They reproach Iskandar for avidity and for wishing to destroy their peace. Thereupon Iskandar sees enormous beasts. One of them was so great that it passed by his cage for the duration of a fortnight. For fear of the sight of this beast Iskandar takes ill. Surūš warns him that his life is at end, and helps him ascend to the surface of the sea.*

The type of scene described here from the bottom of the Ocean is a staple in the Alexander legend. Only the ‘people of the sea with red faces and great beards’ do not quite fit in. Or do they?

We recall the expert mariners and pirates in the text falsely ascribed to Aethicus Istricus. Through the expedient of exchanging hostages, Alexander himself gets an opportunity for descending to the bottom of the Ocean, by way of the ‘diving-places’ (*colimfas*) of these folk. They enjoy the reputation of staying underwater, at least when on the prowl, in order not to be seen by their victims.

### 7.17. Nağīb Hamadānī, c. 1180 & Amīn Rāzī, 1593

These two Persian authors have little to contribute over and above what they themselves found in Ibn Faḍlān. They key passage in Nağīb Hamadānī runs:<sup>1</sup>

*The Rūs are a numerous people upon an island [or: peninsula]... The Rūs folk – they are a people of tall stature, with white bodies and red faces...*

Likewise, Amīn Rāzī (sometimes incorrectly called Aḥmad Tūsī) has a brief description, the opening lines of which are as follows:<sup>2</sup>

*The Rūs: This is an enormous mass of people. Their nationality in its entirety has red hair, tall stature, and white bodies. (...)*

### 7.18. Nižāmī Ganğevī, 1199

The great poet Nižāmī Ganğevī in his *Sikandar-nāma e-barā* (‘Story of Alexander the Great on the Dry Land’, as opposed to his ditto *e-baḥrī* ‘Story of Alexander, Maritime Version’), has a lengthy description in poetic parlance of how Sikandar worsts the “redfaced Rūs”, a recurrent epithet:<sup>3</sup>

*On the other side the Russians, red of face,  
Illuminators, like the place of adoration (the fire) of the Magi.*

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1. Kovalevskij 1956, 153.

2. same, 154.

3. Clarke 1881, 694: Song 58, line 22.

The ruddiness of the Russians is described in hyperbole – they literally glow so redly as to illuminate their surroundings, like the fire-place! In the best of Persian poetic style, there is the *allusion* to the Mağūs – among whom the Russians were classified. And allusions relevant to our subject matter are to be found in some abundance in Niẓāmī, their contents being such as to merit separate treatment.<sup>1</sup>

### 7.19. *Abū Maṣṣūr* (d. c. 980 or 1050?), in *Yāqūt*<sup>2</sup>

*Abū Maṣṣūr said: The Slavs are a tribe of red colour, having ruddy-blond hair. They march with the land of the Ḥazars and the upper parts of the mountains of ar-Rūm. A man of red colour is called a Slav, because of his resembling the colour of the Slavs.*

The same elements are refound with reference to the extreme north in the late geographers al-Marvāzī, c. 1130, and ad-Dimašqī, c. 1310, who however both utilize very much earlier sources. The former is disinclined to believe reports on a reddish (etc.) people in the vicinity of China, since redness is an attribute of others, namely our far-northerners:

### 7.20. *Al-Marvāzī*<sup>3</sup>

*The author of the book al-Masālik asserts that beyond China there is a nation of ruddy complexion and red hair. The heat of the sun in their land is extreme... However, this record needs (further) examination, as ruddy traits and red hair are produced by the excess of cold and deficiency of heat, as in the case of the Slavs and the Rūs.*

### 7.21. *Ad-Dimašqī*:<sup>4</sup>

*The Ice Ocean, beyond the Qipčak deserts... In this Ocean a great island is situated, populated by men of a great stature, with skin and hair of a blond hue, with blue eyes, and not comprehending any tongue...*

*In the Qipčak desert, towards the Northeast at a latitude surpassing 60 degrees, the lake of Devils is situated, close to the headwaters of the Volga... Among the voyagers who have made their way thither are the companions of Alexander the Great and of the Dağğāl, who saw deformed beings swimming upon the surface of the water...*

*Right near to the Ice Ocean, at a distance of 20 days towards the West, and to the North of the country of the Kilābiyya, there is a great lake called 'the Glowing Lake', the shores of which are populated by a race of Slavs. There one in the nighttime sees lightings-up, even though this effect is produced neither by the stars nor by fire.*

*To the South of the Ya'ğūğ and Ma'ğūğ one finds a race without neck as it seems, the head being attached directly to the body. They nourish themselves on venison and plants and resemble wild beasts by their strength, their stupidity and their ferocity.*

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1. See chapter 13.4-5 below.

2. Wüstenfeld 1876, III: 'Saqlab'.

3. Minorsky 1942, 26, translating the word **šūqr** 'white-and-pink complexion' (sic).

4. Mehren 1874, 158-159 – *my trsl., HS.*



As for ‘coloured’ peoples, this passage on the blue-eyed blonds is not all there is in ad-Dimašqī; in another place he introduces the Romans, or rather the Romans-cum-Byzantines (ar-Rūm) in the following way (my emphasis – HS):<sup>1</sup>

*The Rūm, or the **Yellow Boys**, are descended from Naẓr b. ‘Is b. Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm; this is the prevalent opinion among the genealogists... According to another view, the Rūm stem from Rūmī b. Šimāğak b. Ḥarbiyān b. ‘Alfā b. al-‘Is the **Yellow** b. Ishāq; or, according to others, from Rūmī b. Naẓr who, like we have said, was called the **Yellow**...*

Calling the Greeks ‘the Yellow Ones’ would serve as a natural contrast and backdrop to naming the Russians ‘the Reds’.

Finally, ad-Dimašqī has an entry on the Rūs saying:

*They inhabit a number of islands situated in the sea of Māniūtūs [= Azov Sea, HS] and have ships with which they make war upon the Ḥazars. They enter by a branch of the Itil [= the Volga, HS], which debouches into the Black Sea and, having reached the main course of the river, they follow its course all the way to where it disembogues into the Caspian. Thus do they keep up their invasions.*

The Azov Sea as the main localization of the Rūs is highly original – were it not for the fact that it holds good for their ‘forebears’ the Eruls.

## 7.22. *The ‘Reds’*

Above, we noted the usage *ar-Rūsīya*, meaning ‘the Reds’ (< *’oi rousioi*), in Ibn Faḍlān. It is also met with in Ibn Rusta, who wrote after 922 AD but clearly reflecting conditions from *before* 860;<sup>2</sup> his famous description of the Russians will be addressed later on.<sup>3</sup>

In Ibn Ḥawqāl, 977 AD, we find that the inhabitants of Ğurğān, on the southern shore of the Caspian, call the Russians **ar-Rūsīya**. Otherwise in this author, the dominant form is *ar-Rūs*, although he in a couple of places, when treating the attack by the Russians on the town of Barḍa‘a on the south shore of the Caspian, in Azerbayğān, 943 AD, utilizes the form *ar-Rūsīya*.<sup>4</sup>

So do, regarding this same attack, Ibn Miskawayh, c. 1000 AD,<sup>5</sup> and al-Hamadānī,<sup>6</sup> sometime before 1100, plus Ibn al-Aṭīr, 1231 AD, and Ibn Ḥaldūn, c. 1380 AD, who both use *ar-Rūs* and *ar-Rūsīya* interchangeably.<sup>7</sup>

The geographer al-Idrīsī, writing in 1154 AD yet drawing upon materials very much older, speaks of the people of *ar-Rūs*, although also using *ar-Rūsīya* to design-

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1. same, 372. Cf Marquart 1913, 273: “*Banū l-aṣfar* ist bei den vorislamischen Dichtern, zumal bei ‘Adī b. Ziyād al-‘Ibādī, eine Bezeichnung der Romäer.”
  2. *versus* Birkeland 1954, 15, and particularly 16, on al-Bulğār: “Al-Ḥazar have trade relations with them, and so do ar-Rūsīya (the Russian, sc. nation)...”. The last few words, in brackets, are not found in the Arabic text, and are a gloss, grossly misleading, by Birkeland.
  3. Text and discussion in ch. 13.1 below.
  4. de Goeje 1873, 241, 282, Kramer 1938, 339, 393-394, Birkeland 1954, 49-50.
  5. Margoliouth 1920-21, V, 67-74, Birkeland 1954, 54-58.
  6. Birkeland 1954, 66-67.
  7. same, 91-92, 127, Seippel 1896, 97-98, 110-111.

nate both ethnos and territory.<sup>1</sup> In al-Mağribī,<sup>2</sup> as in ad-Dimašqī,<sup>3</sup> *ar-Rūsīya* is the capital of ar-Rūs.

In late authors like Abū l-Fidā' and al-Ḥarrānī, around 1330, *ar-Rūsīya* is the land.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the name itself, we note that a number of authors repeat, or rephrase, the colour bit; some are late indeed, like Ibn Iyās, c. 1510 AD.<sup>5</sup>

**On the lands of ar-Rūs:**

*They are a people of at-Turk. Their lands are insalubrious and located in the vicinity of aṣ-Ṣaqāliba. They dwell upon an island, surrounded by a lake... The people of this country have a ruddy body colour, yellow hair and big bodily size. They are the basest of God the sublime's creatures. They have a strange speech.*<sup>6</sup>

### 7.23. 'Ruddy Slavs' of al-Aḥṭal

Besides the above Abū Maṣṣūr, only one Arab author expressly attributes this redness of hue to the Slavs; and this is traditionally held to be an early source indeed: The poet al-Aḥṭal is believed to have set down the following brief stanza sometime in the 7th c. AD, before the introduction of Islam:<sup>7</sup>

*As if you really see in them! A multitude of the red Slavs.*

### 7.24. Islamic Pictorial Art

In Muslim representations of the Alexander legend, we once in a while meet with the Ya'ğūğ and Ma'ğūğ, shown on top of, or behind, the Wall of al-Iskandar.<sup>8</sup> The usual scene is of al-Iskandar overseeing the erection of the Wall, no fiends depicted.<sup>9</sup> Yet even if there are pictures of redskinned monsters contending with Muslim (and pre-Islamic Iranian) heroes,<sup>10</sup> we should not draw hasty conclusions. These pictures are generally late, and it is uncertain which older traditions, if any, this redness is descended from. At our present stage of research, it is only in the written tradition that the redness of the Ya'ğūğ and Ma'ğūğ is historically significant.

### 7.25. Non-Muslims – Procopius, Monomax

For the sake of completeness, be it said that the Arab and Muslim authors are not wholly alone in speaking of this 'redness'. We also have Procopius who in his Book

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1. same, 70-71, 74, Seippel 1896, 85-86, 136.

2. same, 99, Seippel 1896, 101.

3. same, 117, Seippel 1896, 105.

4. same, 119, 123, Seippel 1896, 106, 147.

5. same, 131, Seippel 1896, 113.

6. This 'strange speech' is a recurrent postulate, harking back to the description in the Qur'ān, *sūra* 18, of the neighbours of the Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ.

7. Garkavi 1969, 2.

8. Folsach 1991, 32, plate 75.

9. Titley 1978.

10. Folsach 1991, 30, plate 70, frontispiece.

VII of 'The Wars', when describing the two Slavonic groupings of the Sclaveni and the Antae, characterizes their natural bodily hue as follows:<sup>1</sup>

*And both the two peoples have also the same language, an utterly barbarous tongue. Nay further, they do not differ at all from one another in appearance. For they are all exceptionally tall and stalwart men, while their bodies and hair are neither very fair or blond, nor indeed do they incline entirely to the dark type, but they are all slightly ruddy in colour... In fact, the Sclaveni and Antae actually had a single name in the remote past; for they were both called Spori in olden times, because, I suppose, living apart one man from another, they inhabit their country in a sporadic fashion.*

From a later age there is the description of Vladimir Monomax:<sup>2</sup>

*Of face he was red, his eyes were large, his hair ruddy and reddish-blond, his brow tall, his beard wide, of build he was not markedly tall, but strong of body and forceful.*

This picture of one man's looks may be deemed irrelevant to our study. We cannot however dismiss the distinct possibility that Vladimir here is held up for admiration in the light of an ideal, the archetypical ruddy Russian warrior.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Dewing 1924, IV, 271-273 (= Book VII: xiv).

2. Rybakov 1982, 456, citing Tatiščev.

3. Lixačev 1950, I, 133-134: Under the year 1078, Izjaslav is *vzorom krasen*.

## 8. Renewal of Erul ‘Rus’ Tradition in Spain & Byzance

*En generel analyse af de arabiske forfatteres  
omtale af ruserne ville nok være ønskelig...*  
Baek Simonsen 1979, 79.

### 8.1. Al-Ya‘qūbī on ar-Rūs attacking Sevilla 843-844<sup>1</sup>

*To the west of the town called Algeciraz is the town named Sevilla, by a great river which is the Cordova river. In the year 229 [= 30/9 843-17/9 844 AD, HS] al-Mağūs, called ar-Rūs, broke into the town of Sevilla, carrying away captives, pillaging, burning and slaying.*

This is the oldest source mentioning ‘Russian’ attacks on Spain.<sup>2</sup> Al-Ya‘qūbī wrote in 891, i.e. less than fifty years after the event. The idiom **yuqāla lahum**, here translated ‘called’, means that they were thus called by the Spanish Muslims, and not by the Mağūs themselves (literally, “it was said with respect to them”).

### 8.2. Ibn Ḥawqāl on ar-Rūs & Spain<sup>3</sup>

*Bulğār is a small town having but few possessions. It became well-known for the reason that it was the seaport of these realms [: al-Ḥazar, al-Burṭās, al-Bulğār]. But ar-Rūs plundered it, Ḥazarān, Itil and Samandār in the year 358 [= 969 AD], and at once made off for ar-Rūm and al-Andalus.*

This is all that is found on the part of the geographer Ibn Ḥawqāl on a relationship between ar-Rūs and Spain (in Arabic, al-Andalus) in a standard Russian compilation of Arabic sources on ar-Rūs; the comment being:<sup>4</sup> “We leave aside the expedition to Andalus, about which our traveller has been misinformed.” Likewise, concerning the texts of al-Ya‘qūbī above and al-Mas‘ūdī (item 5) below, the same work insists that these authors are simply wrong: Their identification of the Mağūs assailing Spain with the Rūs of old is judged to be a mere unfounded ‘guess’, especially since ‘no other Arab authors’ mention visits by these Rūs to Spain.<sup>5</sup>

The trouble is: They do.

Thus, for one thing, immediately after the above, there is another passage in Ibn Ḥawqāl on the same phenomenon.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Seippel 1896, I, 50; Wiet 1937, 218; Birkeland 1954, 13.

2. The oldest date of these attacks given by Arabic authors, but then under the name of al-Mağūs, is that of Ibn Ḥaldūn, namely 841 (‘the year 27’) or even 840 (‘the year 26’, in the Bulāq edition): Birkeland 1954, 126, 164.

3. Garkavi 1969, 218-219.

4. same, 225-226.

5. same, 69-70: “Upon what did Ya‘qūbī found his insistence that these Mağūs were Russians? Did he hear it from the Spanish Arabs? But they actually told Mas‘ūdī the opposite,” etc.

6. Kramers & Wiet 1964, I, 15.

*The Rūs are a very uncouth people living on the Volga in the direction of the Bulġārs, from whom they are separated by the Slavs. A Turkic people has left its native land in order to settle between the Ḥazars and the Byzantines. They are the Pechenegs. This region does not belong to them from ages back; they have simply installed themselves there by force. They are the spearhead of the Rūs [šawkatu r-rūs, literally ‘the thorn’ – HS], and their allies. It is they who in olden times attacked al-Andalus, and subsequently Barḡā’.*

The latter part of this quotation, from “*they are the thorn of the Rūs*” on, is missing in several publications.<sup>1</sup>

### 8.3. *Ibn Ḥawqāl on ar-Rūs attacking Spain of old*<sup>2</sup>

*Ar-Rūs are the very same ones as of old arrived in Spain by boat.*

This precious little piece of information occurs in a work by the geographer Ibn Ḥawqāl from 977 AD. It has been left out in several compendiae of sources on the Rus’.<sup>3</sup>

In another chapter of the same work, devoted to al-Andalus, Ibn Ḥawqāl is considerably more informative; here we are being informed about ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad and his predecessors, meaning the Umayyad caliph of Cordoba ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān III (912-961), whereas the following words must relate to the times of his uncle (!) ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān II (822-852).<sup>4</sup>

*Apart from ar-Rūm [Byzantines and Franks – HS] he has no enemies, and rarely do they bother him. In olden times however vessels from ar-Rūs, the Pecheneg Turks and people among them from the Slavs and the Bulġārs appeared by him and ravaged his provinces. Yet they were often beaten off, having suffered losses and defeats.*

That the Rūs took along Pecheneg warriors on a ‘treaty basis’, perhaps primarily as archers, thus both obviating a danger on the Volga and augmenting their own forces, is quite credible; as is people coming from the Slavs and the Bulġārs on a more individual basis, for booty and adventure.

Which expeditions are meant? Reputedly, *several*. In point of historical fact, however, only one attack by ar-Rūs is registered during the reign of ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān II, viz. that of 844 AD; the other attacks on Spain coming later. This would seem to indicate that, by Ibn Ḥawqāl’s time, the Spanish Muslims still had a hazy ‘recollection’ of several seaborne attacks; only now they were all attributed to ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān – and not even the Second, but the Third! That it is the Second who was meant, originally, is proved by al-Mas‘ūdī, below. The conclusion being: these *more than one* maritime expeditions go back upon times before 843-844 AD; meaning a distant past indeed...

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1. e.g. Garkavi 1870, Seippel 1896, Birkeland 1954.

2. Kramers 1938, 15, lines 7-19.

3. Birkeland 1954, 48; Garkavi 1969, 218-222.

4. Kramers 1938, 113, Birkeland 1954, 48.

#### 8.4. *Al-Mas‘ūdī on ar-Rūs in Spain every 200 years*<sup>1</sup>

*Before the year 300 (= 912 AD) ships came to al-Andalus from the Ocean with thousands of people on board, ravaging its shores. The inhabitants of al-Andalus believed that these people were a nation out of al-Mağūs, making their appearance with them from this Ocean and attacking them every 200 years; and that they reached their country through a strait branching off from the Ocean – only this is not the same strait as the narrows where the copper lighthouse stands. I however am of the opinion, and God knows best, that this strait is connected with the Maeotis and Pontus seas, and that this people is ar-Rūs.*

The narrows “where the copper lighthouse stands” is the strait of Gibraltar, between Morocco and Spain; the copper lighthouse itself being the one at Cadiz. The whereabouts of the strait in question wherefrom the Vikings hail, another than the one leading into the Mediterranean, is indisputable: It is the one known today as the Kattegat and Skagerrak, leading to the Baltic.

The phrase ‘before the year 300’ sounds odd at first. It is however simply another way of saying ‘before the accession of ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad III’ (on whom above, under Ibn Ḥawqāl).

That both these sources use the dating ‘**before** the accession of ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān’ is conspicuous. It would indicate that they go back upon one and the same ulterior source. It is all the more striking in that ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān III was a contemporary of al-Mas‘ūdī.

Valuable is al-Mas‘ūdī’s testimony that it is the inhabitants of Spain themselves who insist that these (Viking) maritime marauders fall upon them every 200 years; meaning by implication that they must possess some oral or preferably written tradition that ‘they’ were here c. 200, and 400, and perhaps even 600, years ago as well.

#### 8.5. *Al-Bakrī on Rūs attacking Spain every 200 years*

The third testimony to this ‘Spanish tradition’ we find in the text of al-Bakrī (c. 1040-1090). Al-Bakrī utilizes a now lost Muslim-Spanish chronicle on the attacks by the Vikings (‘al-Mağūs’) upon the Atlantic littoral of Spain in 858 AD – without identifying them with the Rūs; on the other hand he says, in a quite different section of his work, while listing peoples and events in Eastern Europe:<sup>2</sup>

*In the neighborhood of [the Great Bulḡārs on the Volga – HS] dwell the Rūs. They consist of many kinds, and are island-dwellers and seafarers, who are mighty upon the ssea and travel it a lot, living by the Pontus sea, mentioned above. They cleave to the faith of al-Mağūs. They fall upon Spain every 200 years. Thereto they reach through a bay of the Uqīyānūs sea [= the Atlantic Ocean, HS] and not through the sound where the iron [or: copper, HS] light-house stands [= Cadiz, HS]. It is a bay which is connected to the Maeotic and the Pontus sea.*

The island-dwelling (etc.) nature of ar-Rūs is conspicuous. So is the insistence that they, although living down by the Black and Azov Seas, go all the way up north, crossing the Baltic and the Belts of Denmark, to get at Spain. This would be next to

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1. Birkeland 1954, 38; Seippel 1896, 1-2.

2. Birkeland 1954, 65.

ridiculous, were it not for an oldstanding fact or two: that the Eruls did live on the islands of the Black and Azov Seas; that they did attack Spain – as there happened to be Eruls both eastern and western; and that they did use the Baltic. Naturally, only recourse to the Eruls can explain the ‘every two hundred years’ bit too...

## 8.6. ‘The Geography Book’ on Rūs raids upon Spain

§ 240. *Earlier many enormous ships used to come out from this Ocean, which the people of al-Andalus used to call qarāqīr. They were great ships with square sails, and sailed both forwards and backwards. Upon them sailed units out of the people called al-Mağūs. They are characterized by strength, intrepidity and forcefulness. They were intent upon (wa-ḡalada ‘alā) travelling the Ocean. Every time they went out, the shores of the Ocean were emptied [of people] for fear of them. They did not show up save at the start of every sixth or seventh year. The least that went out was 40 vessels [at one go], and sometimes they attained to 100 ships, vanquishing all they met upon the Ocean, taking them prisoner and capturing them. (...)*

§ 273. *From the town of Galizia the qarāqīr go out that are [called] the bayūnāt – they are manufactured there – from the Greatest Ocean unto Morocco.(...) Their crew are known as the Mağūs.*

The source quoted here is the *Kitābu l-Ġa‘rafiya* of one az-Zuhrī,<sup>1</sup> primarily a book of ‘aḡā’ib (wonders) arranged geographically. Interestingly, az-Zuhrī must have found the ‘each 200 years’ tradition much too fantastic to find credence with either him or his readers. Hence, in this, the latest of our Arabic sources, the periodicity of the phenomenon is still retained, yet its frequency has been whittled down to the more readily acceptable 6-7 years.

## 8.7. Zhao Jugua on Spain

*The country of Mulanpi is to the west of the Dazhi country. There is a great sea, and to the west of this sea there are countless countries, but Mulanpi is the one country which is visited by the big ships of the Dazhi. Putting to sea from Tobandi in the country of the Dazhi, after sailing due west for full an hundred days, one reaches this country. A single one of these (big) ships of theirs carries several thousand men, and on board they have stores of wine and provisions, as well as weaving looms. If one speaks of big ships, there are none so big as those of Mulanpi...*

*If one travels by land (from Mulanpi – HS) two hundred days journey, the days are only six hours long...*

Mulanpi is the realm of the Murābiṭūn (‘Almoravides’), comprising the Maḡrib and southern Spain from the latter part of the 11th to the mid-12th c. AD. Tobandi may well be Damietta, although the export of wine to the zealously Muslim Murābiṭūn is incongruous. Size and travelling distance of these vessels is grossly exaggerated.

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1. Hadj-Sadok 1968, commentary 75-76, 109, text 215, 201. That the Viking ships are said to set sail from, and even be made in, Galicia (the *qarāqīr*, also named *bayyūnāt* after Bayonne), is surprising. An-Nuwayrī indicates much the same in describing the 844-845 attack by al-Mağūs: “In the year 230 [= 844-845] the Mağūs, who live in the farthest-off part of al-Andalus, made an invasion in the land of the Muslims.” – Stang 1981, 366.

The introduction however mentions ‘countless countries’ west of the (Mediterranean) sea – and the last sentence above of course points to Scandinavia. The ‘ships of Mulanpi’ is a strange locution indeed if ships travelling to Mulanpi are meant. These ‘mammoth ships’ have been discussed earlier;<sup>1</sup> the conclusion being that they carry Scandinavians.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, these sources between them attest to the presence of a tradition in Spain regarding sea-borne precursors of the Vikings who indeed attacked Spain beginning from c. 844.

Second, this ‘Spanish tradition’ is remarkable for insisting on placing these attacks upon Spain in an East European context, insofar as a context is given at all: Not only is the Rūs (= Rhos) name otherwise known only from easternmost Europe; the Pechenegs and Bulḡars are thrown in so to speak for good measure.

### 8.8. *The Explanation*

The Spanish Muslim sources insist that precursors of the 9th century ar-Rūs had the nasty habit of coming back to ravage Spain at very long intervals. Is this in any way credible? We take into consideration that 100 Muslim years equal c. 97 (Gregorian) ones.

The **first** attacks recorded may refer not to raids against Spain but to the great maritime expeditions against Byzance by the ‘Eastern’ Eruls, in 267 and 269 AD, followed by the raids against the coasts of Gallia by the ‘Western’ Eruls in c. 286.

**Second**, there are the shipborne Erul onslaughts from Scandinavia against Spain in 409, in 455-456, and again in 459. Thus, one view of one of these the mid-5th century AD raids: “...the mysterious trek with seven vessels and a force of ‘bog-find size’ (400 men) which ‘Heruls’, apparently from Scandinavia, performed against northernmost Spain in 455 AD and repeated four years later”.<sup>3</sup>

This attack is described in the *Idatii Chronicle* under the year 455 AD:<sup>4</sup>

*Some seven vessels from the people of the Eruls came to the Luca littoral, approximately 400 lightly equipped men, and two out of their number were killed after having been routed, overtaken by the congregated multitudes. While on the return journey to their own parts, they most cruelly ravaged the maritime reaches of Cantabria and Vardulia.*<sup>5</sup>

**Third**, an attack or even a series of attacks by ‘Eruls’ or ‘Vikings’, meaning maritime marauders from Scandinavia, in the mid-7th c. on the Atlantic littoral is far from

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1. Hirth & Rockhill 1911, 33-34.

2. Stang 1981, 362-367.

3. Randsborg 1988, 14.

4. Thompson 1982, 180-181, Latham 1851, xcvi: *De Erulorum gente septem navibus in Lucensi litore aliquanti advecti, viri ferme cccc. expediti, superventu multitudinis congregatae duobus tantum ex suo numero effugantur occisis: qui ad sedes proprias redeuntes, Cantabriorum et Varduliarum loca maritima crudelissime depraedati sunt.*

5. meaning parts of Lusitania and the Biscaya Bay area (northwestern Portugal and Spain).



implausible. A faint possibility may reside in a recording in the Irish Annals:<sup>1</sup> these attest to quite close contacts with the Continent, meaning that a recording in Ireland just *might* have made a lasting literary impression there too. Having reached the Shetland isles by the early 7th c., Norwegian Vikings may have ravaged the island of Torach (Tory island) off the coast of Donegal in Ireland in 617 AD, sustaining a defeat that put them off for a long time.<sup>2</sup>

We are on safer ground, only up by the mouth of the Rhine, with the battle in which the monstrously oversized king Hygilaicus was killed, in 512 AD. And then there are the testimonies of Beowulf and Widsith, of Cassiodor and Jordanes, and of course, chronologically last in line, Procopius – whose word on the élite Erul conquerors of Numidia in the mid-6th century is the closest we get, in time and space, to 7th c. Spain; only we are still a century short.

Around 580 AD, Venantius Fortunatus speaks of the victories of the Franks over Danes and Saxons;<sup>3</sup> and also over Getae (here = *Geats*, Göts), Danes, Juthlanders, Saxons, and Britons,<sup>4</sup> yet only in the most general terms.

**Fourth**, of course, there are the 9th c. attacks mentioned in the Arabic and other sources above.

In sum, the indigenous Spanish tradition on Eruls/proto-Vikings, as taken over by the Arabs, provides ample grounds for the insistence that this people – called ‘Rōs (= ar-Rūs) – assail Spain “every 200 years”. Yet were the Muslim Spaniards the ones to activate this knowledge? Did they study the old Visigothic records assiduously – and come up with this **eureka!** all on their own? We may be quite certain that they did not. The power either goading them to make this discovery, or more probably making it for them, based on its own recordings, was Byzantium.

### 8.9. The ‘Rōs in 626/860 “and Earlier”

*A Discourse on the Very Holy Lady Mother of God*, authored by the Emperor of Nicaea, Theodore II Lascaris (1245-58), opens as follows:<sup>5</sup>

*Today the barbarians have been destroyed; today the Christians have been raised up on high; today the people of the pious have been liberated and the troops of the impious have been plunged in the sea like that of Pharaoh... and that numerous unconquerable gathering of boats has been sent to the bottom, into the sea... Who does not know the Happening? The ‘Rōs who had once sailed against the Byzantis (...), who placed their hopes*

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1. My colleague Per Sveaas believes such an attack is mentioned in one of the Irish annals c. 650 – oral comm. 1995. One thing they yield up is a Norse *erell* ‘regent’ serving the king of Lathlann in the Ulster Annals, 847, while the name *jarl* crops up shortly after: cf. von Friesen 1924, 76.
  2. Zimmer 1891, 299-304, 308-317, Marquart 1903, 389.
  3. Venant. Fortunatus VII: 7, 49-50, Marquart 1903, 388 n.4: “*quae tibi sit virtus cum prosperitate superna./ Saxonis et Dani gens cito victa probat.*”
  4. same, IX, 1: 71 ff, Marquart 1903, 388 n.4: “*... ne ruat armatus per Gallica rura rebellis./ nomine victoris hic es et ampla tegis:/ quem Geta, Vasco tremunt, Danus, Euthio, Saxo, Britannus./ cum patre quos acie te domitasse patet./ terror [es] extremis Fresonibus atque Suebis./ qui neque bella parant, sed tua frena rogant.*”
  5. Translation from Vasiliev 1946, 103-104.

*upon naval battle, were immediately drowned and the pious in their weakness were saved by the strong hand of God, for His Mother is their guardian. And what slave can oppose the powerful Mother of the Lord? That well known host, dog-like, greedy, fond of pleasure, looking only for pleasure and not recognizing God, was speedily drowned...*

This source has been treated to a in many ways thorough discussion by Vasiliev, who concludes that it may apply equally well to the ‘Rōs onslaught in 860 and to an invasion and siege of the capital by the Avars and Persians in 626.<sup>1</sup>

“It should be noted that in the descriptions of the siege of 626 several later sources list Russians among the allies of the Avar Khagan who besieged Constantinople. This is evidently the application by later writers of the name of Russians to the Scythians, who according to evidence contemporary with the siege of 626, participated in this siege... The name *Russian* in 626 need not trouble us, because in several later sources on this siege, as we know, this name replaces *Scythian* which is given in earlier evidence.”

With regard to the event mirrored by the *Discourse*, Vasiliev opts for the 626 invasion, on account of the “many analogies in phraseology and vocabulary” found in the *Bellum Avaricum* by George of Pisidia describing that invasion.<sup>2</sup>

While this observation is certainly correct, there is good reason to caution against jumping to conclusions on such grounds alone. For with Byzantine archaism, the ‘recycling’ of ancient texts or quotations for new purposes is common enough. We are at a loss to decide whether the excerpt from the *Discourse* in Lascaris was indeed ‘recycled’ into dealing with the 860 invasion, and also from what date the name ‘Rōs here stems.

What Vasiliev fails to analyse is that key subjunction: “who **had once** sailed against the Byzantis”. An historical attack on Byzance itself by a people ‘Rōs prior to 860 or the 9th c. in general, cannot refer to anything but the Erul attacks of the late 3rd century. (The *name* of ‘the Byzantis’ is of no aid to us, as it was commonly used by the Greeks in Christian times too, centuries after the settlement of Byzantion had been renamed Constantinople).

Finally, there is one indication that the *Discourse* excerpt may indeed be treating of the 626 Avar & Persian (or some even earlier) siege to Constantinople. This is a source on the 674-678 investment of the city by the Arabs – a single Greek manuscript, probably from the 10th c., preserved in the library of the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on the island of Patmos; here, under the day commemorating the Muslim siege of the city under Constantine IV, 25th June, there is the note:

*The attack of Saracens and ‘Roun, and the religious procession in Blachernae.*

“Our first reaction is that in this name we may have a distorted form of Rus or Ros (‘Ρους, ‘Ρώς) i.e., Russians,” is the comment by Vasiliev. “If this were true, it would be evidence for a combined Arab-Russian attack, of which we know absolutely nothing. Granted, “the enigmatic name *Roun* occurs only once, in a very defective manuscript, full of errors, so it is impossible to draw any definite conclusion from such doubtful ground.”<sup>3</sup> Yet Vasiliev’s conclusion above is unwarranted: that if so be, this

1. Vasiliev 1946, 100, 104.

2. same, 97-99.

3. same, 208-209.

would be evidence of an Arab-Russian attack. It is perfectly possible to construe these words as a reference to two different attacks by the ‘heathens’ threatening Byzance, decades or even centuries apart.

A form ‘**roun**’ does exist, being the accusative form of the word **róos** ‘sea’ (with the parallel, Attic form ‘**rous**’); we witnessed it above, in the *Discourse* by the Emperor Theodore Lascaris, where *tón* ‘roun’ signifies ‘by sea’.

The people in question being mariners, if identified with the Eruls, a misinterpretation of the name ‘*Rōs*’ or ‘*Rous*’, unknown to the copyist, as ‘*Roun*’ (i. e., something associated with the sea) would be but natural.

### 8.10. Why the Eruls Anew?

What then proved capable of stimulating the Byzantines into so to speak resuscitating the long-dead Reds?

One most natural suggestion would be clothing.<sup>1</sup>

A second guess might be the colour of Viking ships, and/or Viking battle gear. Thus, according to the poet Hornklove, at the battle of Hafrsfjord c. 890, the men fought with “*red shields*” aboard battle ships “*with red prows*”.

A third guess might be the colour of Viking sails. Not that the Eruls had sails; but red sails in the 9th c. might indeed give the Greeks a cue (albeit a historically false one). In the Bayeux tapestry we see war ships colourful indeed, with hull planks in red-yellow-red, or blue-yellow-blue, etc., and sails likewise striped in red-white-red, etc., “and we have every reason to believe that the same was the case a couple of centuries earlier in the Viking age”.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, one popularized rendition of an Arabic poem concerning the 843-844 attack on Spain runs:<sup>3</sup> “The Vikings *‘had filled the Ocean with red birds (sails) and the hearts with anguish’*.”

This however is much too simplistic. The Arabic wording is **ṭīran ḡawnan** and the latter word can indeed lend itself to a translation as ‘red’ in certain contexts and usages; an inventory of its meanings runs:<sup>4</sup> *white* and *black* (sic!); *black tinged over with red*; *black intermixed with red*; also, *red*; or *of a pure red colour*; yet also, of plants and herbage, *green*, or *intensely green, inclining to blackness*. The sun’s disc is called **ḡawna** ‘because of its becoming black [or of a blackish colour tinged with red] at setting’; etc. Thus, better to say, in English:<sup>5</sup>

*The Maḡūs came raiding [fa-haraḡa] in about eighty ships, as if the Ocean was filled with dark birds, just as the hearts were filled with fear and pain.*

When wishing to impress the Byzantines, the Norwegian Crusader king Sigurd Jór-salfar (‘the Jerusalem-farer’) sailed majestically into the Golden Horn, his sixty vessels powered by billowing red sails of pure silk. Yet this is in the 12th century, not the 9th. There is nothing to suggest that the 839 ‘*Rōs*’ came sailing along in this wise.

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1. Again, Monclair 1994.

2. Marstrander 1986, 27-28.

3. Paasche 1977, 80-81.

4. Lane 1883, I, 490-491.

5. Seippel 1896, 28, Birkeland 1954, 108.

Nor is there reason to believe that these visitors were conspicuously red, be it in clothing or other accoutrements. Their hue was probably ruddy, though, and their hair partly reddish-blond, in the eyes of the more olive-skinned or sombre Greeks. Yet that alone would hardly be enough for coming up with the name of ‘oi ‘rousioi.

What suggests itself is a combination of themes and traits, leading up to an identification with ‘the Reds’, meaning primarily the Eruls.

We turn to Procopius from Caesarea, who informs us of Erul customs: Their old and sick they kill, burning the corpse atop a gigantic wooden pyre, whereupon the bones are buried; and an Erul wife must follow up by hanging herself “beside the tomb of her husband”, evidently accompanying him in the grave.<sup>1</sup>

This is exactly what we find in the earliest mid-9th c. Scandinavian burials at Old Ladoga, in the Plakun cemetery: in several instances, the man is accompanied by a woman.<sup>2</sup> The man has been burned beforehand some other place.

Such is also frequently the case in other cemeteries belonging to the earliest Rus’, i.e. on the south-eastern and eastern approaches to Old Ladoga,<sup>3</sup> as well as by the Upper Volga.<sup>4</sup>

This is what Ibn Faḍlān witnesses in the summer of 921 AD and describes in vivid, even gory, detail: Instead of a wife proper, a slave-girl is killed by a combination of strangling and stabbing, and lain atop the pyre. – In this case, the pyre is on board a boat, which is set afire and shoved out into the Volga.

This too is what Arabic authors attest to: female victims accompanying ‘their’ man into the grave,<sup>5</sup> or onto the pyre,<sup>6</sup> while still alive.

2) The paganism of 3rd-6th c. Eruls and 9th c. Vikings was very much alike, meaning in particular the modes and the objects of religious veneration. In particular, a passage in Procopius on the former opened up for an understanding that they were ‘Magians’:<sup>7</sup>

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*Now Thule is exceedingly large... In that place a very wonderful thing takes place each year. For the sun at the time of the summer solstice never sets for forty days, but appears constantly during this whole time above the earth. But not less than six months later, at about the time of the winter solstice, the sun is never seen on this island for forty days, but never-ending night envelops it... I made enquiry from those who came to us from the island as to how in the world they are able to reckon the length of the days, since the sun never*

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1. Dewing 1914-28, III, 402-404 (Book VI, xiv).

2. Sedov 1985, 162.

3. Kočkurkina 1973, 11, 15.

4. Pimenov 1965 for references.

5. Seippel 1896, 51, Birkeland 1954, 17: “They also carry his favourite wife with him into the grave, while she is still alive. Then the door to the grave is bunged up, and so she dies in there.”

6. Al-Iṣṭāḥrī, Seippel 1896, 56, Birkeland 1954, 29: “Ar-Rūs are a people who burn their dead. And along with the rich ones of them, the slave women are bunnred of their own free will.” Ibn Ḥawqāl, Kramers/Wiet 1964, II, 388, Birkeland 1954, 50: “Among the Rūs, when a man dies, they burn his body. And when it regards one of their rich ones, their slave women are burned along with them of their own free will, just like the people do in India, Ghana, Kūga, and other places.” Slightly different in de Goeje 1873, 286.

7. Procopius, Wars, VI, xv, 615, Dewing 1914-28, III, 416-419.

*rises nor sets there at the appointed times. And they gave me an account which is true and trustworthy... They always take note of the courses of the moon and stars and thus reckon the measure of the days. And when a time amounting to thirty-five days has passed in this long night, certain men are sent to the summits of the mountains – for this is the custom among them – and when they are able to see the sun, they bring back word to the people that within five days the sun will shine upon them. and the whole population celebrates a festival at the good news, and that too in the darkness. and this is the greatest festival which the natives of Thule have.*

To the Byzantines there could hardly be any doubt that the natives of Thule were Magians, judging by their painstaking observation of the moon and stars in anticipation of the greatest feast of all: that of the sun. Using this description of the Erul Thulians when interrogating the 839 Viking visitors, the chancellor in Constantinople would be confirmed by these latter in their suspicion that they really were the same people. More than anything else, this would make for an identification of the Vikings with what the Arab sources subsequently testify to: *al-Mağūs*. There is little other explanation to be found.

3) Outward appearances were strikingly similar (although again for the Eruls the 9th c. ‘observer’ would have to rely on written descriptions). In particular this goes for the general blondness and bodily size of the northerners when compared with the smaller and swarthier Mediterraneans.

4) Their shocking behaviour, their being so prone to violence, and their sexual mores, made an impression as well.<sup>1</sup>

4) Their maritime character, their coming from the same far-off North both times, and moreover their coming ‘both ways’ – by the Atlantic as well as the Black Sea route, on real ocean-going vessels – must have made a major, if not *the* major impression.

These traits would be enough to make for an identification of the two. With the attack by the Rus’ on Constantinople in 860, that by their Erul predecessors surely came to mind. But then we are in the 860-ies, not in the year 839 when the appellation, and the identification, clearly was effected.

### 8.11. *The Xazar Cue*

There is an additional clue to just why the Byzantines would be on the lookout for men from the Prince of ‘Ros; and why the 839 visitors could latch on to the Biblical ‘Ros identification – even before reaching Byzantium. For prior to their arrival there, they would have called on the Xazar town of Sarkel.

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1. same, VI, xiv (Dewing 1914-28, III, 413) on the Eruls: “*They are still faithless... and eager to do violence to their neighbours, feeling no shame at such conduct. And they mate in an unholy manner, especially men with asses, and they are the basest of all men and utterly abandoned rascals.*” Ibn-Faḍlān has the Wīṣū (=Veps) attest to Scandinavians “*mating like quadrupeds*”, and Ibn Rusta and others to their mating in public, etc.

Allies of the Byzantine Empire, the Xazars were Turks – and Jews. The self-picture of the latter shows up in the correspondence between the Jewish *waz̄r* of Muslim Spain, Hasdai ben Shaprut, and the Xazar *xagan* Joseph; one letter opens:<sup>1</sup>

*...I can inform you that I am one of the sons of Japheth, from the seed of Togarma. Thus I have found it [written] in the genealogies of my forefathers: that Togarma had ten sons...*

Another version says:<sup>2</sup> “*Letter from Joseph, son of Aaron, king of Togarma...*”

Now in several versions of the Alexander legend, immensely popular in Byzantium, Togarma is the leader, or a main leader, of the Gog-Magog hordes going to overrun the civilized world at the end of time.<sup>3</sup>

No wonder that in early sources, the Xazars are squarely identified with these fiends:<sup>4</sup>

*Cap. 37. ...And of the king Alexander we read that he entreated, turning to God, that the peoples of Gog and Magog be shut in, they who are now called the Xazars, who were once Hunnic peoples, as he was unable to crush them by war. God hearkened to him, shutting in their mountain, so that they came to stay behind with their people; and he placed copper gates in front of this mountain...*

*Cap. 56. We know of no people under the heavens where Christians are not found. For [they are even found] in Gog and Magog, who are peoples of the Huns, who are called the Xazars, now a people which is stronger than those which Alexander led, circumcised and observing all [the rules of] Judaism.*

We recall the identification of the Turks (= the Xazars) with Gog-Magog which we have seen already in the *Cosmography* penned c. 770 and masquerading behind the name of Aethicus Istricus.

The search for unclean ‘Gog-Magog’ peoples even rubbed off on another Turkic people too, the Polovcy as mentioned in the preamble to the *Tale of Bygone Years*, “shedding blood, and devouring carrion and everything unclean – hamsters and earth squirrels”.<sup>5</sup>

While engaged in this Xazar-Andalusian correspondence, we may as well hear what it says about the Rus’, mentioning as it does Oleg (= Norse Helgi, here Helgu):<sup>6</sup>

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1. Svane 1993, 33.

2. same, 39-41: the shorter version.

3. Anderson 1932, 16: Afrem the Syrian. On Togarma, see *Genesis* 10:2.

4. Christiani Druthmari Corbiensis Expositio in Matthaeum, *PL* 106, 1405, 1456: “...*et de Alexandro rege legimus quod ad conclusionem gentium Gog et Magog, quae Gazara nunc vocatur, gentes quondam Hunnorum cum non posset eos bello delere, ad Deum conversus petierit, et Deus ad conclusionem eorum montem adauxerit, et quod remansit ipse cum populo suo conclusit, et portas aereas subter ipsum montem posuerit.*”

*Cap. 56. Nescimus jam gentem sub coelo in qua Christiani non habeantur. Nam et in Gog et in Magog, quae sunt gentes Hunnorum, quae ab eis Gazari vocantur, jam una gens quae fortior erat ex his quas Alexander conduxerat, circumcisa est, et omnem Judaismum obserrat.”*

5. Lixačev 1950, 16, cf. also on Slavonic tribes prior to Christianity, 14-15.

6. Svane 1993, 21-22, 50 n. 18: “Rusia.... renders the Old Russian Rus.”

*Thus [Pesah] saved [Xazar] from the hand of Rusus. He smote all whom he found of them [by the sword]. Then he went to war against Helgu... Then Russians were subjected under Xazar's hands.*

The forms appearing here are, first, Rusus, which would seem to reflect *russeus*, 'rousios' '[the] Red'; and secondly, Rus, which in the Hebrew script may stand for either 'Rūs[ioi] or 'Rōs in the Greek – or of course, both.

## 8.12. A Greek Accent

A number of scholars have disregarded the difference in Greek between the purely Biblical 'Ρῶς and the ethnonym for the Russians, 'Ρῶς.<sup>1</sup> This is even the case with Byzantinologists.<sup>2</sup> Nearly, treacherously, look-alike, these two name-forms differ only with respect to their accent.

Now the Bertinian Annals, which are the first to mention our historical Rus', under the year 839, tell us nothing about which of these two forms was utilized by the Greek chancery; for the Latin text says simply *Rhos*, no accent indicated. For this we turn to the Greek sources. And there we find three things.

For one thing, the first sources following the 839 visit all sport the form 'Ρῶς. Thus, e.g. the patriarchs Photios (in 860 and 867) and Nicolas the Mystic (c. 910-925),<sup>3</sup> Simeon Logofet (or Symeon Magister) and Leo the Deacon (c. 970), Theophanes Continuatus and the anonymous late 10th c. *Tractate on Cantonments*.<sup>4</sup>

This widespread and consequent usage testifies unambiguously to a common point of departure: the 839 visit to Byzantium by the Rhos, evidently understood by the Byzantine chancery as 'Ρῶς. In differing from the Biblical form this newfangled spelling demonstrates that the chancery took pains to render the self-appellation of the new arrivals, or at least to show that it was not identical with the 'Ρῶς of the Septuagint. *What* exactly the newcomers called themselves will be examined in the very last chapter of the present study.

Second, the name 'Ρῶς is indeclinable. This is most uncommon in Greek; and in the High Middle Ages it by and by is challenged by a more normal, i.e. declined form, viz. 'Ρῶσοι or 'Ρωσοί. This we have seen in the Mt. Athos acts; and it is likewise attested in Eustathius (c. 1170), Michael Glika and Ioann Kantakuzin.<sup>5</sup> It in turn is modelled on the Biblical 'Ρῶς.

Third, the Biblical form by and by crops up too, to designate the Russians. The first to introduce this usage that we know of is Leo the Deacon, who in so doing expressly quotes the Septuagint text of Ezekiel's prophesy. It also predominates in Georgius Cedrinus and Nikita Choniata; in the former, however, there is also one instance of 'Ρῶς. And in other authors, the spelling vacillates. Thus, in Theophanes

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1. e.g. Florovskij 1925, Mango 1980, 202, Thulin 1981, 181-182, Schramm 1982, 34, Mel'nikova & Petruhin 1989, 34 n. 6.

2. Sjuzumov 1940.

3. Nicolai Mystici epistola 22 ad Simeonem Bulgariae, PG 111, col. 151.

4. Vari 1901; cf Solov'ev 1957, 138.

5. Same.

Continuatus there are three entries with 'P $\acute{\omega}$  $\varsigma$ , versus two with 'P $\tilde{\omega}$  $\varsigma$ ; whereas in Zonaras we find only two 'P $\acute{\omega}$  $\varsigma$  but a series of 'P $\tilde{\omega}$  $\varsigma$ .<sup>1</sup>

What does all this show posterity – us – in sum? I believe it shows, as advertised at the end of our chapter 2 above, that the Byzantine chancery was indeed most aware, and wary, of what it was recording in and after 839 AD. There was this lurking suspicion that these newcomers, however few at first, were perhaps the fiends pre-advertised under the name 'P $\acute{\omega}$  $\varsigma$  in the Septuagint. The patriarch Photios too, while retaining the 'historical' neologism (if such it were) of 'P $\tilde{\omega}$  $\varsigma$ , made conscious play on the Gog-Magog-and-'Ros fears of his times.

Such fears were not to be taken lightly. We may even conclude that the Byzantines had an innate propensity for vacillation in this regard. On the one hand, panic had to be avoided. On the other hand, all precautions had to be taken, and people be on their guard, lest it turn out that these far-northern folks *really* were the fiends.

This then is neatly reflected in the usages recorded.

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1. Solov'ev 1957, 138, noting that the editions cited are generally based on late compilations and not directly on the extant manuscripts.



## 9. From Byzantium to the Arab West

*“I am enthralled by a woman of the Mağūs who stays the sun of beauty from darkening, she lives in the farthest-off of God’s lands, where he who travels thither finds no way.”*

The Spanish envoy to the Norse, c. 844,  
Yaḥyā al-Gazāl.

### 9.1. Did the 839 ‘Rōs Simply End in Ingelheim?

It is other Arabic sources and Muslim Arab historical personalities who clarify for us the circumstances behind the renewed use of the term **Rūs** or ‘**Rōs**. Our literal point of departure is, again, the Bertinian Annals of the Carolingian court, under the year 839. For these annals leave us up in Ingelheim – with the question: What next? For some strange reason the great interest in the 839 ‘Rōs going to Byzance, and from Byzance to Ingelheim, has found no parallel interest in, literally, *further* studies.

For there are two or three **sequels** to be found to the story which has ended, for all too many historians, but not for the ‘Rōs and Byzantine participants, in Ingelheim; one in the far north or north-east (on which more below, on Adam of Bremen); one in the deep south or south-west, in Cordoba, which we shall follow now; and one in the even deeper south or southeast, that up-and-coming capital of the world, Baḡdād.

The purpose of the mission from Theofilos was to secure military assistance against the onslaught from the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate – either from the Franks or, failing that, from those visceral fiends of the ‘Abbāsīds, the Ummayyad dynasts in Cordoba.

### 9.2. *Al-Maqqārī on the Axis Cordoba-Constantinople*<sup>1</sup>

*In the year 29 his son Muḥammad sent the troops (forth) and they advanced to Pamplona, falling upon the polytheists therein, and he killed its master Garcia, who was one of the greatest kings of the Christians.*

*And in his days the Mağūs appeared, penetrating into Sevilla. So ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān sent his troops to them under the commanders from Cordova. The Mağūs descended from their vessels and the Muslims battled them, putting them to flight after a strenuous stand. Subsequently the troops from Cordova arrived in some quantity. The Mağūs fought them, yet the Muslims chased them away and took possession of some of their ships, which they burned. The Mağūs travelled on to Sidona. They stayed there for two days, taking possession of various things.*

*‘Abd ar-Raḥmān’s ships arrived in Sevilla, whereupon they evicted the Mağūs to Lisboa, attacking and taking captives, and subsequently to Bāḡa, and thereafter to Lisboa. From there the information about them stops, with their eviction from Lisboa. The land settled back into peace. This was in the year 30. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān restored what they had razed in the country and reinforced its defences.*

*In the year 31... ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān dispatched his chamberlain ‘Abd al-Karīm on a raid to the land of Barcelona. So he harried in its environs and traversed the passes called al-Burt into the land of the Franks. He conquered it, killing, taking captive and enslaving,*

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1. Dozy/Dugak/Krehl/Wright 1855-60, I, 222-223 (my translation – HS).

and he razed their great city Gironda, caused havoc in its neighbourhood, and returned home.

And from beyond the[se Franks] the king of Constantinople Tūfīlis had sent a (mission with a) present to the Amīr ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān in the year 25, requesting his assistance, wishing for his [military presence] in the property of his forefathers in the East because of his being hard pressed by al-Ma’mūn and al-Mu’tašim. He even mentioned the two of them in his letter to him, calling them son-of-a-bitch...(.....).

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān reciprocated him for the gift and sent to him Yaḥyā al-Ġazāl from among the great men of his realm. He was renowned for his poetry and his sagacity. Thus a nexus was established between the two of them, and the mention of ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān rose among his detractors from the ‘Abbāsids.

Several details given here are quite informative. For one thing, Theofilos wisely plays upon Umayyad irredentism, suggesting that ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān by military means try to recover the realm or ‘property’ (*mulk*) wrested from the Umayyads by the ‘Abbāsids a century earlier.

The embassy mentioned is the very same one which had travelled with the ‘Rōs in its company to the Frankish court at Ingelheim. Having had the prayer of Theofilos for military assistance courteously turned down by the Franks there, the Byzantines now try their luck in Cordoba. The sole result, disappointing to them but quite exhilarating to us more than a millennium later, is the travel of Yaḥyā al-Ġazāl to Constantinople.

### 9.3. The Term *Mağūs*

What we can say for sure is that, among other things (and in the absence of productive talks on military assistance from Cordoba to Constantinople), Theofilos and al-Ġazāl have had ample occasion to try and find out who the enigmatic Rhōs accompanying the embassy half-way really were.<sup>1</sup>

“Thus a nexus was established between the two of them”, al-Maqqarī stated above. What kind of nexus? It cannot very well have consisted in solely this one(-way) visit by a Cordoban envoy to Theofilos.

If our theory is correct, and also more than a mere theory, then this first round of talks in Constantinople served to raise Cordoban apprehensions, like those nurtured by Theofilos already, regarding the Norsemen. And some echo of these talks and these apprehensions must then be audible still in our sources.

This indeed is the case. For one thing, the very name *al-Mağūs* is not taken out of the blue. This usage, *Mağūs* = Vikings, has puzzled scholars. Although acquiring by and by a rough meaning of ‘northern pagans’, the technical import is probably, originally, ‘Magian, Zoroastrian’; which of course is something these Norsemen

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1. Melvinger 1953, 61: “Durant son séjour à Constantinople pendant l’hiver 839/840, al-Ġazāl avait peut-être rencontré des hommes du Nord ou du moins entendu parler de leurs personnes. En 839 en effet, arriva de la part de l’empereur de Byzance à la cour de Louis le Pieux à Ingelheim une ambassade à laquelle prirent également part des Rhos...” Melvinger of course is mistaken. The visit of al-Ġazāl to Constantinople took place after the Rhos had left with the Byzantine embassy going to Ingelheim and Cordoba, and as a direct consequence of this.

were not. Even the translation ‘fire-worshippers’ is far from apposite.<sup>1</sup> Norsemen were **not** fire-worshippers. How come, then, that they came to be termed thus nevertheless?<sup>2</sup>

One (part-)explanation has hitherto not been suggested: In Hiberno-Latin texts, *magus* is the standard word for the Irish druids; it is met with twice in Ps.-Aethicus.<sup>3</sup> With the Norsemen coming from Ireland, we cannot really exclude the possibility that this usage was at play; indeed, it might be deemed an extra indication that Ireland is where they came from.

A ‘Celtic explanation’ from just across the Spanish border is however to be dismissed.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Ya‘qūbī wrote his ‘Book of the Lands’, from which the above excerpt on the Mağūs = Rūs is taken, in Egypt, 891 AD; i.e., nearly fifty years after the event. He grew up in Armenia and in the eastern Iranian province of Ḥurāsān, where Zoroastrian religion was still strongly present; in a word, the Mağūs. Yet the word, as applied to the Norsemen in Spain, is not from him. This we know because it is used by our Spanish envoy Yahyā al-Ġazāl in one of the poems he improvised in honour of Queen Nūd (Aud) while in Dublin, i.e. around 845 AD (see excerpt at head of this chapter).

When fighting the Norse attackers in 844-845, the Spanish Muslims **may** have taken an intellectual interest in their religion, although this is not all that likely; yet wholly implausible is the coining by the Spaniards of the usage *Mağūs*. This belongs to the far East! The word should be seen in the same ‘eastern context’ as other items in the Spanish tradition – pointing to Byzantium and beyond. This conclusion is not vitiated by the occurrence of the name in later sources referring to Mağūs north of Spain in the 8th c., e.g. Ibn al-Aṭīr (d. 1233) on Alfons the Chaste, king of Galicia (791-842), being aided by al-Mağūs in his campaign against the Arabs, 795 AD.<sup>5</sup>

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*Then commenced the year 179 [from March 27, 795]. On the expedition against the Franks in al-Andalus: In that year Hišām the master of al-Andalus sent a numerous army on the march, over them [stood] ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Muğīr, to Galicia. So they travelled until they ended up in Asturqa. Adfīnaš was king of the Galicians, and had*

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1. Mel’nikova/Petruşin 1991, 215: “By the term ‘al-Madzhus’ (namely ‘fire-worshippers’), the Oriental authors defined the pagan peoples of Europe, who had the custom of burning their dead.” No Muslim author would be so uninformed as not to know that the last thing proper which al-Mağūs (Zoroastrians) would do was to defile the pure fires they venerated by having them consume corpses.
  2. Interestingly, the geographer al-Idrīsī calls Russia five times the land of al-Mağūs: Birke-land 1954, 75.
  3. Richter 1985, 148-149.
  4. Pritsak 1990, 465-474 insists that *al-Mağūs* reflects Celtic **magos** = ‘forum’, Arabic *quran* ‘marketplace’ (sic – incorrect, *HS*), on the strength of the four placenames Carantomagos, Cabiomagos, Condatomagos, Vindomagus. That *magos* was used independently, in the 8th-9th cc., to designate a group of merchant-pirates, is not credible – and why then only in the Arabic sources? More Pritsak theory in ch. 10.5 below.
  5. Tornberg 1965, 146, wrong reference in Pritsak 1990, 469, text also in Melvinger 1955, 10-11

*gathered and amassed [troops]. The king of the Basques joined up with him, and they are his neighbours, plus those bordering on them of the Mağūs and the inhabitants of those reaches. So he issued forth in a mighty throng...*

Likewise, Ibn ‘Idārī:<sup>1</sup>

*In the year 177 [from 18/4-793 - HS] the Imām Hišām sent ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd al-Wāhid b. Muḡīṭ at the head of a summer expedition to the land of ar-Rūm. It is a renowned raid, one of the most significant. He ended up in it in Garonne, besieging it and forcing a breach in its walls by mangonels. He drew close to (‘ašrafa ‘alā) the land of the Mağūs, and he toured the land of the enemy, staying there for months, burning the villages and razing the fortresses. He attacked the town of Arbūna (=Narbonne)...*

Either visiting scholars from the Baġdād caliphate convinced the Cordoba court that these ugly customers belonged to al-Mağūs, or the Greeks did – by way of mouth from, again, the Baġdād caliphate. If a single scholar did the trick when visiting Cordoba, one would at least expect some echo of deliberations on the subject. Instead, their being al-Mağūs is a matter-of-fact thing from the start. This probably reflects Norse-Iranian contacts from much earlier than has hitherto been envisaged.<sup>2</sup>

The explanation suggesting itself is that al-Ġazāl when visiting the Byzantines was told that the Northerners were the same ar-Rūs as were attested of old in Byzantine and perhaps Visigothic sources, that their fleets had ravaged Spain several centuries earlier, at intervals of two hundred years, that they were of the same faith as the Zoroastrians, al-Mağūs, with whom they had been trading for some time already;<sup>3</sup> that they were also identical with the Viking pirates who had been plaguing the coasts of France; and that the Franks<sup>4</sup> and even the earlier occupants of Spain<sup>5</sup> had originally cleaved to this faith. Another solution is hardly plausible.

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1. Colin/Lévi-Provençal 1956, 64, faulty translation in Pritsak 1990, 463-464.
  2. Melvinger 1955, 82-83: “Il est moins facile d’expliquer pourquoi les **rūs** étaient désignés par le même nom... Ce qui très certainement a dû frapper les Arabes, c’était la présence du feu à toutes les circonstances, petites ou grandes, de la vie des Vikings”. Birkeland (*Dagbladet*, Oslo 26/5-1951) believed that the Arabs designated the Vikings by the same name as “the Iranian priests” because of the Norse dualism between Valhall and Helheim” (sic!).
  3. On this religious proximity and identification, see now Stang 1993. He posits that the Norse deity Heimdall (literally ‘Light of the World’) was adopted by Norse traders in Iran and ‘Irāq c. 864-880 AD, from the archangel Soroush of the Zoroastrians. In the winter of 1993/94, professor Rjabinin from the Archaeological Dept. of the St. Petersburg University analysed the clay used in Old Ladoga for the production of commercial ‘pearls’ and trinkets, finding it to have been imported from Central Iran c. 750-850 AD.
  4. Likewise, we have al-Mas‘ūdī, Murūġ ad-Dahab, cf Melvinger 1955, 48: “When I was in Fuṣṭāṭ in Egypt in 330, I came across a book composed by Gudmar... it’s said there that the first king of the Franks, Qulūdūth was first *maġūsī* and his wife Gurtīld (= Clotilde) made him Christian.... Then after this last one (Louis son of Qarlūh b. Ludwīq) revolted a count of the Franks called Eudes (Odo) took the power & exercised it for 8 years. He’s the one who... bought the peace from *al-Mağūs* by stipulating that they stay far from the land for 7 years.”
  5. Thus ar-Rāzī (d. 955, Melvinger 1955, 46), on a pristine people that gave name to land, i.e. the Vandals > al-Andalus, states that they were *‘ahl tamaġġusin* “of fire worship”.

Second, when the Norse ravagings did commence on the coasts of Spain, and had been beaten back, and peace was concluded, the very same Yaḥyā al-Ġazāl is despatched north – in the company of the Vikings!<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, upon arrival he finds out that the Northerners do not conform to preconceived notions regarding the Maḡūs:

*He came to the beginning of the Maḡūs lands. They stayed there some days, repairing their ships and resting. The ship of the Maḡūs sailed on ahead to their king, informing him that the envoys were coming together with them. He was glad for this, and sent a message concerning them. They then came to him in his royal residence. It was an immense island in the Ocean, with flowing water and gardens. Between it and the [continenta] mainland there is a distance of three days' journey, and that is three hundred miles. On that island dwell innumerable Maḡūs. And close to that island lie many islands both small and big. The inhabitants of them are all Maḡūs. The closest-lying mainland too belongs to them, to a width of several days' journey. They were [earlier] Maḡūs but now profess the Christian faith, having discarded fire-worship and the religion they had previously, and converted to Christianity, save for the inhabitants of some islands that belong to them and lie isolated far off in the Ocean. These still cleave to their ancient faith with fire-worship, marriage with mother and sister and other vile customs. Against these they fight, making them into thralls.*

On the one hand, the term Maḡūs here is used throughout in the nature of an *ethnographic* label. On the other, it is said that they have ‘discarded’ the Maḡūs religion, more specifically fire-worship (which **is** the Maḡūs religion) **as well as** the religion they held earlier. This is a confirmation that the envoy from Cordoba was well informed on, and on the lookout for, the nuances in the pagan faiths; and even an indication that he was, or became, aware that there *had* existed another, ‘Magusian’ (= Druid) religion in the land.

It has been suggested<sup>2</sup> that the Spaniards were probably influenced by pre-conceived notions inherent in the pre-given label Maḡūs and, surprised that of fire-veneration there was nought to be seen, concluded that this was a thing of the past.<sup>3</sup> The words ‘*and the religion they had earlier*’ indicate that, once the fire-worship figment had been disposed of, Yaḥyā al-Ġazāl and his companion(s) were perfectly capable of imbibing some semi-correct observations regarding both Christianity and Norse paganism; semi-correct because the Spaniards, coming from a society where people are either Muslims or Christians, clearly take the presence of churches in Ireland and the ‘superstitious tolerance’ of the Norse for paganism and Christianity alike as indications that now all are outright Christians.

The entire visit paid to the king of the Maḡūs by Yaḥyā al-Ġazāl has been described in lively detail by this past-master of poetry himself, with particular emphasis

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1. Lévi-Provençal (1937, 1-24) discounts al-Ġazāl’s journey to the Maḡūs court, since it is not found in Ibn Haiyān, concluding that it “n’est qu’une contamination postérieure de la relation du voyage officiel d’al-Ġazāl à Constantinople.” In this hyper-critical position he is alone, save for a wholly unargued reiteration by Pritsak 1990, 477.
  2. Dozy 1881, II, 271. Criticized by Melvinger 1955, 43 ff.
  3. In Hiberno-Latin texts, *magus* is the standard word for the Irish druids; it is met with twice in Vergil’s *Ps.-Aethicus*: Richter 1985, 148-149. With the Norsemen coming from Ireland, we cannot really exclude the possibility that this usage was at play.

on how he managed to charm the *queen*. (We are entitled not only to identify the land of the Mağūs with Ireland, more specifically with the Norse-dominated Dublin kingdom under Olaf the White, but also the queen called Nūd in the Arabic with Olaf's spouse Aud 'the deeply reflected', later an immigrant to Iceland.)

In al-Ġazāl's travelogue there is one little imprint of what may originally have been on his mind – and that of Theofilos: He travels to “*the farthest-off of God's lands, where he who travels thither finds no way.*” This is allusive Arabic poetry at its best; alluding as it does to the tradition on the border-place between the civilized world and the Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ wildernesses beyond: Here, the Two-Horned al-Iskandar has erected a statue or other marker, saying that “beyond me there is no way, only perdition”, something to the tune of: ‘Abandon hope, all ye who exit here’.

#### 9.4. *Theofilos Relieved*

Whereas al-Ġazāl's adventures are preserved for us by Ibn Diḥīya (c. 1200), it is to al-Maqqarī that we turn once more for yet another follow-up on what began down in Constantinople in 839. In quite another part of the same work by al-Maqqarī there is a brief reference to Ibn Diḥīya – and then to another Arab-Spanish source:<sup>1</sup>

*Abū l-Ḥaṭṭāb b. Diḥīya relates in his Kitāb al-Muṭrib that Yaḥyā l-Ġazāl was sent to the land of the Mağūs.*

*Ibn Ḥayyān in his Muqtabis relates that ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥakam al-Marwānī dispatched his poet al-Ġazāl to the king of ar-Rūm. So his narrative astonished him and his anxiety subsided.*

In contrast to Ibn Diḥīya, Ibn Ḥayyān is lost to us. Yet the sum-up by al-Maqqarī is tersely eloquent:

Al-Ġazāl is sent to the Greek Emperor, evidently in order to do just what is said here – to tell him the truth about the Norse Mağūs. The precedent is, logically, that the Greek Emperor had informed the Cordoba court first about the Rūs and the acute possibility, nay probability, that these were the fearsome peoples of Gog-Magog. The Cordoba court, having now checked this out first-hand by sending their envoy to the Dublin realm of the Vikings, report back to the initial source of apprehension, their ally in Constantinople. The point must indeed have been to allay his fears.

“So,” as said here, “*his anxiety subsided*”.

#### 9.5. *The ‘Rōs a Doomsday People*

The three Greek versions of the so-called *Revelation* of Ps.-Methodios of Patara, plus sundry versions of the related *Apocalypse of St. Peter* (even in Arabic, Syriac and Ethiopian) describe the ill fate of the Orthodox Empire under the onslaught of the Ishmaelites, yet go on to prophesy a dramatic sea change:<sup>2</sup>

*Then suddenly an Emperor of the Greeks or Romans will rise upon them with great strength; he will wake as a man from sleep, who has drunk wine, whom men regarded as*

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1. Dozy (etc.) 1855-60, I, 630-632 (*my trsl. – HS*).

2. Istrin 1897, II, 19-22. Bousset 1895, 45-47 on the *Apocalypse of St. Peter*.

*dead and worthless. He will march upon them from the Ethiopian sea and will inflict sword and devastation down to Ethrimbos, that is to say down to their own fatherland...*

*[Yet] then the gates of the North will open, and the forces of the peoples who have been shut within will emerge. The whole earth will be shocked by their appearance; men will be frightened and will flee away and hide themselves upon mountains, in caves and tombs. For the peoples coming from the North eat human flesh and drink blood of animals like water and eat unclean things.*

Though couched in the form of a prophecy, this has been found to contain historic references to the reign of Michael III and the 'Rōs.<sup>1</sup> Pseudo-Methodios then continues in the same very precise chronological vein: After seven years, when the peoples from the North have captured the city of Ioppe, the Lord God will send one of his *Archistrategi* and smite them in a moment. Then the Greek Emperor will come to Jerusalem, and ten and a half years after his advent the Antichrist is born.

The appalling eating practices of the Northerners are those traditionally ascribed to Gog-Magog, while the insistence that the Northerners will go on to capture Jaffa (Joppe), only to be smitten by an Archangel, refers to the advent and destruction of Gog-Magog in the Holy Land prior to Doomsday. The rôle of the Archangel (= Michael!) is a veiled reference to the Emperor Michael III. In a Latin version, Gog-Magog are explicitly named:<sup>2</sup>

*Then the king of the Christians goes forth and battles with them [the Saracens] and kills them by the sword... At the same time Gog and Magog are come, and when they have made peace, thus will their advent be by way of the Caspian gates in the northern reaches... They are from the stock of Japheth, and thus it is that they exit from beyond the Breasts of the North, that they eat the flesh of men, and serpents, and chew stillborn foetuses and small children, and there is nobody to vanquish them. [Yet] after 7 years of their age, when he has taken the city of Joppe, then God sends one of his princes [or: commanders] and he beats them to the ground with lightning and fire in no time.*

Likewise, a Slav version has it that:<sup>3</sup>

*...God will open the western mountains, which Alexander of Macedon shut up... And after Michael's reign, for the lawlessness of those men, God will open the western mountains, and Gog, Magog, and Aneq will spring out of them... and men going from the North will start to eat human flesh and drink blood like water...*

These passages demonstrate clearly that the eschatological interpretation of the 'Rōs name was current with the Byzantines. The Latin text makes clear, just like the very

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1. Vasiliev 1946, 155-156. Bousset 1895, 48-49 suggested the Emperor Heraclius, 610-641 AD.
  2. Istrin 1897, 81-82: "*Surget autem rex christianorum et proeliabit cum eis [Sarracenis] et occidit eos gladio... ita erit adventus Gog et Magog, et cum fuerit ita pax, referabuntur portae Caspiae in lateribus aquilonis et gentes illae cum Gog et Magog venient ... ex progenie enim sunt Japheth et exeuntes de transubera aquilonis tales igitur, ut carnes hominum comedant et serpentes et jumenta mulieris cum parvulis manducant et nullus est qui possit expugnare illos. et post VII annos temporum illorum cum comprehenderit civitatem Josephen, tunc immittet deus unum de principibus suis et percutiet eos cum fulgore et igne sub uni momento.*"
  3. Vasiliev 1946, 158.

much older one by Jacob of Seruḡ, that the far-northern people irrupting into the oikumene is not identical with, but rather comes in addition to, Gog and Magog.

Importantly, the eschatological ‘*prince of Rōs*’ interpretation of the name did not rule out ‘*the fair-haired people*’ usage; on the contrary (above, ch. 5.5 and 6.7), we recall the Life of St. Andrew the Fool, on the youth who “*will build big ships and go to Rome, and enlist the fair-haired nations*”;<sup>1</sup> the apocryphal ‘*Vision of Daniel*’, on this blond people as the redeemer of the Empire from the utmost peril; and the prophet who “in about 820” foresaw that the last Emperor, arising in Syracuse, would send his agents north to tame the fair-haired nations for war against Islam.<sup>2</sup>

The word used for ‘fair-haired, blond’ throughout, *xanthós*, translates into Russian as **rusyj** ‘ruddy-blond’. This is what we find in the 17th c. Russian version of the text. Any Russian would take it as an allusion to ‘Russian’; and that is just what was intended, for 17th c. political reasons.<sup>3</sup>

In these sources, the ‘Reds’ or ‘Blonds’ have a positive rôle to play – and just as apocalyptically decisive as the foreboding ‘prince of Ros’ rôle. We found that originally, in the Migration Age, the ‘Reds’ too were negatively cast. The ‘prince of Ros’ and his hosts have, Biblically, no ‘colour’ attribution. Yet in the apocalyptic ‘Blonds’ we find confirmation of two things closely connected:

One, the ‘folksy’, perhaps even vulgar, decidedly *popular* view of the Germanic northerners as ‘the Blonds’ or ‘Reds’ coexisted, nay *cohabited* so to speak, with the lofty Biblical ‘Ros. The former never was, never could be, given official recognition – on a par with the Word of God. Yet it stuck to it, evidently, as a shadow.

Two, the *reason* why ‘the fair-haired people’ received this *apocalyptic* rôle can only lie in an *identification* ‘Ros = ‘rous[ioi]. The dynamics of this identification are to be sought in the long historical process by which the eschatologically feared Germanics (who happened to be ‘red’) were indeed ‘tamed’ by Roman and Greek civilization.

At the time when the Byzantines were ‘renewing’ the acquaintance, from the 839 call by the ‘envoys’ of the ‘Rōs ruler to the 860 attack on Constantinople, a ‘close call’ indeed, both the ‘fair’ and the ‘fear’ rôles were open; open to being interpreted, open to being filled. And this is the important thing:

Both were Doomsday rôles.

## 9.6. The Doomsday Peoples Hammered

The anonymous so-called *Theophanes Continuatus* treats us to a legend concerning John the Grammarian, Patriarch of Constantinople until deposed in 842 or 843: “A *pagan and harsh people*” are harassing and overrunning the Empire; John has a three-headed statue erected in the Hippodrome, uses a magic incantation to transpose the vital strength of the three leaders of the enemy into the statue, and bids three men

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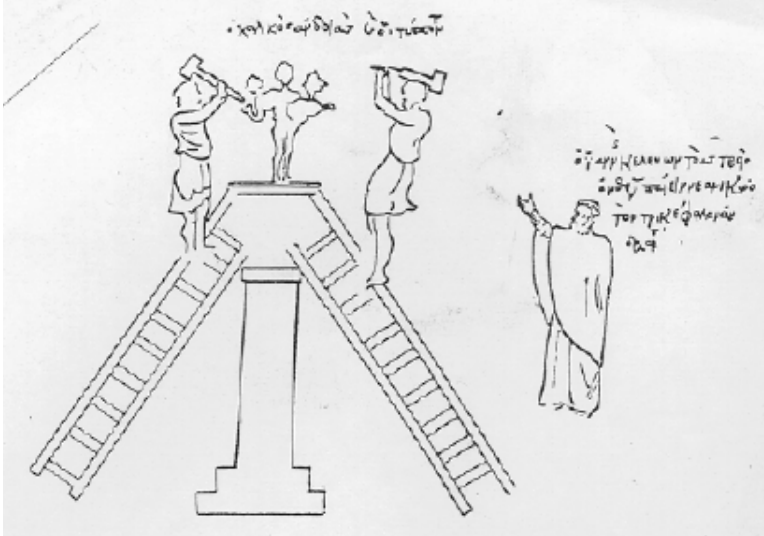
1. PG 111, 856. Cf Vasiliev 1946, 162-163, Mango 1980, 210-211.

2. While Vasiliev does substantiate that Saint Andrew’s ‘prophecy’ refers to historical events in the age of Michael III, he does not touch upon the two other sources mentioned here, viz. the *Vision of Daniel* and the Sicilian prophecy.

3. Istrin 1897, 325.



of immense physical strength strike at the three heads simultaneously, in the dead of night, with huge iron hammers. Two heads come off, the third however stays put, bent only. What subsequently happens is that the three pagan leaders fall out among themselves, two being slain by the third, who survives, wounded, returning with the pagan forces to their homeland in flight and defeat.<sup>1</sup>



*The statue being hammered.*<sup>2</sup>

Vasiliev has argued that this may reasonably refer to the 860 attack on Constantinople by the Rus'.<sup>3</sup> The Rus' were routed, their leaders Askol'd and Dir being slain by Oleg after their return to Kiev.

What Vasiliev does not address is the question of why this legend speaks of Theofilos and John the Grammarian, and not of their respective successors Michael and

1. Theoph. Cont., liber IV, c. 7: PG 109, 169-172, : "Utut sit, illi charissimus fuit, ac Theophili præceptor constituitur. Theophilus vero suscepto imperio primum eum syncelli dignitate ornat; tum deinde patriarcham Cpolitianum præficit, cum is illi divinatio ex pelvi vates ac præstigiis quædam auguratus esse. Fuit autem divinatio ejusmodi: Gens quædam infidelis sævaque tribus doctoribus Romanæ ditionnis terras locaque incursabat, exque ea prædas agebat; quæ res, ut par est, Theophili animum omniumque subditorum mæstas anxiosque habebat. Jannes [sic] dimissa illa animi ægritudine optime de rebus sperare ac gaudere jubet, si modo illius consiliis parere in animum induxerint. Consilium tale erat ... Inter æreas statuas in circi Euripo erectas statua quædam triceps exstare ferebatur... Quadam vero noctis hora viros illos ad etiam statuam prope se stantes malleosque ad ictum sublimes tenentes, cum ipse mandaverit, summa vi capite ferire præcipit, unoque velut ictu ac conatu ea excindere. Recreatus verbis Theophilus, similique stupore affectus, rem exsequi jubet. Veniunt itaque intempesta jam octe vir quidam malleos feentes..."
2. From Beylie 1908.
3. Vasiliev 1946, 240-241.

Photios. The reason suggesting itself is that we here do have an historical souvenir of Theofilos and his Patriarch; and the one and only occasion we as yet have knowledge of where the 'Rōs did 'beset' and scare up this Emperor was their visit to Byzance in 839. In that year, of course, no **attack** occurred. Yet in the legend referred above, is the harassing and 'overrunning' of the Empire best understood as a reality, or as merely a threat perceived, with the hammering an effective *Steigerung*, a dramatic heightening of the tale?

I believe it is warranted to take the said legend as confirmation, and the sole one found as yet in Byzantine sources, of the 839 visit by the 'Rōs – or of an actual attack (on which our next sub-chapter).

The story at first appears to be told from the vantage point of hindsight: In 860, the enemy are indeed routed, and two of their leaders (Askol'd and Dir) killed by a third (Oleg). The legend would then be a *vaticinatio ex eventu*, although not couched in that form as preserved for us today. Yet may there not have been three leaders at an earlier date as well? To relegate the story to 860, and not to the person and the age stated, i.e. before 842-843, is to cut toe and heel to make a shoe fit. That should not be done unless the source in question is **demonstrably** mistaken; which it is not. The 860 conclusion is plausible guesswork, yet guesswork all the same.

Instead, it is probably correct to see in this legend an historical reflection of the very real apprehension felt by the Patriarch John the Grammarian in the face of first contacts with the 'Rōs. This may actually be taken to be confirmed by the very absence of the name. For in 860 the 'Rōs name was on everybody's lips. It is simply wholly unconvincing that Theophanes Continuatus would first write about an unnamed people, knowing that they were the 'Rōs and even going to the trouble of dating them to the early 840-ies, only to shortly afterwards name and describe these same 'Rōs when assailing the city in 860.<sup>1</sup>

Instead, then, we trust our sources – which is the best way to lay them under contribution. So, if we suspect that this refers to the 'Rōs from a time when the name was as yet not common knowledge, then we must try and tap our source one extra bit.

Extra confirmation is to be found in the very instrument of magic employed by John in the above legend: Men endowed with immense physical strength wield **iron hammers** against the fiends. This recalls another popular vaticination: In the end of time, two hammers are what the Empire of the Byzantines shall use to smite the Doomsday peoples, evidently in magical wise:<sup>2</sup>

*...Then the kingdom of the Greeks shall move itself, and shall come and take a hammer of iron in its right hand, and a hammer of brass in its left, and the kingdom of Greece shall smite the hammers one upon the other, and as iron which is melted by fire, and as brass which boils in the flame, so shall the power of the kingdoms melt away before the might of the kingdom of the Greeks which is that of the Romans. And the kingdoms of the Huns and of the Persians shall be desolated the one by the other; only a few of them shall escape and flee to their country; and what remains of them the kingdom of the Romans shall destroy...*

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1. PG 109, 209-212.

2. Syriac *Christian Legend on Alexander*, in Budge 1889, 154-155. The reference is to Jeremiah I, 14. Note also that the Wall against Gog-&-Magog was "hammered into the rocks of the mountains" by Alexander the Great.

*If ye will not receive my word, receive [that of] Jeremiah the prophet who long ago pointed out that kingdom in his prophecy, and spake thus in his book: **Evil shall be opened from the North upon all the inhabitants of the land.***

### 9.7. A Doomsday Bas-Relief

In the forum of Taurus in Byzance, according to a little book from the late 10th c. on the origin of the city, stood an equestrian statue; upon its base were bas-reliefs which everyone then agreed depicted “*stories of the last days of the city when the Russians would destroy Constantinople*”.<sup>1</sup>

The comment by Vasiliev runs: “The Russian attack of 860-861 laid the foundation for this mysterious belief that the Russians finally would take and destroy Constantinople.” That is but a conjecture. A single attack, ending in a rout of the ‘Rōs and followed by friendly relations quickly established, renders this belief mysterious indeed – or rather, inexplicable.

The ‘mysteriousness’ of the conviction disappears if we do what Theofilos and John the Grammmarian evidently did: take recourse to the prophecy on the ‘prince of ‘Ros’ and ‘the princes of the North’ destined to overrun the world all the way down to the Holy Land. These, then, would indeed be ‘the last days of the city’, simply for being the last days of the world.

### 9.8. Two Riddles on the ‘Rōs

To a Byzantine writer of the late 12th c. two riddles are ascribed (preserved in a writer from the 13th c., who gives the solutions): ‘*A pagan people*’, or ‘*a people foreign in appearance*’ runs one of the two; the solution being ‘*the ‘Rōs with their whole army*’.<sup>2</sup> ‘*A barbarian Scythian, a domestic slave, or domestic servant or menial*’ is the second; with the solution given: ‘*the Russian race*’.

By the time of these writers, of course, the ‘paganness’ of the Russians was a thing of the past. So why dwell on it, when it was positively wrong? Many other nations had passed from a pagan state to baptism, without earning this type of riddle. The reason is obvious: The ‘Ros had been feared for their eschatological frightfulness, of which their pagan state was an important constituent.

Likewise, ‘a people foreign in appearance’ sounds very much like an attempt at eliciting a description such as ‘red, ruddy-faced’, ‘red-haired’, etc. To the Byzantines, other nations too were alien in appearance, even much more so; yet only in the case of the Russians do we have the affirmation that “by the Greeks they are named from a quality in their bodily appearance”, to cite Liudprand, viz. again, their redness.

The ‘slave’ or ‘menial’ status of the ‘Rōs we have had occasion to touch upon already.

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1. Preger 1907, II, 176, cf Vasiliev 1946, 242 with later literature given.

2. Vasiliev 1946, 243.

Even these riddles, then, registered centuries after the Christening of the Russians, reflect clichés with their beginnings deep down in not merely the Viking era but beyond, in Antiquity.

## 10. Rūs Attack Amastris & Surož from the West?

“The name Russian in 626 need not trouble us...”

Vasiliev 1946, 104.

### 10.1. The Amastris & Surož Problem

A semi-official Soviet Anti-Normanist position has been vented in the following terms:<sup>1</sup>

“...One of the greatest achievements of Soviet research within the study of the Normanist problem has been the novel solution worked out by Soviet scholars in the 1930-ies and 40-ies as regards the rise of the Old Russian state.. This process.. commenced not later than the start of the 9th c. (or even by the late 8th c.), when Byzantine sources attest to the rise of the first state (or proto-state) formation in the southern half of the East Slavonic lands, called Rus´ (Ros, Ros´), mounting attacks on Byzantine possessions (Surož and Amastris)...

Judging by the dates assigned to the Scandinavian finds, the Northmen arrive in Gnezdovo only on the eve of the 10th c., only at the start of the 10th c. do they appear in the Middle Dnepr region. How can these data be reconciled with the words of the Bertinian Annals on the Swedish Northmen in Rus´, and even in southern Russia at that, in the 830-ies? It is particularly difficult to explain these facts if one is to uphold the Normanist position and believe that by the term Rus´ in the 9th c. Scandinavians were meant, and that the sea exped-tions of the southern Rus´ against Surozh and Amastris in the start of the 9th c. and against Constantinople in 860 were performed by Scandinavians.”

Even if we disregard the now dated view on the late appearance of the Norsemen in the Gnezdovo cemetery north of Kiev, etc., this problem is really (or should be) quite intractable to Normanists and Anti-Normanists alike – except if one is content to ‘uphold’ a position, ‘believe’ what one wishes, and disregard Arabic and other near-contemporary sources.

The present writer is not competent to judge the date and reliability of the two Byzantine *Vitae* in question which both attest to a seaborne assault by the Rōs on Byzantine Black Sea towns: the *Vita* of George from Amastris, and that of St. Stephan from Surož. It would probably be prudent **not** to take for granted that they (or the sequences relating of the attacks by the ‘Rōs) are from the 820-ies to early 840-ies. On the other hand, neither are we entitled to view these two sources, at least not both of them, as late falsifications.

We first proceed to sources hitherto untapped in this connection.

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1. Šaskol’skij 1981, 205, 210. Cf. Mavrodin 1945, 154: “Russian soldiers (*družiny*) conduct expeditions... They attack Byzantine possessions in the beginning and the first half of the 9th c. upon the Crimean littoral of the Black sea (Life of Stephan of Surož) and upon the Black sea littoral of Lesser Asia (Life of George of Amastris), and thereafter upon Constantinople (860, 907, 941)...”

## 10.2. Ibn al-Qūṭīya on 844 raid to Byzantium

*Then al-Mağūs assailed al-Andalus and plundered both its littorals at one and the same time. During this expedition of theirs, which lasted for 14 years, they arrived in the land of ar-Rūm and in Alexandria..*

These words by the Spanish historian Ibn al-Qūṭīya ('the-Son-of-a-Goth') have provoked great discussion. More than 150 years ago they were collated with the testimony by Sebastian of Salamanca:<sup>1</sup>

## 10.3. Sebastian of Salamanca on 844<sup>2</sup> raid to Byzantium

*In these times Norse pirates arrived upon our shore. Thereafter they harried Spain, annihilating all of its seaside by pillage through sword and fire. Then, having crossed the Ocean, they invaded the town of Nakur in Mauretania, there killing a great number of Moors. Subsequently, having gone out against the isles of Majorica, Minorica and Formentera, they depopulated them by the sword. Having after this gone to Greece, they three years later went back to their homeland.*

In brief, having ravaged both the Moroccan town of Nākūr and the Balearic Isles, "and having attained unto the Greeks, they three years later returned to their home country." The Viking raid on Nākūr has been described by several Muslim authors.<sup>3</sup>

## 10.4. 'Book of Geography' on raid to Marmara Sea

*Al-Mağūs did not come sailing along save every sixth or seventh year... The abovesaid talisman [by the town of Cádiz – HS] used to show itself to them when they entered into the Straits of Gibraltar. They subsequently used to sail forth through the sound unto the isles of this small sea, reaching right unto the farthest parts of Syria.*

Or rather: That is the literal reading of the text. Yet the end words *wa-yaṣīlūna 'ilā 'aṭrāfi š-šām* permit of another interpretation as well. Which are these 'farthest parts'? Is *aš-Šām* here really Syria?<sup>4</sup>

In his description of the borders of Macedonia Ibn Ḥurdādbih mentions *baḥr aš-Šām*, literally (or so we would think) 'the Sea of Syria', adding that his information here is taken from the work by Muslim al-Ġarmī, now lost. As has been rightly observed: "Baḥr aš-Šām, here evidently 'Marmara Sea'."

1. Chronicon Sebastiani = Crónica de Alfonso III (ed. ZG Villada, Madrid 1918, 84, ch. 26): "Normanni piratae his temporibus ad nostra litora pervenerunt. Deinde Hispaniam perrexerunt, omnem ejus maritimam gladio igneque praedando dissipaverunt. Deinde mari transvecti Nacchor civitatem Mauretaniae invaserunt, ibique multitudinem Caldeorum interfecerunt. Deinde Majoricam, Formenteram et Minoricam insulas adgressi gladio depopulerunt. Post Graeciam advecti, post triennium in patriam suam sunt reversi."
2. Vasiliev 1946, 21-22 sees in this a reference to the 858-860 attack on Constantinople.
3. Birkeland 1955, 46 (Ibn al-Qūṭīya), 64 (al-Bakrī), 90 (Ibn al-Aḫṭar), 129 (Ibn Ḥaldūn).
4. Moravczik G, Constantine Porphyrogenetos, Budapest 1949 187 (ch. 42): Maeotis, "on its North runs the Dnieper river, from which the Russians come through to Black Bulgaria, and Chazaria, and Syria." Judging by the context, Syria here designates al-'Irāq, cf Ibn Ḥurdādbih on the route of the Rūs merchants via the Caspian and Iran to Bagdād.

In another passage, Ibn Hurdādbih asserts that the Straits of Constantinople empties itself into the *bahr aš-Šām*.

The same is said in the *Kitāb at-tanbīh* of al-Mas‘ūdī.

### 10.5. George of Amastris & Stephan of Surož on 842 raid?<sup>1</sup>

We next attend to the much-discussed Greek sources, the *Vita* on George of Amastris and that on Stephan of Surož, basing ourselves on the discussion by the three leading scholarly authorities.

A hundred years ago, Vasil’evskij championed the view that the *Life* of St. George from Amastris is dependable as a source on the Rus’, and as early as from c. 842, whereas that of St. Stephan from Surož is not: The latter saint was martyred in 767. His *Vita* exists only in a single manuscript in Russian, from the 16th century, and not in Greek. And mention in it of a ‘count’ Bravlin coming “with a powerful Russian army” from Novgorod (sic) is to be viewed not as a late and isolated insertion but as strong indication that the entire work is unreliable as an historical source.<sup>2</sup> With this there is all reason to agree.

Half a century later, however, Vasil’evskij’s near-namesake Vasiliev discounted not only the *Life* of St. Stephan but that of St. George as well. In his outstanding monograph on the 860 attack by the Russians on Constantinople, he concludes:<sup>3</sup> “As an historical source, the *Life* of Stephan of Surozh must be eliminated... I am now absolutely convinced that the story told in the *Life* of George of Amastris deals with Igor’s expedition...” The assessment by Vasiliev is that this *Vita* treats of, not 842 or even 860, but the attack on Constantinople by Igor’ in 945.

The latest development, however, has been again to revert to the ‘earliest’ view. St. George’s biography has been reassessed. Through comparison with two other *Vitas*, those on Tarasius and Nicephor, it is now attributed to Ignatius, who wrote in the first half of the 9th c. upon the initiative of John the Grammarian (and not John from Amastris, as Vasil’evskij believed). John, as we have seen already, was deposed in 842 or 843. Born c. 770-774, Ignatius concludes his known literary activity before 846 – on a note of desperation over his old age and decrepitude.<sup>4</sup> In this way, a Soviet specialist readdresses the issue in, to our mind, a convincing and conclusive way.

The same specialist draws attention to a novel source, a series of miniature paintings from a psalterion dated to the first half of the 9th c.<sup>5</sup> Here, Ignatius figures alongside John the Grammarian in what are clearly a series of portraits based on contemporaneous knowledge. Significantly, John and Ignatius appear as a pair on more than one miniature; in addition, there are two separate representations of John.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Vasil’evskij 1893, II, 66-67.

2. Ignatius, metropolitan of Nicaea, as author of St. George’s *Vita*: Vasil’evskij 1893 and Lipšic 1948 (more below), Ševčenko 1977. St. Stephan “a less reliable source than the *Vita* of St. George”: Levčenko 1956, 51. On ‘count Bravlin’: Vasiliev 1946, 72-73, 79 n. 33, 80, 83; Saxarov 1980, 25-30; *Stand der Forschung* in Lovmjan’skij 1985, 196, 285.

3. Vasiliev 1946, 83.

4. In the *Vita Tarasi*, which we accept him to have authored: Lipšic 1948, 317.

5. Same, 330.

6. Kondakov 1897, 8-9, Lipšic 1948, 329.

The conclusion is that the raid on Amastris was historical, having taken place “circa 842 AD”.<sup>1</sup> This has since been the predominant opinion in Russian historians.<sup>2</sup>

Now to the text:

*Chapter 43. That which follows is even more wondrous. There was an attack by Barbarians, Ros, a nation which all know to be savage and coarse to the utmost degree, carrying in itself no traces of the love of man whatsoever. By beastly mores, inhuman affairs, making manifest their bloodthirst by their very outward appearance, finding their satisfaction in nought other typical of humans than in killing, they – this terrible people both as regards factual behaviour and name – having begun their ravagings from the Propontis and having visited the opposite littoral, they at last reached the birthplace of the Saint...*

Thus the opening passage on the **Ros** assailants in the verbose *Vita* of George from Amastris. What happens next is that these Barbarians, having killed and wrecked their fill in the vicinity, enter George’s grave chapel, yet are physically unable to lift their arms or legs to do as they were bent on: digging up his remains in the hope of finding some treasure. They are informed by a Christian captive that it is the power of God that is restraining them. The ‘prince’ of the Barbarians asks what sacrifices this God desires. Wax candles, the release of prisoners and the restoration of the sanctity of the chapel, replies the captive, “*then you will see your warriors sound again, as before!*” The Barbarian complies, even converting to Christianity; and the *Vita* exults:<sup>3</sup>

*One single grave was strong enough to arrest the headlessness of the Barbarians, to stop the murderous killing, to halt the beastliness, to bring the wily wolves to... the sheep, and to make those who were used to venerate thickets and glens reverence the temples of God.*

*Do you see the power of the grave – having broken the power of a whole people? ...O grave, the glory of which has reached the very ends of the Ocean!..*

Where are “the ends of the Ocean”, whereto the fame of our George did reach? The Ocean here is of course not the Mediterranean, nor the Black Sea itself; nor can it very well be the Baltic or North Sea, which would be quite beyond intellectual bounds for this Greek author. These ends of the Ocean are, in a word, Spain.

We recall Ya‘qūbī’s terse words (preceding chapter) on the 844-845 events: “*Al-Mağūs, called ar-Rūs, broke into the city of Sevilla, taking away captives, pillaging, burning and slaying.*”

One scholar has underscored the overriding importance of this identification of the Atlantic Mağūs with the Rūs, yet finding no solution.<sup>4</sup>

Highly original is Pritsak, who in *Pagus Rotinicus* = ‘land of the Ruteni’, a part of Aquitaine, finds both the Mağūs and the origins of the Rūs: “The *Magos’es* which were also called *Rus* and *Lordoman* – (*N*)*ordoman* were... an organization of both

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1. as seconded by Levčenko 1956, 48-49.

2. e.g. in Litavrina/Novosel’cev 1989, Commentary.

3. Vasil’evskij 1893, II, 71.

4. Birkeland 1955, 135 n.



ambulant negociatores-merchants and pirates.” With the type of ‘proofs’ given, anything can be proven.<sup>1</sup>

### 10.6. The ‘Spanish’ solution

The solution, as indicated by Ibn al-Qūṭīya and Sebastian of Salamanca, the Book of Geography and al-Ya’qūbī, as well as by the sources in the preceding chapter, is simply that the Rhos assailing Amastris must have come from the west – all the way from Spain!

The sole remaining problem is that the *Vita* of St. George dates the attack to “not many years after the death of George”. Ordained bishop of Amastris c. 790 AD, and later arch-bishop, George visited the Imperial court some time in the period 792-797.<sup>2</sup> He apparently died before the new Iconoclast onslaught against the churches began in 813, and probably in the period 802-807.<sup>3</sup>

George himself aside, when was his *Vita* penned? Vasil’evskij is of the opinion that it is from the days of Michael II or Theofilos (820-842), i.e. “before 842”.<sup>4</sup> The sole grounds for this proposition is the similarity between ‘our’ *Vita* and another one, that of Philaret from Paphlagonia.<sup>5</sup> A good argument has been made that the author is one Ignatius the Dean, who also wrote a *Vita* of Tarasios (died 806) “perhaps a bit before 846”, as well as a biography on Nikifor (died 829), “evidently soon after his death”.<sup>6</sup> Both these biographies show clear parallels to ‘our’ *Vita* on George from Amastris.

Was the above chapter appended to the *Vita* proper as something of an after-thought? Vasil’evskij is probably right in saying no. His opinion is: “Since, as has been shown above, the entire work, including the post-mortem wonders, makes up one unbroken whole, then we must admit that the attack by the Rus’ on Amastris was possible, or had even taken place, already around 842.”<sup>7</sup>

This in turn means that the said “14-year trek” of the 844 raiders mentioned by Ibn al-Qūṭīya is a candidate for explaining the attack on Amastris – if the Alexandria, Syria and Black sea part of this trek was at the start of it, or at least before news of the raids on Spain had reached the eastern Mediterranean. The singular advantages of the Viking ships were their speed and the ability of their crews to freely navigate the open seas. Thus it is wholly credible that a Viking fleet could and did reach Amastris – through the Propontis, right past Constantinople itself.

This may be asserted on the basis of the sources marshalled above. Around 840, there was no threat to Constantinople itself to be expected from either the Black Sea or the Mediterranean ‘Saracens’. Following the last great Arab attempt on Constan-

1. Pritsak 1990, 465-474. Al-Mas’udi’s *al-lwdgāna/al-kwdkāna* are read > *al-lwdmān* > al-Lo(r)domāna. **Rus’** is explained from German *rut-i* > *ruzz-i*, in Old French \**rud-i*, cf 6th c. *Rut-en-is* > c. 1260 *Rodeis* > *Rodez*. His Mağūs theory we have referred already.
2. Vasil’evskij 1893, II, lxiii-lxiv.
3. same, lxxx-lxxxii. Same, xciv: “George died around the year 806.”
4. same, xciii.
5. *ibid.*
6. same, civ-cv.
7. same, cxvii.

tinople in 717-718, Arab and Muslim sea forces were generally on the defensive; exceptions being their dominance in the Aegean 774-780 and their attack on Sicily (at the invitation of a Greek rebel who had slain the local governor) commencing in 827. Only in 848 did they raid Marseilles for the first time, later on establishing footholds on the French littoral and even pushing up into present-day Switzerland, in 950 occupying the St. Bernard pass and near-by Grenoble.<sup>1</sup>

What has this got to do with the raid on Amastris (and possibly also Suro)? Enough to be decisive: The Byzantines were preoccupied with the Muslims, and for that matter vice versa. If the Norse marauders did raid Muslim territory in the eastern Mediterranean (cf Alexandria), the Byzantines would be prone to regard them as potential allies on their first call at the Golden Horn; and after a subsequent sack of Amastris, their fleet vessels would be sure to outrace word on this going back to the Imperial city; if they did not travel on northwards, up the Don or Dnepr. In a word, they were off long before any arm of Imperial law could stop them.

It is not too incautious to see a nexus between such an attack and the visit of the Rhōs to Byzantium in 839. Quite plausibly the ‘eight-thirty-niners’ acted indeed as information-gatherers, spies not for an extant superpower or any power at all known to the Greeks but, as seen in retrospect, clearly laying a basis for the subsequent challenge to an old superpower from a new one.

### 10.7. *The Propontis Problem*

If the reader is still hesitant to accept the Spanish venue (as was the present writer all too long), then the *Vita* of St. George itself is to be consulted once more. Here is what **ought** to upset at least the Anti-Normanists (who are the ones to have exploited the Amastris-and-Surož attacks as evidence against the Norse origins of the Rus’); and which in this one instance **has** upset a conscientious one:<sup>2</sup>

“According to the story, the Russians came to Amastris from the Propontis. Both Vasiliev and da Costa identify the Propontis with the Sea of Marmara; indeed there is no indication of the Russian penetration into the Sea of Marmara in any source prior to 860; moreover, it would be hard to understand why the Rus’, once in the Marmora Sea, did not try to sack Constantinople but went back to the Bosphorus and raided Paphlagonia instead. Obviously, the crucial point in this argumentation is the meaning of the word ‘Propontis’.”

It will not do (as the author here does!) to simply alter the map to fit a preconceived terrain. One cannot cast about for **another** Propontis just because the Propontis of all other ancient and mediaeval sources does not fit modern requirements. He is not the first:<sup>3</sup>

In point of fact, however, there are indeed two Propontises, or even three. The conventional and nearly universal usage covers, simply, the Marmara Sea. In addition, the Bosphorus **between** the Marmara Sea and Constantinople has in some cases been termed Propontis, or a part of the Propontis. A Byzantine gloss insists: “*There*

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1. Dennett 1948, 131-133.

2. Šaskol’skij 1981, 210.

3. Vasil’evskij 1893, cxli: “There are two Propontises, says a Byzantine gloss.” Cf. next passage.

are two Propontises, one by Abydos, the other by Ieron and Psammathios”.<sup>1</sup> Abydos lies by the Hellespont or Dardanelles, Ieron is present-day Anadolı-kavak closer to the Black Sea.

In the *Vita* of Stephan the Younger from the early years of the 9th c., we hear of the places where the Orthodox may find refuge from the Iconoclasts; here, St. Stephan first enumerates places on the northern coast of the Black Sea, proceeding to localities on the Parthenic Sea, i. e. the Mediterranean, with its Adriatic bay, finally ending up with the lower part of the province of Lycea from Sileos to Sikis “along with the watery expanse of the Propontis itself, the isle of Cyprus, and the coast opposite it unto Tripolis and Tyre”.<sup>2</sup>

What the Propontis here comprises is unclear; what is clear is that it is considerably more than merely the immediate approaches to the Marmora Sea and the Bosphorus. We are not far off the mark in saying that in this instance the Propontis covers the entire Greek and Lesser Asian littoral and the Greek isles lying outside the Propontis proper.

Another interpretation runs: “Here the expression ‘Propontis’ simply designates a part of the sea penetrating into the mainland, in this case the expanse (or corner) from the end of Lycea to the northernmost part of Palestine, to Tripolis and Tyre and including the island of Cyprus”.<sup>3</sup>

Neither of these usages admit of the solution proposed by Vasil’evskij: That the coming of the ‘Rōs from the Propontis somehow means that they can be confined, logically, to the Black Sea. The text insists that the ‘Rōs came through the Bosphorus, and hence logically the Marmora Sea, right past Constantinople.<sup>4</sup>

The simplest and sanest solution must be: The “barbarians, Rhōs” did indeed come from the west – all the way from Spain and beyond.<sup>5</sup> That “all know” these barbarians “to be savage and coarse”, etc., is indication that here the Biblical ‘Ros are meant; and/ or that word on the 844 seaborne attacks on the Mediterranean by the ‘Rōs had gotten around by the time the above passage was penned.

## 10.8. Flavius Blondus on the 860 Attack

The Venetian humanist Flavius Blondus (1392-1463) reiterates the information found in preceding chroniclers in Venice on the 860 attack on Constantinople by the Norse, the *Normanorum gentes*; yet he adds that these Normans “returned to the Britannic Sea” (*in Britannicum mare sunt reversi*).<sup>6</sup>

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1. Vasil’evskij 1893, II, cxxxix-cxl.

2. same, cxlii.

3. *ibid.*

4. Vasiliev 1946, 86: “...in the Life of George, the Russians came to Amastris fro the Propon-tis, i.e., from the Sea of Marmora... Vasilievski’s far-fetched interpretation of the name of the Propontis was pointed out by several scholars; he did not succeed in proving his point. The Propontis must mean the Sea of Marmora...”

5. Citing Ibn al-Quṭīya, Pritsak 1981, 180 wrongly asserts: “Both Muslim and Christian Spanish chroniclers mention that the Norse fleet operating in Spain and Italy in 859 reached ‘the country of the [East] Romans (*bilād ar-rūm*) and Alexandria’.”

6. Vasiliev 1946, 28-32, Pritsak 1981, 179.

This is one of the prime sources adduced by the Byzantinologist Vasiliev in favour of a highly original yet carefully argued proposition. As against Vasil'evskij, Vasiliev holds to the opposite opinion: that there were two attacks on Constantinople in 860, one from the Mediterranean, the other from the Black Sea, "one from the south and one from the north", which "almost met each other under the walls of the capital of the Byzantine Empire".<sup>1</sup> Rejecting an idea that the two expeditions were carried out as parts of a master plan by a single Viking leader,<sup>2</sup> Vasiliev dated the Mediterranean expedition to the spring of 861, the Black sea one from June 18, 860 to March 861.<sup>3</sup> Western and Soviet scholarship alike has concurred in rejecting this conclusion, insisting instead that only one attack took place – that of the 'Rōs from the Black Sea in June 860.<sup>4</sup>

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1. same, 234.

2. Beljaev – in same, 236-237.

3. same, 148-149, 174-175, 217-218.

4. Pritsak 1981, 175 n. 62.

# 11. From Byzantium to the Arab East

*Theologisches und staatliches Denken des Byzantiners ist eine Einheit.*  
Jacobs, 1983, 8.

## 11.1. A Dreadful Dream, 842

Are there additional materials indicating that the Byzantines had an apprehensive interest in the Rūs after the departure of the representatives of the latter to the Franks in 839, and that they under the name of ‘Rōs had in mind the Biblical Gog-Magog inhabitants of the far North?

An affirmative answer may be had so to speak from the mouth of the Caliph in Baġdād himself.

As is common knowledge to all Arabists, in 842 the Caliph al-Wāṭiq Billāh “*dreamed a terrible dream*”. This ‘dream’ has hitherto not been taken into consideration in connection with the Rus’ problem – or possible inspiration and intermediaries from Byzantium.

The dream was about the Wall supposedly erected by Alexander the Great (called The Twohorned in the Qur’ān and Muslim tradition) to protect the world from the Doomsday fiends. Was it suddenly coming apart? At the behest of the Caliph a large caravan set out from Baġdād with the express purpose of ascertaining whether the end of the world was nigh:<sup>1</sup>

*This is what Sallām the interpreter told me:*

*The Commander of the Faithful, the Caliph al-Wāṭiq Billāh, saw in his sleep that in the Wall erected by the Two-horned between our lands and the Ya’ğūğ and Ma’ğūğ an opening had appeared. So he was seeking a person capable of travelling to the place and examining the state of the Wall on the spot.*

*[The Turk general] Ašnās said to him: “No-one is as capable of executing this task as Sallām the interpreter, who masters thirty languages.”*

*So Wāṭiq summoned me, saying to me: “I want you to go to the Wall so as to examine it and report to me on what you have seen.”*

Sallām travels in the company of fifty fit young men with a wergild of 1,000 dirhams each – and ten times as much for Sallām himself. The men are furnished with flame-proof jackets and other critical equipment, and two hundred mules carry provender and water. The men have been paid in advance for one year. As it turns out, the expedition lasts for more than two years. Out of the fifty intrepid young men, only 14 return home alive.

To all good luck it so transpires that the famed Wall, when at long last ‘found’, is still intact. Yet in order to corroborate what the Caliph already knew, evidently, the report from the whereabouts of the Wall underscores two things: Many of the surrounding towns have indeed been ravaged by the Ya’ğūğ-Ma’ğūğ, the traces of their

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1. Ibn Ḥurdāzbih, BGA VI, 162 ff (Arabic) 124 ff (French translation). Paraphrase in Anderson 1932, 93-95, who stands the historical worth of Sallām’s travelogue on its head: “The story of Sallām’s journey has had an altogether undeserved influence...”

degradations being stated to be in fresh and clear evidence. And some of these fiends are even to be seen upon the tops of the (luckily unscalable!) mountains. The neighbours to the Wall are a tribe speaking Arabic (sic!), well-armed and with a leader who confirms that yes, the fiends have been on the rampage, but now they are being properly contained.

The Caliph could heave a sigh of relief.

## *11.2. Goal of 842 Caravan*

The route taken by Sallām and his caravan is most telling. It does **not** pass through Ḥurāsān and Samarqand (which would have been both natural and easy, as these provinces were firmly held by the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate) in the direction of Tibet, Uiguria or present-day Mongolia, towards the north-eastern periphery of the world. These were the regions where according to Syrian Christian and Islamic tradition alike the Wall erected by ‘the Two-horned’ Alexander was to be found.

On the contrary, and most strangely, the caravan heads north-northwest, through the Caucasus, a much more dangerous route at that. Only after thorough but wholly unsuccessful searches in the steppes between the Ural mountains and the Dnepr region does the caravan turn due east, into the areas traditionally associated with Gog-Magog.

Sundry attempts have been made to explain this travelogue. One theory has it that Sallām’s caravan was dispatched on account of the Kirgīz subjection of the Uigur Turks in 841 and the southward migration of the latter.<sup>1</sup>

Another attempt runs:<sup>2</sup> “The initial trek past the western shores of the Caspian.. thus shows itself to be a detour; it was probably taken because of the details known from the Alexander stories.”

This is unconvincing, insofar as it alludes to the pass of Darband in the southern Caucasus often associated with Alexander’s Wall and his Iron Gate. If this Wall had been meant by the Caliph, there would have been no need for the caravan (the Darband being held by the ‘Abbāsīds), let alone for it to roam and comb the steppes to the north of the Black Sea. And farther north there were, to the Muslims, no “details known from the Alexander stories.”

The point is, on the contrary: This is **not** a detour. It is tribute to classical erudition – on the part of the Byzantine chancery, which is where, as we shall substantiate, the inspiration hailed from. They knew that the 839 visitors had come down to the Black Sea by boat through the steppe region between the Urals and the Dnepr. They also had ample information about the onetime movements of the Goths, Eruls and Huns in these parts.

Intriguing is the assertion, e.g. in the Norwegian monk Thjóðrekr, that the Huns were pent in by Alexander the Great in the swamps of the Maotis;<sup>3</sup> meaning in the very regions where Sallām initially conducted his futile search for the Ya’ğūğ-Ma’ğūğ before heading east.

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1. Czeplédy 1954, 32, 36.

2. Nagel 1978, 49-50.

3. Storm 1880, 32-33 ch. 17.

The solution to the entire enigma is, once again, that three-letter word: the Rūs. There is no other conceivable reason whatsoever for going a-searching in the pan-flat South Russian (Ukrainian) steppes than the one we now know:

The Caliph was alarmed at news of the ‘Rōs from Byzantium. Yet why then speak of a ‘dream’? The reason is simple. It would have been impolitic, even impossible, for the Caliph to name his arch-enemy as the source of his anxiety. Hence the Commander of the Faithful “*saw in his sleep*” the fateful news.<sup>1</sup>

He simply **had** to know. And all he really knew beforehand, from the Byzantine dogs, was the direction.

### 11.3. *Rôle of al-Ġazāl?*

Who now acted as intermediary between the anxiety of the Byzantines and the anxiety of the eastern Arabs. We know that al-Ġazāl played a crucial rôle as intermediary between the Greek court and that of the western Arabs, and also between the latter and the court of the Norsemen. It turns out that we cannot wholly exclude that al-Ġazāl was the man in question in relation to the eastern Arabs as well.<sup>2</sup>

*Amongst those who travelled from al-Andalus to the [Arab] East was the poet of al-Andalus Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥakam al-Bakrī al-Nuḡaynī, who was called al-Ġazāl because of his beauty. This occurred in the third century of the Banū Bakr b. Wayl.*

The Banū Bakr b. Wayl are a tribe well-known from times pre-Islamic; yet this can in no way be used to indicate the date of al-Ġazāl’s journey to the East. All we know is that he did go there, for which a suitable point of departure would be Byzantine territory. As an intimate of the ruler in Cordova he had a most understandable motif, plus an impressive and convincing background, to bruit about rumours that would upset the ‘Abbāsids in Baġdād.

### 11.4. *Rôle of a POW?*

We return to the Caliphal ‘dream’. It is first reported in Ibn Ḥurdādbih c. 862-880,<sup>3</sup> who in his work on ‘*The Roads and the Realms*’ names a certain Muslim b. Abī Muslim al-Ġarmī as his source for data from the Byzantine empire. This al-Ġarmī figures in the description of the Byzantine-Baġdādī exchange of prisoners of war which took place in 845.<sup>4</sup>

According to al-Mas‘ūdī and aṭ-Ṭabarī, having lived a long time among the Byzantines and knowing their country and historiography intimately, al-Ġarmī authored a series of works in Arabic which unfortunately have not come down to us but which are cited and sometimes quoted by other authors. These works treated the history of Byzantine emperors and politico-military leaders and also the history of the various Byzantine provinces and the adjacent countries.

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1. A parallel is Olav Haraldsson’s dream of the Cadiz giant: Stang 1986, 36-59.

2. Dozy (etc.) 1855-60, I, 640.

3. Bæk-Simonsen 1979, 67-79, versus Birkeland 1955, 10, on dating.

4. Kovalevskij 1956, 131-132.



*Arab prisoners of war, taken to Byzantium.<sup>1</sup>*

We cannot posit a mistake on the part of Arab historians as to the date 842. So how can al-Ġarmī possibly have inspired the contents of the said ‘dream’, returning to the Caliphate only in 845? The latter date too must be taken for granted (there were exchanges of POW’s both earlier and later, yet there is no occasion to doubt the dating of these sources, detailed and precise as they are).

A most reasonable explanation, surprising perhaps to the modern mind, is that al-Ġarmī had facile links with the Byzantine court and Baġdād alike while in custody as a POW in Constantinople. Being a POW of high rank he was certainly held in what the Arabs came to know as the Dār al-Balāṭ, literally ‘Palace House’, itself a small palace lying directly opposite the imperial court.<sup>2</sup> We know that representatives of the Caliphate were given the opportunity of visiting the Dār al-Balāṭ and its inmates on several occasions. On the other hand, in his capacity as a highly honoured captive al-Ġarmī was very probably invited to the table of the Emperor. And we may be certain that he had access to officials both high and low at the imperial court.

Upon his return to the Caliphate, al-Ġarmī was quite certainly **not** invited to the Caliph himself (as we would have expected), on account of his opinions on the eternity (‘non-createdness’) of the Qur’ān and on the possibility of beholding God; these convictions were anathema to the Caliph, and al-Ġarmī was persecuted for holding them. He was nevertheless deemed valuable, since we find him writing on which roads and which times of the year are best for attacking ‘the land of ar-Rūm’ from the Caliphate; in a word, he played the role of a first-rate informant.

Speaking of POW’s or informants, it may in theory have been the other way around: Byzantines telling about the 839 visit by the ‘Rōs while in the keep of the Saracens. This we however dismiss as improbable. The army rank-and-file would hardly have knowledge of the ‘Rōs visitors in 839, at least knowledge of such depth as to interest the Muslims.

1. Božkov 1972, 97.

2. Vasiliev 1930-50, II, 289, 423.



In fact, the eastern Islamic Caliphate had better ‘Byzantine’ sources than POWs. Besides the possible intermediaries mentioned already, there was no dearth of informative flies on the wall.

### *11.5. Rôle of Arabs in Byzantium*

It turns out that other possibilities also obtain: Information from Byzantium to the Caliph in Baġdād may have come by way of some other Arab, or preferably a Syrian Christian, or even a Greek visitor to Baġdād.

In Byzantium, Muslim traders and travellers came and went. An entire quarter was populated by Arabs and Muslims, who even had their own mosque there. Auxiliary units of the Byzantine army consisted of Arabs too. And the so-called Sacred Palace was built by the Emperor Theofilos some time in the 830-ies on the model of the Caliphal palace in Baġdād, plans of which he had procured. No wonder that miniatures of Constantinople in the manuscripts of Scylitzes show minarets and moush-rabiyas. “Since the 8th century, the interpenetration of the two peoples, Arabs and Byzantines, had become constant.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, theoretically, or even practically speaking, the possibilities of transmission from Constantinople to Baġdād were legion.

In addition to such information as might be volunteered, the ‘Abbāsids had a network which was professionally geared to the gathering of intelligence on external and internal enemies of the régime alike: The eastern Caliphate possessed, and was based on, one of the largest and reportedly most efficient systems of spies in pre-modern times.

On this background it is hardly astonishing that echoes of what was uttered at the court of Theophilos, and eavesdropped upon by the Arabs, would be sure to come to the knowledge of the Caliph, and that of posterity as well. Yet over and above this, it is wholly conceivable that information was indeed volunteered from Byzantium; and neither by Muslims nor by chance merchants.

We have in mind a select few in Byzantium. For the transmitter(s) may be sought among the ‘very important persons’ of that age.

### *11.6. Rôle of a VIP?*

It is after having narrowly escaped capture by the Muslims near Amorion in 839 that the emperor Theofilos sends an embassy to the Caliph, to see whether it can save the day (and the city). It is unsuccessful, Amorion is taken by the Muslims, and Theofilos subsequently despatches another embassy – to the Franks, asking for military aid.<sup>2</sup> This is the embassy with which the Rhos travelled to Ingelheim. If these ‘Rōs had come to the acquaintance of Theofilos before he did battle with the Saracens, he could have used it for what it was worth – even to the extent of having his embassy to the Caliphate cite them as a common danger. Yet this is all the more improbable in that Caliphal fears surface not in 839 but, as we have seen, in 842. More plausibly

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1. Beylie 1902, 117.

2. Thurn 1973, 77-79. Thurn 1983, 110-112.

Theofilos would treat these northerners well (as he did), in the hope of enlisting them on his side if they turned out *not* to be an imminent threat.

Our sources turn up another ‘embassy’ or pair of VIPs of the highest potential interest to our quest. During the reign of Theofilos, that redoubtable ‘magician-Patriarch’ John the Grammarian and Ignatius the Dean, known to us already, had close contacts with Baġdād.

One goal of theirs was the construction and embellishment of churches and palaces, according to Theophanes Continuatus and Symeon Magister.<sup>1</sup> And John, or Jannes as he is called derisively, twice visits Baġdād himself – the second time expressly in disguise, in order to convince a political refugee living there to come back home.<sup>2</sup> This is quite early in his career; yet with his evident obsession with the Doomsday threat of the ‘Rōs, as well as his ecclesiastical contacts deep into the Caliphate, he is a likely candidate for spreading word abroad on the advent of the Ya’ġūġ-Ma’ġūġ. As a leading official of the Byzantine Empire, he would appreciate any anxiety or panic he could stir up in Baġdād. In short: He had the knowledge, the motif, and the means.

### 11.7. Why 842?

What more can be read out of the 842 caravan, other than great personal relief, great state expenses and the subsequent corroboration of the Caliphal ‘dream’? There is one more thing: an explanation of why it took place in 842, and not in 839 when the ‘Rōs had first come visiting. Why a three-year delay?

This question begs an obvious answer: Of course the Caliph did not wait for three years before literally awakening to the potential danger. He was definitely better informed than not to react immediately; which is to say that what he was reacting to was *not* the 839 visit to Byzantium by the ‘Rōs. It was an event shortly prior to his ‘dream’.

The sole suggestion imposing itself upon us regards the attack on the town of Amastris in Paphlagonia, according to the *Vita* of St. George. The date is c. 842. And there is every reason to accept what Sallām the Interpreter reported, and knew he was expected to report: that the Ya’ġūġ and Ma’ġūġ had indeed been on the rampage outside the Wall.

True, a Paphlagonian coastal town is a far cry from the scene by the Wall which is described by Sallām. Yet what Sallām was after was not ‘the scene of the crime’ but the address so to speak of its perpetrators: Where did they come from?

For the Rūs did come. That is the explanation of why Sallām & Co. tried sleuthing them out north of the Azov and Black Seas. There are no other candidates in the vicinity – neither the Xazars (through whose territory the expedition passed) nor the steppe nomads (who were hardly news to the Caliphate and its geographers and historians).

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1. *PG* 109, 109-114, 157-158; 859-860.

2. Same, 109-110, 133-134.

Thus, again: The future – or rather the past – lies in research into the Arabic sources. Sallām’s expedition set off in 842; and it gives dramatic confirmation of the raid upon Amastris having taken place.

Not found by Sallām, the Rūs quickly came of their own accord. As stated in a later source on the Caspian town of Abaskun:<sup>1</sup> “*The Rūs were here under Hasan b. Zayd!*” – meaning the period 864-884. This period apparently is when Rūs merchants frequented Baġdād by way of the Caspian Sea and on camel’s-back through Iran.

One problem remains: If indeed the ‘Rōs assailed Amastris, how come there is no word of this and of them from that time in *Constantinople*? I believe there are two conjunct explanations. First, the Arabs had harried Paphlagonia;<sup>2</sup> so attackers, especially if coming from and returning to the West, might be taken – in Constantinople – for Arabs, who often attacked the Empire by sea. Second, the ‘Rōs had as yet only been introduced as merchant-diplomats, in 839, not as intrepid pirates.

We shall stay awhile with the Arabs, seeing what kind of views on the Rūs they developed.

### 11.8. Bal‘amī

The polyhistor aṭ-Ṭabarī wrote his great History c. 914-915 AD. Some fifty years later, the Samanid ruler of Ḥurāsān bade his wazīr Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh Bal‘amī translate the whole thing into Persian. What Bal‘amī did, however, was to rework major parts of this History according to his own predilections and such additional sources as were at his disposal; which leaves posterity with the following:<sup>3</sup>

*In Bāb al-Abwāb at that time [644 AD] there was a ruler called Šahriyār, who came forth to [meet] ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān, and made peace with the proviso that he need not pay tribute [to the Arabs], arguing as follows:*

*‘I am placed between two enemies. One is the Ḥazars. The other is the Rūs, who are really the fiends of the entire world, but in particular of the Arabs. Yet fighting them is something that no-one is capable of, save for the people here. Instead of paying tribute, we shall fight the Rūs ourselves, with our own weapons, keeping them at bay, in order that they do not come out from their country. Consider this your tribute and dues, which we shall spend every year.’*

*‘Abd ar-Raḥmān replied: ‘Above me there is a higher authority; I’ll inform him.’ And he sent Šahriyār off with one of his men to Surraḳa, who said: ‘I shall inform ‘Umar about this!’”*

*When ‘Umar was informed about this, he gave the response that this was to be considered as being tribute. This custom was instituted in all the defiles, that they pay neither tribute nor dues in order that they do not allow the pagans to get at the Muslims, but fight them themselves, keeping them at bay from the land of the Muslims.*

*Thereupon ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān held counsel with Šahriyār, saying: ‘I shall wage a holy war in these defiles, I’ll sally forth with my troops and turn the inhabitants of the towns and the defiles into Muslims!’*

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1. Garkavi 1969, 69.

2. George Amartol, in PG 109, 863-864.

3. same, 74-75.

To this Šahriyār answered: ‘We laud one thing amongst them, that they do not give the fiend a way to us.’

‘Abd-ar-Raḥmān however said: ‘With this I do not agree. In these defiles, in the direction where you pass by Rūs and Ġurān, there are a realm and many towns called Balanġār; and from here farther on in the same direction lies the Wall of al-Iskandar, called the Wall of Ya’ġūġ and Ma’ġūġ, which the Two-horned one raised in the far East.’

‘Abd-ar-Raḥmān continued: ‘I’m not going to be satisfied before I reach the borders of Balanġār with the troops. If I didn’t fear the Ruler of the Faithful, I’d proceed right to the Wall of Ya’ġūġ and Ma’ġūġ.’

He took along his troops, went off through a defile on a march against Balanġār, penetrated with the troops some 200 parasangs in this land, converted many towns to Islam, and returned back to Darband.

This is anachronistic. The text may reflect Muslim public sentiment following the sack of Barḍa’a, shortly before Bal’amī wrote. Yet the eschatological import was precisely that: an import, from the Byzantines, who first identified the ‘Rōs with the Septuaginta ‘Ros. For this the Muslims themselves had no linguistic grounds. The sack of Barḍa’a (and not Darband) by enemy forces was by itself not sufficient to mobilize such celebrations as the above. Again, then, the telltale footsteps, or mind-steps, point back unequivocally to Byzantium – and the 9th c. AD .

### 11.9. A Xazar Continuation; and al-Marvazī

We perceive a later ‘follow-up’ to these Greek eschatological convictions in the letter despatched by the Xazar ruler Yuṣuf to the Jewish Prime Minister of the Muslim government in Cordoba, Ḥasḍai ben Šaprut, c. 960 AD (a few years before the great Rūs attack on the Xazars):<sup>1</sup>

*I do not allow the Rūs, arriving as they do by boat, to cross through on their way to them [the Arab-Islamic countries]. If I did allow them to come through here, then they would waste to nought all the land of the Banū Ismā’īl, all the way to Baġdād.*

A faint follow-up of sorts is likewise found in al-Marvazī, c. 1142 AD. In his ethnographical work on the Turks, India and China this author also has an entry on the Rūs. A main point of his is that the Rūs fight on foot; yet “*if the Rūs had possessed horses and were riders, then their being a scourge to mankind would have been (even) stronger*”.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Garkavi 1969, 225. Svane 1993, 43.

2. Minorsky 1942, 36, translating: “If they had horses and were riders, they would be a great scourge to mankind.” This however is inaccurate. I translate from the Arabic text: same, \*23.

## 12. Al-Ḥwārizmī's Innovations, c. 846, and the Amazons

Большинство исследователей считают, что 'остров' (страну) русов следует локализовать в Северо-Западной Руси, точнее в северной части Балтийско-Волжского пути...  
Mel'nikova 1995, 29.

We shall now turn to other materials, both Arabic and European, that demonstrate the dual existence of the Rus' up north and of legend harking back to the Eruls but presently applied to these newcomers.

As has been established,<sup>1</sup> the reworking of Ptolemy's *Geographia* from late Antiquity by the Central Asian scholar al-Ḥwārizmī (or al-Ḥorezmī) took place within the time bracket 836-847 AD. The work by al-Ḥwārizmī is in several respects an update, and may if incorporating novel hearsay from the north prove relevant to our study.



*The Sea of Azov according to Ptolemy.*

1. Minorsky 1937, 10-11; Kovalevskij 1956, 91-97.

## 12.1. The (A)rūs River

“Far from all the materials in al-Ḥwārizmī may be deciphered,” it has been rightly noted.<sup>1</sup> One thing is however indisputable: In his text the ‘river *D.rūs*’ or *D.rīūs* makes its appearance, originating from ‘the mountain of (A)rūs’ somewhere up north, in the 6th clime. Is this then, as has been maintained, the first Arab remark on Rus’ and the Russian people?<sup>2</sup> We quote al-Ḥwārizmī (my translation – HS):

*The river D.rūs commences from the mountain Rūs, longitude 27.40, latitude 44.5. It runs through the region lying between the town Lū.z.ūn and the town Nabūna(?), thereupon it attains longitude 28.5, latitude 44.45. It subsequently flattens out, emptying itself into the sea at longitude 22.2 and latitude 42.30.*

*....From this river a(nother) river branches off, disemboгуing into the sea, beginning at longitude 22.2 and latitude 43.5, with its delta into the sea at longitude 22.40 and latitude [42.30]. Into the D.rīūs (sic) river a river falls from the Arūs mountain, commencing at longitude 27.5[±?] and latitude 44.30. Its confluence with the river is at longitude 26.30 and latitude 44.30. It flows through the area between the town of D.ksala and the town of F.l.nūn(?).*

*Into the river D.rūs one more river falls from the Arūs mountain at longitude 27.5 and latitude 43.10, its confluence with the river is at longitude 22.30 and latitude 43.30. Another river from the Arūs mountain (likewise) falls into the river D.rīūs, at longitude 27.5 and latitude 42.40, running through the area between the town of T.lsa and the town of D.ksala, disemboгуing into the river at longitude 22.20 and latitude 43.10. From this river two other rivers branch off into the sea, one of them commencing at longitude 24.40 and latitude 48.10, with its mouth into the sea at longitude 24.40 and latitude 42.30. The second river takes its start from longitude 26.10 and latitude 48.5, with its mouth into the sea at longitude 26.10 and latitude 42,30.*

*From the Arūs mountain a river runs, intersecting the area between the town F.l.nūn and the river D.rīūs, falling into the town Nabūna(?), and commencing at longitude 27.30 and latitude 43.40, falling into the town at longitude 28.40 and latitude 44.30.*

This should be dismissed out of hand as a description of Eastern Europe. The Ptolemaian degrees of longitude and latitude given here refer us not to Russia but to the south of France! Might these data then be connected with the Spanish Erul tradition discussed above? The answer must, it seems, be in the negative, although it cannot theoretically be wholly excluded, as a Gothic presence and power actually did survive here right down to the mid-9th c., subservient to the Franks.<sup>3</sup>

Upon Ptolemy’s original map we in the area indicated by al-Ḥwārizmī find the river *Rhodanus*, which in Arabic could very easily come across as *D.rīūs* by the quirks of paleoigraphy ( رودنوس v. دريوس ). As regards the mountain of (A)rūs, the map of Ptolemy and modern maps alike have the Rhône river flowing down from the Jura mountains, or in Ptolemy *Iurassus mons*. Al-Ḥwārizmī misread this name in typically Arab wise: Unaware of its consonant value, he took the initial I- for an initial hamza, i.e. in Arabic script **إ** or **آ**, which is what his text has; the -a- he moreover read as an Arabic ‘short faḥa’ (an -a- not appearing in the Arabic

1. Novosel’cev 1965, 373.

2. *ibid.*

3. Himly 1849, 107, Wolfram 1974.

script), whereas the -u- was understood as a ‘long kasra’ (the -ū, i.e. **و** of his text), and the mind-boggling three s’es were simply contracted into one, giving in the up-shot the **أروس** of our text.

It is much the same way with other toponyms in the above. Thus, Nabūnā reflects the name of the province (Gallia) Narbonensis; *Lū.z.ūn*, that of (Gallia) Lugdunensis; between which the river Rhodanus indeed is found to flow.

In the absence of a deciphering of the longitudes and latitudes so painstakingly given in al-Ḥwārizmī, and under the influence of wishful thinking, the river *D.rūs* could come to be interpreted as an Arabic transcription of *Danapros*, i.e. the Don, and (*A*)*rūs* as a reference to the Rus’. Indeed, the form **أروس** might have reflected a faint pronunciation of the sound h- before an initial r-, as in al-Mas‘ūdī’s *Arūsīya*. Yet this is simply not the case; what we are in the presence of is a reworking of Ptolemy’s nomenclature from southern France.

## 12.2. The Swamp

If the *Arūs* or *Rūs* river of al-Ḥwārizmī turned out to be a red herring, this is not the case with another feature, namely the conspicuous change effected in the shape, location and name of what we know today as the Black Sea. In Ptolemy this is *Maeotis Lacus*, a name unknown to or suppressed by al-Ḥwārizmī, who instead introduces the strikingly newfangled **al-batīḥa**, literally ‘the Swamp’. Now antiquity does of course know the **paludes** ‘marshes’ of the Maeotis; but that is quite another thing. Here, the Swamp alone reigns supreme.

The dimensions of this ‘Swamp’ have moreover been significantly enlarged in all directions; particularly conspicuous is its elongation northwards: In contradistinction to the original *Maeotis Lacus* of Antiquity, which did reach quite far north, al-Ḥwārizmī’s ‘Swamp’ reaches unto the *extreme* North of what we now know as Russia.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as will be seen from a facsimile overleaf, the *nahr ṭanā[i]s* i. e. ‘the river Don’ hails from high up in the North - from an intriguing novel fixture: a lake.

## 12.3. The Amazon Isles and the Baltic

Equally unparalleled in Ptolemy are the twin Amazon isles. This has hitherto been a mystery, as has the existence on al-Ḥwārizmī’s map of a riverine network:<sup>2</sup> “Woher al-Ḥw. seine Fluss-Systeme auf der Frauen- und der Männerinsel genommen hat, ist unbekannt.” That al-Ḥwārizmī simply invented the two isles along with their system of rivers is out of the question.

The two ‘Amazon isles’ are not peculiar to al-Ḥwārizmī; they are a recurrent fixture of subsequent Arabic as well as Norse literature. In the latter they occur in some of the so-called liar sagas; as well as in the reworking of Orosius by King Alfred the Great.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, they crop up in connection with the Veps in Adam of Bremen as well.

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1. cf Birkeland 1955, 142 n. 53.

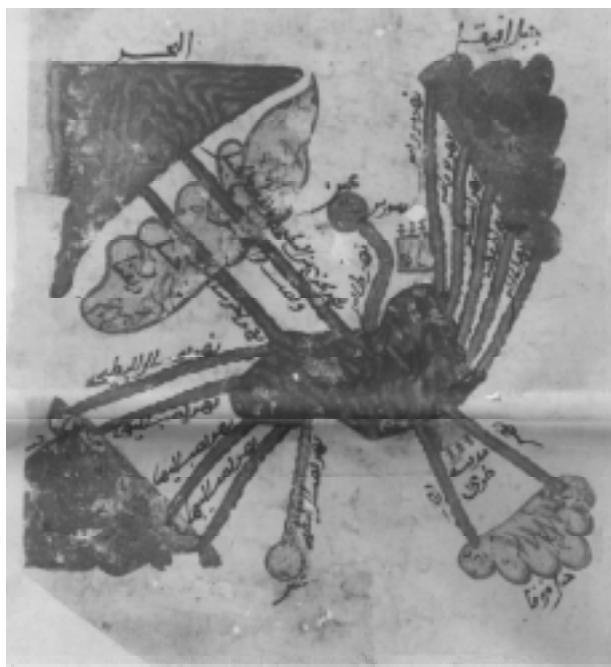
2. Mžik 1936, 184.

3. Sweet 1885; Pritsak 1981, 545.

The legend on the Amazons is of Greek (or ‘Greek-Scythian’) origin.<sup>1</sup> As noted above, it was adopted by the Goths and Eruls domiciled upon the shores of the Maeotis; where the legend had become popular long before the beginning of our era.<sup>2</sup> However, in all the classical versions of the legend, including the Map of Ptolemy, the Amazons are conceived of as cavalry, indisputably land-bound. Hence, their transposition from the steppes to the far-northern isles by al-Ḥwārizmī and later Muslim geographers such as Suḥrāb (902-945) and al-Munaḡḡim (literally, ‘the astrologer’, c. 900 or later), must be taken to reflect information from al-Ḥwārizmī’s own age.

It is our contention then that the localization of the Amazons to the far North is part of the renewal of Erul- and Goth-related themes that was prompted by the arrival in Byzance (and subsequent return home) of the Ladogans, 839 AD.

Wholly new in comparison with Ptolemy’s map is also the outline of the northern littoral of the ‘Outer Northern Ocean’, running as it does due west. All this prompts the question: How now did these innovations come to find their way into the earliest extant Arab map there is?



*Map of al-Ḥwārizmī, original specimen in Arabic, Mžik 1936.*

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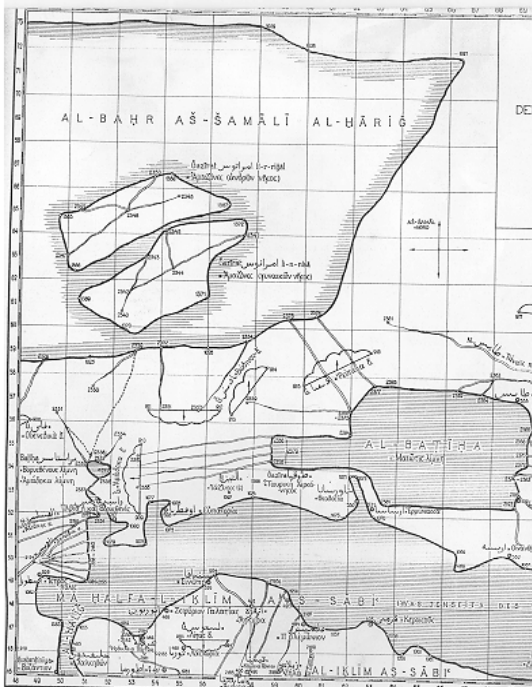
1. Blok 1991.

2. Gajdukevič 1971, 102, 108.



## 12.4. The Two Rivers of Russia

As against our (A)rūs red herring above, al-Ḥwārizmī does give us a riverine clue or two to northern ways of transport and transmission. A novel feature of his map is the two rivers flowing in a north-westerly direction from the Maeotis right unto the Northern Ocean (i.e. the Baltic Sea), through the Riphean Mountains known to us from Ptolemy. It goes without saying that both these rivers are physically quite impossible, running as they do through the highest of mountain massifs and nevertheless joining two oceans on either side. Naturally wholly aware of the law of nature so blatantly broken here, al-Ḥwārizmī all the same faithfully reproduces the information given him: The two rivers in question most adequately represent the two main routes of transportation from the Baltic to the Black Sea, the Dnepr one and the Volga one respectively, “from the Varangians unto the Greeks”. The description we must surmise was given by the Rhos ‘envoys’ of how they had to pull their boats around the cataracts, would be wholly in keeping with the conception of lofty mountains intersecting these two rivers on the way.



Map of al-Ḥwārizmī, Latinized.

## 12.5. A Persian Anonymous on Far-North Maeotis

Al-Ḥwārizmī's 'Swamp' is not alone in reaching unto the extreme North of what we now know as Russia.

An extreme northerly position is assigned to the Maeotis in other, later Oriental works as well. One such is *Ḥudūd al-'Alam* from 982:<sup>1</sup> “*The Maeotis lies at the very farthest end of the Slavs, in the direction of the North...*” From a certain island north of Britain a current is said to lead “*directly to the Mart.s Lake, lying, as we have had occasion to mention, north of the Slavs.*” The spelling Mart.s ما رتس is but a slight misrepresentation of the standard Arabic ماوتيس Maeotis.<sup>2</sup>

The same notion is witnessed in both Saxo the Grammarian and Adam of Bremen, as will be shown subsequently. In sum, not only the transposition to the far North of the Gothic-Erulian legend on the Maeotis ‘swamp’ (Eli – Eluri), but also the role of the extension northwards of this swamp has hitherto not been taken into consideration.

This transposition was made all the easier by the presence of extensive bogs and marshes in the vicinity of Old Ladoga. One such is Nevij Mox covering “hundreds of square kilometers”.<sup>3</sup> The stress on a far-northern swamp may even have some connection with veneration of the swamp; cf. the *Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis'*: “They sacrifice to devil-sprites, and to marshes, and to wells.”<sup>4</sup>

We turn our attention to a magnificent Viking burial only a couple of years after the 839 visit of the 'Rōs to Byzantium, in 845: that of the Oseberg queen, in Vestfold, Southern Norway. Why was she buried in what amounted to a bog? This “brings our thoughts to the age-old tradition of sacrificing to the deity of water and fertility by immersion ...in a bog,” an authority concludes, referring to finds from Skedemosse on Öland c. 200-500 AD and Rislev in Southern Zealand c. 300-400 AD.<sup>5</sup>

Yet are Nevij Mox and other northern marshes, plus the putative origin of the 839 Rōs in Old Ladoga, sufficient grounds for ‘stretching’ the Maeotis so far towards the north as we see in Ibn Ḥurdādhbih and the Persian Anonymous? Or is there more to this?

## 12.6. The ‘Northern Opening’ in Jordanes

The passage in Jordanes on the early migrations of the Goths from Scandza (Scandinavia) into the region of Oium runs:<sup>6</sup>

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1. Minorsky 1937, 54, 59, 429.
  2. The celebrations of akademik Rybakov 1982, 208-209 regarding Minorsky's ‘mistake’ here are to be dismissed.
  3. Mavrodin 1945, 30.
  4. Čtenija v istoričeskom obščestve Nestora letopisca, II, 66, Mavrodin 1945, 310: “Жруть бесомъ и бологомъ и кладежемъ.” Cf Sreznevskij 1955. Vasilevskij 1893, II, cl, has the aberrant reading: “Бяху же тогда погании, жруще езеромъ и кладежемъ и рощениемъ.”
  5. Christensen 1993, 255-256.
  6. Skard 1932, 36-37. The sequel on Gothiscandza, on the southern coast of the Baltic, following on the initial Berig passage, has been left out here.

*From this isle Scandza, this laboratory of peoples, this womb of nations, the Goths once are said to have set out, under their king Berig.(...)*

*The people however was numerous and steadily increasing. And when Filimer was king, the son of Gadarik – and the fifth or so after Berig – he took counsel on going out therefrom, weapons in hand, he and all the Goth people.*

*While they were asearching for good and suitable abodes they came to the land of Scythia, which they in their tongue called Oium. They became eager when they beheld these fertile tracts, and set about crossing the border river. Half the army was already safely over, when as they say the bridge went asunder and could not be repaired. Hence it was impossible to get across; nor was it possible for them to carry on further. For round about this place there is said to lie an abyss with quagmire bogs all around. In two ways then has nature made the place inaccessible. Yet if one is to believe what travellers report, they hear the lowing of cattle and see signs that there be folk there still today...*

*The Gothic throng which was led by Filimer set across the river to Oium, it is said, and took into possession the land they had desired. They continued directly to the Spali people, joined battle with them, and prevailed. They then continue in one single burst of victory right unto the outermost Scythia, which lies by the Black Sea.(...)*

*Yet we do not know why the truthful chronicler Josephus deletes what we here have told about the origins of the Gothic people. Otherwise he is directed only by the truth, enumerating the oldest reasons for everything. Yet of their lineage he mentions only Magog, saying that they were termed Scythians on account of both their name and their lineage.*

Logically, this is neither here nor there. A bridge breaking down irreparably is of course nonsense (how then could it have been built in the first place?); if irreparable, the need for a bridge could surely be recompensated for by boats or other means. And if Filimer led the first half of the Goths across the river, who according to this account then somehow became isolated on the said island Oium surrounded by abyss and bogs, how could they possibly press on southwards, into Oium? (The Gothic view evidently was that the vanguard were the ones who pressed on, and the remainder were the ones who were isolated in the abyss-encircled Oium.) Modern logic aside: This is not history; it is legend. To which historical logic was Jordanes put to use? We follow him farther up the track:<sup>1</sup>

*The Goths lived first in Scythia, we read, by the Maeotis marsh; thereafter in Moesia, Thrace and Dacia; and their third place was in Scythia once more, north of the Black Sea.*

The logical upshot of the above two excerpts in sum is of course that the quagmire island (= Oium) lies by the Maeotis marsh; and that close relatives of the Goths still are thought to dwell upon this isolated 'isle'; which in turn are both thought to lie far north of 'our' Maeotis = the Sea of Azov. This in turn opens for a (wholly unhistorical!) view that the Eruls could indeed be identified with these 'left-behind' Goths; all the more so in that the Eruli are nicknamed 'the quagmire ones', the **Eluri** as we have seen.

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1. same, 39.

## 13. Arabic & Other Confirmation: Amazons & Red Nudes

*It is also possible to point at other interpretations, likewise coming to the fore in deep antiquity.*  
Mošin 1931, 118.

### 13.1. Marshy Isle of Ibn Rusta, etc.

We next turn to a much-discussed Arabic source. Written after 922 AD, this ‘*Book on the Costly Embellishments*’ by Ibn Rusta includes much older materials excerpted from works now lost, one of these being, as with al-Ḥwārizmī above, the intelligence report authored by al-Ġarmī or some other Muslim informant some time in the period 842-847. The opening passage on the **Rūsīya** runs:<sup>1</sup>

*As for ar-Rūsīya, they dwell upon an island [or: peninsula] which lies in a lake. The island which they inhabit is three days in circumference and covered by woods and dense thickets. It is very insalubrious and so quagmire that the earth quakes when one treads upon it. They have a ruler called Ḥaqqān-Rūs. They ravage among aṣ-Ṣaqqālība, using ships to get at them. They take them captive and bring them to Ḥazarān and Bulġār, selling them there. They have no fields, living only on what they import from the land of aṣ-Ṣaqqālība.*  
(...)

One conclusion on the above has been that “Ibn Rusta gives us extremely interesting traditions which seem to reflect the situation prior to the Kiev state (882) but after 862”.<sup>2</sup> This inference cannot be upheld. The above description does not tally very well with the post-862 political situation, where Rjurik and his men according to the *Tale of Bygone Years* have established their power throughout what is now Northern Russia, with garrisons in Novgorod, Izborsk, and Beloozero. At least the two former places were populated by Slavs.<sup>3</sup> There was absolutely no need to use ships to “get at” these populations after 860-862; and according to the same *Tale of Bygone Years*, the more southerly Slavs centered on Kiev were soon under the dominance of Askol’d and Dir – two other Viking chieftains. It is hardly conceivable that Rjurik & Co. would try raiding the Kiev region for Slavonic slaves, provoking war with Askol’d and Dir.

Instead, the conclusion is: The Ibn Rusta tradition above goes back upon al-Ġarmī (who indisputably wrote in the 840’ies). It reflects a situation where the **Rūsīya** (= ‘Reds’ in Byzantine parlance) are in control of Old Ladoga, but still have to use ships to “get at” the Slavonic centres of population a bit farther south.

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1. Birkeland 1955, 14-17; Russian translations in e.g. Garkavi 1870, 267-268, Novosel’cev 1965, 397.
  2. Birkeland 1955, 15, citing Minorsky 1942, 433-434 (sic).
  3. On the Veps settlement called Krutik, south of Beloozero lake, Golubeva/Kočkurkina 1991, 8: “The settlement ceased its existence in the third quarter of the 10th c., just as the Slavs were beginning to penetrate [the area].”

The sole problem we are left with is this: While there is indeed an abundance of marshes in the vicinity of both Novgorod and Old Ladoga, as well as farther afield, there is no place where we find “an island (or: peninsula) in a lake,... so quagmire that it quakes when one treads upon it”. No other place than Old Ladoga can very well be meant here (although both Novgorod and even mainland Sweden, the Roslagen area around Stockholm, have been suggested); Novgorod was a Slavonic town and if the Rūsīya lived there they would not have needed ships to take on the local inhabitants. *Some* of Old Ladoga’s surroundings are indeed quagmire; yet to say that an area here three days in circumference was surrounded by water and quaking bogs was and is simply not true. So whence this insistence? There is but one suggestion: Not Old Ladoga in itself, from the side of nature; but Old Ladoga as the meeting-place of fact and fiction, of nature and literature, of 9th century AD Viking ruffians and 3rd-6th c. AD reminiscences revived.<sup>1</sup>

The 9th c. AD ‘isle of the Reds’ is testimony to the staying power of tradition in Byzance, capital of the ancient world.

### 13.2. *The Amazons*

Al-Ḥwārizmī is not alone in assigning the Amazons to a far-northerly – and maritime – location. In a reworking of al-Ḥwārizmī by one Suhrāb (902-945), the latitude and longitude of the isle of Thule is given followed by those of the isle of S.qandīya (= Scandinavia), and then “*the Amazānūz isle where the Spring of the Men is found*”, as well as “*the Amazānūz isle where the Spring of the Women is found.*”<sup>2</sup>

Then there is al-Munaḡḡim (c. 900, or possibly later), who mentions

*the island of Thule, lying north of the lands of the Slavs, and also the Isle of Women and the Isle of Men, where people dwell who separate women and men because of the jealousy of the menfolk.*<sup>3</sup>

In the travelogue of the Jewish trader Ibrāhīm Ibn Ya‘qūb (presumably from 973), there is a description of the Burūs (= Prussians), living by the Ocean (= the Baltic) and fighting to the death:<sup>4</sup>

*For ar-Rūs come on plundering expeditions among them in ships from the West. West of ar-Rūs there is the City of the Women. They possess fields and slaves. They have children by their slaves... They ride on horseback, waging war...*

In the Dark Ocean (= the Atlantic), according to al-Idrīsī (c. 1152), “*out of the inhabited islands there are two, called the Isles of Amazūniyūs of the Maḡūs*”, menfolk on one of them, women on the other, “*each Spring crossing over a sound sundering them, by means of small boats which they have..*” Even the whereabouts are indicated:<sup>5</sup> “*In order to reach them, the nearest road is from the town ‘Anhū; yet one can also get there from the town of Qalmār (?) and from the town of Daḡwāda (?).*”

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1. On the **name** Ladoga and its serving as a cue for the ‘Swamp’, there is more below!
  2. Mžik 1930, 66-71, Birkeland 1955, 25.
  3. Birkeland 1955, 12-13.
  4. same, 44.
  5. same, 75.

Among even later authors, Ibn Sa'īd al-Mağribī (1214-1274/1286) locates and describes both “*the City of the Women*”, surrounded by forest thickets, and in addition “*the Isle of the Women*” plus “*the Isle of the Men*”; whereas “*to the east of these two islands is the great island of the Slavs..*”<sup>1</sup>

His contemporary al-Qazwīnī (1203-1283), citing one aṭ-Ṭarṭūšī, describes “*the City of the Women, a great town with a widespread territory upon an isle in the Western Ocean*”.<sup>2</sup>

The representations of the Amazons in all these authors are in no way at variance with al-Ḥwārizmī; on the contrary, they bear the very same imprint: Like him, they generally speak of **two** populations called the Amazons, viz. the men as well as the women, and upon two islands out in the Ocean, to the west of the Slavs (meaning present-day northern Russia). True, in al-Mağribī there is a land-bound ‘City of the Women’ as well; and in Ibn Ya‘qūb the ‘City of the Women’ is not explicitly maritime – yet it is, again, due west of (northern) Russia; just like in the Ptolemy map by al-Ḥwārizmī.

The point here is: **This** ‘Amazon tradition’ is novel. It is no mere **tradition** at all, no continuation of classical literary themes but a break and a radical reconstitution.

There is one other place where these newfangled northern warrior women are found. Not in Russian literature, nor in e.g. Anglo-Saxon,<sup>3</sup> but only in the Norse one are these ladies amply attested.<sup>4</sup>

Now **why** should we have this spate of Amazons up north? The explanation at hand is that traditions on them stayed alive from the Migration Age and far down into the Middle Ages, and not merely in written literature (for and by the learned few), as will be seen in e.g. Saxo the Grammarian’s tales on the ‘shield-maids’. Another evidence of this continuity is the testimony of Paulus Warnefridi (‘Paul the Deacon’), in the very start of his *History of the Langobards*, that this people recognized the Amazons as their forebears<sup>5</sup> – along with the dog-heads.<sup>6</sup>

There are also traditions on the Amazons which are clearly literary – for being steeped in the classical tradition and demonstrating no imprint of the oral, maritime, two-isles, etc., ‘cluster’. One such is the story on the Amazons found in the *Tale of Bygone Years*. Another is the mention of the Amazons in the translation into Anglo-Saxon of Orosius by King Alfred the Great.<sup>7</sup>

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1. same, 100.

2. same, 104, 159 n. 14: Aṭ-Ṭarṭūšī, a 10th c. Spanish emissary to the Emperor Otto’s court.

3. *The Tale of Bygone Years* does mention the Amazons, but in a classical vein and without geographical context: Lixačev 1950, I, 12. In King Alfred’s reworking of Orosius we learn that north of the Dalmatians dwell the Croats (‘*Horigti, Horoti*’), north of the Croats lies ‘The Land of Maidens’, north of which in turn are the Sarmatians and the Rhiphaean mountains: Sweet 1883, 16. In same, 46, King Alfred glosses the name: “*For þon hi mon hæf on Crecisc Amazanas, þæt is on Englisc ‘fortende’.*”

4. Discussion in Vilkkuna 1970 (in Finnish). Vilkkuna concludes that the name Kainuu, or in Norse **Kvenland**, gave rise to the nearly homonymous **Kvennaland** ‘Land of the Women’. Cf Heggstad 1963, 390.

5. Waitz 1878, 49, 50, 62.

6. Malone 1962, 176-177.

7. Sweet 1885, 9.

The last of all northern Amazons recorded, and far-northern with a vengeance, are the ones located up on the shores of the Arctic Ocean in a Russian work from 1772.<sup>1</sup>

The conclusion is: The transposition of the Amazons from their cavalry rôle in mainland Scythia to far-northern islanders from al-Ḥwārizmi onward can only be explained by events in al-Ḥwārizmi's age 'pinning' such traditions to a more maritime or island environment far north; meaning the Viking environment centered on Old Ladoga, as fitted into a web of classical traditions from the 'proto-Viking' Eruls. These traditions in turn were themselves partly tailored to fit Old Ladoga and the north. And what set off this flurry of new-fangled celebrations on Amazons and so forth<sup>2</sup> was no fantasy but the visit to Byzantium by the 'Rōs in 839.

### 13.3. *Nizāmī Gangēvī on Red Russians*

Above, we have had occasion to note that the Persian author Nizāmī saw the Russians as being 'ruddy-faced, red'.<sup>3</sup> This redness is spelled out in several 'colourful' ways:<sup>4</sup>

*From the Russian (army), came a horseman like the elephant,  
With a face (ruddy) like the red-coloured (bakam) tree...  
From the clamour of the (Rúmish) brazen trumpet, and the sound of the drum, From  
the red rose (the ruddy cheek), – the yellow colour of juniper appeared.  
From the camp of the (ruddy) Russians the sound of the camel-bell  
Ascended, from front and rear, to the bright red star, Hyades-following.  
Of all Russia the heart became full of sorrow;  
Their red rose (ruddy, joyous complexion) became yellow (sad) safflower.  
In every direction the Rúmí, hate-displayer,  
Brought forth the Resurrection Day from the Russians.  
The armies of (ruddy) Rúm and (yellow) Russia commingled;  
In ruddiness and whiteness like the face of a bride.*

Again, this 'elusive allusiveness': The reader has to be versed in the *topoi* being referred to if he is to really appreciate the fulness of this poetry. Thus, Resurrection Day seems to *allude to* the eschatological Gog-Magog rôle of the 'Rōs in the eyes of Christians (which is what the 'Rúmís' were).

Many of Nizāmī's details on both the Rūs and the **Isū** (= the Veps) are historically and ethnographically interesting, yet must await a forthcoming publication. For our 'red' tradition, they are of little interest, with one exception – the following presentation of a people dwelling up in the far North and taking stupendous part in the multiethnic Russian army:<sup>5</sup>

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1. Kunik & Rozen 1878, 77-79, Lewicki 1961, 521, Thulin 1981, 179.
  2. On the equally novel transposition of the Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ to Biarmia, ch. 17.3.
  3. Lipskerov 1986, 436-470 on Sikandar v. the Russians does not recognize that here literary topics are at work.
  4. Clarke 1881, 703: Song 59, line 24; 713: Song 61, line 4; 722: Song 63, line 3; 743, Song 64, line 166; 752: Song 65, line 27-28. I use the translation – and the transcription – by Clarke.
  5. Clarke 1881, 725: Song 63, lines 35-40.

### 13.4. *Nizāmī Ganḡevī's Erul tradition*

*Near to the Darkness (where is the water of life) is a mountain  
To which the road is like a hair for fineness.  
In it, – such man-forms,  
In composition, of dust; in form, of iron.  
No-one truly knows their origin;  
How, from the first, was their birth and being.  
All are ruddy of face and blue of eye;  
They fear not the time of rage of Iblīs:  
Are so strong and firm of step (in battle)  
That one individual is sufficient for an army.  
In conflict, whether it be the male or the female,  
He excites the Resurrection Day in the world.*

The Land of Darkness up in the far North is traditionally considered adjacent to the haunts of the Gog-Magog hordes. And the path “*like a hair for fineness*” is the one leading to these pent-in fiends, in the homily on Alexander and the last days of the world by the early 6th century Syriac author Jacob of Serūḡ.<sup>1</sup> That they “*fear not the time of rage of Iblīs*” is another allusive circumlocution for the throes at the end of the world, when Iblīs (= Satan) is on the loose. Third, the reference to “*the Resurrection Day*” likewise points to the latterday rôle of the ‘Rōs.

What our Persian author is passing on here is culled from the late Classical Greek tradition, not the Muslim Ya’ḡūḡ-Ma’ḡūḡ one. Thus too, the mountain mentioned here would be the Arctic Taurus, the dwelling-place, according to learned Byzantine authors, of the ‘Tavrosythian’ Russians (on whom more in the next chapter).

That these warriors are “*so strong and firm of step (in battle)*” point to the famed fleetness of Erul footwork. Moreover, the above words on the fighting prowess of male and female being equal come across as an allusion to the classical Amazons and their (Germanic) mates.

All this might be dismissed as mere guesswork, were it not for the occurrence of the following as well:<sup>2</sup>

*Thus he spake, saying: This army (of Russia), war-seeking,  
sweated (practised) not in the contest of lions.  
Only in thieving, and treachery, and highway robbery,  
Display they manliness and man-overpoweringness:  
They have not experienced double-handed anyone’s sword,  
The battle-axe and the spear – all in front and rear:  
Have fit,- neither weapons nor clothing;  
From those weaponless warfare comes not well:  
In the battle-ranks, – a few naked (unarmed) men,  
Why is it necessary to hew down from head to navel?*

Here, the classical characteristics of the Eruls are on display: Their treachery, their being robbers (or pirates), and above all, their having “*neither weapons nor clothing*” – a preposterous proposition, by any standard of warfare. All this makes up part

1. Hunnius 1906, Anderson 1932, 26.

2. same, 688-689: Song 57, 82-86.



of an exhortatory speech by Sikandar (Alexander the Great) to his commanders before taking on the Russian foe. By these words “*the world-possessor made them free from care (fear)*”. He adds, not very convincingly: “*Not mine is fear of war with the Russians,*” and hopes that “*one can scatter the blisters (of flight) on the feet of the Russians*”.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the Russians are pedestrian fighters.

One additional trait of the Eruls is paraded in the *Sikandar-nāma e-barā*: their unruliness or anarchic streak. This is vented by the Russian leader Kintāl (sic), when trying to explain to Sikandar why it is that “*this multitude (the Russians) slave to the order [of] the Russian king?*” The latter responds, mentioning the pelts of wild quarry recognized as money among the Russians as one instance of his good governing acumen:<sup>2</sup>

... *In royalty,  
Governing makes the king's hand strong.  
Behold to what extent governing produces reverence  
When it makes hide like this better than silver  
(inasmuch as it never becomes dull in the market!)  
In this territory, of whatever I have seen,  
This (governing) is best; and of this I have approved.  
If this jewel (of Kintāl's governing) had not been this people's  
None would have bound his loins (in obedience) to a person's (a chief's) order.  
None (of the chiefs of Russia) has kingly qualities;  
With this one quality only (of governing on Kintāl's part),  
They (the chiefs) are king (through the awe inspired by him).'  
When the king became possessed of plunder through his superiority  
(In battle), he reckoned thanks for treasure given.*

Though tailored to fit the author's end of lauding royalty, that of the Russian ruler and Sikandar alike, the original *topos* is still palpable enough: Being king of the Russians is an exceptional feat! That “*none (of the chiefs of Russia) has kingly qualities*” is our author's twist to the classical theme of the Eruls being chieftains (‘princes’, earls) only, their body politic being based on a ‘warrior democracy’, without any king.<sup>3</sup> That they even opted for regicide must (in the eyes of the knowledgeable) merely have heightened the feat and fame of ruling them!<sup>4</sup>

The historical fact that in 9th c. Russia the pelts of squirrel, marten, etc., were used for tender, and for the payment of tribute,<sup>5</sup> is used by Nizāmī to raise our admiration for the ingenuity of the Russian ruler. Our Persian author did not get it right, though, when describing how Sikandar beheld “*...a great mass heaped up / Of the (skin of the) heads of the ermine and the boneless heads of the sable, / Old become,*

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1. same, 688-690: Song 57, 81, 92, 95.

2. same, 760: Song 66, 38-43.

3. A characteristic of the Rūs found in other authors too, e.g. al-Ḥarrānī, Seippel 1896, 108, Birkeland 1954, 123: “*They consist of many peoples who obey neither king nor law. In their parts are gold mines. No stranger comes there without them killing him. Their region lies between mountains which encompass it...*” Here even the in-hemming mountains are present.

4. Rappaport 1920, on the killing of their king Ochus.

5. The Tale of Bygone Years, e.g. *sub anno* 859, 883.

and from them the hair fallen; / From the most suitable place suspended (so that the stench might be wafted away)". A Russian tells him not to look "with contempt at this dry skin", "this ignoble hide", as it is "the most resplendent (current) coin of this territory", etc.<sup>1</sup>

Despite Niẓāmī's mistake here, or rather because of it, we know that he had at his disposal information that was already many centuries old – with nobody to disabuse him of the sometimes strange interpretations he fell prey to. If this is poetic license, it is license born of ignorance, or rather, of the lack of firsthand knowledge. Niẓāmī is clearly widely read. His is merely the ignorance of what to make of this intriguing yet very distant past.

As to which works he did read, we are reduced to speculation. All we can say in sum is that this text by Niẓāmī Gaṅḡevī is highly valuable for demonstrating that even in as late an age as around the year 1200, and even in the lands of the then much reduced eastern Caliphate, information stemming from the Eruls was to be had. This information, furthermore, was associated not with the long-dead Eruls, but with the Russians; showing conclusively that a transference of themes from the 3rd-6th century Eruls to the 9th-10th century Russians had indeed taken place; meaning, naturally, in Byzantium.

Valuable too, finally, are Niẓāmī's multiple allusions to what the name really means: These are the Doomsday scourge (cf. the Greek 'Ros); yet they are also, very clearly, the Ruddies. They partake of **both** the 'name-rôles' which the Greek tongue managed to keep apart but which to the Arabs and Muslims were pronounced the same, coalescing in *ar-Rūs*.

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1. Clarke 1881, 759: Song 66, lines 27-36.

## 14. ‘Third Rus’ & Ladoga

*Bjarmalandsför* – in modern Icelandic ‘a wild  
goose-chase’....  
Stang 1977, 3.

### 14.1. Sources on Third Rus’

The Oriental sources on the ‘three Russias’ have already been subjected to a meticulous discussion by Novosel’cev, and ought to be in need of no new treatment ‘from scratch’. Nevertheless, in order to address the question anew we have to begin with presenting the oldest one preserved, that by al-Balḥī c. 921, as referred and probably reformulated by al-Iṣṭaḥrī c. 951:<sup>1</sup>

*Ar-Rūs consists of three species (‘aḡnās). One species is those who dwell nearest to Bulḡār; their king resides in a town called Kūyāba, it is bigger than Bulḡār. One [species] lives farther off than they, and are called aṣ-Ṣalāwīya. And a [third species] are called al-Artānīya. Their king lives in Artā. People come on merchant travels to Kūyāba. As for Artā, it has been said that not a single foreigner has entered it, for they kill every stranger who sets foot on their soil. They sail down the water [= the rivers] only for trading. But they do not tell anyone about their circumstances and their dealings in trade. They do not allow anyone to strike up company with them, nor to penetrate their lands. From Artā are exported black soble and lead [or: tin, ar-raṣāṣ]. (...)*

The sources in question, beginning with this one, comprise a brief description of the three groups or tribes (*ḡins*, pl. ‘*aḡnās*) of the Russians, called Kūyāba, aṣ-Ṣ(a)lāwīya and Artā(nīya). The vowelling of the latter name is uncertain, with an original E- or I- or U- being as equally possible as the -A- conventionally given. Since aṣ-Ṣalāwīya is said to be a group of Russians dwelling farther away from the Muslim world than Kūyāba; this has generally been taken for a reference to the Novgorod Slovenes. Kūyāba has been unanimously identified with Kiev. Whereas the third name has provoked the most animated discussion.

### 14.2. Third Rus’ – scholarly status

The question of the identity of this ‘third Rus’ is one of the classics of Russian historiography, inspiring an extensive specialist literature.<sup>2</sup>

It has been suggested several times that by Artā the Mordvinian tribe of the Erza are to be understood. This conviction may be considered the dominant one up to now.<sup>3</sup> It has been upheld by Soviet historians.<sup>4</sup> It was espoused by the editor of the anonymous Persian treatise *Ḥudūd al-‘Alam* from 982 (where the name occurs in the

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1. Birkeland 1955, 26.

2. Review in e.g. Thulin 1979, Konovalova 1995.

3. Suggested by Markwart 1913, upheld also by Minorsky in his edition of the anonymous *Ḥudūd al-‘Alam*, 1937, 434-438.

4. the editors of *Osnovy jazykoznanija*, Lytkin (etc.) 1974-76.

form *Urtāb*.<sup>1</sup> The same scholar however later concluded that the Mordvinian Erza are an unlikely candidate, as Slavs and Scandinavians alike could hardly be confused with them, adding:<sup>2</sup> “The Erza tribe is not connected with any known deposits of lead or tin, whereas, according to the words of al-Iṣṭahṛī, this metal... was exported from the land of the *Arṭā*.”

The Erza Mordvinians, moreover, are not remote and hard to get at; on the contrary, they are the closest of the three groups in question to the Muslim world, if the other two be the Novgorodians and the Kievans. Further, the Mordva were partly subject to Great Bulḡār on the Volga, and could in no way be characterized by precisely the Muslims as being unknown to the surrounding world.

Being a Normanist, the Ḥudūd al-‘Alam editor unfortunately came to espouse a most unconvincing position:

“Taking into account the form of the name *Arṭā* given in the Ḥudūd... as *Urtāb*, I infer that the correct reading from a paleographical point of view may be regarded as *أُرْمَان*, *Urmān*, i.e. these very same Russian *Urmāne* (Normans). Geographically speaking I would locate the ‘third Rus’ in the White Sea basin (*Biarmia*?), from where the Scandinavians penetrated to the Volga and brought along lead from Sweden...”

Characteristic of the Normanist approach is the insistence that the appearance of lead in northern Russia can only be explained by the beneficent works of Scandinavians.

Another ‘*Biarmian*’ theory has been fielded by an Anti-Normanist; here, of course, the Slavs are the necessary prime movers:<sup>3</sup>

“Other scholars have maintained that the Arab authors have placed *Arṭānīya*... in the north of Eastern Europe, in *Biarmia* (Thomsen 1981, 35). This latter conclusion seems fair enough, if *Biarmia* is to be placed within the territory of Karelians and Veps, near Lake Ladoga. Yet I doubt whether a centre of Kievan power could have developed here by the mid-9th c.”

There are also representatives of a ‘Baltic’ school. Here, the reading *Arṭā* *ارشا* is reconstituted as the name of the island *Arkon*, i.e. *Rugen*.<sup>4</sup> Thither *Arṭā(nīya)* has likewise been located by a whole bevy of Soviet scholars,<sup>5</sup> and Western ones too.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the view has been expressed by a leading Russian historian that “the three centres of Rus’ may be a folklore variant on the migration tales of three tribes or three brothers dividing a country into three parts”.<sup>7</sup> The entire foundation for this supposition is the number three. About brothers or a partition of the land there is not the slightest trace in the Arab authors.

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1. Minorsky 1937, 434-438.

2. 1963, 149.

3. Lovmjan’skij 1985, 200 n. 2.

4. by the Czech scholar Hrbek 1957, 628-652.

5. Bilinbaxov 1962, Kuz’min 1970, Lovmjan’skij (cf. Petruhin 1985, 286 note), and Truxačev 1980.

6. e.g. Dralle 1985.

7. Petruhin 1982, 1985, 286. Several recent works on the subject have as yet not been available to me, thus Konovalova 1992, Karsanov 1992.

The latest scholar to make an endeavour seems to have simply given up, not venturing so much as a word on where, if anywhere, the third Rus' might be; only that it is *not* among the Turkic Kumans.<sup>1</sup>

### 14.3. *The Veps Venue*

We instead opt for the conclusion:<sup>2</sup>

The third group of ar-Rūs should be located in tentative wise in the area of Rostov and Beloozero. In favour of this militate the export articles mentioned (tin, lead and, in particular, furs) as well as the much-famed eating of people coming their way. It is precisely in Zavoloč'e or Biarmia, once populated by a smattering of Veps, that we find up till now a host of fear-inspiring mythical ideas on “self-eaters” (in Russian, *samoyedy*) and raw-meat-eaters (*syrojadczy*) devouring people, as well as a whole gamut of other monsters and marvels borrowed from the arsenal of Muslim convictions regarding the peripheries of the world – e.g., the idea of giants living pent up behind and hankering to smash, the Iron Gates separating them from the civilized world.<sup>3</sup> Such ideas could be put to good use by the ancient Veps in order to scare away all comers who just might be interested in challenging them over furs and other local resources.<sup>4</sup>

This conclusion is borne out by Veps toponymics<sup>5</sup> as well as lexicology. First, all we know of the abovesaid Arṭā is that it is, in addition to Kiev and the Novgorodian Slovenes, “yet another town”, the inhabitants of which are unwilling to say anything much. If so be it, then one may envisage the possibility that the real name too has been withheld, and that our Arṭā reflects precisely such a hostile haziness on the part of the natives in question.<sup>6</sup>

In the dictionary of the Veps tongue we find the following:<sup>7</sup> **eraz, -sen** ‘another, some’; **erd, erdal, erdas, erdale** = **ird**, etc., ‘the farther side’; **irdale, irdas, irdha**

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1. Konovalova 1995, 143, points out the Kuman Turkic background to two of the three names given in al-Idrīsī: **Qūqīāna** and **Slāw**. The latter was easily substituted for the original, homonymous **aṣ-Ṣalāwiya** ‘Slovenia, Novgorod’. Konovalova then walks into the trap of supposing that the third name too reflects mid-12th c. realities, concluding, 145: “The name of Arṭā, apparently, was in full use in the language of the 12th century. Therefore, those pieces of information that al-Idrīsī did manage to acquire about this town he entered into the tale about the three groups of the Rus’.”
  2. Novosel'cev 1965, 418-419.
  3. latest example of this idea in Mullonen 1994, 10, cited below.
  4. These ‘Muslim’ ideas in the north of Russia will be treated separately by the present author,
  5. Latest recorded instance in Mullonen 1994, 33: “The Iron Gates [*Železnye Vorota*] is the name for narrow thoroughfares for pulling one’s boats across [*nazvanie uzkiy porožistyx mest*] on rivers.” The Iron Gates are a prime ingredient in the Alexander legend. Their occurrence sub anno 1096 in *Tale of Bygone Years* is not based on Ps.-Methodios, but on Muslim tradition, cf preceding note.
  6. This name was considered a fake name already by Karasik 1950, 304.
  7. Mullonen/Zajceva 1972, 80-81, 149-150.

‘away, off’; **irdal’in’e** ‘exterior, outside’; **irdbok, irdpol** ‘outer, external side’. This most unproblematically tallies with *Irtā* or *Ertā* as well as *Irtānīya* or *Ertānīya*.

As for the semantics reflected by the name, two distinct possibilities obtain: Either we may see in it a reference to ‘Biarmia’, Perm’, Zavoloč’e, in the sense of ‘periphery, far-off place’; or the rendering by non-plussed Muslims of a Veps expression meaning approximately “get away, off you go, shoo”.

It is tempting to compare this Veps lexicology, connoting something ‘outer, outside’ (along with the information that the tribe aš-Šalāwīya too is far-off), with the division found in Constantine Born-in-the-Purple of Russia into Inner Russia, comprising i.a. Kiev (al-Kūyābā above), and Outer Russia.

Which town or townlet *Artā* in fact refers to is and will ever remain unknown to us. Yet one is drawn towards the ethnically composite Upper Volga settlements (Timerevskoe, Petrovskoe, Mixajlovskoe), where excavations have uncovered objects of Baltio-Fennic (Veps), Scandinavian and Slavonic character respectively. In favour of an Upper Volga ‘Ersa, Erdha’ there is the Arab parlance that the merchants therefrom “pass downwards” by way of the river in order to arrive at the places of trade. The Volga waterway has traditionally been called “the way downwards”, *doroga na niz*.<sup>1</sup> Yet as indicated already: We must seek farther *upwards*.

Regarding a possible location for *Artā*, then, we note an observation that the Sarskoe *gorodišče* (fortified settlement) in Rostov fits the role.<sup>2</sup> Name forms such as **Sar’** are typical of the Veps tongue,<sup>3</sup> as will be seen in a later chapter too (regarding monosyllabic palatalized words, e.g. *Rus’*).

Finally, which year is the original report on this third Rūs from? We can rest assured that they are more than a generation older than the first report we have today, that of al-Iṣṭahrī, c. 921 AD. To all appearances, this is prior to the rise of the Kievan state; for the *Artā[nīya]* have their own king, and allow nobody (including members of the other Rūs ‘species’) to enter their lands.<sup>4</sup>

The Norse sources attesting to an immense territory to the east and northeast of Old Ladoga populated by giants (*jötnar, Jötunheimr*) and hence generally inaccessible (except to the god Thór!) will be lain under contribution in another study. It has already been contended that this territory was under Veps (‘Biarmian’) dominance.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Popov 1981, 57.

2. Novosel’cev 1985, 268. Also Leont’ev 1981 and Petruhin 1985, 268; and most incisively Mačinskij 1985, 3-23. We note the observation by Popov 1981, 85-86, regarding the same name farther west along the same waterway: “In the Izhora region there were nobles of local (non-Novgorodian) origin – the Sarskie, mentioned several times in the registry books of the Vod’ Fifth from the year 1500...” “The little volost’ called Sar’- from Stepan the son of Trifon, from which this family got its name, lay... quite close to Ladoga, in this pogost there are also a series of village names ending in *-sar’*, *-sar* (island).” And in the Mixajlovskoe Ozerskoe pogost in the registry book of 1678-79 there is mention of “a village in the Sarskij konec called Spirikova...” – 143 CGADA/Novgorod no. 965, leaf 385.

3. Mullenon 1994, 62, 70, 111.

4. Kononova 1995, 142-143, argues brilliantly for the view that al-Idrīsi transmits contemporaneous information culled from merchants actually visiting a locality on the way to the Kumans, filling this like new wine into an old an empty bottle, viz. the name *Artā*.

5. Pimenov 1965, Stang 1977.

The natural outlet on the World for this territory was on the Upper Volga, near the said settlements; here is where Russian sources attest to the existence of the *Merska-ja Ves´*, meaning a Veps trading station in, or on the border of, Merjan territory on the Volga.<sup>1</sup>

That the Veps here would not let strangers get past them, on pain of death, is only natural: Strangers would be quick to realize how pitifully few and hence how vulnerable, these ‘Biarmian’ Veps were. In a word: The ‘Biarmians’ made up for the lack of Biarmians by populating these reaches by all the bogeymen that could be found in the combined Islamic, Norse and (probably) Slavonic inventories of horror and Doom. (Peeved, the Muslim Bulġār retaliated by refusing their Veps ‘Biarmian’ trading partners access to Bulġār, saying that they would bring along their snowy climate and thus destroy the crops there – a sly retort indeed. Yet all this is another tale.)

Is there no possible literary confirmation of this view? There is indeed. Having brought one version, that of al-Iṣṭaḥrī above, we end with another:<sup>2</sup>

*The author of Nuzhat al-muṣṭāq fī ḥtirāḥ al-ʿafāq gives the information that in his time there existed four species of the Slavs: Aṣ-Ṣalāwīya, Barāsīya, al-Qurāqrīya, Arġānīya. They all carry their names after that of their locality, except for the Arġānīya. Any stranger arriving by them they devour; for they live like wild beasts in the wilderness forests by the Encompassing Ocean.*

This text by ad-Dimašqī at first sight looks like a rather helpless rehash of the first text on the three Russian groupings which we ran above. For the author of the *Nuzhat at-muṣṭāq* is of course al-Idrīsī. And the second name enumerated (*b.rāsīya*) has been unmasked as an adulteration of the appellation **rāw.s** in precisely al-Idrīsī.<sup>3</sup> This appellation, adding a novel name to the three ‘tribes’ of ar-Rūs, is easily explicable from, and as an attempt at rendering as faithfully as possible, the Greek ‘rous.

So why bother with the addenda concocted by this late traveller? For one thing, ad-Dimašqī’s text has in many places showed itself most valuable in transmitting very archaic materials not otherwise retrieved. For another, his addenda to earlier authors simply make sense: He says squarely that there is no such name of a *locality* as Arġā. And whereas all others leave us out in the dark as to where these ruffians may live, he gives us the only logical solution so far – evidently ancient, by his time of writing, but not from al-Idrīsī:

Their haunts are the far-northern periphery of Russia, where the forests begin; in Russian called Zavoloč’e, in Norse, Biarmia, in Veps *perama* ‘the Ulterior Land’. Thus of course also, the message and the motif behind their threat of ‘devouring’ interlopers is again most understandable: “Stay clear, this is **our** territory!” – all the way up to the White Sea. Inspiration for masquerading as man-eaters they found in the mental ‘chamber of horrors’ which Muslim traders brought along,<sup>4</sup> where the Ya’ġūġ-Ma’ġūġ are just that.

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1. Stang 1977, Stang 1981, 102.

2. Mehren 1877, 261-262.

3. Konovalova 1995, 146.

4. See e.g. ch. 17.3 below. Other scholars laying store by ad-Dimašqī for resolving the ‘third Rus’ problem are Vestberg 1908, 397-400, Togan 1939, 320-321, Kmietowicz 1972-73, 231-260, Thulin 1979, 103-107.

The question of the whereabouts and background of the ‘third Rus’ may be resolved also by recalling the costly furs mentioned as their monopoly above – and the assertion by another Arabic author that<sup>1</sup> – “*most of these furs, and the most exquisite of them, are found in the land of ar-Rūs. To them and their reaches they come down from the areas of Ya’ğūğ and Ma’ğūğ.*”

#### 14.4. Rjurik & Beloozero

All this merits mention and attention not only because we here hold a novel explanation to the ‘third Rūs’ enigma; but also because we in addressing Artā have chanced upon a possible explanation to something more central to historian discourse so far: the question of why the founding figure Rjurik, now acknowledged by the post-Soviet Russian historians as a *historical* figure, had to be ‘accompanied’ by those two shadowy ‘brothers’ of his, in whom no-one today has much belief.

If we are to believe the ‘third Rūs’ tradition (and traditions should be believed unless gainsaid by measurable, i.e. empirical, facts), then this ‘third Rūs’ enjoyed autonomy, nay independence, from the incipient Rjurik dynasty. If we are not very much mistaken, this ‘third Rūs’ fur trade contributed substantially to the rise of Novgorod’s rival Rostov – with ‘Čud’ (i.e. Veps) grandees, enriched by the ‘third Rūs’ Biarmian trade, central to this process.

**This** – and the ensuing rivalry of Rostov and Novgorod over Beloozero, explains the need of the chronicler for asserting that these regions were **not** independent of Rjurik; on the contrary (albeit with a concession to Beloozero and Biarmia), these Veps did have a prince or king of their own, but only in the form of one of Rjurik’s brothers, and only for some few years – until Rjurik himself took over.

The words of the *Tale of Bygone Years* that “*at Beloozero the Ves’ sit*” take on a novel significance. This is no mere statement of geography but one of power politics: “Sit” should be construed as “rule”. In the latter part of the 9th c., Beloozero is **the** approach to the furry riches of ‘Biarmia’. Recent scholarship indicates that the Veps were relative newcomers, and in no great number, to the Beloozero region.<sup>2</sup> Yet here they were left to rule, as part of, one would think, a bigger bargain – the rise of Russia.

#### 14.5. Name of Old Ladoga

Having finished with ‘the third Rūs’, we turn to the second: **Ladoga**. The name, it has long since been established,<sup>3</sup> is a Slavonic metathesis of the originally Veps name \***aludjogi**, meaning ‘lowlying river’, or more logically, ‘river in a marshy district’.<sup>4</sup> The significance of this etymology has yet to be properly appreciated.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibn Hawqāl, see ch. 17.3 below.

2. Mullonen 1994, 132.

3. Mikkola 1934, 23-37.

4. The work by Džakson 1991 is unfortunately not available to me.

5. Kočkurkina 1989, 291 raises the question: “Can the linguistic materials have a decisive say?” in deciding the ethnicity of the archaeological finds of the 9th-11th cc. around Old Ladoga. Yet she does not adduce Aludjogi/ Aldeigjuborg, nor Svir’.



Some related Veps words are:<sup>1</sup> *alah* ‘bottom, bottom storey’, *alahain’ē* ‘lowlying’, *alahaks*, *alahan* ‘downwards’, *alahal’i* ‘down’, *alangg* ‘lowlying place’, *alaz* ‘downwards’, *ald* ‘wave’, *aleta* ‘lower oneself, sink’, *alle* ‘under’.

Relevant Karelian and Livvikot lexicology (historically reflecting Veps) also comprises:<sup>2</sup> Karelian *alanneh* ‘a place surrounded by a bog...’, Karelian, Livvi *alho* ‘marshy place...’; whence, evidently, Russian Olonec dialect *ól’ga*, *ol’gá* ‘marsh’.

The Veps name is admirably reflected in the Norse name, as attested in the Sagas, **Aldeigju-borg** ‘the Aldeigju stronghold’. For the Norse name attests to a Norse-Veps, and not a Norse-Slavonic, milieu. It is most conceivable that the 839 travellers to Byzantium, when questioned on the basis of Cassiodor (accessible to us now only in the paraphrase by Jordanes) and other authors now lost, forwarded information that the name of their settlement indeed meant ‘a place surrounded by marsh and low-lying river’. For this is the picture to be had from a number of subsequent Arabic sources on the whereabouts of ar-Rūs.

#### 14.6. *Rôle of Old Ladoga*

It has been argued elsewhere that this Norse-Veps milieu or symbiosis was what lay at the basis of not merely the town of Ladoga, c. 750 AD or even earlier, but later, in 860 AD, the Russian state as well.<sup>3</sup>

That underdog Slavs also were part of this alliance goes without saying; the ‘saying’ is done by the *Tale of Bygone Years*, which states that ‘family rose against family’, coupled with archaeology – which says that the town of Old Ladoga was totally destroyed in a fire c. 860; confirming the picture of a civil war painted by the *Tale of Bygone Years*. Yet the overall picture is this: the more than century-old Veps-Norse symbiosis is threatened by Slovene merchants travelling up the Volxov river to Ladoga, eager to get their hands on the settlement’s rich fur trade. The Veps and Norse (plus Slavonic allies) rout these rivals, travel upstream (southwards) to their base of power, Novgorod, which they crush, thus founding the Russian state.<sup>4</sup>

One measure of the Veps contribution to this symbiosis of power is precisely a physical symbiosis – in the hundreds of graves from the late 9th and early 10th cc. east of Ladoga, on the Ojat’, Sjas’ and Kapša rivers. Normanist historians and archaeologists were long adamant that these were Norse, Viking graves, because part of the grave finds were closely akin to Scandinavian ones. Today a consensus has been reached: these are graves of Veps warriors attached to Old Ladoga.<sup>5</sup>

On this background we can perhaps better understand the expression still preserved in the Veps language, which today is spoken on the middle and upper reaches of the same rivers Ojat’ and Sjas’ were these warriors were laid to rest more than a thousand years ago: **rus’ – lahtta rus’ile, lahtta rus’he**; meaning ‘travel off, leave

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1. Zajceva/Mullonen 1972, 27-30.

2. Mamontova/Mullonen 1991, 21.

3. Stang 1981, 1981, 1983, 1988.

4. Gerd/Lebedev 1991, Gerd 1995, on

5. see e. g. Kočurkina 1973. The latest development is Mačinskij 1992.

one's home place (usually for seasonal work):<sup>1</sup> “**rus'ile l'akšpa burlakeita maha mužikad**” – “the menfolk went off [to Russia] for seasonal work”.

We are now in a position also to appreciate the ancient idiom found in the Eastern Karelian tale *Všivyj kundjuk*, from the now Russified area of Pudož (formerly Veps-populated): “The hero travelled around all of Rus'-Ladoga.” Or in the original,<sup>2</sup> *vsju Rus' – Ladogu ob'exal molodec*.

The conclusion is: Once, in the dawn of the process leading to the Russian state, Ladoga alone was Rus'.

#### 14.7. *Al-Mas'ūdī on Ladoga & Rūs*

On this background we turn to an illustrious Arabic source:<sup>3</sup>

*The Rūs consist of many peoples, who fall into different categories. Among them are a species called al-Lawduḡāna, and they are the most numerous. They have trading relations with the countries of al-Andalus, Rūmiya, Constantinople, and the Ḥazars.*

There is no dissension among scholars regarding this passage in al-Mas'ūdī's major work, the ‘Meadows of Gold’ (*Murūḡ ad-dahab*): The *Lawduḡāna* Rūs are the ‘Ladogans’, the inhabitants of Old Ladoga. Later on in the same work we hear about:<sup>4</sup>

*...the Straits of Constantinople.. The shore is covered by dwellings, and there one sees the town called Musannat, belonging to the Byzantines and barring the way for the ships of the Russians and others who come sailing along on this sea.*

In al-Mas'ūdī's last work, the ‘Book of Attention to and Revision of What has Been Said Before’ (*Kitāb at-tanbīh wa-l-išrāf*), there is a parallel to this latter passage, along with the information that the Byzantines call them **Arūsīya**, meaning the Reds:<sup>5</sup>

*The breadth of it [the Sound] is ten miles, and there lies a town of ar-Rūm called al-Musannāt; it blocks the way for those ships of al-Kawdukāna and other groups of ar-Rūs who arrive upon that sea. Ar-Rūm call them Arūsīya, which means ‘the Reds’.*

These *Kawdukāna* **كودكانه** are but a misfiguring of the above-said *Lawduḡāna* **لودغانه**. We are left with the testimony of al-Mas'ūdī that these Ladogans were the leading group of ar-Rūs, strong enough to launch attacks on Constantinople itself.

Another passage by al-Mas'ūdī may be enlightening too:<sup>6</sup>

*In the upper parts of the Ḥazar river there is an embouchure uniting itself with a branch of the Naīṭus Sea, which is the Russian Sea; no-one except they sail upon it, and*

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1. Zajceva/Mullonen 1972, 52, 484.

2. Razumova 1980, 73.

3. Al-murūḡ ad-dahab, II, 18-20; Birkeland 1955, 34-35.

4. Al-murūḡ ad-dahab, II, 317; Birkeland 1955, 37.

5. same, 40; Golb & Pritsak 1982.

6. same. Also Rybakov 1982, 346, 354.

*they dwell upon one of its shores. They constitute an enormous people answering to neither king nor law.*

This is hardly consistent with what we know of the Kievan state, which was firmly ruled from Kiev; in yet another passage al-Mas'udī mentions the mighty ruler **ad-Dir** and his inconclusive petty warfare with al-Nukubard (= Novgorod):<sup>1</sup> cf. the ruler of Kiev, **Dir**, mentioned along with his mate Askol'd in the Tale of Bygone Years. The 9th-10th c. Rūs cannot very well have inspired an observation that they answered to neither king nor law. And what really makes one suspicious is the insistence that the Rūs “dwell upon one of the shores” of the Azov (*Naiŭs* < *Maeotis*) = Russian Sea. By the early 10th century they did not. On the other hand, long before, the Eruls, “answering to neither king nor law”, did indeed.

#### 14.8. The “Others, Called Rus’”

One formulation which has vexed a few scholars is the one found in the *Tale of Bygone Years*, under the year 6390, meaning 882 AD:

*Oleg went off on a military expedition, having taken along with him many warriors: Varangians, Čud', Slovenians, Merjans, Ves' and Kriviči. He came to Smolensk with the Kriviči, took power in the town, and garrisoned it with his men. (...)*

*... And Oleg settled in Kiev, ruling it, and Oleg said: “This shall become Mother to the Russian towns.” Along with him were Varangians, and Slovenians, and others, called Rus'.*

In standard translations, **slovene** is rendered ‘Slavs’ (*slavjane*); yet it is more correct to read it as *Slovenians*, i.e. designating the tribe inhabiting Novgorod and its environs, not only because the (part-)Slav tribe of the Kriviči are also mentioned, but also because ‘Slavs’ is too much of an anachronism here, before the unification of Russia.

The Kriviči appear to have been left to garrison Smolensk. If we are entitled to leave them there, as seems reasonable, after the capture of Kiev we are left with “*Varangians, Slovenians, and others, called Rus’*”. It has been concluded that what is intended to say is not that the “Varangians, Slovenians, and others” are called Rus’; it is only to the latter, these “others”, that the name of Rus’ applies.<sup>2</sup>

If we compare the ethnic list at the beginning of the above entry with the one at the end, subtracting the left-behind Kriviči, then the ‘others’ can only mean Čud', Ves', and Merians. It is now generally accepted that the Čud' and the Ves' are simply geographically sundered forebears of the Veps – the *priladožskaja Čud'* comprising those gravitating towards Old Ladoga, with *Ves'* being the name applied to those in e.g. the Beloozero region, at the headwaters of the Volga. Who the **Merja** were in this connect is not clear; one possibility being the *Merska Ves'* already mentioned.

Using simple subtraction math, we would arrive at the surprising conclusion: The Rus' are the Veps, plus possibly the Merians! This is hardly warranted. Counselling caution regarding any and all attempts at construing this text, we may nevertheless suggest a way out of this enigma:

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1. Garkavi 1970, 137.

2. Lihačev 1954, II, 253.

If Rjurik is an historical Viking (Roric of Juthland and Frisia?), then one scenario is as follows: Having stayed for some time in Old Ladoga and then having had his men visit Byzance in 839, acquiring the ‘Rōs name, he may have been invited back – or got himself invited. After all, if he had made it from Old Ladoga to Constantinople and back, through the hands of two emperors, his was some fame. If so, we must understand the 862 entry in the *Tale of Bygone Years* on “the Varangians called Rus’” as a reference to those ‘Varangians’, or rather Vikings who, connected with Old Ladoga, were now abroad. Not **any** or **all** Varangians, but **these** ones.

Scenario 2: We discount, or do not express any opinion on, the historicity of the 862 entry on Rjurik and his ‘overseas’ Rus’. Then what we must scrutinize, as indeed we should with regard to scenario 1 as well, is the term **Čud’**. Perhaps reflecting Norse **þjóð**, ‘people, folk(s)’, it does not impress one as a natural choice, on the part of Norsemen, for designating their Baltio-Fennic, more specifically Veps, neighbours. It signifies 1) ‘a nation’, 2) ‘people (at large)’, 3) ‘a band of men’, i.e. warriors.<sup>1</sup> So what did it originally signify, before ending up as the Russified form **Čud’**?

Archaeology sums it up beautifully, through its materials from the early 8th to the early 10th c. in the Ladoga region: First, this is a predominantly Norse town. Later, the local Norse are assimilated into the area’s dominant Fennic (Veps) population. And finally, the Veps here in turn are Slavicized.<sup>2</sup>

The linguistic parallel is striking: first, **þjóð** is a word restricted to the Norse themselves. Later, it comes to be applied to both Norse and other ‘folks’ attached to and engaged in Old Ladoga’s civil and economic life and perhaps, not least, the military aspect too: ‘a band of men’, in a modern word more felicitous than accurate, the ‘militia’. Finally, the non-Slavonic, Veps-speaking population in and around Old Ladoga are called the **Čud’** – by Slavonic-speakers.

This then may explain the otherwise enigmatic ‘others’: In the early days of Russian nation-building, there are two prestigious terms afoot: The older of the two is **þjóð**, and comprises the mixed (Norse, Veps and allied Slovene) denizens of Old Ladoga, now pressing south, according to the above text. The other is **Rus’** (as variously pronounced by its new users). Around 860 AD, they could be and probably were used nearly interchangeably – the prestigious 839 name being the rave of the day among the followers of the Rus’ Ladogan leaders. In this view, the Rus’ name was fast becoming a byword for the Ladogans (called Čud’), wildly successful as they were, and joined by other Scandinavians (‘Varangians’, mercenaries) and Slovenians too.

This however could not last: Within a matter of years, the name **Rus’** came to designate the new state apparatus, centred on Kiev, whereas the Ladogans remaining up north retained the appellation **Čud’**.

### 14.9. Veps ‘Founders’

This survey of ‘far-northern confirmations’ would not be complete without mention of an early 17th c. Russian manuscript, *On the Beginning of the Russian Land*, which

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1. Heggstad 1963, 722.

2. Kočkurkina 1973 et al.

does portray the Veps as the founding fathers of Russia. Here, we meet three princes of the Slovenes by the Volxov river – and Alexander the Great:<sup>1</sup>

*In the time of Alexander the great the princes Velikosan, Asan and Avexasan ruled the Slovenes and the Rus'. ...[Yet] soon a terrible plague depopulated the Slovenic land; the remaining inhabitants went off to the White Waters, that is, Beloozero, or the Muddy Lake, and were called Ves'; others, to the Danube, to their ancient tribes; and in Slovensk and Rus' only wild beasts lived then...*

A dichotomy will be noted: *the Slovenes* are juxtaposed with *the Rus'*; likewise, further down, the Slovene settlement of **Slovensk**, on the Volxov, is contrasted with that of **Rus'** – which one would take to be Old Ladoga. Finally, the original Slovenes, surviving the plague, turn out to be, or rather are turned into, the **Veps**, in Beloozero!

Many of the assertions found in this work seem so preposterous as to disqualify just about anything there. Whether the rôle of the Veps here is a muddled recollection of their onetime historical significance, cannot be said. Of some interest, however, is the distinction made between the Slovenes and the Rus'.

Finally, we note the assertion in a footnote by Tatiščev to the effect that Lake Ladoga is called by the Finns 'the Russian Lake':<sup>2</sup> This is one of the mainstays of his theory that the first Rus' were really Finns. This theory may be summarily dismissed: Since Lake Ladoga was where the Finns proper probably first met the Novgorod Slovenes, after the founding of the Russian state, and also the only *sea* close to them, it was but natural that it be termed 'the Russian'. The name proves nothing.

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1. Karamzin 188, 295-297.

2. 1962, I, 115 (ch. 4.15): "Ot morja do morja. Razumeet [more] Baltijskoe i ozero Ladoskoe, kotoroe more Ruskoe imjanuemo", with further references to ch. 17, n. 47, ch. 32, Part II, n. 14.

## 15. Greek Confirmations: Tavroschythians & Runners

*The Greek writers call Oskol'd the Prince of Rōs.*  
Catherine the Great, in Pypin 1901, VIII, 26–27.

### 15.1. Tavroschythians, Tavrohuns, Eudosians

In the Ravenna Anonymous we meet a surprising view of Scythia: it is an island. More precisely, it is Scandinavia:<sup>1</sup>

*It [Scythia] is that which the most sage geographer Jordanes calls Scanza. Thus from this island went out the Occidental peoples; for we read that from it in the ancient time issued the Goths and the Danes, just like the Gepids.*

Who were these **Danes** who like the Goths and Gepids issued from the isle of Scythia/Scanza? As will be seen in Thietmar from Merseburg too, ‘the rapid Danes’ are a byname for the Eruls.

Next, who and where are the **Tavroschythians**? There is a consensus that this term in the 9th-10th cc. AD designates the Russians; yet it is very much older. It first crops up in Ptolemy and in the *Periplus of the Pontus Euxinus* (= Black Sea) by Arrian, both c. 140 AD, as designating the inhabitants of the area around the so-called Achilles’ Race-course.

From another (and anonymous) *Periplus of the Pontus Euxinus* we learn that ‘Tavrian’ is a language, possibly akin to Gothic:<sup>2</sup> “*This place the Eudosians now inhabit, using the Gothic and Tavric tongue.*”

This latter testimony is important. For the Eudosians are known to us already from Tacitus’ *Germania* as a tribe up in Scandinavia,<sup>3</sup> viz. the Juths.<sup>4</sup> And when many centuries later we find Eudosians living down by the Maeotic Lake, these are to be considered as Eruls who were left behind in this ancestral region of theirs after the majority had moved on.<sup>5</sup> From this it follows that the Eruls, or at any rate these ones, answered to other names as well, they were not ‘just’ Eruls; some of them ev-

1. Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia et Gvidonis Geographica, Berlin 1860, 29: “*Quam (scil. Scythiam) et Jordanu sapientissimus cosmographus Scanzun appellat. Ex qua insula pariterque gentes occidentales egressae sunt: nam Gotthos et Danos, imo simul Gepides, ex ea antiquitus exisse legimus.*”
2. Diller 1952, 130.
3. Forni/Galli 1964, map 56-57, 177 (ch. 40): “*Reudigni deinde et Aviones et Anglii et Varini et Eudoses et Suardones et Nuitones fluminibus aut silvis muniuntur.*”
4. same, 177.
5. Loewe 1896, 29-35 (who considers them “Gauvölker der Heruler”), Marquart 1903, 363-364, and Rappaport 1920, 1159, who also considers the Tetraxits to be Eruls. This is unfounded. Procopius in his *Wars* VIII, iv-v, repeatedly speaks of “the Goths who are called Tetraxitae”, conscientious Christians dwelling at “the head of the outlet of the Maeotic Lake”, where the Maeotic and the Pontos (Black Sea) meet: Dewing 1928, V, 85-95. Procopius, our best source for the Eruls, never calls the Eruls a Gothic people, clearly knowing better; whereas the Tetraxitae are simply and expressly Goths.

idently had been, and still stuck to the ancient name of, Juthlanders. Even better reason, then, to speak of the Eruls as rapid *Danes*.

In his *Gothic War*, Procopius also says that “*the Scythians and Tavrians*” hold the country by the Maeotic Lake, “*a certain part of which is even now called Tavrica*”.<sup>1</sup> Yet his Tavrians are located i.a. in Celesne, Armenia, which is called “Tavric Armenia”,<sup>2</sup> while the Tavroschythians are quite another people. In his *Edifices* he says that the cities of Cherson and Bosporos (today Sevastopol’ and Kerč) lie “*beyond the Tavri and the Tavroschythi*”.<sup>3</sup> The exact whereabouts of these peoples are not given directly, but from the mention of the two cities it is clear that the Crimea is meant.

The fleeting references to the Tavri and the Tavroschythi in Procopius are valuable in demonstrating the currency of both these terms – as two distinct appellations – in the mid-6th c. In later literature, the Tavri hardly occur; and then not as a people apart from the more commonly known Tavroschythians.

From the above we may infer that “the Tavric tongue” referred to in the said *Periplus of the Pontus Euxinus* is that of the Eruls who, evidently dwarfed by their neighbours the Goths, were more or less bilingual, utilizing the Gothic tongue as well.

The 4th c. author Julius Capitolinus refers to the **Tauroscythas** twice. First, some time during the latter 2nd c. AD., the Emperor Antoninus II sends aid to the city of Olbia against them: *Olbiopolitis contra Tauroscythas in Pontum auxilia misit et Tauroscythas usque ad dandos Olbiopolitis obsides vicit*. Second, the hapless Emperor Valerian was taken captive in 260 AD by his Iranian counterpart Šāpūr, who sent letters informing the neighbouring peoples of this; yet several of these, including the Tavroschythians, refused to accept his letter, opting instead for sending their assistance to free Valerian: *Bactriani, et Hiberi et Albani et Tauroscythae Saporis litteras non receperunt...*

An intermediate source between the late classical ones and those of the Viking and early Rus’ age is the *Life* of the Gothic bishop John (Ioanna). The said Bishop flourished in the latter half of the 8th c.; and his *Vita* is judged to have been penned “not earlier than 815 and not later than 842”.<sup>4</sup> Here we read the following:<sup>5</sup>

*1. Our excellent father Ioanna was Bishop of Gothia under the Emperors Constantine and Leo. He originated from the land of the Tavroschythians, lying upon the opposite side [and] subordinate to the power of the Goths, to wit from the trading post named Partheniti, as the son of Leo and Photina(...)*

*5. After this the excellent Bishop Ioanna together with his flock was delivered up to the Zazar authorities, for he entered into a compact with the master of Gothia and its authorities and all its people that the abovesaid Zazars were not to rule their land. (Yet) the Kagan occupied their fortress, called Doros, and posted in it armed guards. These however the excellent one and his people chased out, taking control also over the ‘Elisuri.(...)*

Doros is also known as, and was clearly the popular form of, the name Theodoros. The plural ‘*Elisouras*’ has long since been emended to *Klisouras*, meaning ‘armed

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1. Dewing 1928, V, 95: *Wars* VIII, v, 23.

2. same, I, 147-151: *Wars* I, xvii, 11-21.

3. Dewing 1940, 215: *Buildings*, III, vii, 10.

4. same, 153.

5. Vasil’evskij 1878, 126.

mountain defiles'.<sup>1</sup> And the main culling to be had for our study from this source is the knowledge that the Tavroschythians were found right next door to, opposite and subservient to, the Goths in the Crimea, around the trading post of Partheniti.

Interestingly, this Ioanna is not the only bishop to spring from 'the land of the Tavroschythians'; one Timotheos 'the Elurian', an Aryan, having been quite a scourge down in Alexandria until put to death in 469 AD.<sup>2</sup>

When the *Geography* of Strabo was reworked at the end of the 10th c., Tavroschythia was termed a peninsula, said to lie between the mouths of the Dnepr and the Carcinites (today Karkinitiskij) bay; its southern littoral is named The Achilles' Racecourse.<sup>3</sup>

As Ammianus Marcellinus likewise says (long before Procopius, and clearly using the appellation Tavri to cover the Tavroschythians of others):<sup>4</sup>

35. ...At no great distance from these are the Tavri... 35. In this Tavric country is the island of Leuce, entirely uninhabited and dedicated to Achilles...

Finally, there is Ptolemy c. 140 AD:<sup>5</sup>

*By Achilles' Racecourse [dwell] the Tavroschythians.*

What happens in the 9th-10th cc. AD is a resurrection in the grand style of this ancient appellation. The Russians staying in Constantinople on business are called **Tavroschythians** by the historian Zonaras,<sup>6</sup> even though he is perfectly clear that the Russians (or 'Rōs Scythians) inhabit regions farther north.<sup>7</sup>

Other authors calling the Russians *Tavroschythians* while locating them far north of the Crimea are Nicetas Acominatus,<sup>8</sup> Ducas,<sup>9</sup> and Cinnamus,<sup>10</sup> plus Leo the Deacon (on whom more below). With this we contrast the *Life of St. John the Goth*, from apparently just a few years **before** the arrival of the 'Rōs in 839 AD, where the 'land of the Tavroschythians' is 'under the rule of the Goths' down in the Crimea; meaning that the 839 and later Vikings passing by here on their way to Byzantium were identified with these last remnants of the Eruls.

The conclusion is: Prompted by the arrival of the 'Rōs in 839, the Byzantines reached back in time for classical appellations from the so to speak 'last time these

1. Vasil'evskij 1878, 147. Surely correct; cf Latin **clausura** 'a narrow shut-in road', e.g. in Procopius, Dewing 1914, I, 535 (*The Persian War*, II, xxix 25): "The Romans call the roads through such passes **clisurae**, when they put their own word into a Greek form."
2. George Kedrenos, PG 121, 661-662: "*Timotheus, cognomento Aelurus.*" Rappaport 1920, 1159 for other sources.
3. Koehler 1826, 620, 768.
4. Ammianus Marcell. XXII, 8, 33-34; Rolfe 1972, II, 233.
5. Koehler 1826, 620, 768.
6. Zonar. Annal. L. XVII, ch. 24, 254.
7. same, L. XVI, ch. 5, 162.
8. Nicet. Acomiat. Alex. Comnen. L. III, ch. 5, 337.
9. Ioann. Duc. Histor. Byzant., ch. xvi, 33.
10. Cinnam. Histor. L. V, ch. 16 136.



folk were around'. One such name with which the 9th-10th c. 'Rōs/'rous were identified then, was that of the Tavroscythians. And what helped the Byzantines in effecting this identification was the existence still, on the very route of the newcomers, of 'oldtimer' Eruls

Another name is the *Tauri*. Scylitzes cites a no longer extant chronicle as saying that the 'Rōs attacking Constantinople in 860 are a Scythian people, dwelling in the region of the **arctic** *Taurus*. In George Kedrenos too we read:<sup>1</sup>

*Meanwhile all the maritime regions within the Pontus Euxeinus were plagued and ravaged by the incursions of the 'Rōs ships. The 'Rōs are a Scythian people, dwelling in the northern Taurus, savage and monstrous in size.*<sup>2</sup>

The term *Tauri*, pure and simple, occurs in the *Orbis Descriptio* by Dionysios of Byzantium:<sup>3</sup>

*The enormous land of the Dacians and the warlike Alans,  
And then the Tauri, who inhabit the height of Achilles' race-course,  
Narrow and long, all the way to the mouth of the marsh.*

As a glance at the map will show, the Race-course of Achilles did **not** stretch "all the way to the mouth of the marsh", meaning the *Maeotis paludes*, the 'Eli of the 'Eluri. Yet all the more indicative are these words then, for showing the 'popular opinion' that the Race-course of Achilles did indeed belong to the Eruls and their haunts – even by a *stretch* of the geographic imagination.

In Dionysios, we even encounter the 'Reds', yet in quite another context; what is referred to is the tradition of the Phoenicians that they are descended from the inhabitants of South Arabia, down by the Red (or Erithraean) Sea:<sup>4</sup>

*There are others in the Mediterranean, who are called Syrians; others nearby in the sea, called Phoenicians, born from the race of men called the Reds.[who were] first in the boats of the sea, said to be first occupied with goods on the seas...*

Another name than the Tavroscythians and the Tavri, only much rarer, was that of the *Tavrohuns*, occurring but once, in the account by Epiphanius on the Apostle St.

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1. PG 121, Paris 1869, 1057-1058: "*Interim quidquid est intra Euxinum pontum maritimorum regionem, Rossica incursionibus vexabat atque vastabat classis. Rossi gens est Scythica, ad septentrionalem incolens Taurum, fera atque immanis.*" The Greek word is 'οι 'Rōs.
  2. Lewis/Short 1975, 891: **immanis** 'monstrous [in size], enormous, immense, huge, vast' (class.); also, 'monstrous [in character], frightful, inhuman, fierce, savage, wild' ... The Greek text has: *κατωκμείνον, ἀνημερον τε καὶ ἄγριον.*
  3. Miller 1861, 119, Dionysii Orbis Descriptio, line 305-309: "*Dacorum immensa terra et bellicosi Alani./ atque Tauri, qui arduum Achillis cursum inhabitant./ angustum longumque, et usque ad ipsius os paludis./ Super his gens equestrium Agaurorum expanditur./ ibique Melanchlaeni sunt et Hippemolgi, ...*"
  4. same, 159-160, lines 902-910: "*Alii sunt in mediterraneis, qui Syri vocantur, / alii prope mare, Phoenices appellati, / de eo hominum genere qui Erythraei nominantur, / quique primi navibus sunt mare experti, / primi mercaturam in maribus occupatam commenti, / et sollertes coelestium siderum cursus indagarunt./...*"

Andrew, who in his wanderings comes to the town of Bosporos “*lying close to the land of the Tavrohuns*”.<sup>1</sup>

This leads us right into a much-needed discussion of three related subjects: First, we note one more name both expressing and making for, one would think, yet another continuum from late antiquity, namely **Thule**. Second, there is the ‘runners’ (**Dromitai**) tradition. Third, we address a late 10th c. source: Leo the Deacon. He identifies Achilles himself with the Tavrosocythians = Russians in a most singular way.

### 15.2. Crimean ‘Thulians’

Surprisingly, perhaps, Thule was not merely *ultima Thule* – generally identified with Scandinavia. There was another one closer at hand down south as well: The name was applied to a part of the Crimea. This Thule occurs rather in the plural form, “the *Thules*”, At least that is the best way to reconstitute the otherwise inexplicable *filoun* in the historian Menander regarding a Greek embassy to the Crimea in 579.<sup>2</sup>

In the Life of John the Goth, Bishop of Gothia (on the Crimea), which we quoted above on the *Tavrosocythians*, we also read:<sup>3</sup>

*9. When the Excellent one was sitting under guard in the Thules, the lord of these same Thules came to him and flung down before his legs a servant of his who was so covered with wounds from his head to his toes that a human appearance was not to be discerned in him. Yet when he gave him name and baptized him, taking him by his hands, then the servant at once was cleansed.*

The Thules are also met with as an eparchy (an ecclesiastical division) later on in the 9th c. Here, the apostle of the Slavs Kirill (Constantine) found people “*speaking the Thulian language*” and performing sacrifices to an old oak tree.<sup>4</sup> The oak tree was called Alexander, and may be a reminiscence of the classical tradition on Alexander’s altars upon the shore of the Dnepr.<sup>5</sup> We recall the Meoparots in the Cosmography of Aethicus Istricus, whom we have taken to be Eruls of the Maeotis and Pontus (Azov and Black Seas), priding themselves on Alexander and his Altars. The Greek text on Kirill’s meeting with them has been published,<sup>6</sup> yet without any discussion of their name.

The *Thules* next door to the Goths on the Crimea? This all sounds very much like a last presence, or a lingering echo of the presence, down by the Azov and Black Seas, of our by now familiar Eruls. The homeland of the Eruls according to Proco-

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1. Vasil’evskij 1877, 173.

2. Vasil’evskij 1878, 117 n. 1.

3. same, 129.

4. same, 152; Vasil’evskij 1893, clxxvi.

5. Ammianus Marcellinus XXII, 8, 41: Rolfe 1972, II, 237: “*Next the Borysthenes... On its well-wooded banks are the cities of Borysthenes and Cephalonesus and the altars consecrated to Alexander the Great and Augustus Caesar. Then, a long way away, is a peninsula inhabited by the Sindi... Next to these is a narrow strip of shore which the natives call* Δρόμος Ἀχιλλεῖος*, memorable in times past for the exercises of the Thessalian leader...*”

6. Vasil’evskij 1878, 151.

pius was precisely Thule.<sup>1</sup> And ‘the *Thules*’ sounds like a bout of homesickness in the onetime Thulians, or perhaps like a spot of humour on the part of their neighbours.

Later on, a form with double **-I-** seems to predominate.<sup>2</sup> Thus there is the ruler of *Sugdothoullon* in 1156.<sup>3</sup> As an administrative unit, ‘*Fully*’ disappeared in 1666, in a merger with *Kaffa* and *Amasia*.<sup>4</sup>

These *Thules* have continued to carry a telltale name down to our times: **Russko-Fuley** (‘the Russian Thules’, the Slav form substituting an *F-* for the Greek *Th-*), and also the less readily recognizable *Russkofil’-kale*, or *Russkofleya*, the ruins of which are found upon the *Nikitskij* promontory.<sup>5</sup>

This name, “the Russian Thules”, might be taken for a logical contrast to some **non**-Russian Thule(s), such as *Ultima Thule*. Yet more to the point is the supposition that the name, in this largely non-Russian land, simply underscores a close association of the Thules with a concept of ‘Russians’. Taken together with the identification *Tavri/Tavros*cythians = Russians, this points once again not to a new-fangled 9th c. phenomenon but to a continuation of the ‘*Erul* tradition’.

### 15.3. *Russian Letters of Kirill*

An enigma in the life of the man who gave the Russians their ‘Cyrillic’ alphabet, the first Byzantine teacher of Christianity to the Russians, *Kirill* (or *Constantine*), may be approached afresh in the new-old *Goth-Erul* spirit of the present study. According to ch. 8 in the *Life of Constantine the Philosopher*, around 860 *Kirill* found a book in *Korsun’* (the Crimean *Chersonnesos*) written in ‘Russian letters’:<sup>6</sup>

*In Korsun’.. he learned the Hebrew tongue and writing and, having translated eight chapters of Grammar, he attained the highest knowledge [of Hebrew]. There too a certain Samaritan dwelled, who stayed with him and discussed with him, showing him the Samaritan script, which he brought along. The philosopher acquired [the manuscript] through his entreaties, locked himself inside, began beseeching God and, having received wisdom from God, began reading faultlessly...*

*There he also found the Gospel and a psalter written in Russian letters, as well as a fellow speaking this tongue. Thanks to his conversations with him he succeeded in mastering this language, and he became capable of distinguishing the letters of the vowels and consonants, comparing them with the spoken tongue. Having addressed God in prayer, he began reading and construing [the text], and a crowd of people was enrapt by him, lauding God.*

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1. De Bello Goth. II, 14-15.

2. But see *Vasil’evskij* 1893, ccii, n. 4.

3. same, clxxvi.

4. same, 154.

5. *Vasil’evskij* 1878, 152, citing *Keppen*.

6. Cf *Dvornik* 1933; also, *Dümmler/Miklosich* 1870, 235: “... *invento vero ibi evangelio et psalterio rossicis litteris scripto reperit etiam hominem lingua illa loquentem, et cum eo locutus vim sermonis accepit, cum sua lingua conferens, et discrevit litteras vocales et consonantes, et deum precans mox coepit legere et loqui, et multi eum admirati sunt, deum laudantes.*”

Which were these letters? The source itself is most trustworthy, having been authored around 870, immediately after the death of Kirill. An extensive scholarly debate<sup>1</sup> has resulted in a ‘Bulgarian school’, a ‘Gothic’ one and, prevalent today, a ‘Syriac’ one.<sup>2</sup> The Syriac hypothesis assumes that we are in the presence of a slip of the pen, the metathesis **rous’sky > sour’sky**.

“It is wholly unclear what these oldest ‘Russian letters’ were,” in the words of one scholar.<sup>3</sup> And in the words of another, “these debates are fruitless, since the book which Constantine supposedly found (if it ever did exist), has not been preserved.”<sup>4</sup>

This latter view is too facile. The Syriac hypothesis is no mere wild guess; for Kirill’s knowledge of Syriac (**sur’sky**) is expressly mentioned in an abridged later version of his Life.<sup>5</sup>

Both the Syriac and the Gothic argument may actually be strengthened. First, as Syriac goes, under this name may lie a reference to a text from the Christian Palestinian (‘Syrian’) literature which was enjoying its last bloom during these very years and until around 900, based on Aramaic dialects very close to Samaritan but written with Syriac letters. From this literature are preserved quite a number of Gospels. Such a text would have helped Kirill to master ‘Syrian’.

On the other hand, the Syriac hypothesis has its weak points. Kirill learned to distinguish both vowels and consonants – yet Syriac has no letters for the vowels, only small ‘reading aid’ signs which would probably not be found in a Gospel or psalter. This argument is perhaps not crucial. Yet one cannot but be surprised that most scholars upholding the Syriac solution have not questioned the total lack of interest on Kirill’s part, in that case, in the language not of the stray Samaritan or Syriac scholar but of the local Goths.

The most important argument in Jakobson for rejecting the Gothic theory is simply that if the writer really did have Gothic letters in mind, “then why did he call them ‘Russian’ instead of calling them Gothic letters, when he knows the Goths full well?”<sup>6</sup>

The Black Sea Goths had their own literature, of which the most important we know of was also the oldest: the Bible, translated into Gothic by the Visigothic (West Gothic) bishop Wulfila. And the age of Wulfila was the age of the Eruls. We have noted that ‘**oi rousioi**’ designated the early Rus’, dating back to the heyday of the Goths and Eruls. Being well-versed in contemporary political developments, Kirill would be prone to do, and the more so in that still Gothic town Korsun’, what his contemporaries were up to: reaching back in time, to the ‘first age’ of the Rus’.

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1. *Stand der Forschung in Zagiba* 1971, 18-24, Birnbaum 1984.
  2. Georgiev, Genov (Bulgarian), Liver (Gothic), Vaillant, Jakobson, Horálek [Goralek], Auti (Syriac): Zagiba 1971. The Gothic school has since been renewed by Toporov 1983, who however has not taken into consideration the arguments of Jakobson and other representatives of the ‘Syriac school’.
  3. Rižskij 1981, 24.
  4. Filin 1981, 192. If the book *had* been preserved, debate on its ‘nationality’ would of course have been even more pointless.
  5. Lavrov 1930 101. On the term *sur’sky*: Goralek 1956, 233. On Kirill’s knowledge of Syriac: Jakobson 1939, 44, 181 ff.
  6. Jakobson 1939, 183.

This cannot be proven, and the problem will probably for ever be hanging in abeyance. Suffice it to say that one should not take recourse to slips of the pen or other substitutes if a literal reading of a given text does make sense, the *lectio simplicior* being preferable on principle. And in the present case there is no need to insist on, or give priority to, any emendation.

According to his Life story then, the coming ‘Apostle of the Russians’ found ‘Russian letters’. And the spelling, with neither ‘rus- nor ‘ros- but ‘**rous**, could not be closer to the Greek ‘**rous**: the Reds of the now rising Russia.

#### 15.4. Thietmar from Merseburg on Fleet Danes

The ‘Erulo-Gothic approach’, with archaic Byzantine traditions for its point of departure, allows us to appreciate anew several primary sources on the Kievan state which hitherto have left scholars non-plussed. One such is that of the ‘fleet Danes’ appearing in the *Chronicon* of Thietmar, Bishop of Merseburg c. 1000 AD. The text runs, in my translation:<sup>1</sup>

*In this great city [Kiev], which is the capital of this realm, there are more than 500 churches and 8 markets, and the number of the inhabitants is unknown. These, like all in this province, consist of runaway slaves who have come together here from here and there, and most of them from the swift Danes, and they have resisted up to now the Pechenegs, who have been harming them much, and won over others as well.*

Who were these literally ‘swift Danes’ resisting the Pechenegs? One solution has been sought in ‘runaway slaves in 11th c. Kiev’ (sic), begging the question: While Danes resident in or travelling by way of Kiev surely had slaves, are we to suppose that Kievans (meaning primarily Slavs) held slaves who were originally Danes, and fleet ones to boot, and that the task of fighting the steppe nomads had been entrusted to these slaves (along with the necessary weaponry)? Hardly. The **owners** of slaves would surely be found in Kiev itself, home to the mightiest aristocrats, and not out in the (Pecheneg-infested) countryside. How then could their own *runaway* slaves be living alongside them in the very same city? This type of interpretation is pure nonsense.<sup>2</sup>

Failing this solution, then, one earlier suggestion has been as follows:<sup>3</sup> “M. Riasanovsky et plusieurs de ses collègues se donnent beaucoup de mal pour trouver une explication satisfaisante de l’adjectif *velox* appliquée aux Danois, sans vraiment y réussir. Ne serait-ce pas tout simplement la traduction de *dromitai* du célèbre passage

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1. Holtzmann 1939, 371: “*In magna hac civitate [Kiev] que istius regni caput est, plus quam quadringente habentur ecclesiae et mercatus VIII, populi autem ignota manus: quae, sicut omnis haec provincia ex fugitivorum robore servorum huc indique confluencium et maxime ex velocibus Danis, multum se nocentibus Pecinegis hactenus resistebat et alios vincebat.*”

2. That the ‘Rōs as a people were sometimes characterized as ‘slaves’ by the Byzantines, probably through their proximity to the Slavs and their trade in slaves (< ‘Slavs’), is another matter; on which more below.

3. Karlin-Hayter 1965, 359.

du Ps.-Syméon Logothète .. et interprété comme Ps.-Syméon l'interprète?" Which takes us to the next source in line.

### 15.5. *Ps.-Symeon on 'Rōs-Dromitai*

In the work of this Pseudo-Symeon Magister there is a passage which has long be-devilled specialists. One tentative translation is the following:<sup>1</sup>

*Rus, the famous Dromitai, are called after a certain mighty Ros, having escaped the charms (disasters) which had been allowed by God, or sent by the unclean spirits, and which possessed her.*

Another, earlier attempt, runs:<sup>2</sup>

*Die Rōs, welche auch Dromiten heissen, haben ihren Namen von einem gewaltigen (?) Rōs erhalten, nachdem (weil?) sie den Feindseligkeiten (? wörtlich den Misshälligkeiten) derer entgangen waren, welche einen Götterspruch (?) oder ein Orakel eingeholt (?? sich zu Nutze gemacht??) und über sie ein Übergewicht erlangt (sie besiegt?) hatten.*

The latest to date is as follows:<sup>3</sup>

*The Russians, who are also called Dromitai, have been so named after a certain mighty (or crafty) Ros, after they had escaped the consequences (lit. echoes, repercussions) of the oracles made about them through some admonition (perhaps magical doctrine) or revelation from above, and which had overpowered them. The name Dromitai accrued to them because they run fast.*

Scholarly endeavours here have been legion. The most ingenious one is probably that of Vasiliev: "Their designation as Dromitai derives from the name of a place which was situated (sic) at the mouth of the river Dneper, whence Russians were setting out on their piratical inroads in the Black Sea. This was a long narrow stretch of land or rather of shore, which we have seen to be known from ancient times as the Achilles' race course."<sup>4</sup>

That the river- and sea-borne Russans be called 'runners' is on the face of it implausible; to the Byzantines, they sailed, they did not *run*. Yet runners they were called all the same. This nickname must have a very specific origin: Either from their launching-ground, as 'Achilles-runners'; or from their Erul (literally speaking) precursors; or, perhaps preferably, from both. For the Eruls themselves set out from these parts and may have acquired their name of 'runners' not merely from their footwork in general, but indeed from the race-course of Achilles.

Let us for a moment suppose that the **sole** reason for the *Dromitai* name was this race-course. The trouble with this interpretation is simply that it is wholly at odds with Pseudo-Symeon's own explanation, that the 'Rōs are so named 'because they run fast'; no word on the race-course of Achilles. The explanation resides instead, it would seem, in the *veloces Dani* above (see also next item).

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1. Uspenskij 1890, 16-34; other sources in Vasiliev 1951.

2. Kunik 1845, II, 412-413.

3. Mango 1953, 458.

4. Vasiliev 1951, 193-195.

Which ‘spell’ or premonition (etc.) did the ‘Rōs escape from? In the absence of other suggestions the sole explanation would be the Biblical one: viz., that the Prince of ‘Ros was to lead his northern hordes southwards for a final battle of battles, in which he and Gog/Magog would in the upshot be slain; the ‘charm’ or ‘spell’ leading to the said disaster would then be what the prophet Ezekiel refers to by the words:

*38.(4) And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth... (8) After many days thou shalt be visited... (10) At the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages ... (14) Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord God: In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? (15) And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts....*

When Gog breaks up against Israel from his far-northern haunts, it is indeed the result of a spell – from God. The ‘unclean spirits’ remain unidentified; they may be the Hunnic women mentioned in Jordanes.

In the Greek author Zonaras we find a parallel to the Ps.-Symeon text just quoted:<sup>1</sup>

*The Scythian race of the ‘Rōs, who live around Taurus, overran with a fleet the regions of the Euxine and intended to attack Byzantion herself; but their intention was not executed, because they were prevented by supreme providence, which made them, against their will, retreat unsuccessful, after they had undergone divine anger.*

Instead of Vasiliev’s theory, that the Russians were called *Dromitai* for setting out from the race-course of Achilles on their 9th-10th c. raids, we suggest: The race-course is of interest as a link **backwards** in time, to the mythical Achilles and the 3rd-6th c. Erul ‘runners’.

We quote Jordanes, § 44-46, on the Scythian ‘men of the Amazons’:<sup>2</sup>

*Then Vesosis made war on the Scythians, on those whom antiquity calls the men of the Amazons. .. At that time these dwelled in the area ... which its inhabitants call Danaper, unto the Tanais, right around the corner of the Maeotic swamp... The Danaper arises out of a great swamp... In front of its embouchure there is an island by the name of Achilles. And in between lie wide wildernesses, overgrown with forests and full of perilous swamps.*

For the sake of completeness, we draw attention to another type of ‘runners’ too, the *Dromones* (literally, ‘runners’) used by the Byzantines against e.g. the Vandals under king Gelimer when, as we have seen, the Eruls led by Pharas eventually carried the day (*De bello Vandalico III, 11*):<sup>3</sup>

*...And there followed with them also four hundred Eruli, whom Pharas led, and about six hundred barbarian allies from the Massagetae...*

*And they also had ships of war prepared as for sea-fighting, to the number of 92, and they were single-banked ships covered by decks, in order that the men rowing them might*

1. PG 134, Dindorf 1868-75, IV, 15, Pinder 1841-98, III, 404, Vasiliev 1946, 111.

2. Martens 1884, 14-15.

3. Dewing 1914-28, II, 105.

*if possible not be exposed to the bolts of the enemy. Such boats are called 'Dromones' by those of the present time; for they are able to attain a great speed. In these sailed two thousand men of Byzantium, who were all rowers as well as fighting men; for there was not a single superfluous man among them...*

*...Now Belisarius was a native of Germania...*

Now according to Constantine Born-in-the-Purple, the 10th c. Russians used *monóxyla* boats, literally 'dug-out, a boat hollowed out of a single tree-trunk', when travelling all the way from Novgorod to Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> That these "Russian *monóxyla* were actually made of hollowed-out tree-trunks"<sup>2</sup> is wholly incredible: This is simple no way to cross the Black Sea, or to transport any sizeable amount of goods! Sensing this perhaps, the editor of Constantine's work has translated the word as 'a single-straked ship'; and Constantine's very text belies the 'dug-outs': The Slav tributaries of the 'Rōs cut these 'single-strakers' in wintertime, and "when they have fastened them together, .... bring them on to the neighbouring lakes"<sup>3</sup> 'Fastening them together' then would imply a number of pieces of wood (planks).

The explanation is, rather: the Viking ships described here lacked a keel proper (which would only have got them stuck in shallow waters); the bottom plank, in lieu of keel, was however fashioned out of a single long oak trunk, by adzes; whence the expression *monóxyla*. Leo IV in his *Taktika* says that the 'Rōs sail in light, very fast-moving boats, for only thus can they ply the rivers leading to the Black Sea.'<sup>4</sup>

The point is: Such vessels could easily be characterized as *dromones*. The Erul vessels many centuries earlier, for use in the swamps around the 'Maeotic Lake', were probably equally shallow – and very fast-rowed (thus rendering them doubly invulnerable to any punitive expedition by the Greeks); of these, the Pseudo-Aethicus text makes much too. Isidor defines the *dromones* as "long ships... said to be longer than all others".<sup>5</sup> In the *Heimskringla* of Snorri, the word *dromon* is still current, as **dromund** (< Old French *dromont*).<sup>6</sup>

Possible attention to the **vessels** of the 'Rōs as *dromones* > *dromitai* 'runners', and to Achilles' 'race-course' too, may simply be secondary associations to what sources on their predecessors the Eruls indicate as the primary thing: the Eruls themselves being **runners**. That they were able to 'run upon the water' as well, would be a most apposite quip, in the same humorous vein as the *Eluri* 'swamp-dwellers' for the Eruli. And the testimony of Leo the Deacon above, on Achilles as a wild-'n-ruddy pedestrian fighter, may likewise stem from erudite knowledge of and speculations on the Eruls of old.

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1. Dvornik 1962, 23-25.

2. *ibid.*

3. Moravscik 1949, 57.

4. cf. references in Dvornik 1962, 24-25.

5. Lindsay 1911, II, Lib. XIX, i, 14.

6. Heggstad 1963, 103.



The Eruls were famed for their *cursus Erulorum*, their running. As Isidor says:<sup>1</sup> “Cursum enim Graeci **drómon** vocant.” (We recall also the *pirnas* and *dromones*, ‘running’ upon the water.) Thus, in a word, the **Dromitai** ‘runners’.<sup>2</sup>

### 15.6. Ravenna Anonymous on Fleet Danes

Around 700 AD an anonymous author writing in Ravenna noted:<sup>3</sup>

*...Thus too vis-à-vis the same Scythia the coast of the Ocean is taken to be the homeland of those who are called the Rerefins or Sirdifins [**<Skridifinns, ‘the gliding Finns’ – HS**]. In which homeland men are said by Aithanarit the philosopher of the Goths to dwell upon the mountain-tops and where men as well as women live by hunting, being said by all to subsist on [animal] fodder and fiery wine. To their homeland is ascribed a coldness surpassing all others.*

*Thus too vis-à-vis the Serdefins on the coast of the Ocean is the homeland which is called Dania; which land according to Aitanaridus, Eldevaldus and Marcomirus, the authors of the Goths, produces men more fleet than all other nations; and this their problem is addressed here [i.e., in the following words]:*

*Marco lauds the Parthian, as long as the Goth  
has not arrived. Yet o where is the Dane?*

*This Dania is now called the land of the Nordomannes. This Dania is transected by many rivers, of which one is called Lina, flowing out into the Ocean.*

Thus again: ‘fleet Danes’; only now not in Kiev of the 11th c., but in Scandinavia of the 6th c. AD. We already know these ‘men more fleet than all other nations’; this ‘stamp of (self-)approval’, this so to speak professional trademark, refers to the Eruls. We may rest assured that what Thietmar of Merseburg is referring to is not a

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1. Lindsay 1911, II, Lib. XIX, i, 14, on the *dromones* vessels.
  2. Recent interest in these *Dromitai* has gone down the wrong track. Thus Karpozilos 1988 and Mel’nikova/Petruxin 1989, 38 n. 79, for their interpretation of Theophanes Continuatus “*the ‘Rōs... also called the Dromitai, who derive their origin from the Franks’*”, rely on a Slavonic translation: “*The Rus’... also called Skedi, we derive from the Varangian stock.*” Now the word *skedi* reflects *skedia* ‘a type of boat’. Obviously, the Slavonic translator, puzzled by the term *Dromitai*, has taken recourse to the *dromones* – and from there gone on to another boat type, the *skedia* – better known to Russians. Likewise, for the outlandish Franks he substitutes the Varangians. Yet of course, it is inadmissible for scholars to follow in the steps of one translator’s confusion; a confusion crowned by his insistence that this name of a boat (sic) is synonymous with that of the Rus’.
  3. Pinder & Parthey 1860, 201-202: “[IV] 12. *Item iuxta ipsam Scythiam litus Oceanum pontitur patria quae dicitur Rerefenorum et Sirdifenorum. cuius patriae homines ut ait Aithanarit Gothorum philosophus rupes montium inhabitant, et per venationes tam viri quamque mulieres vivere, cibo vel vino ignari existentes in omnibus dicuntur. quae patria super omnes frigida esse ascribitur.*  
13. *Iterum iuxta ipsos Serdefinns litus Oceani est patria quae dicitur Dania. quae patria ut ait supra scriptus Aitanaridus et Eldevaldus et Marcomirus Gothorum philosophi super omnes nationes velocissimos profert homines. et hoc affati sunt in sua problemata: Laudabatur Parsus Marco dum non venerat Gothos. Sed o ubi est Danus?*  
*Quae Dania modo Nordomanorum dicitur patria. per quam Daniam plurima transeunt flumina, inter cetera quae dicitur Lina, quae in Oceano ingreditur.*”

bunch of especially volatile slaves in Kiev, from Denmark of all places, but the knowledge of the rulers in Kiev that – in the eyes of the world, Byzance and themselves – they stemmed from, historically, those proto-Vikings from centuries before, those ‘swift Danes’, the Eruls.

### 15.7. Symeon Magister on ‘Rōs-Dromitas

The above might be dismissed as the uncanniest of coincidences – from the Erul ‘runners’ to those of Ps.-Symeon, and from the Ravenna Anonymous on ‘fleet Danes’ to those in Thietmar of Merseburg, were it not that the **Dromitai** are indeed found in more authors than merely Pseudo-Symeon.

One is Symeon Magister himself<sup>1</sup> (today identified with, and better known under the name of, Symeon Metaphrastes, born c. 890-900<sup>2</sup>):

46. *The same year the ‘Rōs, who are called the Dromitas* (both because they wander about and because they are fleet in running)<sup>3</sup>, *deriving their stock from the Franks, came to Constantinople bringing along 10,000 ships full of warriors. In it [= the same year] Theophanes the protovestarius with marine troops, having equipped war ships, withstood their onslaught. When they thus came to Pharos in the Pontos Euxeinos (it is said that Pharos has a certain mole or tower, from which a lighted flame directs travellers on their way in the night-time; in fact the Pontos is called the Euxeinos by antithesis, meaning good of hospitality. [Yet] little is it heard to be hospitable, on account of the injuries effected against guests by [the] robbers running (katadromás) in it...*

### 15.8. Theophanes Continuatus on ‘Rōs-Dromitai

In the group of chronicles conventionally known as *Theophanes Continuatus*,<sup>4</sup> the unknown author to the history of the Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos likewise calls the ‘Rōs infesting the Byzantine Empire the *Dromitai*:<sup>5</sup>

*The ‘Rōs, who are also called the Runners (said to be either roaming about or of rapid running), they who trace their stock back to the Franks, sailed against Constantinople with 10,000 ships.. Therefore the patrician Theophanes went out against them with as many triremes and rapid boats as were in town. And as he had readied and equipped an army beforehand and fortified himself with fasting and tears, he was waiting for the ‘Rōs, for he wished to fight them in a sea battle. (...) And now he as the first broke through the amassed ships of the ‘Rōs, splitting them apart with his own rapid boat, incinerating most of them by a fire he had readied beforehand, and driving the remainder of them off into rout and defeat.*<sup>6</sup>

1. PG 109, 807-810. The Latin runs: “*Eodem anno Russi, quos Dromitas vocant (ac si vagos dicas ac cursu expeditos), ex Francis genus ducentes, conferta decem millium navium classe infestis signis Byzantium venerunt...*”
2. Beck 1954, 570-575.
3. These words in brackets are found in the Latin text only, not the Greek; another suggested translation: “*...and whom one says stray about by rapid running...*”
4. or *Scriptores post Theophanem*: Hunger 1978, 339.
5. PG 109, 439-442: “*...Hos Dromitas vocant (velut palantes dicas ac cursu veloces) atque a Francis genus ducunt...*”
6. [Translation by cand. philol. Marit Sauge & HS.]

What is the background for the tracing of their descent to the Franks by these ‘Runners’? A solution we find in the Pseudo-Aethicus Istricus text in chapter 3.14 above, in the form of a legend. That goes for their *straying* too: After the destruction of Troy, one part of the remaining population emigrated to Macedonia, becoming a constituent part of the Macedonian people; the others **strayed** on, ever farther afield, having elected one Francio their king – whence their name. Having warred with other peoples for a long time, and having laid waste a part of Asia, they came to Europe and settled between the Rhine, the Danube and the sea. Decimated by warfare, the few remaining Franks nevertheless held staunchly to their independence from Roman and other alien rule; and they kept electing their leaders by themselves.<sup>1</sup>

That the ‘Rōs Runners trace their origin to the Franks may be taken to reflect knowledge that their forerunners (forgive the pun) were one of the Migration Age peoples or groupings; the name **Eruls** said nothing to them, that of the **Franks** spoke wonders. That the Eruls were meant is however reflected in the other details given: their having laid waste parts of Asia (which the Eruls did, in 395-396); possibly their ‘Trojan’ background (the Amazons having partaken in the defence of Troy); and of course, first and foremost, their byname, the ‘Runners’.

Again, there is no reason to suppose that mere ‘runners’ would be a match for, let alone a threat to, the Byzantine armed forces; and no reason in the behaviour of the 9th-10th c. Russians to make the Greeks come up with this weird word for them. We are left with one conclusion: The appellation **dromitai** is a ‘technical-archaic’ term, dug up and resuscitated from the Migration-Age descriptions of the fleetest of all Germanic professional troops.

### 15.9. *Leo Diaconus*

Normanists and anti-Normanists alike have long discussed choice passages in Leo the Deacon. For some reason, interest in another highly pertinent passage of his has not been forthcoming. We quote:<sup>2</sup>

*...In his Periplus Arrian asserts that Achilles the son of Peleus was a Scythian from the small settlement of Myrmicion by the Maeotic marsh[es]. Having been expelled by the Scythians because of his spirit of cruelty, crudeness and arrogance, he set up his residence*

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1. Pfister 1978, 139: *Origin of the Franks* by the so-called Fredegard Scholasticus.
  2. Niebuhr 1828, 149-150: “...*Siquidem Arrianus in Periplo auctor est, Achillem Pelei filium Scytham exstitisse, Myrmecione natum, quod est ad Maeotidem paludem oppidulum: expulsum vero a Scythis ob saevitiam, crudelitatem, arrogantiam animi, in Thessalia posthaec sedem collocasse. Cuius rei clara argumenta sunt amictus fibulati ratio, pugna pedestris, capillus rufus, oculi glauci, amentia, iracundia, crudelitas; quae ipsa conviciis Agamemnon consecrabatur, sic dicens: “Huic semper iurgia cordi, / Rixaeque, pugnaeque.” Caede enim et sanguine ad hanc diem Tauroscythae dirimere rixas consuerunt. Audaciam autem et virtutem atque robur gentis, finitimum quemque populum invadentis, cum multi alii testantur, tum etiam divus Ezechiel, mentione eius facta, ubi ad hunc modum ait: “Ecce ego induco super te Gog et Magog, principem Rhos.” Sed de inferiis Taurorum haec sufficiant.*” For my translation into English I have consulted Loretto 1961, 137-138. I take exception to Loretto’s translation of *oculi glauci* as ‘die funkelnden Augen’.

*in Thessaly. This fact is clearly demonstrated by his clothing, a cloak with clasp buckle, the trait of fighting on foot, the reddish hair, the blue eyes, and the raging, the savageness and the cruelty. Agamemnon too criticizes him for these traits when saying: 'You always love the quarreling and bloody wars and battles!' For still today the Tauroscythians use to settle their disputes through murder and blood. That this people is audacious, ferocious and violent, threatening all adjacent tribes with their incursions, that is what, amongst many others, the godly graced prophet Ezekiel is witness to with the words: "Behold, I shall bring against you Gog and Magog, the prince of Ros!"*

*Yet of the death-customs of the Taurus[-dwellers] this suffices.*

From Leo on, the Tauro-Scythians are but another learned label for the Russians. What Leo does is to treat us to an excursion into his own opinion on just who Achilles was; the conclusion being, clearly, that not only was he a Scythian, as stated already by Arrian, he was – worst of all! – one of the Tavroschythians, under the leadership of (as Ezekiel rightly says) 'the prince of Ros'. In a word, Achilles belonged to the Rōs (Ros). And the Tavroschythians or Rōs (Ros) are characterized by the following traits: their clothing (including a cloak with clasp buckle), the trait of fighting on foot, reddish hair, blue eyes, and lying, savageness, cruelty.

Moreover, the Tavroschythians practice human sacrifices. And they are, as underscored by Leo in another passage, particularly long-limbed.<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen, 'red-'n-blue' savages and long-limbed foot fighters is just what the Eruls were, according to literary convention. They were notorious for human sacrifices too.<sup>2</sup>

Here these traits are applied to the people of 'Rōs (Ros) by a 10th c. AD author. And the reason why he does so **may** reside in a longstanding association of the sand-bank (or 'island') called Achilles' Race-course, by the mouth of the Dnepr (on which more presently), with the Eruls and, hence, their 'successors'.

Leo's 'quote' from Arrian is no such thing.<sup>3</sup> In Arrian, there is not a word on Achilles being red, let alone dominated by the 'Rōs (Ros) prince. What Leo is passing on to us stems not from Arrian but from some other as yet unidentified source – which is lent some extra credibility in 10th c. eyes, one would think, by Leo's glib invocation of Arrian's name and fame.

### *15.10. The Myrmidons*

Why did Achilles come to pass for a Scythian, and eventually even a 'Russian'? Certainly for more than one reason, as indicated in ch. 3 above. It has long since been suggested that one thing in particular was conducive:<sup>4</sup> the name of Myrmicion by the outlet from the Maeotic into the Black Sea, and perhaps that of the river Mermodas too, also emptying into the Maeotic, evoked the appellation of Achilles' faithful

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1. Niebuhr 1828, 110, 149.

2. Procopius, cf Rappaport 1920, 1161.

3. Noted already in Vasil'evskij 1877, 178, 180: *zamečanja L'va Diakona o rodstve Rusi s Axillesom ili ego družinjoj...*

4. same, 177.

helpers, “*his select fighters*”,<sup>1</sup> the Myrmidons. Historically, these latter were from Thessaly and the island of Egina.

This was no long-forgotten term. In the Anglo-Saxon poem on the life and martyrdom of Saint Andrew, the Myrmidons scourging the saint all day are “the devil’s followers”.<sup>2</sup>

In the account by the 10th c. Byzantine historian Malalas on the Trojan War we meet the troops of Achilles “*called the Myrmidons, who are today called the Bulgars*”. This reflects the onetime historical stay of the Bulgars east of the Maeotic – and the above-mentioned transposition of the Myrmidons of literature to the Maeotic as well.<sup>3</sup>

The same name of **Myrmidona** crops up in a brief roster of holy places appended to the (6th c.?) *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, where it is identified with the Black Sea port of Sinope. The apocryphal *Wandering of the Apostle Andrej in the Land of the Myrmidons* has the latter name designate what later became Russia. As noted by a Russian historian, “the burial customs of the Rus’, akin to the ancient Hellenic ones in the eyes of Leo the Deacon, in his mind originated from the companions of Achilles, i.e. the Myrmidons.” The 11th c. author Attaliota tells how part of the Uz Turks (the Polovtsy) were vanquished by the prince of the Myrmidons, meaning again the Russians.<sup>4</sup>

This usage continued down through the Middle Ages, the name of the Myrmidons, although still recognizable, being given the weirdest of twists.<sup>5</sup> Whether the **Myrm-idons** so to speak ‘fathered’ that hitherto inexplicable form **Murmane** ‘Norwegians’ (instead of the *Nurmane* one would expect) is too speculative to merit discussion.

What these sources demonstrate is, again, the bent of the Byzantines for resorting to archaic names – and here, names associated with the ‘Scythian’ Achilles. All these **other** names (Tavroschythians, Dromitai, Gog/Magog, Tavrohuns, Myrmidons) indicate that the name ‘**Rōs**’ originated in the same archaic vein.

### 15.11. Photios on the ‘Rōs, 860

During the attack on Constantinople by the ‘Rōs in 860 AD, the Patriarch Photios produced two *homilies*, sermons read out aloud in the Church of Hagia Sofia, both venting the fears of people at large in the capital and trying to guide them. An excerpt from the first of these two sermons reads:<sup>6</sup>

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1. The Iliad, e.g. Book 16, 269: Wilster 1878, 62.

2. Malone 1962, 30.

3. same, 178.

4. same, 178.

5. same, 179-182: “... Myrmin (= Myrmidonia), i.e. by the identification of the Myrmin or, in another pronunciation, the Murmen land, with the Urmans or Murmans, mentioned in the Chronicle [of Bygone Ages] among the Varangian peoples and corresponding to the Norwegians...”

6. Mango 1958, 82-88.

*What is this? What is this grievous and heavy blow and wrath? Why has this dreadful bolt fallen on us out of the farthest North? ... miserably grinding up men's very bodies, and bitterly destroying the whole nation? ...*

*Does not the terror of things present indicate the awful and inexorable judgment of the future? Is it not the apprehension of us all, nay the sight before the eyes of each, that not one will have been left to survive...?*

*For this reason the Lord hath opened His treasury and brought forth the weapons of His anger. For this reason a people has crept down from the North, as if it were attacking another Jerusalem, and nations have been stirred up from the end of the earth, holding bow and spear; [the people] is fierce and has no mercy, its voice is as the roaring sea. ...*

*For this reason His wrath has been poured upon us, and He has kept watch over our sins, and He has set His face against us. (...)*

*...the unbelievable course of the barbarians did not give rumour time to announce it, ... and the fact that the invaders were sundered [off from us] by so many lands and kingdoms, by navigable rivers and harbourless seas. (...)*

*As for this fierce and barbarous Scythian tribe... O city reigning over nearly the whole universe, what an uncaptured army, equipped in servile fashion, is sneering at thee as at a slave! (...)*

The ‘navigable rivers and harbourless seas’ have been taken to “favour the view that the invaders came from Kiev rather than from the Crimea or the Black Sea coast in general.”<sup>1</sup> This is unwarranted. Navigable rivers carry us all the way up to, or invaders all the way down from, the Ladoga region and the Baltic. And only up here, in the remote North, does one find ‘harbourless seas’ – words fitting neither the Black nor Azov seas, where the 9th c. Greeks knew harbours galore.

From the second homily, read by Photios to his flock shortly after the departure of the ‘Rōs, we excerpt:<sup>2</sup>

*...to the extent that this nation was obscure, insignificant, and not even known until the incursion against us, so much the more is the enormity of our shame set down...*

*An obscure nation, a nation of no account [or: countless], a nation ranked among slaves, unknown, but which has won a name from the expedition against us, insignificant, but now become famous... a nation dwelling somewhere far from our country, barbarous, nomadic, armed with arrogance, unwatched, unchallenged, leaderless, has so suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, like a wave of the sea, poured over our frontiers...*

The second homily stresses the ‘obscurity’ of the ‘Rōs, who were even ‘unknown’ before the assault; their ‘being ranked among slaves’ would seem to indicate that they arrived from the lands of the Slavs (= ‘Slaves’).<sup>3</sup> An Erul backdrop to this is conceivable.

Their being ‘uncaptured’ (first homily), ‘leaderless’ (second one) can be understood in at least two mutually (and not necessarily exclusive) ways: Leaders or officers were indistinguishable from the rest; not only were uniforms lacking, so were recognized tactics (springing from ‘captaining’); and the leader whom the Greeks perhaps expected, ‘the prince of ‘Rōs’, was not on the scene. Again, we do not know

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1. same 88 n. 41.

2. same, 96-98.

3. Cf the riddle (ch. 9.8 above) from the 12th c., “a barbarian Scythian, a domestic slave or domestic servant or menial” has as its solution “the Russian race”: Vasiliev 1946, 243.

what Photios had on his mind; but the Eruls were notorious for having no king, no single leader, only a ‘warrior aristocracy’.

‘*Dwelling far from our country*’ certainly does not point to Kiev, lying as it did not far from the Black Sea, but rather to “the most important group of the Rūs”, in al-Mas‘ūdī’s words: the Ladogans (and Novgorodians).

One view has it that probably Photios did not himself believe in the identification of the attackers with the Biblical ‘Rōs’;<sup>1</sup> and his non-mention of the **name** ‘Rōs’ throughout his two homilies (it occurs only in their heading) might be taken to strengthen this view. Yet this is too hasty a conclusion. His references to the attackers as unknown, etc., are part rhetoric – underscoring the contrast to the capital of just about the whole universe, cautioning it that God’s wrath may pounce on it from a people beyond the known world; and in part, the plain truth: To his audience at large, the ‘Rōs were indeed wholly unknown.

What characterizes the style of our patriarch, however, is his two-level approach: He addresses the broad masses with repeated appeals to anguish and repentance; yet he also has food for thought for those well versed in scripture. Probably just about **all** his audience would recognize that **some** of his imagery was right out of the Bible. The lack of explicit references is didactically well-advised, blurring the line where the word of God ends and that of the patriarch begins – and leaving to the connoisseurs and clergy to find out just that.

The Biblical, more precisely Old Testament, references have a wide spread. Yet the **sole** reference which literally addresses the problem of who these far-northerners are is the paragraph on the people that had ‘crept down’ (i.e. unnoticed before it suddenly showed up at the city walls) from the North, ‘*as if it were attacking another Jerusalem*’: This alludes to Ezekiel, ch. 38-39, plus Revelation, ch. 20, which is where we meet nations stirred up from the ends of the earth, holding “all sorts of armour”.<sup>2</sup>

One characteristic is crucial, cf. Ezekiel 38, 9: “*Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land.*” This is a main point in Photios: the *suddenness* of the attack, “like a storm”. Even the *cloud* is there; the opening of his first homily runing:

*...Why has this dreadful bolt fallen on us out of the farthest North? What clouds compact of woes and condemnation have violently collided to force out this irresistible lightning upon us? Why has this thick, sudden hail-storm of barbarians burst forth...*

Indication that the reference to Ezekiel was not mere rhetoric, no chance figure of speech, would reside in the rooting of not only the ‘Rōs name but also that of Magog, in Russia itself; which is what we do find.

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1. Dvornik 1949.

2. Mango 1958 lists a goodly number of Old Testament citations in Photios, but misses this one.

## 16. Kievan Confirmations

В последние годы открылись возможности для свободного изучения экзогенных факторов развития русской государственности. Историографический миф об ‘исконно славянском’ племени русь в Среднем Поднепровье перестает играть роль ‘исторического факта’...  
Petruhin 1995, 117.

### 16.1. Magog in Kiev

In the *Geographical Annotations* by the Abbot Nicolas, we read:<sup>1</sup>

*Japheth had seven sons; their names were as follows: Gomer, Magoc, Madai, Juban, Tubal, Masak, Tirak. These are nations in that part of the world which is called Europe: Svithjod [Swede-folk] the Great, there Magoc ruled; Kylfing-land, which we call Gardariki, there Madai was; Greece, there Juban ruled....*

Likewise, the Book of Hauk Erlendsson informs us:<sup>2</sup>

*In that realm is what we call Russia, we call it Gardariki. These are the main towns there: Muroma, Rostov, Suzdal', Holmgard [= Novgorod], Syrnes [?], Gadar [?], Polotsk, Kiev – which is where Magok the son of Japheth first made his residence.*

Finally, there is the Skálholtsbók:<sup>3</sup>

*In Europe farthest to the East is Scythia, which is what we call Svithjod the Great. There the apostle Philip preached. In Gardariki are Polotsk and Kiev, there Magog the son of Japheth the son of Noah first made his residence.*

These extracts all attest to the onetime presence of Magog. *Koenugarðr* or *Kiaenu-garðar* is the ‘Norsified’ version of the old Slavonic name for Kiev.<sup>4</sup>

These brief assertions really admit of only one explanation. Who is Magog? According to the Bible, he is “the ruler of Rōs”; Ezekiel mentions “Gog and Magog, the ruler of Rōs”. Who or what Gog was understood to be originally, or for that mat-

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1. Rafn 1852, II, 401: “*Japheth átti vij syni; þeirra nöfn voru þessi: Gómer, Magoc, Madaí, Juban, Túbal, Masok, Tírak. Þessit eru þjóðlönd i þeim hluta heims er Eyropa heitir: Svíþjóð sú in mikla, þar ræð Magoc; Kylfíngaland, þat köllum vèr Garðaríki, þar var Madaí; Grikland, þar ræð Juban...*”
  2. same, II, 438: “*Í því ríki er þat er Rúzcía heitir; þat köllum ver Garðarík; þar eru þessir höfuðgarðar: Moromar, Rostofa, Súrdalar, Hólmgarðar, Syrnes, Gadar, Palteskía, Koenugarðr, þar bygði fyrst Magok, sonr Jafeths Nóasonar.*”
  3. same, II, 447: “*Í Európa er austast Cithía, þat köllum vèr Svíþjóð hina miklu; þar prædikaði Filippus postuli. Garðaríki, þar stendr Pallteskja ok Kiaenu-garðar; þar bygði fyrst Magogg, sonr Japhets Nóasonar...*”
  4. Blöndal 1981, 14.



ter by the Norse writers, is immaterial here; by any straightforward reading, Magog is the name of “*the ruler of ‘Rōs’*”.

That Jordanes and others mention Magog as forebear of the Goths may of course have been relevant too; cf Isidor:<sup>1</sup> “*Magog, from whom the Scythians and Goths are judged to trace their origin.*”

## 16.2. Church Slavonic Roš

Without delving into the specialist debate on authorship and number of translations into Church Slavonic of the Old Testament’s constituent parts, we draw attention to a single fact which has hitherto gone unnoticed: Throughout the Church Slavonic translations of the Bible, as well as the Russian ones in their wake, Old Hebrew and Aramaic nomenclature is used in its Greek forms; thus, *Satana, Ierusalim, Messia*, in lieu of the original *Šotona, Ierušolayim, Mašīax*. There is but one exception: precisely the prince of ‘Ros of the Byzantines – which is reconverted into the original *Roš*.<sup>2</sup>

This lone occurrence is most eloquently expressive. Why does it stand apart? It stands to reason that this reflects the establishment of peaceful ties between Russia and Byzantium, and was done in order to avoid untimely thoughts as to the historical mission of Ros, Russia. We thereby possess a source confirming that precisely such celebrations were afoot. (This however refers only to the oldest versions of the Church Slavonic Bible; whereas more ‘modern’ Bibles know but ‘the prince of ‘Ros’.<sup>3</sup>)

This is borne out by Genesis 46:21, where among the sons of Benjamin, as we have seen, one ‘Rōs is named – in all versions of the Bible but one: in the Russian one, his name is suppressed.<sup>4</sup>

On the other side, during the reign of Ivan the Terrible and his successor, Archbishop Makarij chose to render the ‘*prince of ‘Ros*’ passage by the expression (in the genitive case) *knjaz’ja roska* ‘the Rossian prince’, clearly a reference to the name and people of the state he himself was serving.

## 16.3. ‘Red Goths’, ‘Red Russia’

In the *Tale of Igor’s Battle*, generally dated to 1187 AD, there is one reference to a distant past of potential relevance to our topic; in the Russian:

*Се бо готьскыя красныя девы въспеша на березе синему морю,  
звоня рускымъ златомъ, поютъ время Бусово, лелеютъ мечь  
Шароканю.*

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1. Lindsay IX, ii, 27: “*Magog, a quo arbitrantur Scythas et Gothos traxisse originem.*”
  2. Jewish use of Roš = Russians first surfaces in the 12th or 13th c. Byzantine Karaim Yaacov Ben-Ruvim, in his commentary to Ezekiel 38 (cf Garkavi 1878, 118): “The prince of Roš, that is the prince of the Russians, who in the holy tongue is named Roš.”
  3. Biblija, Moscow 1900, Kniga Proroka Iezekiilja, ch. 38.
  4. First noted by Tatiščev c. 1739 (1962, 288).

Literally: “Now the red Gothic maids sang upon the shore of the blue sea, jingling Russian gold, they sing the time of Bus, they caress the places of Šarokan.”

How literal are these ‘reds’? It is a commonplace that in pre-modern Russian, the adjective **krasnyj** ‘red’ could and often did mean ‘beautiful’; one very well-known illustration to this being Moscow’s Krasnaja Ploščad’, today translated as the Red Square but earlier, originally, signifying the Beautiful Square. And naturally, what one would expect in poetry, which the Tale of Igor’s Battle is, is for ‘maids’ to be ‘beautiful’. On the other hand, here we are in the presence of a clearly willed colour contrast: We are made to envisage the red *versus*, or against the backdrop of, the blue. **Red** maidens, **blue** sea. One would believe, on the strength of its greater *strength*, both poetic and logical, that this is the original intent; which then merely confirms and continues a tradition we know.

Nevertheless, on balance we do well to dismiss the red damsels. A specialist study demonstrates that the original (and common Slavonic) meaning of **krasnyj** is indeed ‘beautiful’. To this Russian is now an exception; and the semantic transition came late: the meaning ‘red’ is first attested from 1476, and seems to have become dominant during the 15th century. The reason given for the transition is simply that **the** beautiful colour par excellence to most people was red.<sup>1</sup>

To a later age belong the names White Russia, Black Russia and Red Russia.<sup>2</sup> The ‘black-and-white’ may have been inspired by the nomenclature of invading Asiatic hordes (Black and White Bulgars, Black and White Huns, Black and White Ugrians...) – but **red**? This *Červonaja Rus’* comprised Galicia, i.e. the Western Ukraine. The oldest known reference to it is on the map by Fra Mauro (1459-70), which has the name **Russia rossa**. It has been suggested that this name derived from the red hair of the inhabitants, and even that *Červonaja Rus’* may have arisen as a Polish or Ukrainian translation from the Latin.<sup>3</sup>

We are in no position to **solve** this problem; only to state that a solution is indeed **suggested** by the line of reasoning and the sources at our disposal concerning a tradition on the ‘red Russians’, meaning the Eruls. We have already seen that this tradition was reactivated and applied by Byzantine and some other authors to the 9th-10th cc. Rus’.

Indicative too is the localization of this Rus’ – on the lower and middle reaches of the Dnepr, including Kiev; one contrast being ‘the Real Russia’, meaning North Russia, centred upon Novgorod.<sup>4</sup>

In 981, the *Tale of Bygone Years* says, Russia marched against the Ljaxis (= the Poles), occupying their towns, such as Przemysl and Červen’. This is the first mention in the Russian Annals of the so-called Red Cities;<sup>5</sup> yet whether they gave name to ‘Red Russia’, or vice versa, is unknown.

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1. Herne 1954, 51-53.

2. Zograf 1894, 18-19.

3. Vakar 1949, 204 n.6.

4. Begunov 1982, 57-58.

5. Dvornik 1949, 91.

## 16.4. Stepennaja Kniga

It is for the stalwart Anti-Normanist *akademik* Rybakov to draw our attention to a most intriguing passage in a chronicle from the times of Ivan the Terrible known as *Stepennaja Kniga*, noting that “the Muscovite historians of the 16th century had found some important source which has not come down to us”. We quote the *Stepennaja Kniga* (my translation):<sup>1</sup>

*Chapter 9. The War of Caesar Theodosius with Rus´.*

*Even before the coming of Rjurik to the Slovene land the realm of the Slovene tongue was fighting, warring even then against many countries as well as against the town of Solun´ and Chersonnesos and others too, as is attested in no little way partly in the Miracles of the great martyr Dimitrij and the holy Archbishop Stephan of Surož, both of them. According to the abovesaid, they marched upon Constantinople itself, coming many times. Even much earlier, the Caesar Theodosius having had a fight with Russian warriors, was strengthened by the prayer of that great church father the Egyptian named John the Hermit. Afterwards, under the Caesar Heraclius, the Rus´ marched against the emperor Husraw the Persian.*



*The Emperor Heraclius. From the Radzivil ms.*

The latter information, on the Caesar Heraclius marching against the emperor Husraw the Persian, but minus the Rus´, is found in the Ipat´evskaja chronicle too.<sup>2</sup>

1. Rybakov 1982, 86, citing Rybakov 1963, 17 and the source: *Stepennaja Kniga*, PSRL 21, SPb. 1908-1913, 63.
2. PSRL, Lixačev 1950, I, 14, Palauzov 1871, 6: The White Ugrians “*began to be under the Emperor Heraclius (Iraklii), who marched/went against Husraw the Persian Emperor. At the same time were the Obre (Avars), who warred against the Emperor Heraclius and nearly overcame him (malo ego ne jaša). These Obry made war on the Sloveny, harrowing the Duleby...*”

The emperor Theodosius reigned 379-395 AD. Rybakov comments: "In these events of the late 4th c. the enemies of the Goths (and of Byzantium) are the Slavonic Antes, the Slavonic Rus'es, and the ethnically undetermined Rosomones." Whereupon he etymologizes the latter name as a composite of Ros 'Russians' plus Ossetic **mojne** 'men'. In another commentary he says:<sup>1</sup>

"The Emperor Theodosius (379-395) was a contemporary of Ermanarich, and was called 'Friend of the Goths'. Not in a single source is there word on the wars of Theodosius against 'Russian warriors'. The very name of 'the people Rōs' appeared in the sources that have come down to us only in the 6th c. It would be possible to simply reject the strange information of the *Stepennaja Kniga* as dubious, yet another similar statement in the very same book about the wars of the Rus with the Persian *Ḥusraw* finds confirmation in the works of Arabic and Persian 10th c. historians. Furthermore, in the above enigmatic sentence there is an internal logic: 'The Friend of the Goths' could indeed fight those whom his friends were battling during those very years, viz. the 'Rus-es', the 'Rosomones'."

A later commentary by Rybakov runs:<sup>2</sup>

"The Emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395) was allied with the Goths, and he was called 'the Friend of the Goths'... Not many years earlier the Gothic ruler Ermanarich fought 'the faithless Rosomones': here the Byzantine emperor, ally of the Goths, fights against 'Russian warriors'. The murder of Ermanarich by the Rosomones took place prior to the exodus of the Goths from the northern littoral of the Black Sea; the war of Byzantium against the Rus' warriors was after the coming of the Goths to the Balkans.."

Putting to peace the Ossetian aside of *akademik* Rybakov, we may venture to explain with which 'Ros-warriors' the two Emperors, of Byzance and Iran, had to contend. The first reference, as the text itself makes clear, is to an attempt by 'the friend of the Goths' the Emperor Theodosius to fight the Erul Rosomones who had joined up against Ermanaric, c. 375.

The second reference is to the presence of Rus' warriors = 'Reds' = Eruls more than 150 years later in the Byzantine armies fighting the Persians; more precisely, fighting *Ḥusraw I*, also known as *Anūširwān* (542-579 AD). We give a brief review of their historical exploits:

Under the Byzantine general Belisar, 300 Eruls led by Fara took part in the first war with the Persians, winning the battle by Dara in Mesopotamia in 530 by their ability and courage.<sup>3</sup> The same group was probably active in 532 too, in quelling the Nica uprising in Constantinople. In 539 Eruls fought against Armenians. In 542 they once again under Belisar fought against the Persians. In 543 Belisar's successor Narses mustered even stronger Erul forces under Filemuth and Verus, badly mauled when Narses was defeated. In 550-552 the Erul leader Uligang took part in battles against the Abasgis in the Caucasus, and against the Persians in Colchis.

The reference to the 7th c. Emperor Heraclius thus appears to be a bit off the mark. There are however two things that may make him 'meaningful' in our historical-mythological context:

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1. Rybakov 1963, 17.

2. Rybakov 1982, 86-87.

3. Procopius, *Bello Pers.* I, 13-14

First, the 626 siege of Constantinople by the Avars and the Persians. The 'Roun, if understood as the 'Rōs/ \* 'Rous, may conceivably belong here. This is however wholly hypothetical; and it does not tally with the rôle ascribed to the Rus' versus the Persians under Heraclius in the *Stepennaia kniga*.

Second, Heraclius was the Emperor under whom the Greeks shortly after did sustain the first onslaught by the Saracens. In 629, Aelia (= Eilat) submitted to them, in 635, with Muḥammad only three years dead, Jerusalem itself.

It has been suggested that an oracle referred to in Bede, Adso, and Godfrey of Viterbo,<sup>1</sup> concerns the time of Heraclius. Here, the last emperor of the Christians supposedly calls the peoples of Gog and Magog forth from the Caspian, where they were penned in by Alexander, to stem the Saracen tide; this effected, he lays down his crown in Jerusalem a victor.<sup>2</sup> The identification with Heraclius is however not assured.<sup>3</sup>

### 16.5. Nestor Chronicle's Dating of Russia

Returning to our point of departure, Nestor's *Tale of Bygone Years*, we confront again its little-discussed insistence:

*In the year 6360 (= 852 AD), Indikta 15, when Michael began to rule as Emperor, the Russian land began to be named (thus). This we have gotten to know of because under this Emperor the Rus' came to Constantinople, as it is written of this in the Greek chronicle. That is the reason we begin with this date, and set down the year.*

Two things are notorious: First, the Rus' (or *Rhos*, according to the Bertinian Annals) are known to have visited Constantinople in 839. Second, Michael III did **not** commence his reign in 852. When did he?

“À la mort de Théophile, son fils et successeur, Michael III (842-867), était dans sa sixième année...,” is one opinion.<sup>4</sup> We are informed by another specialist that Theofilos was succeeded by “Theodora und der 3-jährige Michael.. 20. Januar 842..”<sup>5</sup>

Yet Michael III, who did not commence his rule in 852, did not do so in 842 either. His being three years at his accession is also debatable.<sup>6</sup>

Why then does the *Tale of Bygone Years* give the year 6360 from the Creation (= 852 AD), and not 6350 (= 842 AD) as the start of Michael's reign? The question has been ingeniously addressed. The solution suggested is based on the 'extended' edition of the Chronicle by Nicephoros the Patriarch of Constantinople: Here, all the time-spans of world history are identical with those found in the *Tale of Bygone*

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1. sources in Bousset 195, 27-30.

2. Zezschwitz 1877, 61, 58.

3. Bousset 1895, 34.

4. Ostrogorsky 1969, 247, adding: “Que Michael III soit né vers 836, c'est ce qu'a montré E. Stein, *Annuaire de l'Institut de Phil. et d'Histoire Orientales*, 2, 1934, 899, n. 2.”

5. Hergenröther 1966, 337-351.

6. Ostrogorsky 1969, 247: “Que Michael III soit né vers 836, c'est ce qu'a montré E. Stein, *Annuaire de l'Institut de Phil. & d'Histoire Orientales*, 2, 1934, 899, n. 2.”

Years (from Creation to the Deluge, 2242 years, etc.).<sup>1</sup> This begs the question (which goes unasked) whether 842 was really the start of Russian chronology (*kraeugol'nyj kamen' našej xronologii*) – and not the year 839 of the Bertinian Annals, when Michael was indeed crowned and enthroned, as will be seen below.

We consult instead George ‘the Monk’ Amartold, who first says that “*Theofilos crowned [his] son Michael in the Great Church*”, i.e. as a co-regent; following up, under the heading *Imperium Michaelis cum matre Theodora*, with the decisive information:<sup>2</sup>

*In the year 6339 of the world's existence, which is 839 after the divine incarnation, Michael the son of Theofilos became Emperor together with Theodora his mother for [a period of] fifteen years, on his own, ten years, and together with Basil, one year.*

This is in full harmony with what the *Tale of Bygone Years* and the Bertinian Annals between them say: 839 – *the year Michael began to rule* (at the age of 3 or 4)!

Is this gainsaid by other sources? There is the testimony of Symeon Magister under the year 6335 = 835 AD:<sup>3</sup>

*The Emperor of the Byzantines Michael [reigned] with Theodora for 14 years, alone Michael [reigned] for 10 years, and with his colleague Basil for 1 year and 4 months; altogether for 27 years and 4 months.*

As demonstrated long since, however, the 835 date refers not to the start of Michael's reign but to his birth.<sup>4</sup>

In the so-called Theophanes Continuatus text we find basically the same facts, with but slight differences: The date of Michael's accession is not given, only the date of his death (in the year 6376), plus the information that he had reigned together with his mother Theodora for 14 years, alone 11, and with Basil for 1 year and 3 months.<sup>5</sup> At the end of his father Theofilos' reign, however, we are told that he was 3 years of age.<sup>6</sup>

Theophanes Continuatus also does us the favour of telling about the embassy to the Franks otherwise known from the Bertinian Annals.<sup>7</sup>

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1. Šaxmatov 1897, 217-222.

2. PG 109, 869-871, Greek text plus the Latin translation: “*Porro coronat Theophilus Michaelem filium in Magna ecclesia ...Anno mundi 6339, divinae autem incarnationis 839, imperavit Michael Theophili filius cum Theodora matre sua annos quindecim, solus vero annos decem, cum Basilio annum unum.*”

3. PG 109, 707-708, Greek text plus Latin translation: “*Romanorum imperator Michael et Theodora annos 14, Michael solus annos 10, cum Basilio collega annum 1 menses 4, simul annos 27 menses 4.*”

4. Stein 1934, 899 n. 2, giving Michael's date of birth however as 836, and 838 as that of his coronation, “*témoignage en contradiction avec THEOPH. CONT. 148, 8B*”.

5. PG 109, 225-226, Greek text plus Latin translation: “*Imperavit cum Theodora matre sua annos quatuordecim, solus undecim, posteaque adlecto Basilio annum unum, menses tres.*”

6. Same, 161-162, Greek text plus Latin translation: “*Istiusmodi vitæ finem nacto Theophilo Michael ejus filius, illius successor, imperium capessivit, annos tres natus, ex quo eum parens Theodora partu effuderat.*”

7. Same, 149-150.

The Greek chronicle referred to in the *Tale of Bygone Years* is that of George ‘the Monk’ Amartold, quoted above. Whereas Michael III did become the ‘nominally effective Emperor’ at his father’s death in 842, the decisive thing is that he in 839, according to George Amartold, was crowned as co-emperor.<sup>1</sup> This is the event referred to by the Russian chroniclers; and it is surprising indeed that this has not been seen earlier.

In an oral communication, professor Gleb Lebedev suggests that 842 may still be tenable as the date “when Russia got its name”, saying that this year may refer not to the commencement of Michael’s reign but to the date when the ‘Rōs reached home (Old Ladoga).<sup>2</sup> However ingenious, this is untenable. The Bertinian Annals state clearly that the Rhos not only visited Byzantium but also travelled on to Ingelheim in 839; and the further leg back to Old Ladoga cannot very well have taken 3 years.<sup>3</sup> The main objection however lies in the *Tale of Bygone Years* itself: It cites “the Greek chronicle” as its authority in this matter, under the very first year mentioned at all, viz. 852 AD; and a page or two earlier, the name of the Greek chronicler himself is given: It is Georgij [Amartol].<sup>4</sup>

Thus we, just like our *Tale of Bygone Years*, have to follow him and no other Greek chronicler; which leads us to accept the proposition of the *Tale of Bygone Years* (while leaving aside the bungled-up Russian date of 852): The land of Russia got its name the very year when Michael III began to rule – in 839 AD.

We have now arrived at a solution to the major part of our task: Explaining **how** the name of Russia arose as well as **when** and **where** it arose. What remains in this part of our study is to look briefly into another name that appeared the very same year.

## 16.6. The Xaqān-Rūs

Perhaps we may even indicate why the Rhos elected to refer to their ruler as *Chaganus* (in Arabic and Turkic *Ḥaqān*, or with a slightly different spelling and pronunciation *qaḡān*), and why they insisted that they had problems getting home because of wild tribes. It may have been a mere ploy to win status with the Byzantines, based on a superficial knowledge of the Xazar *qaḡān*’s high standing and his cooperation with Byzance; yet it may also reflect more in-depth knowledge of Xazar-Byzantine relations – as shown in the Frankish Imperial Annals.

Even a superficial acquaintance with Xazar politics would have impressed upon these newcomers the expeditiousness of leaning on the Byzantines. In 837-838 the Xazar *qaḡān*’s envoys in Byzance were successful in lobbying for a Xazar fortress, or fortified town to be built – by the Byzantines, at the strategic mouth of the Don.

1. The two, even three, modes of reckoning an Emperor’s rule are the subject of Stein 1934.
2. Oral suggestion, summer 1994.
3. unless they were detained that long; which they were not: Cf. on Adam of Bremen’s text below. Vasiliev 1946, 12 is certainly right: “Since Prudentius never mentions that the *Rhos* envoys were sent back to Constantinople, we may surmise that they were finally acquitted of espionage and were allowed to leave Ingelheim and proceed to their own country.”
4. Lixačev/Romanov 1950, I, 15 (text), 211 (trsl): “Georgij [Amartol] says in his *Chronicle*..”; followed by same, 17, 213: “the Greek Chronicle” (852).

Named Sarkel (‘White Fortress’), it was erected by Byzantine engineers transported thither and protected on the spot by a Byzantine fleet from the Paphlagonian *theme* (military district). The reason: The Xazars felt threatened by savage tribes. Thus there was good grounds for new ‘envoys’ to try out the same trick once more; only this time not from the Xaqān of the Xazars but, tongue-in-cheek, from ‘the Xaqān of the ‘Rōs’.

This would be sufficient to explain how the said ‘envoys’ went about their business in Byzance. Yet they may well have taken the trouble of sleuthing out even more of the story of Xazar-Byzantine and even Xazar-**Frankish** relations. The second part of the puzzle then lies farther back in time; in the Frankish Imperial Annals:<sup>1</sup>

*805. Not long afterwards Capcan the ruler of the Huns appeared before the Emperor because of the straits of his people, asking to be given a dwelling-place between Sabaria and Carnuntus [Steinamanger und Petronell] as he on account of the attacks by the Slavs was unable to stay in his earlier dwelling-places. The Emperor received him kindly – for the Capcan was a Christian named Theodor – listened to his entreaty, and let him with great gifts go back home.*

*Yet shortly after having gone home to his people, he died. Thereupon the Cagan sent one of his great ones, requesting the old (sign of) honour which the Cagan had always enjoyed among the Huns. The Emperor acceded to his wish and ordered that the Cagan according to the old use of the Huns should enjoy the supremacy over the whole area.*

Having stayed awhile in the Xazar capital, the 839 ‘Rōs can be counted upon to have charted the political map ahead: How best to cope with the Byzantines with a view to winning future status? The obvious way would be to try and capitalize on the type of successes already gained by the Xazar *qağān*. If the Xazar *qağān* could win both Byzantine and Frankish approval and patronage so easily, why should not the 839 newcomers give it a try too? Which is what they did. A spate of Muslim sources subsequently insist that the ruler of Russia is the *Ḥaqān-Rūs*.<sup>2</sup> In this they are not alone.

The result of, as we see it, a rather hastily improvised ploy is that the rulers of Russia long after styled themselves, among their other titles, *Chacanus*; a momentous souvenir from some shrewd celebrations by a little band of adventurers stopping by the Xazars on their way to the World, in early spring, one would think, 839 AD.

### 16.7. The Primogenitor Prince Rus

Above (in ch. 15.5) we saw Ps.-Symeon’s insistence: “‘*Rus, the famous Dromitai, are called after a certain mighty ‘Rōs...*” It is in the 13th c. Polish historian Boguchwał that we find such a ‘mighty ‘Rōs’, or rather Rus:<sup>3</sup>

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1. Rau 1961, I, 80-81 [Imperial] *Annales*, year 805.
  2. Another confirmation of sorts being found in the *Chronicon Salernitarum* sub anno 871, where the heads of the Avars, Ḥazars and Northmen (= Rus’) are styled *Chagān* according to Byzantine protocol, *MGH III*, 1839, 523: “*Chaganum vero non praelatum Avarum, non Gasanorum aut Nortmannorum nuncupari reperimus, neque principem Vulgarum, set regem vel dominum Vulgarum.*”
  3. Mošin 1931, 118 n. 5: *Ex hiis itaque Pannoniis tres fratres, filii Pan, principis Pannoniorum, nati fuere: quorum primogenitus Lech, alter Rus, tercius Czech nomina habuerunt.*



*And so from these Pannonians three brothers, sons of Pan, the Prince of Pannonia, were born. The first-born of them had the name of Lech, the second Rus, and the third Czech.*

One aim of this historian, being Polish, was clearly to exalt the forebear of the Poles as the first-born among the Slavonic ‘founding fathers’. Is this a sheer fantasy only? The Poles (the *Ljach*, *Lech*) and the Czechs did not come from the Balkans. And the Rus’? The sole possible historical explanation as the second brother goes, if there is any historico-geographical underpinning to it at all, is that Pannonia was indeed, in the 5th c., a haunt of the ‘first’ Rus (= the Reds), meaning the Eruls.

This legend made it to Russia: In the *Gustynskaja* Chronicle, we are introduced to “*the Prince Rus, the son of Lex*”.<sup>1</sup>

The legend may have made it all the way to the Arabs. Ad-Dimašqī writes:<sup>2</sup>

*Ar-Rūs are named after a town by the name of Rūsīya on the northern coast of the sea that has its name from them. Others believe that they are named after Rūs, the son of Turk, the son of Tawğ.*

The first proposition is backward indeed: That the Rus’ are named from a town called Rūsīya by the sea named from the Rus’! The historical reality that *may* underlie this strange assertion is the ancient one: The Rūs are named from ‘their’ onetime presence, as ‘the Reds’, in a town upon the Black Sea, in the Migration Age.

As for ‘the Prince of Rus’’, he is not merely a literary figure. Russian folk-tales know him too, or rather, they know the two *bogatyrs* (giants, fighters) Slavjan and Rus.<sup>3</sup>

In the latter case, though, we are probably in the presence of two eponymic constructs, with no pedigree from the Biblical ‘prince of ‘Ros’.

Late folklore materials may be a treacherous stick to lean on through the bogs. They should however not be disregarded.

## 16.8. Archon of ‘Rōs

The term *archon* ‘prince, leader’ may repay attention. A *Greek Lexicon of the Roman & Byzantine Periods* says squarely: “ruler, lord, prince, applied to Satan”.<sup>4</sup> Yet this foremost of the uses to which the word was put in Christian times is not exhaustive. The original meaning ‘ruler, commander’,<sup>5</sup> ‘chief, king’<sup>6</sup> was specialized into ‘archon of all the cosmos’, meaning Satan.

If this is the first denotation, the word also designates the following:

In the New Testament, three passages attest to the specialized meaning of ‘superior, president (of a synagogue)’.<sup>7</sup>

1. same, 119 n. 2.
2. Mehren 1877, 262, Seippel 1896, 105, Birkeland 1954, 117.
3. Karamzin 1817, I, notes 70, 91, Mošin 1931, 118-119.
4. Sophocles 1914, 259.
5. E.g. in Herodotus 5.33.
6. Revelation of St. John 16:11.
7. Matthew 9:18, Mark 5:22-43, Luke 13:10-17.

Third, it may mean ‘chief magistrate’.<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, it is used of the ‘Rōs leaders, wholly in keeping with Ezekiel 38-39. Thus, in Constantine Born-in-the-Purple:<sup>2</sup> “*The monoxyla [vessels] coming from Outer Russia to Constantinople are from Nemogard [= Novgorod – HS], where Spendosth-lavos sat, the son of Inger, the archon of ‘Rōs...*”

Likewise in John Scylitzes, in the reign of Nikiforos Focas (963-969) we explicitly meet *archonta* ‘Rousias, literally, “archon of the Reds”, meaning Svjatoslav (or in Greek, Spendosth-lavos).<sup>3</sup>

The words occurs in the female form too: To Constantine Born-in-the-Purple, Ol’ga is *ἀρχόντισσα* ‘Ρωσίας “archontess of Russia”; so are several lesser “archontesses of Russia”, alongside their ducal *archon* consorts.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the Russian leaders adopted the term themselves, as evidenced by the Greek inscriptions on the seals used by some of the tsars in Kiev; e.g. Mstislav Vsevolodovič on his great seal of state is *μέγας ἀρχων*.<sup>5</sup> And a seal from Tmurakan has the inscription *ΑΡΧΟΝΤΙΣΣΕΣ ΡΩΣΙΑΣ*.<sup>6</sup>

In one of the manuscripts to the work of John Scylitzes just mentioned, there is also an illustration to the passage on the aftermath to the 860 attack by the ‘Rōs on Constantinople. In the text, we read that, beaten back, the Russians send emissaries (*legati*) to request baptism. In the accompanying illustration, we see ‘the archon of the Russians’ receiving the Byzantine missionaries and hearing out their faith.



*The Archon of the ‘Rōs being instructed in Christianity.*<sup>7</sup>

1. Liddell/Scott 1948, I, 254.
2. Gorskij 1995, 50 misses the point, translating “*arxonta Rosii*” (sic).
3. Thurn 1973, 277 (= N. II Focas, 20). Overlooked by Solov’ev 1957.
4. Same, 137.
5. Janin 1970 (inaccessible to me), Bedjuškina 1995, 107-108.
6. in Theophanes Muzalon: Solov’ev 1957, 141, Bedjuškina 1995, 107.
7. Beylie 1902, 93.

Yet we must caution against jumping to conclusions. For sixth, the *archon* does crop up in other contexts as well; thus, in John Skylitzes once more: The Emperor Theofilos (829-842) faces the onslaught of the Saracens and their allies at Amorion; and among these allies we meet “‘the headman of headmen’ (archon ton archonton), who came to Dazimon and struck up an armed camp there”. He is Bagarat of Tarson.<sup>1</sup>

The same title is met with later too, e. g. on a Greek coin; in this case, struck by and for one Thathoul, *archon ton archonton*, who in 1101-1105 withstood the Frankish Crusaders down in Syria.<sup>2</sup> This Greek expression naturally recalls the Arabic *amir al-’umarā*, literally ‘the Prince of Princes’.

In 11th-13th c. Byzance, the *archontike dynasteia* and the *archontike prostasia* are terms referring to the oppression of the poor by the rich, and the *archons* are the unjust *honestiores* (sic), *potentiores*, *dynatoi*, circumventing the laws to abuse their clients, the *humiliores*, *tenuiores*, *adynatoi*.<sup>3</sup>

In vaticinations too, concerning the last days of Byzance and the world, the *archons* of Byzantine society play their negative rôle.<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, seventh, in e.g. Athens, as well as in Roman Palmyra, there is the public office of the archon;<sup>5</sup> whether the one in Palmyra was instituted under Jewish influence I do not know.

Common to all the above citings but the last is their negative colouring (from the viewpoint of the Byzantines). The Jewish synagogue leaders were of course anathema to the Orthodox; and the *archon* usage effectively suggests that they are in alliance with the Devil. The same may be the implication with the early 9th century *archón tón archontón* on the Muslim side.

Now the title *archon of the Rōs* was of course no explicitly apocalyptic term, quite quickly becoming *the* technical term for Russian rulers. But **why** did it become so, why was it chosen in the first place? The first Rhos, mentioned in the Bertinian Annals, were content to call their ‘prince’ by the title of *xagan*, that of e.g. the Xazar rulers, and definitely prestigious enough. This the 839 ‘tourists’ to Byzantium may well have taken so to speak out of the air, out of vanity, inspired by their trek through Xazar territory, in order to impress; yet that it was adopted by the subsequent rulers of Kiev we know. This title was in common use by the Greeks, for not only the Xazars but an array of easterly, generally Turkic, rulers. So why not simply stick to it, once (in 839) it had been officially introduced?

The answer to *that* question is the apocalyptic one.

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1. Thurn 1983, 108, 299 n. 75/1, cf *CMH IV*, 1, 611-612.

2. Cheynet 1990, 233-236, coin 234.

3. Saradi 1994.

4. e.g., in the Greek *Vision of Daniel*: Istrin 1897, 295-296, 316.

5. Teixidor 1984, 18, 48, 61-63 + n. 145, 99 (inscription): “*Des querelles sont surgi entre les marchands et les publicains, il a paru bon à la boulé des archontes actuels et à la décurie... et qu’il soit du devoir des archontes du moment, de la décurie...*”

## 16.9. Swedes or Danes, 839 AD?

An afterthought: Were these men visiting both Byzance and Ingelheim in 839 really Swedes? The Bertinian Annals say as much. Yet for once there is no need to take the Frankish Annals at face value. If admitting to be Danes or Norwegians ('*Nordmanni*'), these men would have been in for a rough time with the Franks. For in the early 9th c. Danes and 'Northmen' were the plague of the Franks. Of the Scandinavian peoples, only the Swedes were acceptably non-belligerent. Thus, 'admitting' to being "of [a] Swedish nationality" would be the only sensible way of getting oneself off the political hook.

Most probably our 839 Ladogans did not view themselves as Swedes. But explaining to the Franks that they were neither exclusively Swedes nor Danes nor Norwegians, but 'Northmen' all the same, may have been fraught with great difficulty – and some potential danger. All Scandinavians spoke 'the Danish tongue', as Norse was commonly called. Frankish interrogators would not have been able to hear any difference; let alone to find out what links the Ladogans might have with precisely the dreaded Danes.

The most dreaded of pirates a few years later was the pirate count Roric, Rorech (or in Russian, Rjurik) from Jutland, who is presently enjoying a revival of his candidacy for that historical rôle: master of Old Ladoga, first ruler of Russia.<sup>1</sup> Whether his men took part in the 839 journey, and whether this opened his and their eyes to the power and lucre to be had from control of Northern Russia, the Baltic and beyond (whence the attacks upon Frisia and France?), whether indeed he was subsequently treated to the duchy of Frisia by the Franks for being an old (839) acquaintance, and for suggesting a deal with the Franks on the Volga-Baltic slave trade, all this we elect to leave undiscussed.

Finally, may we suggest that the etymology of the Russian word **dan'** 'tribute' be looked into afresh? It has hitherto been unproblematically explained as a derivative of the verb *dat'* 'to give', which of course is what the subservient do with tribute. It has its parallels; thus, *tkan'* 'fabric, tissue', from *tkat'* 'weave'. Yet this is begging the semantic question: In a master-knave relationship, would the tribute reasonably be defined by the knave, or by the master, as a 'gift'? In Norse, which was the language of the Rus' Vikings, it was *skattr* – cf. Russian *skot* 'livestock' – or in the Danelaw of England, *dane-geldr*. The Icelandic-Norwegian tradition does not mention the latter even once. **If** however Rjurik was indeed Rorik of Juthland & Dorestad, then introduction of the specifically **Danish** term *danegeldr* makes sense. Its fitting so perfectly into Slavonic (Novgorod Slovene) onomastics would only facilitate and ensure its acception and acculturation in the Russian and neighbouring tongues.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Discussion in Old Ladoga with Drs. Lebedev & Kirpičnikov, July 1994.

2. Vasmer 1953, I: **dan'** – with parallel forms in Ukrainian, Belorussian, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian. Also, Ward G: "The English danegeld and the Russian Dan", *ASEER*, 1954, vol. 13, 300 (cited in Lovmjan'skij 1985, 91).

## 16.10. Bavarian Anonymous on Ruzzi

The geographical treatise *Descriptio civitatum et regionum...* by an anonymous Bavarian was earlier deemed to be from the mid-9th c.<sup>1</sup> It is now dated to the first quarter of that century, “before 821 AD”.<sup>2</sup> Despite the title, there is unfortunately no description, only a mention in passing of **Ruzzi** directly after *Caziri*, i.e. the Ḥazars.

As this geographer demonstrates knowledge only of peoples and places in Central and southeastern Europe, we share the opinion that “this people has to be sought on the frontier of the Eastern Slavs, some place to the north of the Black Sea”.<sup>3</sup>

In Austria, the name *Ruzaramarcha* (‘the Russian march’) is first mentioned in 868, and has been dated to as early as the mid-9th c. It has been taken to designate a place in the Enns forest where merchants from Russia congregated, and the name has been believed to be possibly very much earlier.<sup>4</sup> It does not sound German, nor Gothic or Latin, but strikingly Scandinavian (it could have been modern Norwegian and, more relevantly, is impeccably Norse: *Ruzar[a] +mark*).<sup>5</sup>

An ‘Erulian supposition’ is geographically not very farfetched, as what we today know as Hungary was, in the 5th c. AD, Herolia.

## 16.11. Slavonic Rusyj

What is the historical relationship between on the one hand Greek ‘**rousios** and Latin **russeus** ‘red’ and on the other Russian **rusyj** ‘blond’? Related forms in other Slav languages cover the colour range from ‘chestnut’, ‘light blond’ to ‘red, ruddy’.<sup>6</sup> From ‘our’ territories far up in the north, the following has been noted:<sup>7</sup>

“...The majority of Novgorodians had grey eyes and blond hair [*rusye volosy*], hence the most common combination in descriptions of their appearance was ‘of hair blond, of eyes grey’ [*volosom rus, oči sery*]... Moreover, for the colour of the hair, they utilize... a rather big number of composites when in need of defining hues, e.g. *temnorus, svetlorus, krasnorus, sprokrasen, pročermen*’ and so forth... It is not wholly clear what ‘of face *čer-men*’ [*licom čermen*] signifies...”

The root of the word *rusyj* is an Indo-European **\*rudh-** ‘red’:<sup>8</sup>

“The oldest appellations for the colour red based on the root **\*rudh-** have not disappeared, as a group of colour-names has been preserved in the Russian tongue of the present, designating diverse hues of red or reddish colouring... Some of them have estranged themselves to such a degree from their original meaning that they designate another colour – for instance **rusyj**.”

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1. Lowmianski 1952, 31-45; cf. Lovmjan’skij 1985, 122, 176.
  2. Pilar 1974, 205-282, Lovmjan’skij 1985, 277 n.
  3. Lovmjan’skij 1985, 176.
  4. Nazarenko 1982, 104-106.
  5. Heggstad 1963, 450 (*markamađr, mark-bygd, mark-land, Markir*), 549 (*ruzar*).
  6. Fasmer 1958, II, 551.
  7. Baxilina 1975, 71.
  8. same, 108-109.

In point of fact, the word **rusyj** preserved the meanings *čermen´* i.e. ‘red’ even in the late Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Yet **why** has this specific word come to actually ‘change colours’? (Despite the phrasing ‘for instance’ in the quotation above, it is the *sole* instance given.)

One perfectly sound explanation would be that this Slav word was influenced by the homophonic Greek. Surely the Slav words originally did signify ‘red’, as a number of them still do and as Russian *rusyj* long did in part as well; but that the relative fewness of really redhaired Novgorodians made for a semantical shift from ‘red, ruddy-blond’ to ‘blond’. We recall the square assertion: “*Gens quaedam est sub aquilonis parte constituta, quam a qualitate corporis Graeci vocamus Russos.*”

Finally, the written forms *Ruzara-* and *Ruzzi* above appear to reflect not the improbable (down south) *ruotsi*, nor of course the Greek ‘*rous-*’, but simply the Slavonic *-s-* (which is ‘hard’, unpalatalized/dental as in *rusyj*, close to the Arabic *-š-*) and not the *-s-* found in e.g. English ‘sea, see’. This means that the spelling with the *-z-* is to be understood as an attempt, although primitive, at rendering *-s-* of the Slavonic as something clearly apart from the Greek, or Latin, or Norse.

There have in fact been a number of attempts to explain the name of *Rus´* simply from what has been a major theme of the present study: ruddy-blondness,<sup>2</sup> of a long standing, from Germanic migration-age warriors onwards.

An analysis of this theory notes that it “hangs in the air” semantically (as blondness does not mark off one tribe of Slavs from another (sic) and as Russian knows no other ethnonym formed on colour); nevertheless it “appears superior” in that **Rus´** may be neatly juxtaposed to the term **Čern´** – literally, ‘Blackness’, but ‘also, the black, i.e. ordinary, people’, the population at large.<sup>3</sup>

This corresponds, we recall, to the colour ‘class distinction’ in the Norse *Rígsþula*, where the free are ruddy, the thralls are black. And we further note that the Russian rulers are sometimes termed ‘the light-coloured’, *svetlye knjaz´ja*.

Strictly philologically speaking, though, this does not land us with the name *Rus´*.

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1. Sreznevskij 1956, 198.

2. Černyx 1956, 100-101 (AI Sobolevskij’s analysis *Rus´* < *Rusyj* “deserves earnest consideration” in view of Ibn Faḍlān’s words on the redhaired Rūs); Smal-Stocky 1949, 5-18; same 1950, 87-106; Herne 1954 (not available to me); Paszkiewicz 1963, 119-120; Söderlind 1978, 40ff (sharply criticized by Schramm 1980, 151-152); Jonson 1996. First of all was von Herberstein, 1546: *a fusco colore*.

3. Schramm 1982, 30.

## 17. Far-Northern Confirmation: Adam of Bremen

*Then he sent Ansgar out on his behalf as an emissary to all the peoples of the Swedes, the Danes, the Slavs and all the other tribes in the reaches of the North, wherever they might dwell.*

Life of Ansgar (Buchner 1960, 47).

### 17.1. Bertinian Annals, 839<sup>1</sup>

*Envoys from the Greeks also came, sent by the Emperor Theophilus, namely Theodosius, bishop and metropolitan of Chalcedon, and the [imperial] swordbearer Theophanius, who together with the worthy gifts from the Emperor also delivered a letter...*

*Along with them he also sent some men who called themselves, i.e. the people to whom they belonged, Rhos. Their king, by the name of Chagan, had sent them to him out of friendship, so they said; and he in the said letter asked that they with the good permission and support of the [Frankish] Emperor be allowed to return home through his realm without danger, since the roads by which they had come to Constantinople had led through barbarian and most ferocious peoples and he did not want them to use these on the return journey lest they expose themselves to danger. Through a more thorough investigation of the reasons for their journey the Emperor found that they belonged to the people of the Swedes (eos gentis esse Sueonum); and as it seemed to him that they were spies in his and our realm rather than peace envoys, he decided to keep them by him until it could be ascertained for sure whether they had come in earnest purpose or not. This he at once informed Theophilus of in a letter through his envoys, and also that he out of friendship for him would gladly take care of (susceperit) these men, and leave them to go home with his support, as soon as they proved themselves dependable and an opportunity arose for returning to their fatherland. Otherwise, he would send them back to him together with envoys from us, in order that he himself decide what to do with suchlike.*

This is the text that, along with the *Tale of Bygone Years*, sparked the whole Normanist controversy.

Why bring it here? Because we may have the name of a man who was party to the investigations at the Frankish court by which these travellers were found to be Swedes – and who long after his and their death inspired some of the materials which we are going to inspect in Master Adam of Bremen, from c. 1060. And in Master Adam, there may even be an echo of the ‘Bertinian’ story itself.<sup>2</sup>

One question begged by the above text is: Who were the ‘*barbarian and most ferocious peoples*’ located as not merely an impediment on the way but as it were a veil hiding the whereabouts, the point of departure, and the identity of the Rhos? Perhaps we can somehow approach the identity of the Rhos by way of theirs?

True, on the north-south route across the steppes, there were peoples fierce and fearsome enough. Nevertheless, there is little reason to take the text at face value, meaning that the Rhos envoys simply were fearful of going back through the steppes of what is now the Ukraine.

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1. Rau 1961, II, 43-45 (German trsl.), 42-44 (Latin original).

2. Ch. 17.8 below.

The Frankish court at Ingelheim instead point a finger at the crux of the matter: These men were liable to be spies. Which indeed is what they certainly were; not for the those fiends the Danes, but simply for themselves: They naturally had an avid interest in charting prospective routes for trading in Slavs, i.e. *slaves*. Theirs was basically a reconnaissance mission.

## 17.2. Gog-Magog go North

In the Arabic Legend of Alexander, British Library ms. Add. 5928, which I believe to have been authored c. 685 AD, fol. 22a,<sup>1</sup> there is mention of the most ferocious of all peoples, Gog-Magog (Ya'ğūğ wa-Ma'ğūğ), as being found in the "direction of the Turks", in "the heart of the world's climes".

This points to the battles of the early Muslims against the Ḥazars down in the Caucasus, still in fresh memory at the time. And in early Arabic sources, the Ḥazars were indeed identified with the Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ. In the Geographical Encyclopaedia by Yaqūt this is summed up as follows:<sup>2</sup>

*The Ḥazars and their king are all of them Jews. The Slavs and all those who neighbour on them were subservient to him, he ordered them into slavery, and they submitted to him. Some of them came to [the conclusion] that the Ya'ğūğ and Ma'ğūğ are the Ḥazars.*

More importantly, this was the case in Byzantium too, as we have already seen. We recall the commentary on Matthew 24, 14 by Christianus Druthmar, c. 850, on "...Gog and Magog, who are nations of the Huns... called Xazars..."<sup>3</sup>

The acceptance by the Xazars of Judaism made them extra abhorrent in the eyes of Christians. The question is whether the Byzantines, when giving the 'Rōs their name, were influenced by a conviction that the Xazars (i.e. prior to their conversion to Judaism) were indeed Gog-Magog. The answer is a qualified yes: The Byzantines were probably quite aware that the Muslims of the Bağdād caliphate to some extent did see the Xazars as Gog-Magog, and speculated along the same lines themselves. Perhaps they were happy to have the Muslims kept in dread of a Doomsday onslaught from the North, while not believing too keenly in this for their own part.

For quite early in the 9th century AD, following increased contacts, it became impossible to uphold the Xazars = Gog-Magog view. The Greek Emperor gave munificent aid to the Xazars in building the Sarkel fortress for them, c. 835. To the Greeks at least, the Xazars could pass no longer for a Doomsday scare.

So where did the Gog-Magog go?

In the Ps.-Aethicus Istricus text, we are on the trail. One passage speaks of the "*Gogetas et Magogetas et Honargias*".<sup>4</sup> Here, around 770 AD then, the Hungarians are squarely lumped with the fiends. In other passages, the Gog and Magog are pent in behind the *ubera aquilonis*, literally the 'Breasts of the North', conceived of as the

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1. Stang (forthcoming).

2. Wüstenfeld 1896/1967, II, 440: *al-ḥazar*.

3. Marquart 1903, 282. Compare also Lambert li Tors, *Li Romans d'Alixandre*, in Anderson 1932, 98: "*Gos et Margos i viennent de la tiere des Turs...*"

4. Wuttke 1853, 28 (ch. 41).



mountainous locality where, between two cliffs, Alexander the Great constructed his Gate.<sup>1</sup>

It has been surmised, though without any reference to this text, that the “*barbarian and most ferocious peoples*” blocking the return trip for the 839 travellers were the Hungarians.<sup>2</sup> Quite probably, the Rhos visitors and their Byzantine hosts alike did have the Hungarians in mind. Yet our analysis is that blaming an unwillingness to return by the eastern way on them was all too plausible for the Greeks, all too facile for a party of scouts bent on using the western way home. The only shrewd thing to do for the Greeks was to keep all possibilities open, fearing the worst, hoping the best (that this new people could perhaps be played out against the Caliphate), treating them with extreme caution, like rotten eggs.

Now if the Byzantines were really afraid in 839 that they had representatives of the real thing on their hands, we should expect to find not merely the ‘Rōs but also the Gog-Magog folk transposed to the high North; which is what we do.

### 17.3. Neighbours of the ‘Rōs

As we have seen: Confirmation that the 842 caravan was indeed out a-searching for the Rūs (yet not finding them, for the simple reason that they were still holed up way north in Old Ladoga), is to be had from the Arabic sources. So is confirmation that, once the 839 ‘Rōs had been located, the Gog-Magog *topos* gravitated to them, northwards. For at least following the spectacular onslaught of the ‘Rōs against Constantinople itself in 860, the Muslims too knew where to locate them – plus the attendant Ya’ğūğ-Ma’ğūğ of Biblical and Qur’ānic fame.

The text by Ibn Ḥawqāl, from c. 980 AD, runs as follows:<sup>3</sup>

*...The honey, wax and furs they export, they themselves import from the reaches of ar-Rūs and Bulğār. It is the same with the ḥazz furs which are exported abroad; they are only found in those northern rivers which lie in the reaches of Bulğār, ar-Rūs and Kūyāba. Of the ḥazz furs found in al-Andalus some come from the rivers which are in the areas of aṣ-Ṣaqāliba... Yet most of these furs and the most exquisite of them, are found in the land of ar-Rūs. To them and their reaches they come down from the areas of Ya’ğūğ and Ma’ğūğ.(...)*

Penned around 980 AD, Ibn Ḥawqāl’s text here reflects earlier times. The Rūs in the source at his disposal were still thought of as far-northerly, and separate from Kiev (cf. the wording *ar-Rūs and Kuyābā*).

We have already noted the words of the Br. Library ms. add. 5928 and Ibn Faḍlān on the far-northern, indeed Scandinavian, whereabouts of the Ya’ğūğ and Ma’ğūğ. Of these two sources, the former has been dated to the 7th c., nearly a century before the start of the Viking age); and our second author has been found to have read up on the first one. Yet later on, of the Norsemen as Ya’ğūğ-Ma’ğūğ there is no trace. This

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1. same, 27 (ch. 39), 28-29 (ch. 41), 40 (ch. 60)

2. Vasiliev 1946, 11, 68: “These were doubtless the Magyar hordes... ..It was the Magyars who in 838-839 prevented the Russian envoys from returning home to Kiev by the same way by which they had come to Constantinople.” Also, Pritsak & Golb 1982.

3. Birkeland 1955, 49-50.

is all the more noteworthy in that Syriac Christian and Muslim views on these fiends were grounded in late 4th c. observations of precisely Scandinavians, viz. the Eruls pushing south from the Caucasus. Why then a change, and in what did it consist?

As in the testimony by Ibn Ḥawqāl above, the Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ are situated above" the northernmost Rūs, meaning clearly even farther to the north – yet south of the White Sea; for this is what is said in e.g. ad-Dimašqī, who describes the Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ in what we know as northern Russia, adding:<sup>1</sup>

*It is also said that behind them, upon the coast of the Enclosing Ocean, there is a band of warriors who are bullying them.*

According to Abū Ḥamīd al-Ġarnaṭī, who in 1135/36 visited Bulḡār on the Middle Volga:<sup>2</sup>

*Through Bulḡār the Two-Horned [= Alexander the Great – HS] went to Ya'ğūğ and Ma'ğūğ, according to what is said.*

Likewise, as late as in the mid-14th c., to the traveller Ibn Faḍlallāh al-'Umarī the Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ are clearly still around, only described as timorous (!), running away when people try to catch them. They inhabit the north Russian wildernesses – south of the blackish-sombre sea which we now know as the White:<sup>3</sup>

*Their nourishment consists in plants which they find in the nearby mountains. Yet in times of famine they turn into cannibals. The Two-horned passed by their territory without molesting them.*

Even in the *Tale of Bygone Years*, Gog-and-Magog crop up in the extreme north of Russia – in telltale wise: What is told is not the standard Christian story on their being shut in, but the **Islamic** version!<sup>4</sup>

Finally, in Adam of Bremen too do we find these very fiends:<sup>5</sup>

*Now I must describe Sveonia or Sweden briefly... In the east it reaches unto the Rhiphaean mountains, where widestretched wildernesses, amassed snows and human monsters render further penetration impossible. There dwell Amazons, dogheads... and those who eat human flesh for food, whom one therefore avoids and justifiedly passes over in silence. The Danish king, whom I again must mention, has told me that a people of puny stature is supposedly in the habit of coming out from the mountains down into the plain. Against their strength and fleetness the Swedes could hardly resist. 'And these people of unknown provenance', he said, 'very suddenly appear, sometimes every year, many times*

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1. My translation. Mehren 1874, 38: "On dit qu'au delà de leur frontière, sur les bords de l'Océan, il y a un peuple qui les domine et qui est en guerre avec eux..." Cf al-Marvazi: Minorsky 1942, 50.
  2. Bol'šakov 1971, 59.
  3. Lech 1974, 145.
  4. The entry told in the name of one Gjurjata Rogovič, sub anno 1096, is interpreted by the chronicler as referring to [Pseudo-]Methodios of Patara; yet his inference is mistaken. In this entry, the fiends trade and ask for iron through a hole in the Iron Gate. This recalls Islamic sources, including al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; for the sake of saving space, discussion of these and other materials is left to a forthcoming study. A literal reading of the 1096 entry: Bol'šakov 1971, 107.
  5. Buchner 1960, 468-469: Book IV, 25.

*every third year only. If one does not resist them with the utmost vigour, they depopulate the entire country; then they return home.'...*

Although the man-eaters are met with in classical antiquity as well, the '*Anthropophagi*' of the present text come across as, again, a theme transposed to Veps Biarmia from the Islamic inventory of horrors.

For these fearsome peoples descending from, evidently, the Urals have hitherto not been recognized for what they are: the Gog-Magog, or rather the puny variety of them, well known from our Islamic sources. Their smallness, their agility, and their eating human flesh, are all staple ingredients of the Muslim tradition.<sup>1</sup>

Islam has both dwarfs and ogres making up, between them, these twin monster peoples. So where are the ogres? In Norse tradition it is precisely in eastern Russia that they are found, in *Jötunheimr*, 'the Ogre Realm', the exploration of which will have to wait. As of now we make do with some of the opening words of Snorri's *Heimskringla*, in his *Ynglingasaga*, regarding 'Svithjóð the Great, or Cold', meaning Russia, and mentioning its mountains:

*There be dwarfs and ogres...*

What do these locations of Gog-Magog tell us? First of all, it must be noted that as to geography, but only geography, they are widely at variance with the standard Islamic version too, where this inseparable pair is placed in the far northeast of the old world, following the Syriac tradition; meaning in, or to the northeast of, present-day Mongolia. This is what we observed in the 842 caravan: first heading due north, or even northwest, yet failing its target (the recently reported ar-Rūs), it then veered eastwards – in the direction of Mongolia.

Not only is the change in ethnicity remarkable: from Norsemen, or Turks, to a people in the extreme north trading with ar-Rūs; so is the shift of geographical locus: from eastern Asia to 'Biarmia' and the White sea area. This kind of change does not simply 'occur'; it is the expression of a *development*.

With 'Rös the Biblically attendant Gog-and-Magog simply followed suit: If the former was pinpointed to the Old Ladoga region, then Gog-and-Magog would have to 'alight' in the vicinity. This is a Biblical 'must' and not a Qur'ānic one (the Qur'ān knows no 'prince of Rūs') – yet it is in the Arabic sources, reaching farther north and flowing more freely than the Byzantine ones, that we find this reflected.

This then is one reason, an initial one, for the transposition. The other reason, a cumulative one, resides in the commercial interests of the 'Biarmia' Veps, who gladly adopted and adapted the Qur'ānic gallery of monsters for their own, to ward off all comers – cf. Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ.

A third reason is the **wish** of Muslims for confirmation of their world view; meaning that just about any far-off people playing up to Muslim preconceived notions, such as the Veps in 'exploiting' Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ, would be sure of success.

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1. Discussion of this source and of modern recordings of the same Islamic theme in onetime Veps-populated Northern Russia right up until the 1970-ies must await a future publication.

## 17.4. Adam's Baltic Wonders

In Book IV of his *Episcopal History of the Hamburg Diocese*, Adam of Bremen says:<sup>1</sup>

16. ...Further in the interior are other isles, under the rule of the Swedes. The largest of them is called Kurland. It is 8 days long. Its extremely cruel people are avoided by everyone because of their excessive idolatrous cult. There is lots of gold there, and first-rate horses. All the houses are full of priests, augurers and sorcerers, who are clad in the way of monks....

17. I have received narratives of other islands in this Ocean too. A large one, no smaller than the one just mentioned, is Esthonia. Its inhabitants likewise do not as yet know the Christian God... This island is said to lie close to the Land of Women...

18. Of the islands near to the Slavs I have heard three mentioned as being remarkable... The third island, Samland, is contiguous with Russia and Poland ... Horse flesh serves them for food, horse milk and blood for drink, by which they allegedly get inebriated. The men are greenish, have ruddy faces and long hair. Moreover these people, inaccessible in the swamps, tolerate no master among themselves.

19. In this sea there are other islands too, all full of wild barbarians; for which reason the seafarers avoid them. Upon these coasts of the Baltic Sea the Amazons are supposed to dwell, today it is called 'the Land of Women'. It is related that they conceive by drinking water; others relate that they get with child by way of merchants in transit or by prisoners-of-war in their midst, or again by the help of other, wondrous beings, of which there are many in the vicinity, and this I believe the most. All their male children are born with the heads of dogs, all the female ones as the most beautiful girls.

Here one manuscript has a longish 'letter' from the Amazons to Alexander the Great, very similar to the one found in the Br. Library ms. Add. 5928, with the sole difference that the menfolk of the Amazons dwell beyond a river, as against Add. 5928 on their dwelling beyond the sea. Thereupon the main text continues:

...They live together as a collective, contemptuously dismissing cohabitation with men, whom they even chase off if some of them do draw near. The dog-heads have their heads upon their chests. In Russia they are often seen as prisoners of war. They bark forth the words. There also are found those who are called Alani or Albani, who name themselves Wizzi, extremely cruel all-eaters. They are born with grey hair. The writer Solinus mentions them. Dogs defend their country. When they commence fighting they arrange the dogs in battle order.

There also dwell the pale, greenish, tall men of gross build who are called Husos, and finally the man-eaters as well, who consume human flesh. Other monsters too are plentiful there, whom the mariners according to their own tales have often seen. Our people however do not believe in this.

20. About the Baltic or Barbaric Sea I may say that there is as far as I know no scholar besides the abovesaid Einhard who has mentioned it. It is however most probable that the ancient Romans designate it under such disparate names as the swamps of Scythia or of the Maeotis, or the deserts of the Getae, or the littoral of the Scythians.

For one thing, the originally South Caucasian Albani, traditionally represented as being born with white or grey hair, and with fierce dogs to defend them, are transposed

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1. Buchner 1960, 454-459: Book IV, 16-19.

into the *Wizzi*. There is a scholarly consensus that the latter are the Veps; one suggestion being that the form *Wizzi* was construed as meaning precisely ‘the Whites’. If so, there was more to it than merely a name. Up in the Veps ‘Biarman’ North, there is the White Sea; to the east, the big lake and attendant town both called Beloe Ozero, Beloozero, ‘the White Lake’; to the southeast, the Volga itself, derivable from the Veps word for ‘white’ (today *vouged*, as well as *valkeä*). And as for the west: In an Old Swedish text Lake Ladoga, which has its name from the Veps tongue and marks the western boundary of the Veps, is twice called ‘the White Lake’.<sup>1</sup>

### 17.5. *The Monks*

How now to make heads or tails of dogheads, greenish men, and Adam’s other monsters and wonders?

The first, inescapable conclusion is that we and Adam here are treated to the type of tall tales ever and everywhere connected with mariners; the second, that these *mirabilia* are not simply taken out of the air.

An interesting side observation is that in Adam (just like in the Ps.-Aethicus Istricus text), one and the same mythical topos crops up in several variants.

The first section above includes the hitherto unexplained story on the wild inhabitants as it were of Kurland (in southern Esthonia). ‘All’ are sorcerers. They are shunned by ‘all others’; yet at the same time, the next line goes on to say (left out above), ‘all the world’ gets its auguries from them.

Moreover, these sorcerers are clad like monks; implying that they are men only, living apart from women. Consequently, there cannot be doubt that their women are (the) Amazons. The latter indeed do not dwell far from Esthonia, we are told.

This section has been included in our present treatment in order to demonstrate both the longevity and the ‘historicity’ (local staying power) of the mesh of tales found in Adam. For it is in an edition of legends and fairy tales from precisely Kurland that we find a narrative on terrible maritime robbers once living in the Baltic, huge of bodily build, who were called **munkar**.<sup>2</sup> This Swedish term signifies precisely ‘monks’. Their specialty, according to the Kurland book cited here, is warlike assaults upon girls and young women...

A real-life existence of these clerics described by Adam, or of the ‘munkar’, has been discussed recently.<sup>3</sup> The possibility that a legend here met with, and came to be anchored in, an apposite local ‘addressee’ is not to be dismissed. On the contrary: Some local peg is a prerequisite if a legendary theme is to gravitate towards and inure itself into a given locality. Yet it is indissmissible to forget that we are indeed dealing with a legend – not with ‘only’ a reference to some historical fact, in this case possibly a Kurland one, quaintly couched.

Another variant of the same legendary topos is to be discerned in Adam’s words on the folk of Samlandia. The term **žmud’** in Russian designates either the inhabit-

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1. Mikkola 1906, 7, citing the *Gamla eller Erikskrönikan* from G. E. Klemming, Svenska medeltidens rimkrönikor, I, 51: **hwita träsk**.

2. Livl. Sagenbuch, no. 112, 254; Marquart 1913, 277 note.

3. Namsons 1984, 30-35.

ants of Samlandia, close to the Prussians, or ‘aggressors’; with the latter meaning quite fitting for describing the former, according to their neighbours (and Adam). The original meaning of this term, according to specialists, is ‘lowland’; an extremely miry locality is meant, as Adam underlines.

We recall that the Eruli were indeed defined as inhabitants of an extremely miry locality – *Eluri*. They furthermore appear to have had some reputation for sorcery, cf. what has been remarked on the *Haliurunnae* of Jordanes and the introduction by the Eruls of the runes.

The traditions adduced by Adam furthermore reflect the way of life traditionally ascribed to the Scythians. The paramount importance of horses to the ‘Samlandians’ is wholly at variance with the more or less impassable quagmires of the area (as described in Adam too); and the drinking of mares’ milk and eating of horse flesh is not known from the Baltic littoral, including Samlandia, but very well attested in the Scythians and Huns, as well as the ‘Goths’ (properly, the Getae),<sup>1</sup> in short the nomadic steppe peoples with whom the Eruli, with their basis in the ‘Maeotic swamps’, were associated.

### 17.6. From Red Men to Green

The word translating as ‘pale(-green)’, *cerulei*, commands special attention. The very context *homines cerulei, facie rubea, et criniti*, literally ‘pale(-green) men of ruddy face, and with long hair’, should alert us: If your face is ruddy, reddish, how can you be *pale*, and particularly *pale-green*, *greenish*?

This combination of logical inconsistency and apparent redundancy invites the inference that the original text has been misunderstood by Adam, and that it contained some word close to *cerulei* which left him guessing.<sup>2</sup> Just about the closest bid is *homines eruli*.

For the sake of completeness: even a certain **greenish** taint is wholly explicable. The word **flavus** translates as ‘yellow flaxen, gold-coloured’, and may by the 12th c. mean ‘golden-coloured’;<sup>3</sup> yet it can also designate ‘a greenish yellow’ (‘ein grünstichiges Gelb’), as is produced by the hawthorn sap, according to Pliny:<sup>4</sup> *capillum lycium suco flavum facit*.

We note in passing that the same *cerulei* is used by Adam in another context as well, when describing **Gronlandia**, Greenland, the name of which he imputes to the ‘pale-green’ appearance of its inhabitants, again *cerulei*. It has been noted that this usage always designates the natural colour (sic) of a man, and does not refer to body paint or e.g. tattoos.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Buchner 1960, 465, Adam’s Book IV, 23: “*The Göts are named the Getae by the Romans, of them Vergilius evidently says: ‘the wild Gelon, when he flees to Rhodop and to the waste land of the Getae, drinks soured milk mixed with the blood of horses.’ This the Göts and Samlanders are still said to do who, this much is sure, inebriate themselves on horses’ milk.*”
  2. In mediaeval Latin, classical words on **cae-** are habitually spelled **ce-**: Latham 1965, 62.
  3. Smith 1968, 276, Latham 1965, 193.
  4. Nat. Hist. XV, 87; XX, 221; XXIII, 67; XXVI, 164: Ploss 1959, 417.
  5. Lund 1978, 68 note 17.

The interpretation of *cerulei* as ‘pale-green’ is nevertheless too forced to be credible. For one thing, people were not green, nor even pale-green, be it on Greenland or in the above mythical context. For another, *caeruleus* does not signify any sort of ‘green’ applicable to the natural colour of human skin; the word instead means ‘azure, blue’, in speaking of the sky, or of the sea, ‘blue, dark-blue’, in speaking of eyes, or of woad; and it **may** also mean ‘blue-green’, ‘blue-black, leaden’ and hence ‘dark, dun, dusky’.<sup>1</sup>

We recall Tacitus’s words on the *truces et caerulei oculi, rutilae comae, magna corpora*. These words of course invite the conclusion that the *cerulei homines* of Adam are a learned *Verschlimmbesserung* of a passage not understood by him into something he did understand, viz. that great classic Tacitus.

Most significantly, the stressing of large bodily size as well as of a given (body) colouring, so characteristic of the Eruls is combined, in Adam’s narrative on the Baltic littoral, with their equally characteristic trait of not tolerating any ruler above them. Whether the localisation to Samlandia was prompted, in Adam’s source, by some memory that the Eruls had in fact dwelled upon the Baltic littoral before settling in the **Oium** and the Azov area, we cannot ascertain.

Who were the Samlandians (or *žmud’*) in ethnical terms? The Samlandians or Sembs properly speaking made up the main part of the ancient Prussians.<sup>2</sup> According to a specialist study, however, Vikings may be meant, of Swedish origin (from the first half of the 9th c.) and later on of Danish (from around 1000 AD).<sup>3</sup>

[This space deliberately left blank to ensure page-to-page correspondence with the uncorrected, printed version.]

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1. Smith 1968, 89.

2. Namsons 1984.

3. Mühlen 1975.

### 17.7. The Husos

The very same background as for the ‘Samlandians’ in Adam may be suspected for his so-called *Husos*, who in the Latin ought to ring a Classical bell:

*Ibi sunt homines pallidi, virides et macrobii, id est longi, quos appellant Husos; postremo illi, qui dicuntur Antropophagi.*

The ‘paleness’ of these people has led several scholars to see in this a reference to the Polovcy, literally ‘the pale ones’. This conclusion is however upon closer inspection unwarranted. The entire context in which Adam places his items is legendary. And in the sources at our disposal there is not a word on the Polovcy being overly long-limbed or tall, let alone *green*,<sup>1</sup> nor on their being neighbours of man-eaters.

The word *macrobii* has proved a headache not only to Adam (who may have felt the need to pass on the gloss *id est longi*) but also to subsequent scholars (who have seen fit to tone it down).<sup>2</sup> The name (signifying ‘long-lived’) originates with Pliny the Elder.<sup>3</sup> The way it occurs demonstrates that Adam here was belabouring a written source. For the *id est longi* gloss on the *Macrobiani* occurs long before Adam, in the *Etymologiae* of Isidor, Bishop of Sevilla. And what it denotes, in Isidor as in Adam, is ‘gross as to limbs’ – the stereotype used about the *Hrws*/‘*rous*/[‘]Eruls.

The term *Husos* has hitherto remained unexplained. This is really quite surprising, as a solution suggests itself most naturally: First, the information given by Adam is from Northern Russia, or the areas to the east of the Baltic. Second, what is more natural than seeking the origin of the term in East Slavonic, i. e. Russian, which the northern tribes used among themselves as a lingua franca according to Ibrāhīm b. Ya‘qūb?

The word *xusa* signifies ‘robbery, robbing’ and is ‘only Russian Church Slavonic’, whereas *xusar’* is Old Russian for ‘sea pirate’. In late Norse we find the possibly related *kussari* ‘sea pirate’; the ultimate root of which rather, however, is Latin *cur-sarius*. Adam interestingly does not use the Latin form, but the newfangled *Husos*. The closest we get initially is Russian *xusari* (and not the Norse *kussari*). Whence in turn this Russian term? Not from the mediaeval Greek *hoursarios* (from the Latin *cur-sarius* above); but as has been long since established, from *housarios/housiarios*, a Byzantine Greek derivative of *housia* ‘ambush’, from the verb *housou* ‘to ambush’.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Lecouteux 1982, I, 33, 83; Mason 1990, 89: “In French medieval literature, for instance, giants appear whose skin is black, while Adam of Bremen refers to a people with a green skin.”
  2. e.g. Buchner 1960: *hochwüchsige, lange Menschen*.
  3. Mason 1990, 79-80.
  4. Grégoire 1938, 279-280.



This would seem to leave us with more questions than answers – till an answer turns up too: The description of the Husos as we have seen evokes a picture of the Eruls – who indeed assailed Constantinople as ‘sea pirates’ in the 3rd c. AD. And it is here, in their time and clime, that we find the origin of *xusa* (or nasalized, *xqsa*) and its derivatives: Gothic *hansa* ‘gang, multitude’.<sup>1</sup>

A ‘gang’, or ‘robbery’, is still a far semantic cry from the masculine plural of the *Husos*. It does however transpire that we do have one mention of the *Husos* as such, in the impeccable form *Xousy*. This is in the Old Slavonic translation of the Greek Chronicle by Georgij Amartol, also known as Georgij Mnix ‘the Monk’.<sup>2</sup>

.a[.]. Иоуня же м[еся]ца. III день. Дѣ индикъ приплоу Роусь на Константинъ градъ лодиами тысящъ .I[.], иже и скеди гл[аголя]емъ, о[т] рода Вряжеска соущимъ. послан же на ня въ трыре[мах], рекше шляди, дромоны... еи се Роусь хоусы послаша въ Виниискыа, яко да пищоу имъ и прочее принесоу[т]. приключися сеи хоусе Барда Фока, зле сиа приложи, победивъ исече я.

This clearly deals with the 860 attack on Constantinople. In brief, having been beaten off, the Rus’ send their *Husos* to Barda Foka to establish peace. This leaves us with a novel interpretation of the word: Not ‘robbers’, but something in the way of, or functioning as, ‘envoys’.

Now envoys is precisely what the 839 ‘Rhos’ claimed to be. If the otherwise unknown word *Husos* was used for the envoys of the 860 attackers, there is reason to believe that it, as a ‘technical term’, was revived in 839, to designate a motley band of Norse newcomers whom the Byzantines could explain only in terms of a long-dormant ‘Gothic’ past.

The next question is: The Husos dwell ‘there’, Adam states, where we find the Wizzi and the dogheads, meaning somewhere near Old Ladoga and the Veps. By which written source has Adam come to know about ‘latterday Eruls’ denized in the neighbourhood of Old Ladoga and – possibly – associated with Constantinople?

## 17.8. Ansgar

The explanation is, in a word: Ansgar.

Peaceful visits by Swedes to the Frankish realm are attested in that favourite source of Adam, the *Vita* of Ansgar. Here a Swedish oldster speaks up in favour of the non-violability of a Christian prelate with i.a. the following words:

*Earlier our people used to travel to Dorestad and of their own accord confess this sort of faith on the grounds that it seemed useful to them. Now on the way thither many perils however interpose themselves. Because of piratical attacks travelling there has become dangerous to us..*

Here attacks by mainly Danish pirates are meant. Towards Swedish visitors from either Birka or Old Ladoga the Franks most probably showed themselves benevolent.

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1. Vasmer 1953, III, 279.

2. Istrin 1920-22, II, 567.

In his capacity as expert on the Scandinavian heathens, St. Ansgar was surely present in Ingelheim at the interrogation of the Rhos ‘envoys’ mentioned in the 839 Bertinian annals. Here the term **Husos** may have been coined, as a sort of ‘Franglais’ mix of the Greek used by the emperor Theophilus’ envoys and the Latin employed by Ansgar himself.

In sum, what we are in the presence of here is what has come down to posterity from the interrogation of the Rhos ‘envoys’ at Ingelheim, 839-840, as written down by Ansgar.

Lastly, the *Husos* or *xusari* must be viewed in another Frankish context too: Not merely that of the Ingelheim interrogation, but also that of Frankish historiography at large. The term *Hoseri* crops up in the Frankish chronicles of the 9th c. and later, covering Scandinavian Vikings visiting the Northern coasts of the Frankish realm with their raids in precisely the 840-ies.<sup>1</sup>

### *17.9. A Neologism Introduced by Some Greeks Calling on Ingelheim?*

Be that as it may, the overriding conclusion is that here, in this text by Adam of Bremen, we are witness to a transfer of literary themes, across hundreds of kilometres and hundreds of years. How did this come about? It is tempting to think that the 839 Rhos interrogated at Ingelheim, came up with all these stories connected with the Eruls themselves, inspired by the previous interrogation they had gone through in Byzantium.

This is on the face of it most improbable, the 839 travellers hardly being overly erudite (and the transfer is a literary, highly erudite one). More plausibly then, St. Ansgar, who either conducted parts of the interrogation process himself, or at least was well informed as to the visit by the Rhos to Ingelheim, is the one to provide the explanation. Yet how could *he* have come up with all the stuff on the Eruls on his own? And if he did, how come he garbled it? For garbled and repetitive it is.

The logical upshot is: The Rhos, or rather their ambassadorial Greek co-travellers brought along such additional materials from Constantinople to Ingelheim as the Byzantine chancellors had found to be relevant. They were *literary* quotations; yet they came out more or less wrongly because of the responses coming out of the mouths of the visitors when asked for additional, filling-in information (e.g. *caerulei*, transposed from the colour of the **eyes** of the Germanic Erul pirates to that of the **body** of the 9th century Husos pirates).

The crowning confirmation of this we find in the literally concluding part of the above quotation from Adam: “*By the ancient Roman authors*” the Baltic was called “*the swamps of Scythia or of the Maeotis, or the deserts of the Getae, or the littoral of the Scythians*”.

This suffices as a low-voiced, yet fitting, acknowledgment by Master Adam of the background to so many of his allegedly far-northern, Baltic, wonders.

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1. Pertz II, 301 n. 1, 303.

## 17.10. The 839 Visitors

One last wonder our Adam maybe will treat us to. The 839 Rhos callers on Byzantium and Ingelheim have generally been thought of as attested to only in the Bertinian Annals. We have however espied some traces of them down south, in the Arabic sources at our disposal. What about up north?<sup>1</sup>

*Beyond, the Swedes rule over great reaches all the way to the Land of Women. East of this dwell the Wizzi, Mirri, Lami, Scuti and Turci, all the way to Russia. And farther on this bay of the Ocean finds its end. The south side of the sea thus belongs to the Slavs, while the north side belongs to the Swedes.*

*There are even locally knowledgeable people who assert that there have been some people who from Sweden have managed to travel over land all the way to Greece. Yet the Barbarian peoples who are in between impede this travel, and for this reason they try this dangerous feat by ships.*

The peoples enumerated have been translated as "... die Wes, Merja, Hämen, Tschuden und Turk," – the latter (*Turci*) being identified with Turku in Finland.<sup>2</sup> This is untenable. The *Mirri* are indeed the Merja, whereas the *Scuti* and *Turci* must be understood as the Scythians and the Turks.

Really intriguing is the second paragraph: 'Some people from Sweden' have made it all the way to, evidently, Constantinople. That they have 'managed to travel over land' does not necessarily mean by horses; on the contrary, this would be much too dangerous, what with the Barbarian peoples lying in wait on the way. Hence, the last sentence should plausibly be understood as relating to the mode of travel once used by these adventurers: They went by boat. This was the only sensible, relatively safe and swift way to 'travel over land', using the great rivers flowing southwards.

By Adam's time at least, this was no feat of intrepidity. Russians did it all the time. Yet Master Adam did not speak much with Russians of his day. His informants, so he says, are people experienced in travelling 'locally', meaning, one would think, in the Baltic; meaning in turn that this is a tale told there.

Now the reason for such a story to captivate the hearts originally would not just be that somebody made it to Greece. Rather, something more momentous would be expected, concerning either the dramatic nature of the travelogue, or the results or the status of the travellers to which this event may have led.

There are no better candidates than one group of travellers: They who once went over land down the rivers by boat, all the way to Greece. They who, being barred by Barbarians from returning the same way, probably passed through Hamburg in 840, before completing their incredible (to contemporaries) trek around the Continent.

We note also that the victims of the Ya'ğūğ-Ma'ğūğ fiends in subchapter 18.3 above were defined as the *Swedes* – whereas clearly *Russia* is meant. This lends itself to but one interpretation: This harks back to the age when the *Rhos* were identifiable with a certain *gens [esse] Sueonum*, from Old Ladoga, with the forests and mountains in the hinterland full of scary monsters, some puny, some huge of build.

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1. Book IV, 14: Buchner 1960, 452-453.

2. same, 453.

From the hoards of Islamic coins in the North Russian forest belt we know that the Fenno-Baltic and Norse traders (and raiders) up here were in close contact with Muslims, primarily along the Volga-to-Baltic waterway. If we are right in our view that Master Adam's above materials hark back to Ansgar – as these words indicate – then another thing they indicate is that the 839 Ladogan callers on Byzantium and Ingelheim were well versed already in 'relevant' Islamic conceptions.

In the *Tale of Bygone Years* too, there is I believe a 'hidden', implicit reference to the trek of the 839 travellers, plus their very many successors: the description, and the repeated mention, of the '*road from the Varangians to the Greeks*'. There is little reason to dwell on this transit route in the way that is done, were it not for its being historically constitutive of the Russian state.

## 18. Far-Northern Confirmation – Saxo & Snorri

*Even less clear is the meaning of the term  
Rus'...*  
Cambridge Encyclopedia of Russia, 1994, 70.

### 18.1. Saxo's Varangian Tales

To clinch the argument there is also Saxo the Grammarian. In this comparatively late author (c. 1200), there are copious materials reflecting tales told of – and in – the East of Europe, among 'Varangians' visiting or serving in Russia and Byzantium. This is demonstrated in no mean part by the constant focusing on individual Norse warrior-heroes fighting it out (victoriously, of course) with Russians, Huns, Slavs, etc.; and by the rather coarse and crude nature of the stories told, e.g. on Óðinn – who, along with the other gods, has his domicile in Byzantium.<sup>1</sup>

Why, modern scholars have asked, were Óðinn & co. centred in Byzance?<sup>2</sup> The answer is: Because the Eruls once were centred here – and the Varangian guard knew that they in their turn were, chronologically speaking, 'followers' of the Eruls; the Varangians also reckoned themselves as Óðinn's followers, until christened, and probably long after too.

As demonstrated by Stender-Petersen (1953), mainly with recourse to Snorri, many of the stories told by Varangians in Russia, or upon their return to Scandinavia, trace their origins to legends current in Byzantium. The same is the case with materials utilized by Saxo, e.g. the tale about Hadding using birds with burning faggots to fire a city under siege; and especially so concerning the mythic king Frode, or Fróði (literally, 'the Sage'): Frode using wooden effigies to fool his foes, Frode diverting a river so as to deprive a besieged city of water, Frode pretending to be dead, or masquerading as a woman, in order to enter a hostile city. Some anecdotes reflect the Alexander legend: Frode announcing to a vanquished people (the Slavs!) that all thieves and murderers are to step forward, so that they may be placed in an exalted position – and promptly hanging them high in the gallows.<sup>3</sup>

### 18.2. Saxo's Ruthenians

Of particular interest in our context are Saxo's materials on Huns, 'Rut[h]enians'/Russians, and 'Hellespontians'. Peculiar to Saxo is his use of, on the one hand, the term 'Slavs', on the other hand 'Ruthenians', the latter term being associated with 'Russia'. In Book V (Frode III), The Danish king Frode slights the king of the Huns by rejecting his daughter, calling her a whore,<sup>4</sup> whereupon:<sup>5</sup>

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1. Saxo Book I, 42: Horn 1985, I, 18.
  2. Saxestudier, Cph. 1982.
  3. Cf. Pseudo-Callisthenes and e.g. Br. Library ms Add 5928 fol. 38 a-b, on Alexander outwitting Darius' murderers.
  4. same, I, 156.
  5. Horn 1985, I, 181.

*...The king of the Huns made a compact with Olimar, the king of the Eastern [sea-]route, and over a span of two years he raised an army against the Danes. Frode likewise collected an army, consisting not only of his own countrymen but also of Northmen and Slavs. When Erik, whom he had dispatched for spying on the enemy army, not far from Russia encountered Olimar, who had been set up as commander over the fleet, while the Hun king led the land army, he addressed him thus:*

*'Say, what signify/  
All the row-boats?!  
Sea-war muster,/  
O Olimar, king?' (...)*

The use of *rowing-boats* for war of course bespeaks an age prior to that of the Vikings as we know them; sails being perfected by the time of the Oseberg ship, in the first half of the 9th century.

Now Frode first subjects “the islands lying between Denmark and the Eastern [sea]way”, and then, having sailed on, comes across and attacks “*some ships of the Ruthenian fleet*”. Saxo continues:<sup>1</sup>

*Thereafter they sailed against Olimar's fleet, which because of the tardiness entailed by the great number of vessels in his fleet preferred to wait for the foe rather than attack him. For the ships of the Ruthenians were cumbersome and because of their size difficult to row. Yet the great multitude of his men stood him in no good stead, as the Ruthenians had their strength in their exceptional number rather than in courage, and the little party of stalwart Danes won over them...*

*Now king Frode had all the peoples he had subdued congregate and enstated as a law that any married man who had been killed in that war was to be buried in a tumulus along with his horse and all his arms... A [sea] commander's body was to be burned on a pyre erected upon his own ship. Every earl or king who had fallen was to be burned upon his own vessel. He gave such detailed instructions as to the burial of the fallen in order to avoid that they were inhumed without differentiation.*

*All the kings of the Ruthenians had now fallen, with the exception of Olimar and Dag. He also ordained that the Ruthenians were to wage war in the same wise as the Danes...*

After this, Frode marches against the Hun army – yet follows the advice that, instead of joining battle, he was to fall back and let the Huns perish “*on account of their very multitude*”:<sup>2</sup>

*...The Huns advanced through roadless deserts and wasteland where nourishment was nowhere to be found. General famine was imminent, for the region was uninhabited and swampy, and there was no way out to be found for reducing their need. When at last they had slaughtered and devoured their beasts of burden, so that they possessed nothing either for riding or for eating, they spread out, yet their roaming about turned out to be as harmful to them as the very famine. They spared neither horses nor asses, nay, they did not even shy away from carrion or the vilest things. Finally they did not even spare the dogs. Nothing was so revolting that they did not make do with it when at the extreme limit of life. For nothing is too vile when one is in the utmost need...*

*Then a general epidemic struck the already famished people...*

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1. same, I, 183-184.

2. same, I, 185.

Here is a reference to the abominable eating practices which served as a main reason for Alexander to exclude the peoples of Gog/Magog from the oicumene, according to Syriac and later on Muslim sources.<sup>1</sup>

Frode when going east to do battle with the Huns, encounters vessels from the 'Ruthenian' fleet (meaning allies of the Huns, whereas the Slavs are said to be subservient to Frode).

In later parts of Saxo we meet not only Vikings but also 'Amazons'; thus, Book VII ('Sigar'), on the Danish king Sigar's son Alf, who is in love with princess Alvilde (properly Alfhild) of Gautland in Sweden; she however initially spurns him, turning into an Amazon Viking leader herself:<sup>2</sup>

*Alf, who surpassed the others in valour and handsomeness, went Viking. His hair, which was very fair, was radiant with such beauty that it gleamed like silver...*

Alvilde felt contempt for the Danish youth, changed her women's clothing with male apparel and, from an extraordinarily bashful virgin, turned into a gruesome Viking. Having taken a goodly number of maidens who were of the same mind as she into her service, she by chance arrived in a locality where Vikings were mourning the loss of their chieftain, who had fallen in battle. On account of her beauty they made her their chieftain, and she performed deeds far surpassing what could be expected of a woman's valour....

The above of course is reminiscent of the sources from late classical antiquity, on Amazons and on 'blond-fiery' hair alike ("very fair", "gleaming like silver").

In the same Book VII, the Danish prince Halfdan confronts Ruthenians:<sup>3</sup>

*In those days a Ruthenian Viking by the name of Red harried our fatherland shamefully with plundering and cruelty. He was so rapacious that, whereas others could not get themselves to plunder their prisoners to the very skin, he felt it not inappropriate to rid them even of the apparel covering those parts of the body which modesty dictates to be hidden. Therefore we still have the habit of using the word 'Red Plunder' to denote a very brutal and inhumane robbery.*

*When he [Halfdan] heard that a war was raging between the Swedish king Alver and the Ruthenians, he at once went to Russia, offered the common man there his assistance, and was received by all with the greatest honour...*

Are the 'Ruthenians' simply an anachronism for 'Russians' in a Viking-Age or later sense? No: With the above events we are in the age of the Huns and the Eruls. 'Rutheni' is of course in itself an anachronism; it originally referred to a people in Gallia Aquitania, the Ruteni (living in and around Rodez), mentioned by Caesar (51 BC),<sup>4</sup> Pliny (79 AD),<sup>5</sup> and the poet Annaeus Lucanus (65 AD).<sup>6</sup>

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1. on the *topos* from Pomponius Mela, see above.
  2. Horn, I, 276-277, plus 278-279: general discourse on Danish (sic!) maidens devoted to warfare (= Amazons).
  3. same, I, 290-291. Cf Olaus Magnus quote in chapter 6.9. above.
  4. De bello gallico I, 45, ed. M Hadas, N. York 1957, 34.
  5. Natural History, ed. EH Warmington 1969, II, 202-203 (Liber IV, xix, §109).
  6. Cf also: Lexikon der alten Welt, Zürich/Stuttgart 1965, 2679; CT Lewis & C Short, A Latin Dictionary, Oxford 1975 1608: 'Ruteni (Ruth-)'.

So why call a Migration Age people – in this case evidently the Eruls – Rut[h]eni-ans? Saxo is ever set on proving his erudition. Yet what led him to choose precisely *this* anachronism?

The natural guess is: an association with *rutilus* ‘of a warm or glowing red colour, ruddy (inclining to gold or orange) ... of hair, esp. among Germanic races’, and associated words (*rutilans*, etc.)<sup>1</sup> Yet what made for this association? It turns out that Saxo did indeed have his grounds. There is nothing of interest in Caesar or Pliny. Lucanus is the only one to characterize the Rut[h]eni; which he however does in a to us most relevant way:<sup>2</sup>

*When Caesar saw that his soldiers greeted the war so willingly and that Fate thus decreed, he did not wish to stand in the way of Fortune for one single moment, and hence called upon the cohorts spread about across the land of Gallia that they from all sides march against Rome. (...) The blond Rutenians were freed from a long occupation.*

The word used, **flavus**, means ‘golden yellow, reddish yellow, flaxen-hued’,<sup>3</sup> as in the expression in Seneca:<sup>4</sup> *cur iracundissimi sint flavi rubentesque*. Its use is “mostly poetical”.<sup>5</sup>

From this we are entitled to conclude: Making himself learnedly costly, playing peekaboo with posterity, Saxo by speaking of the *Ruteni* has the *Russi* = ‘ruddy-blonds’ of the Migration Age in mind.

### 18.3. Saxo’s *Rus[i]lla*

In Saxo, we three times encounter a certain ‘Norwegian warrior maiden’ named *Rusla* or *Rusila*. She also crops up in Olaus Magnus. As noted by the editor-commentator of the latter:<sup>6</sup> “*Rusila*, the red maiden, probably reflects an historical personality known from the 10th c. Irish annals.” The argument runs:<sup>7</sup>

“Il est remarquable qu’une flotte scandinave qui vient en Irlande au milieu du 10.e siècle, est commandé par Inghen Ruaidh, patois gaélique qui signifie ‘la fille rouge’ ou ‘la fille au cheveux rouges’; il est relaté dans la même chronique que les deux fils de ‘la fille rouge’ sont morts dans le combat.

L’identité de ces deux personnages...n’est pas invraisemblable. Saxo l’appelle en effet *Rusla virgo* ou *Rusila virgo* et dans le latin du moyen âge *russulus* veut dire rougeâtre, *russeolus* tirant sur le rouge, et *rutilus*, rouge.”

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1. Glare 1982, 1671-1672, cf. Lewis/Short 1975, 1608.
  2. Lucanus, *Bellum Civile*, ed. W Ehlers, Munich 1973, 30-31: “Caesar ut acceptum tam pro-milite bellum fataque ferre videt, ne quo languore moretur Fortunam, sparsas per Gallica rura cohortes evocat et Romam motis petit undique signis.(...) solvuntur flavi longa statione Ruteni.”
  3. Lewis/Short 1975, 758, cf. Glare 1982, 711: ‘having the hair (or beard) yellow, fairhaired, blond’.
  4. *Dialogues* 4,19.5.
  5. Lewis/Short 1975, 758.
  6. Granquist 1976, I, 403.
  7. Steenstrup 1880, 25-26, cf. Herrmann 1901, I, 504.



The name Rusila is most intriguing. In Fenno-Baltic, the suffix **-ila** occurs, or rather (in Finnish) **-ilä**. Yet there is nothing to suggest that Rusila was a Finn, and there are several arguments suggesting that she was not (i.a. express identification of her as Norwegian).

Among the Indo-European languages, the suffix **-ila** in names is met with in the Gothic tongue, where, it is characteristic of men's names up to c. 500 AD, and most popular too, cf. Attila, Ansila Totila, Rugila, Wulfila, Unila, etc.

Later, it is met with in Old Norse, as a suffix to male and female nouns alike (of 'strong' declension). We may call attention to the self-appellation **Erila(R)** among the Eruls (or their 'copycats' back in Scandinavia), and also to two catholici of as it would appear Erul origin – Vasila and Herila.<sup>1</sup>

This primarily male suffix is attested for a woman too, a Gothic maiden warrior taken prisoner by the Romans – Hunila. Her name, or is it nickname? – "little Hun", indicates that she was indeed considered something of an Amazon.



*Rusila & Co., in Olaus Magnus, c. 1555.*

We are apparently in the presence of two Amazons of very different ages – Hunila and Rusila (we consider Rusla a variant reading). And Saxo's chronologically wide use of the term *Viking*, comprising as it does migration-age warriors too, opens for the eventuality that **Rusila** in fact – with her otherwise incongruously Latinized pidgin name – is a part of the migration-age Erul-and-Amazons heritage.

#### *18.4. Saxo's Hellespontians*

There certainly is an association of *Rut[h]eni* with *Hellespontii*, as well as with 'Huns', in Saxo. First, the Norse king Hadding is said to have warred with 'king

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1. Schmidt 1969, 551, versus Höfler 1971, 150 n. 112.

Handvan of the Hellespont', laying siege to his capital Dunaborg (i.e., literally, 'the Stronghold on the Don', a far geographical cry from the Hellespont of Byzantium).<sup>1</sup>

Even more indicative of who these 'Hellespontians' are is the story on them and Jarmerik, i.e. Jörmunrek/Ermanaric, showing that the tales of Sunilda/ Svanhildr were alive in the milieu from which Saxo got his inspiration; of Saxo's story, which is quite detailed, we give only the 'Hellespontian' part:<sup>2</sup>

*Having thus set his things in order at home, he again turned his attention to foreign lands. He once more took up on sailing, and was quick to join sea battle with four Hellespontian brothers, old veteran Vikings, whom he met out at sea. Having battled them for three days, he suspended the fray on condition that he have their sister and half of all the taxes and tribute they had exacted from those whom they had subdued.*

*Thereupon Bikke, a son of the Livlandian king, came to Jarmeric after having run off from the captivity which the said brothers had held him in... He was taken up friendly by Jarmeric and soon achieved a decisive say at all his secret counsels. Noticing that he in all matters was able to get the king to do as he said, he lured him, when he asked his advice, to the foulest things and made him commit crimes and atrocities, and thus he strove slyly to harm the king under the guise of being a loyal servant...*

*Then the Hellespontian brothers came with their sister, in order that he, as agreed upon, could wed her. When this had been celebrated, he once more upon the goading of Bikke went to Germany, caught his sister's sons in a battle and had no scruples about hanging them. He thereupon convened the nobles of the realm under the pretext of giving a banquet for them, and had them slain in like wise.*

*The king charged his son Broder, born to him in a prior marriage, to watch over his stepmother. This commission he discharged with the utmost earnestness and conscientiousness, yet Bikke accused him by his father of having fornicated with her, and so to make it look as if this was not a false charge he bribed people to give false witness...*

*The king... ordered the Queen bound to the ground with the strongest of ropes to have her trodden to death by horses. According to what is said, she was so beautiful that even the horses were loath to trample so delicate limbs with their filthy hooves. It occurred to the king that this must be a testimony to the innocence of his wife; and seized by rue over his delusion he hastened to set the falsely accused loose. Yet Bikke was hastily on the spot, saying that when she lay supine she frightened the horses with her terrible galdr-song; they could only trample her underfoot when she lay with her face down. For he knew full well that her beauty was her redemption. After the Queen had been laid the way he said, the flock of horses were driven forth and set their many hooves deep in her body, and thus Svanhild died.*

*...When Broder had been saved from death, Bikke got afraid that he would be punished for his accusation, and he therefore hastened to the Hellespontian brothers and informed them that the king had subjected Svanhild to a base death. When they set sail in order to avenge their sister, he returned to Jarmeric and told him that the Hellespontians were set on making war on him. The king opined that it was safer to fight behind walls than out in the open, and retired into the fortification he had built...*

*Now it so happened that the Hellespontians, when about to partition out the booty they had taken, killed a large part of their own men, whom they accused of having committed embezzlement. As they in the course of this internecine strife had felled so many of their*

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1. Horn (Book 1, 'Hading'), 1985, 18-19. Vasiliev 1946, 27-28 locates the Hellespontians "in the North, in Livonia, with their chief town of Dunaborg".
  2. same, I (Book VIII, 'Budle & Jarmeric'), 329-332.

warriors, they believed it would be above their strength to take the fortification; and therefore they sought the assistance of a sorceress by the name of Gudrún. She saw to it that the fighting men of the king were suddenly stricken by blindness and started fighting each other. When the Hellespontians saw this, they charged forth and occupied the outer approaches to the gates. Thereafter they uprooted the wooden supporting pillars and broke into the house, where they slew the blinded throngs of the enemy. During this fray Óðinn came and threw himself into the midst of the fighting men where the hustle was at its worst, and gave back to the Danes, whom he had ever cherished with fatherly love, the sight which sorcery had bereft them of; and he moreover instructed them, even though the Hellespontians used to harden their bodies against weapons by *galdr*-songs, on how to slay them by stoning them. In this way both armies annihilated each other. Jarmeric lost both legs and arms, and the delimbed body rolled about among the corpses.

After him Broder became king, for which he was but little fit.

Subsequently, in Book IX, the Norse hero Regner is said to have warred with the Hellespontians and their king, Dian. The latter is killed, and his two sons, called Dian and Daxon and “*married to the daughters of the Ruthenian king, got their father-in-law to assist them with fighting men and set about to avenge their father with the greatest alacrity*”. The multitude of the forces arrayed against Regner is daunting; yet he throws them into defeat by the ruse of having horses fashioned out of copper, mounting them on rollers and having them “*shoved with a vengeance in against the most serried ranks of the enemy*”. Since these inventions of his “*by their irresistible mass crushed everything that came in their way*”, one of the two young Hellespontians is slain, the other flees, and with him “*the entire Hellespontian army... as well as his maternal people, the Scythians – Whitesark got their land*”.<sup>1</sup>

The copper horses have given rise to some speculation, the *equos aeneos* (*ligneos*?) as Steenstrup ventures:<sup>2</sup> “P. E. Müller has been unable to find out what it is that occasioned this story in Saxo.” Steenstrup himself believes that it is Abbo’s narrative on the (unsuccessful!) Viking beleaguering of Paris 866, along with word on the Trojan horse (sic).

The explanation is naturally much simpler: Heated effigies of horses and riders were a prime expedient of Alexander when contending with (and routing) the Indians under Porus, according to the life story on him known as the Pseudo-Callisthenes and its many derivatives.

### 18.5. Snorri’s *El[l]ipalta*

The ‘Hellespontians’ are, as noted by Stender-Petersen,<sup>3</sup> a ‘learned’ Latin *Verschlimmbesserung* designating the inhabitants of **El[li]-palta**, which was Varangian/Viking parlance for the Maeotis or Azov Sea and its swamps. It is attested in the *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturlusonar, in his Saga of King Harald Harðráði (roughly,

1. same, I (Book IX, ‘Ragnar Lodbrog’), 364.

2. Steenstrup 1876, 110-112.

3. 1953, 132-138. Lukman 1949, 13 simply assumes that “the transposition of geographical names in Adam of Bremen is carried on further in Saxo in that he uses the ‘classical’ name Hellesponti of inhabitants in the region of the Baltic.” Cf also Helgason 1967, 75-78.

‘the Heavy-handed’). Having served in the Varangian guard, and blinded the Byzantine Emperor, the heavy-handed Norwegian king-to-be sets sail northwards:<sup>1</sup>

*In this way Harald managed to get out from Constantinople, and then he sailed into the Black Sea... So Harald sailed north to Ellipalta, and from there traveled all through the Eastern realm [Russia].*

As we have seen, Jordanes (or rather, before him, Cassiodorus) gives us the cue: The name derives from Greek [*’Jeli* ‘swamp, bog’ – whence as we have seen the pun [*’Eluri* for the **Eruli** – plus the Slavonic *palta* (modern Russian *bolota*) ‘swamp, bog’; a ‘double-up’ mouthful, a hapax legomena and a linguistic mix-up in much the same vein as **tapar-yx** (from the Russian, originally Iranian *topor* ‘axe’, plus *yx* ‘axe’), or **poluta-svarf** (from the Russian *poljudie* ‘making of a [tax-collecting] round’, plus *svarf* ‘the making of a circular movement’), or again **Gull-vrata** ‘the Golden Gate’ in Constantinople (from Old Norse ‘gold’, plus Slavonic *vrata* ‘gate’).

The ‘Hellespontian’ brothers mentioned (but not named) in Saxo are said to be the brothers of Sunilda/Svanhildr – Sörli, Hamðir, Erpr in Snorri, Sarus and Ammius in Jordanes. In a word, we are back with the Eruls. Especially intriguing is the consensus, in Saxo and Snorri, that these folk had relations on the maternal side with the Huns/‘Scythians’; which strengthens the case for Erul enmity towards the Goths – as well as for participation by the Eruls/‘Reds’/Rosomones in the Hunnic campaigns, as manifested in our Oriental sources.<sup>2</sup>

The name Ellipalta is mentioned by Snorri too: Fleeing Byzantium where he had been head of the Varangian guard, Haraldr Harðráði sailed “*north in Ellipalta*” on his way to kingship in Norway.

Finally, who are the ‘Hellespontians’ Dian and Daxon mentioned by Saxo? Procopius introduces us to an Erul leader named Todat(ius), from Theodat (a Gothic name too), in the form of Dation – which is as close as we, or probably anybody, can ever get to Daxon. Dian has long been recognized as a shortened form of that other name given by Saxo (in Regner’s Saga) for the first *rex Hellesponti*, Handwanus,<sup>3</sup> the etymology for which will still have to wait out in the dark.<sup>4</sup>

## 18.6. Snorri on Óðinn’s Friends

Finally, Snorri has one or two more contributions to make; not on the said Hellespontians, but on those fighting for and dedicated to Óðinn. It is in the first saga in Snorri’s *Heimskringla*, the *Ynglingasaga*, that we read (in my translation):

*Óðinn could order it thus in a battle that his enemies became blind or deaf, or terror-stricken, and their weapons did not bite any more than sticks do, yet his own men rushed forward without so much as a hauberk, crazed like hounds or wolves, biting their shields, as strong as bears or bulls, smiting people to the ground all around, neither fire nor iron biting into them.*

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1. F Jónsson 1966, 456. For the spelling **-ll-** in *Ellipalta*, cf *Ellisif* = Elizabeth, *ibid.*
  2. Whitesark’s who “got the land of the Scythians” may refer to the Ephthalites.
  3. Storm 1878, 93-94; Herrmann 1922, II, 93 n. 3, 643.
  4. Pritsak 1981, 172 unconvincingly attempts a derivation from Altaic.

This is highly reminiscent of what al-Firdawsī had to say on the ‘Yellow Ones’ – meaning the Eruls. Highly interesting is the expression “*his own men*”: and the corresponding word for ‘enemies’ here – “*unfriends*”. The same dichotomy is found later on in this text: “*His unfriends feared him, but his friends counted on him, believing in his power and in himself.*”

This indicates that one did not merely ‘believe’ in Óðinn; having dedicated one’s life to him, one became his ‘friend’, his associate, his companion. Even a ceremony whereby this bond is affirmed is described:

*It was his wont, when despatching his men to the fray or to other things he had charged them with, that he would lay his hands upon their heads beforehand, giving them his benediction; for then they believed that all would go well. Thus it was with his men, wherever they were in peril, on sea or land, that they would invoke his name, and apparently in fact to get help therefrom. For in him they seemed to have their entire trust. Often he would travel so far off that he would be away on his journey for many years.*

The latter sentence indicates an organization of ‘friends’ far-flung indeed: While fighting on one front, his men there would be assured that Óðinn himself was occupied on a second or third front; and in point of fact, the Eruls in one area would keep abreast of how their fellows fared in other parts.

At the very start of the *Ynglingasaga*, Snorri has this to say on the times and whereabouts of Óðinn:

*A great mountain ridge runs from northeast to southwest, dividing between the Great Svithjóð and other realms. South of the mountain it is not far to the Turk land: there Óðinn had great possessions. In that age the chieftains of the Romans travelled far and wide about the earth, subjecting all peoples, yet because of this lack of peace many other chieftains fled from their lands.*

*But since Óðinn was foresighted and versed in sorcery, he knew that his progeny was to dwell and build in the northern part of the world. He set up his brothers Woe and Will over Ásgarð. He himself left, and along with him all the Diar and many other people; first through the western parts of Gardaríki, then south through Saxland... Thereupon he went north to the Sea, taking up his abode on an island. That place now is called Óðinn’s-eye, in Funen.*

That Óðinn once had “great possessions” in the land of the Turks should not be viewed as being taken by Snorri, a conscientious historian, out of thin air: The great mountain range comprises the Urals in the northeast, the Caucasus in the southwest; and south of the latter, by Snorri’s time of writing, the Turks were in power, gradually pushing the Byzantines back west-wards through Anatolia. So Snorri is putting us in the picture by referring to the politico-geographical facts of his times. Yet he also makes clear that Óðinn was around, and had his possessions, in the era when the chiefs of the Romans were busy subjecting other peoples here; meaning in the Migration Age.

More precisely, three quite narrow time brackets stand out: One, that of Goth warriors attested to by the Šāpūr inscription from 262 AD. Two, the joint Hun-Erul invasion, 395-396 AD. Three, the 530-550’ies, when Erul forces made themselves noted on the Roman-Iranian border.

In general, the later and more recent the event, the more likely it is to be remembered by posterity. The first of the above items, the Goth one, is just too hazy to count

(the Goths being Roman mercenaries, and their whereabouts in the Middle East, as well as their possible nexus with Óðinn, being wholly speculative). The two latter are really equally convincing to our mind; yet the last, 6th century one is preferable, not only for being closer to Snorri, but also for the information above that in this age many non-Romans fled – but Óðinn, being wise, of course did not flee, he merely directed the cream of his folks north, to dwell in Scandinavia.

### 18.7. Whither Óðinn? The North Houts

After what was said above on Óðinn's-ey (today's Odense) on Funen, the saga goes on to state that Óðinn moved north across the Sound to a king Gylfi, where he settled. 'The Sound' (*Sundet*) remains the name of the stretch of sea between the Danish isles (Funen, Zealand, etc.) and southeastern Sweden.

In his *Getica*, Jordanes says that the Eruls moved back north to their homelands in Thule after their defeat at the hands of the Langobards in the early 6th c. AD, settling "*alongside the land of the Gauts*". Now West-Götaland lies inland from Bohuslän, with Göteborg (or in English, slightly misleading, Gothenburg) its outlet to the sea.

The last king of the Eruls, Rodu[u]lf, had held sway over i.a. the *Ranii* tribe before moving down south; and *Ránríki* is the Viking-age name of Bohuslän.

"*Returning home*", then, as well as "*alongside the land of the Góts*" would thus seem to refer to, roughly, Bohuslän.

We say roughly. For while the southern divide was the Gøta River, as it is today, the northern one was not Svinesund (where the presentday boundary runs between Norway and Sweden) but, a bit farther north, the Glomma River. And what does Snorri say? "*Óðinn set up his abode by the Lågen, where it is now called Ancient Sigtuna.*"

In addition to being used for the area near Sigtuna, the *Lågen* today is the name of a number of rivers and lakes in Norway as well. The main *Lågen*, and the one Norwegians will think of willy-nilly, is the big river flowing down from the Dovre mountains into the Mjøsa Lake, from where it flows on southward under another name, the Vormå, before joining the Glomma for the final more than one hundred kilometers down to the Ocean by Fredrikstad. The old appellation for the Glomma is *not* the Glomma, but simply *Áa* 'the River'; and a *låg* would likewise designate an extensive river or water-stretch.

If the *Lågen* referred to in Snorri is this one, and if the name was used for the entire length of the river from Dovre to the sea, then we may be entitled to follow Snorri's indications: Coming sailing up from the south, Óðinn and his Eruls would set up their abodes where the *Lågen* disembogues into the sea.

Here, in Fredrikstad, is where we indeed find a cluster of such names as we would expect: *Onsøy* (literally Óðinn's Isle, just like Óðinn's-ey/Odense down in Funen), *Torsøy* (Thor's Isle), *Ullerøy* (the god Ull's Isle). Right north of these and other names lies *Vansjø*, recalling the name of the other class of Norse gods, the *Vanir*.

All this we mention not because it has any direct bearing on the naming of Russia, but because it may have some interest to see whether Snorri and Jordanes are leading

us down a wrong track – or whether there is any possible trace of the Eruls come home upon this Gothenburg-to-Glomma littoral.

In northern Bohuslen, south of Svinesund, a legend is still alive, to the effect that once a people came and settled, to dwell upon this littoral, blond of hair, blue of eye, big of bodily build. They were the masters. Their name, the North Houts (or in Bohuslen dialect, *Nolhottane*). Yet by and by they were squeezed northwards by another people, swarthy and of smaller stature, into ever smaller pockets up farther north (indicating the southernmost coast of eastern Norway).<sup>1</sup>

This legend is from what was traditionally called Viken<sup>2</sup> – cf. the name of the Vikings. Whatever its ultimate historical worth, it is clearly relevant to our subject matter.

### 18.8. *Chronicle of the Normandy Dukes*

Leaving Saxo and Snorri, we round off this chapter with a near-contemporary of theirs, in far-off France, showing that the very same cluster of *topoi* could and did reach even there.

Around 1175 Benoit de Sainte-Maure authored an enormous poem (of 42,300 verses!) dubbed *The Chronicle of the Dukes of Normandie*, the introductory part of which includes a cosmography where Russia too is mentioned:<sup>3</sup>

*A cest ovre que j'ai a faire  
Me besoigne un poi a retraire  
Comment Eürope est asise  
Qui des autres parz se devise...  
Que le premere regon  
Dum je i truis memoire e non  
Est Sice la basse apelee,  
E si commence e est jostee  
Od les Paluz Meotidiens  
Qui de granz merveilles sunt plenes.  
Entre Danube et l'Ocean  
Qui cort devers septentrion,  
S'estent iceste region;  
Eisi est close d'environ.  
Jusqu'en Jermaine tient et dure,  
Eisi com retrait l'escriture.  
Estrange est dite e apelee  
E d'estranges genz abitee...  
Li Cit i sunt, uns poples nuz  
Pres des mareis e des paluz  
Ou mainte merveille a orrible;  
li Got, une jenz moct penible,*

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1. Heard from the members of the North Bohuslen theatre group *Nolhottane*, at Berby in Enningdalen, July 1993.
  2. *Norra Viken* being the name of a *prosti* (prevostship, an ecclesiastical division) until modern times, comprising roughly today's Strømstad commune.
  3. Matuzova 1979, 238-242.

*i sunt après, e li Alain,  
 Qui ne sevent qu'est vin ne pain...  
 Li Gepidien sunt enprés,  
 Felon e enreure e engrés,  
 E pius li Roge e li Ungreïs,  
 Li Hun après e li Bougreïs  
 E li Daneïs, fort gent hardie  
 E après cil d'Esclavunie...  
 ...Hyster Danube est apelez.  
 Entre icest fluive e l'Ocean  
 E la terre ou sunt li Alan  
 A fieres genz de mainz semblanz;  
 Sauvages sunt e mescreanz.  
 Une isle i a par non Cancie,  
 E si crei bien que c'est Rosie,  
 Qui est de la grant mer salee  
 De totes parz avironnee..."*

My translation of the above runs:

*In this work which I'll be doing/ I need to say something/ About how Europe is ordered./ Divided off from the other parts./ ...The first region/ Of which I have recollection and name/ Is called Lower Scythia./ Commencing and concentrated/ At the Maeotic marsh./ Which is full of marvels./ Between the Danube and the Ocean/ Which runs towards the North./ This region is laid out;/ In this way it is closed off from all sides/ Stretching right unto Germany./ As scripture says./ It is called and termed [the] strange./ And inhabited by strange people...*

*The Scythians are there, a nude people./ Near to the morasses and the marshes./ Where there are many terrible wonders:/ The Goths, a most tiresome people./ And following upon them, the Alans./ Who know neither wine nor bread./... Farther on are the Gepids./ Squalid, warlike and inflammable./ And beyond them the Rugi and the Ungarians./ The Danes, a very intrepid people./ And after them, Slavonia..."*

*The Ister is [now] called the Danube./ Between this river and the Ocean./ And the land where the Alans live./ Dwell many unvanquished tribes;/ They are savages and pagans;/ There is an isle called Scandza./ And I believe it is Russia./ By the enormous salty sea/ Surrounded from all sides./ Like unto bees/ From their diverse habitations/ They fly out in enormous, mighty droves/ Where they number thousands./ Or immediately, enflamed/ They throw themselves into battle sword in hand./ At once in heat of anger./ Thus all together, moreover./ This mighty people can issue out/ To invade great kingdoms./ To make great battles./ Great booty and conquests.*

Other translations have aberrant readings.<sup>1</sup> The sources to Benoit de Sainte-Maure's work have not been sufficiently clarified; we know that he was well acquainted with the writings of Pliny, Isidor and St. Augustin.<sup>2</sup> In addition there are Dudo and Wil-

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1. same, 241: "Živut tam sity, vol'nyj narod./ Bliz botot i ozër..." (= *There the Scythians live, a free people./ Near to marshes and lakes...*) Same, 243 glosses "Rogi" as 'Rugi, a tribe of the Pomorian Slavs' and *li Daneïs* as 'Dacians'.

2. same, 236, citing Michel 1836.



lasmus Gemmeticensis; one pointer being the name **Cancie** – in Dudo *Canza, Scanzia, Scansa*, meaning Scandinavia.<sup>1</sup>

Russia here is termed an island – and identified with Scandinavia. The similarity with the information found in Arabic sources on ‘the isle of the Russians’ has been pointed out already.<sup>2</sup> The habit of getting “instantly inflammated” we have had occasion to refer to above as a corollary of eating red toadstool mushrooms and/or quaffing mead, or both.

The Scythians being “a naked people” is striking – and indeed strikingly reminiscent of one phenomenon only: the nakedness of Germanic warriors, according to Tacitus, and more specifically, the near-nakedness of the Eruls, according to Procopius and Paulus Diaconus.<sup>3</sup> That these Scythians are enclosed on all sides by marshes recalls, again, the Oium tale in Jordanes – as well as the more sinister Alexander-legendary pent-in Doomsday peoples threatening to, as Benoit says also, issue out against the world at large. That they are pent in all the way up to Germany is perhaps of some solace to Mediterraneans.

If now, as has been demonstrated, traditions on the Eruls were alive among the Scandinavian Varangians in Byzantium and Russia half a millennium after the Eruls disappeared, and were registered even in distant Normandie, are we not entitled to believe that this knowledge was preserved in Scandinavia itself, and also among the Byzantines, against whom and for whom the Eruls once fought? Yes: Literary tradition, and the oral one too, died hard, or did not die at all.

Through the centuries conventionally called the Dark, from the fading and fall of the Roman empire to the Viking Age and the rise of Russia, runs a shining, continuous red thread.

What remains is to see whether this thread carries through the final needle’s eye as well: that of phonetics.

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1. Dudo ed. 1853, col. 619, Willelmus ed. 1853, col. 782.

2. Matuzova 1979, 244.

3. Tacitus, *Germania* 6: *...cohortes Germanorum... more patrio nudis corporibus*. Procopius *De bello Persico* II, 25, Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* I, 20.

## 19. Rus': The Phonetics

*“Das Problem der etymologischen Erklärung dieses Namens gehört ohne Zweifel zu den schwierigsten und zugleich den wichtigsten in der russischen Geschichts- und Sprachforschung.”*  
Falk 1981, 147.

*The long forgotten view that the name Rus' is from Greek has now again appeared in literature.*  
Lovmjan'skij 1985, 163.<sup>1</sup>

### 19.1. The Problem

Characteristic of Normanists and Anti-Normanists alike has been the inability to even contemplate a solution outside of their respective northern peripheries, within the two centres of the world, the Christian and the Islamic one, so to speak the Washington and the Moscow of their day.

Even the Greek 'Rōs has been subjected to such 'peripheral' treatment:<sup>2</sup>

“Likewise inexplicable... is the formation of the Byzantine form 'Rōs, undeclined and wholly alien to the Greek language, a form which may have come about solely by way of a loan from another people. In the majority of European tongues, and particularly in the Germanic tongues, collective names of peoples and tribes are subject to declension and occur in the plural. The source of the indeclinable Greek form 'Rōs may evidently only be the collective Eastern Slavonic form (Ros', Rus'), which occurs only the singular. To explain the form 'Rōs by the Finnish Ruotsi by way of the Slavonic Ros', Rus', is impossible on historical grounds as well.”

Equally 'peripheral' are the constructions of most Normanists. If the Bible is not taken into consideration by Normanists or Anti-Normanists today, it was without doubt present in the minds of mediaeval Christians, including the Greeks; again, it is these minds, not ours, that are the object of our study.

According to one scholar, the name '**Rōs** entered the Greek language through the medium of some Turkic tongue, most probably the Xazar one, whereby the Greeks construed it as a reference to the people 'Ros in the Prophet Ezekiel.<sup>3</sup> By this latter conclusion the said scholar marks himself off as a rare Normanist indeed.

Instead, we now turn to the possible ways in which this term arose, and to its transmission on Russian soil. Of these, there are four: We term them, respectively, the Norse, Gothic, Slavonic, and Balto-Fennic, or more precisely Veps, theories. The

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1. Cf same (Petruhin 1985), 254: “Such 'anti-Normanist' theories, generally born of insufficient knowledge of the sources, surface from time to time. Thus, e.g. Stang H. Rysslands uppkomst – en tredje ståndpunkt, *Scandia* 1981, no. 2, pp 153-198, where the merit of having founded the Old Russian state is ascribed to the Veps.”

2. same, 165.

3. Thomsen 1891, 87.

pronunciation by mediaeval Greeks of a word like ‘Rōs by an **-o-**, and not by a **-u-**, must be regarded as established beyond doubt. By ‘our’ time, and that of the Byzantines, there was no longer a distinction in pronunciation between long **-ō-** and short **-o-**. Yet it is only in certain modern northern Greek dialects that a classical **-ō-** has been further reduced, to a **-u-**.

Orally, then, this one form of this one word in the Greek is all we have to contend with, as **the** basis and starting point for what ended up as the state name Rus’.

First, as to the point of departure, our initial point d’appui, the Greek side:

In the Bertinian Annals we learn of the ‘*Rōs* (or latinized, *Rhos*), not the *Rus* or *Reds* (‘*oi* ‘*rousioi*, or latinized *Russi*). Clearly, the name given to these newcomers on the scene was the one first mentioned here – ‘*Rōs* – even though, as other sources have made equally clear, there was a strong undercurrent of popular knowledge, that the Russians were ‘the Reds’.

Although the Greek tongue in 839 AD did not distinguish between ‘Rōs and ‘Ros, Byzantine orthography still did – a most sophisticated chancery still did. There is every reason to believe that by penning ‘*Ρῶς* and not the Biblical, Septuaginta form ‘*Ρῶς*, the chancery achieved two things: Differentiating the two, thus signalling to us (if we no longer turn a deaf ear) that they Byzantines did not necessarily identify these two peoples, although clearly keeping this possibility open. Moreover, the Byzantines still knew and appreciated that ‘*Ρῶς* originally was pronounced with a long vowel, and by choosing this orthography they signal to us (if we are willing to hear) that they had indeed *heard* this pronunciation – meaning from a non-Byzantine source.

Second, as to the point of arrival, the Slavonic side: We can equally confidently disregard other forms of the name than Rus’. For *Rossia* is a both late and literary form, inspired (but not directly borrowed) from the Greek. According to Tatiščev, it originated with the Metropolitan Makarij, under Ivan the Terrible.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the vacillation between these two evidently related names and their derivatives – *ruskij* versus *rossijskij*, etc. – is a modern phenomenon.

This vacillation is most puzzling to foreigners.<sup>2</sup> And it begs the question: How are we to explain that the form **Rus’** came to be established in Russia, instead of for instance precisely *Rossia*, or simply **Rōs**? If now a form close to **Rōs**, lies at the bottom of it all, why did not this latter form prevail right away – instead of waiting for admission, so to speak, for more than 700 years, through the good but late offices of our Metropolitan Makarij?

In short, having narrowed our sights, the big question is: how, and for what compelling reason, did Greek ‘*Rōs* originate, being attested in the Bertinian annals, only to turn into Rus’?

We commence with the explanation closest at hand; **if** an explanation it is...

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1. Tatiščev 1962, 288 (ch. 30.7). Also, Tixomirov 1953, Hobsbawm 1993, 50.

2. Solov’ev 1957, 134 on this ‘anomaly’, citing Martel 1925, Tixomirov 1953.

## 19.2. The Norse Venue

Though the Bertinian Annals were penned by a priest, the 839 *Rhōs* visitors to Byzantium were certainly no theologians. They would be sure to carry their name, of indigenous or newfangled Byzantinian origin, along back home with them in their own pronunciation. And since they were found to be “*from the stock of the Swedes*” (*gens esse Sueonum*), one should perhaps expect that the name *Rus*’ bore a Norse (Swedish) imprint?

Instead, what travelled along with these men from Byzantium to Ingelheim was a name expressly given them by others, *se vocari dicebant*. For at the Frankish court, these men did not say or pronounce the name *Rhos*, ‘*Rōs*’ to be their name. And a loanword it has to be, as there is no indigenous Norse word to the tune of *Rōs*. It is a given name.

This Greek-and-Latin-attested name would have suited Norse perfectly; compare *kóri* ‘choir’, *Rómaborg* ‘Rome’. Nevertheless, what struck root up in Old Ladoga and in Russia at large was not *Rōs* but *Rus*’. A purely Norse formation of the latter is simply out of the question.

We conclude: The Norse did not give rise to the name, from out of their own language. Nor does Norse explain the subsequent transmission.

The sole ‘Norse’ possibilities we are left with are the following: Either the 839 travellers picked up the term *Rus* from Byzantine daily speech, in which the Russians were nicknamed ‘**rusos**’, i.e. ‘reds’,<sup>1</sup> and adopted this as their favoured nickname, alongside the ‘official’ chancellery-sanctioned ‘*Rōs*’ one; or they picked up *Rus* even before coming to Byzantium: from the Goths.

## 19.3. The Gothic Venue

We cannot exclude the possibility that the Norse ‘envoys from the Prince of ‘Ros’ adopted the *Gothic* form of the term ‘*Rōs*’, in the Gothic settlements on the Crimea. A Byzantine form ‘*Rōs*’ would certainly be more prestigious than the Gothic, yet the Gothic may have impressed itself on the newcomers first.

A ‘Gothic’ solution may appear a bit farfetched. What militates in favour of it is the parallellism observed in **þjóð** > **Čud**’. This is completely parallel to the transition **Rōs** > **Rus**’. Other parallels also obtain.<sup>2</sup> For is it in fact the ancient Norse **þjóð** (thjodh) ‘people, nation’ that gave rise to the ethnonym *Čud*’? The Russian words *čužój* and *čuždyj* ‘strange’ (sic) must be taken to have the same background.<sup>3</sup> The first *Čud*’ are indeed Germanic, but antedate the rise of Russia by half a millennium.

It is our Gothic authors Wulfila and Jordanes who give us the name. Wulfila’s translation of the New Testament gives ample testimony to the Gothic **-u-** versus

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1. Thesaurus Graecae Linguae, ed. Stephan/Hase, Paris 1842-47, VI, 2457.

2. See on **stór** > **sur**’ etc. in next chapter.

3. Bubrix 1947, chapters “Čud’”, “Dejanija Čudi’”, and 1971, 9, *versus* Mägiste.

German, Greek and often Norse **-o-**.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Goths are (in Gothic) not *Goths* but **Gut**, the composite for the Gothic nation being Gutþiuða,<sup>2</sup> (with the diphthong **-iu-** consisting of two short vowels). Jordanes too in his Latin text transcribes the name not by an **-o-** but by the original Gothic **-u-**, in the word **Thiuda** ‘nation, people’, in the form *Thiudos Inaunxis*.

This latter is a composite too, properly the **Thiudos in-Aunxis**, and has been deciphered to mean the Čud’ in *Aunus* (Russian Olonec), in the inessive case **Aunuksessa**.<sup>3</sup> A novel explanation of both the Jordanes appellation and Russian *Olonec* from Veps **alanukse** ‘depression’ has been given by a Soviet specialist;<sup>4</sup> and the name, plus one more in Jordanes,<sup>5</sup> constitute the oldest Veps lexicology attested in literature.<sup>6</sup>

This *Thiudos* is a telling word, eloquently attesting to the ancient relations of the Čud’ with the Goths and also with the Scandinavians (notably the Eruls) who were subject to the Goths. It also attests to the onetime ‘strangeness’ of the Čud’ in Slav eyes (whence *čužoj, čuždyj*). What we hear in this word then is the original Gothic short **-u-**, which always corresponds to Old Norse short **-o-**, except directly preceding **-r-** or **-h-**.

Now Jordanes mentions *Thiudos, Inaunxis, Vasinabroncas, Merens, Mordens*, etc. The latter two are the Merja and the Mordva (Mordvinians). Immediately following the *Thiudos in-Aunxis* there is another composite: the **Vasina-broncas**. Whatever or whoever these *Broncas*,<sup>7</sup> there is a near-consensus that *Vasin-* refers to

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1. Streitberg 1971, index, 179, gives a Greek example: *Hristòs* > Gothic *Hristus*.
  2. same,
  3. Usually ascribed to Mikkola 1915, 56-66, thus in Schramm 1974, 5-6; yet suggested by i.a. Braun 1899, 255.
  4. Bogdanov 1949, n. 260, 84, versus Bubrix 1949, 48, 177.
  5. *Vasinabroncas*, see below.
  6. A name or two might be suspected in Sidonius Apollinaris’ panegyric to the West Roman emperor Majorian, 458 AD, verses 471-478, Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 161: “*Thou dost carry off to the war the frozen army of the seven-mouthed Danube. All the multitude that the sluggish quarter of the north doth produce in the Sithonian region beneath the Parrhasian bear...*” Of the many names that follow, *Bastarna, Neurus, Halanus, Bellonitus, Biscalta, Sarmata* were culled from Valerius Flaccus, *Moschus* from Lucian; while *Dacus, Pannonius and Suebus* are obsolete (the latter from Claudian). We are left with *Procrustes*, a brainchild of Sidonius for impressing listeners by his erudition, plus two names: **Vesus** is hardly = Ves’, Wisinnus, Wītsū, etc., but rather **Veses** = Vesi = Visi(gothi): Wolf-ram 1979, 13-14, 16, 17 n. 14. **Alites** may translate as ‘Ala-people’, cf the later Áluborg, yet this is all too speculative - and chronologically as well as linguistically unconvincing.
  7. Streitberg 1971, index, 22-23: **brakja** ‘Ringen, Ringkampf’; **brunjo** ‘Brust-harnisch’. Compare Saxo Grammaticus on “the fighters of the Biarmians”, cropping up much in the way of a technical term.

the ancient Veps (in the composite, genitive case);<sup>1</sup> the one alternative to this being an absurdity as ethnonyms go,<sup>2</sup> and based on several misconceptions to boot.<sup>3</sup>

This appellation is highly interesting: For here, long before the advent of the Slavs up north, we meet the apparently direct antecedent and ancestor to the term *Ves´* in the *Tale of Bygone Years*; meaning that the elision of the *-p-* in *\*Veps[ä]* is not a Slavonic phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

Surprisingly, perhaps, we find that the Goths had so intimate relations with the northwesternmost Veps, by the Ladoga lake and the river Svir´, in present-day southern Karelia, as to nickname them simply ‘the people’ – as against the farther-off, ‘non-partner’ Veps called the *Vasinabroncas*. And if relations were that close, and both the *Čud´* and the *Ves´* of the Russian chronicles were established before the 550-ies of Jordanes, then could not the same hold true of the *Rus´* as well?

We should give this question a cautious yes.

A beginning of the name *Rus´* in the Gothic era, in the heyday of Ermanarich, has indeed been suggested, but then on account of societal developments under Germanic rule north of the Black Sea and not with regard to how the name, if borrowed from Greek, sounded in Gothic.<sup>5</sup>

Although the Prophecy of Ezekiel is not found among the preserved parts of the Gothic Bible by Wulfila, we know that this name must have sounded **Rūs** (with a long vowel), judging by other Gothic lexicography. Another instance in point is **\*Rūma, Rumoneis** (from *Roma, Romani*).<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, we must dismiss the

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1. Pimenov 1965, 20. First identified by K. Zeuss, *Die Deutschen & ihre Nachbarstämme*, 1837. The identification by Pimenov 1965 and Petrušin in *Lovmjan’skij* 1985, 185 of **-bronicas** in *Vasinabroncas* with ‘Biarmia’ is however pure fantasy.
  2. Schramm 1974, 6, following Grienberger 1895, 167: **\*Wasinabroks** – “Bewohner eines flachen Landes mit üppigem Rasen, reicher Bewässerung und stellenweiser Sumpfbildung”, citing Old High German **uuaso** ‘a piece of grass, a lump of earth’, **uuasal** ‘rain’ etc. < **\*was-** ‘wetness, wet ground’, plus **brōka-** ‘brook’ (Old English **brōc**, Old High German **bruoh** etc.); or < **\*-bronicans**, reflecting ‘brink, grassy knell’. With all due respect, “a wet brook” is hardly a convincing ethnonym; nor is the clot of earth, or piece of grass, plus grassy hillock...
  3. Same, 1-6: “Aber Vas(in) ‘Wepsen’, die einzige Zuweisung die – über Merens, Mordens hinaus – fast allgemein Anklang gefunden hat, ist, wie zu zeigen sein wird, falsch.” This Schramm fails to show. He merely argues that **Vasin-** strangely is rendered in its Slavonic form (cf *Ves´* in the *Tale of Bygone Years*), which is incorrect: The form *-in* is not Slavonic but a Baltio-Fennic, Veps genitive. Gothic did not have *-ps*, nor did Old Norse, cf *Visinn(us)* for the Veps in Saxo; hence *Vasin* is not Slavonic but Germanic, or Veps-Germanic ‘franglais’, patois, trading pidgin. Schramm finds it ‘unconvincing’ to lop off the ending **-bronicas** (sic) without offering an explanation; yet his suggestions are hardly better. Further, to him, the Veps are “an unlikely member of the Northern Peoples’ Confederation”, as the Goths were only after gold and furs in towards the Urals. *What ‘confederation’?* Ermanaric was no ‘confederal president’. And it is inadmissible to reduce, as Schramm does, the *Goltescytha Thiudos Inaunxis* to *Goltethiudos* ‘the gold peoples’ near the Urals – without any proper explanation of *Inaunxis*.
  4. An important point, considering the argument *ruotsi > rus´*. See next chapter.
  5. Mošin 1931, 521, citing Pogodin.
  6. Streitberg 1971, 112.

suggestion that the Ante ruler *Bos* (or *Boz*, *Boz*)<sup>1</sup> was immortalized on the lips of the Gothic maidens in the Lay on the Battle of Igor as **Būs**.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Gothic was in a perfect position to bequeath to posterity not only **Rūs** but also, surprisingly perhaps, **Rōs**. The former would be particularly palatable and tempting because it sounded like the Greek and Latin word for ‘the Reds’, of ancient Germanic fame. Indeed, this may have latched onto, and even confirmed, a belief among Greek intellectuals in the saving graces, or earlier on the Doomsday threat, of the red-blond northerners.

In chapter 4.4 above, the Gothic-based form *‘Pōz* in the 3rd-4th c. text by a Pseudo-Agathemeros was inspected, along with the Bible Gothic *\*raus*, in late Gothic<sup>3</sup> *\*rōs* with a long vowel,<sup>4</sup> our quest ending in the question: Is this a blind alley?

In our assessment it is, on the contrary, highly relevant. It shows a Gothic form of the name which is identical with the 9th-10th c. form which we have set out to explain. Moreover, this Gothic form would conjure up, to any erudite Greek ear, the very gamut of clichés under investigation, viz. the Reds, the Prince of ‘Ros, the ‘Swamp’ of the ‘Eluri’ Eruli, and the ‘Rōs. This is not to say that the Byzantine chancery in 839 chanced upon, or chose to consult, this Pseudo-Agathemeros text; that, on the face of things, is rather unlikely. It is particularly unlikely since the Rhos group hardly came travelling down the Volga; they surely came by the Dnepr route. On the other hand, that classical river-name the Tanais could designate the Don and the Volga alike.<sup>5</sup> However, it is most implausible that the Byzantines – or their informants – would elect to name the 839 newcomers by the name of a river by which they had come.

The value of the said text is, instead, that it tells us of the existence of a Gothic form, which was surely in oral use in the Gothic-speaking settlements in the Crimea; which is where the 839 travellers must have sojourned before continuing onwards to Constantinople.

In 838 the Byzantines commenced building the White Fortress, Sarkel, for their allies the Xazars, to stop the inroads of the steppe peoples. The Xazars had to accept increased Greek control over parts of the Crimea, including a local Greek administration. So did the Goths. We can rest assured that the chancery in 839 had adequate recourse to Gothic-speakers, which was the closest thing available, both linguistically and ‘ethnographically’ speaking, when interrogating the Rhos newcomers. Goths would be sure to be used, as their settlements, which had just passed under Greek control, was where the group in question came from.

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1. on which Rybakov 1982, 83, Petruhin 1985, 248.

2. Lixačev/Petrova 1981, 58.

3. or *spoken* Gothic, Wulfila’s **-aw-** now being deemed his own invention (Grønvik 1997)

4. Schramm 1973, 119, citing van der Lee 1962, 125-152.

5. Jordanes, para 44-46, in Mierow 1966, 62: “... the Amazons. They dwelt at that time along a bend of Lake Maeotis, from the river Borysthenis, which the natives call the Danaper, to the stream of the Tanais. By the Tanais I mean the river which flows down from the Rhipaean mountains... For the other Tanais is the one which... flows into the Caspian Sea. The Danaper begins in a great marsh and issues from it as from its mother...”

As remarked by Jordanes in the mid-6th c.:<sup>1</sup> “The Danaper begins in a great marsh and issues from it as from its mother... At its mouth there is an island named Achilles.” Immediately afterwards Jordanes characterizes the area lying between the Danaper and the Tanais: “Between these two rivers is a vast land filled with forests and treacherous swamps.” In a Gothic-cum-Greek word, *raus* > *Rōs*, ‘reeds, marsh thickets’.

No wonder that the Greeks, basing themselves on Gothic informants and one or more Slavonic-speaking interpreters among the Rhos, would come to think of the Eluri who once infested these swamps and had likewise hailed from the extreme North. This, in our humble view, may be how and why the Greeks saw to it that the Erul heritage was revived.

Is all this philology more than mere theory? That will become clear if, on the one hand the Arabs will oblige us once more as flies on the wall and, on the other, the Goths will clear up the \***Rōtsi** bit for us too. The latter task is formally distinct from that of the names ‘Rōs and Rus’, and perhaps too much to request.

In point of fact, the Arabs do oblige. As we have had occasion to see, they stress the quagmire nature of the Rūs habitat up north. And neither Old Ladoga nor other conceivable candidates for localizing the Rūs are anything approaching the swampy state described. So whence this swampiness? We conclude: What the Arabs bear witness to is an heritage from late antiquity and the earliest Middle Ages, as recorded by Jordanes, preserved by the Greeks – and ‘triggerred’, revived, by the visitors named as ‘Rōs (from the earlier *Raus*) by the Goths in Constantinople, 839 AD.

We now must look into the remaining theoretical venues.

#### 19.4. The Slavonic Venue

With the Norse approach dismissed, and the Gothic one accepted, what of the Slavonic one? We try it out:

Now if the Greek-and-Latin-attested ‘Rōs either came from or struck root in Slavonic linguistic soil, where words of the type *оsъ*, *nosъ*, but not *ōs*, *nōs* existed, then **Ros** (short vowel, i.e. really *Roсъ*) would be expected? Yet of Russia and the Russians, in Old Russian literature the name *Ros* is nowhere attested.

This need not be important. It turns out that Gothic is not the only language to witness a shift **-ō-** / **-o-** > **-ū-** / **-u-**. The vowel **-u-** found in the form *Rus*’ may be explained by way of Eastern Slavonic, just as much as by Gothic, phonetics. We here rely on a standard work:<sup>2</sup>

**The vowel U:** Slavonic U corresponds to Indo-European \***au**, \***ou**... This U in loanwords renders a long O, which is not found in Slavonic (para 46). **Buky** ‘letter’, from Gothic **bōka**, Old Slavonic **ikuna** ‘picture’, from Greek *εἰκόνα* (vulgarly *ίκόνα*).

The phenomenon is explained in this way by another specialist:<sup>3</sup>

“Towards the close of the Early Slav period it must be considered as certain that the

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1. same.

2. Vaillant 1950, I, 120.

3. Stang 1965, 26-30.



language had long and short vowels, inherited from Indo-European, but no diphthongs... As for the phoneme which in the Slav languages sounds *-u-*, in elder loanwords from Russian into Finnish and Latvian (and partly Lithuanian...) it is rendered by *-uo-*:

Karelian *kuomina* 'threshing-floor': [Russian] *gumnó*.

Latvian *duoma* 'thought': [Russian] *dúma*.

Younger loans have *-ü-*: Karelian *tūma* < *dúma*.

Hence one must infer that the later Slavonic *-u-* in the oldest Russian still sounded *-ō-*, i.e. that it had an intermediate position between *-au-* and *-u-*. In that case this must have been the case with Early Slav too.

... Later on, **all** Slav languages have changed the... *-ō-* into *-ü-*."

This is exactly what we witness in *suomi*: *sum*, and of course in **ruo[t]si**: **rus**. Other instances of the same transition are easy to find.<sup>1</sup>

It is the same transmission that we witness in Norse loans into Slavonic (Old Russian) as well. Thus, *Nórðmaðr* corresponds to *Murman*; *Asmóðr* to *Asmud*; *Hróarr* to *Ruar*; *Liótr* to *Ljut*; *Blótr* to *Blud*; *Þorr* to *Tur*.

An obverse explanation, Slavonic *Rus* > Greek 'Rōs, is to be dismissed,<sup>2</sup> simply because Slavonic *Rus* would be rendered in Greek by 'rous[os], not by 'Rōs.

Although relevant, this all still falls far short of our mark: providing an explanation of how Russia got its name. The problem with the Slavonic venue so far is of course, as with the Norse, that it cannot explain the initial term, \*Rōs (as attested in the Greek and Latin). And this Greek form might just as well have ended up, in Slav mouths, as *Rās*,<sup>3</sup> or again, particularly in view of the Greek pronunciation (and the Septuagint form), as *Rosъ*. Yet, in sum, Rōs > Slavonic Rus is wholly possible.

Another 'Slavonic half-explanation' of the end product Rus has been proffered as well: that this name reflects, or was influenced by, Old Slavonic **rus(u)** 'blond'.<sup>4</sup> If so be it (and this remains a pure hypothesis, wholly unproven) then this name would be "formally unique", without any linguistically relevant parallel, "and hence an improbable solution".<sup>5</sup> It in any case lands us with two major problems:

1) Why then did this name end up as a linguistic anomaly – a feminine singular, monosyllabic and palatalized, and not e.g. as **Rus** (a masculine short-form, an 'abstract', like *Skuf* 'Scythia'), or **Ruso** (neutrum, like *Nevo*), or **Rusa** (feminine, like *Morava*, *Naroma*, *Litva*, *Ugra* and many others – and also itself a river-name), or **Russia** (modelled on an equally common, indeed very common, name form), or even **Rusy** ('the Reds')? All these name-forms are very much more normal and expectable

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1. Laanest 1982, 337.

2. Mel'nikova & Petrušin 1989, 38 n. 79, cf. ch. 15.5 above: "The context of the information in Ps.-Symeon and Theophanes Continuatus tallies well with [our] inference that the term 'Rōs was taken up directly in the early Byzantine sources, cf. Theophanes Continuatus: 'the 'Rōs.. also called the Dromitai, who derive their origin from the Franks', and the Slavonic translation 'The Rus'... also called Skedi, we derive from the Varangian stock.'"

3. Comment by Prof. Terje Mathiassen, Oslo University, Nov. 1996.

4. Schramm 1982, 30, citing Russian scholars (Černyx, Sobolevskij).

5. Same, also arguing (cf. above) that "hair hues between dark blond, red blond and light brown were hardly a specific setting off one Slav tribe versus others, or for all the Slavs versus their neighbours; nay, I know of no other Slav tribe that is named after a bodily characteristic". This of course totally disregards our Germanic 'rousiōi traditions.

– and *must* be dismissed in a stringently scholarly way before any anomaly is to be considered.

2) If this were the name supposedly used by the first Rus', then why was it *not*? Instead, for a fact, they used *Rhos*, 'Rōs. Why?

### 19.5. The Veps Venue

Our Norse + Gothic + Slavonic conspectus is not exhaustive. There is a distinct possibility that Balto-Fennic contributed and constituted if not the whole then at least a part of the input into what became the name of Rus'.

The historical phonetics of the Veps language have been studied,<sup>1</sup> along with the oldest loan-words in the Balto-Fennic tongues from the Germanic ones.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the present writer has relied on talks in 1994 with Maria I. Mullonen and Nina I. Zajceva who, building upon their previous dictionary<sup>3</sup> and extensive subsequent research, are presently editing the new Veps-Russian & Russian-Veps dictionary (1996).

Having tried out three venues already then, we now test the fourth: Could and would the appellation **Rhos**, (**h**)**Rōs**, stranded and landed in a Veps ambience, turn into **Rus**[ʔ]? The answer is yes. And the purely Veps explanation is superior, to the hair, to a purely Slavonic or Gothic one – not to speak of the Norse one, which we have rejected.

First, how does the vowel **-u-** come to replace **-ō-** in an Old Ladogan context? We look into the Norse>Veps possibility, nay necessity, first, and then for good measure check out on Old Slavonic>Veps as well.

Norse words containing **-o-** or **-ō-** are rendered in Veps, as in other Balto-Fennic tongues, by **-u-**. As an example of a Scandinavian word with a *short -o-* at the stage of development in question, rendered by a **-u-** in Veps, we refer to **mur'gin** 'morning', **mur'gneita** 'to breakfast'. In Veps, a medial **-a-** is not found; thus the original form was not *morgan*, nor the rare *myrgin*, but *morgin*.<sup>4</sup> Yet this is so far in no way decisive.

We next turn to Scandinavian words with a long **-ō-**; one instance being **stór** 'big, great', which in Finnish has become *suuri*, and in Veps: **sur'** 'big, great', **sur'kun'igaz** '(great) king' (in folklore tales), **sur'sünd** 'God', etc. True, the word **stór** in Norwegian and Swedish (yet not in Danish and Icelandic) today is pronounced with a **-u-**; but the change from **-o-** into **-u-** took place not earlier than the beginning of the 13th c. AD. In a word, before this, any Scandinavian word with an **-o-** among the Balto-Fennic peoples produced loan forms on **-u-**.

This then fits perfectly with the Bertinian Annals and Greek sources: The original thing, as pronounced by Norsemen (*gens Sueonis*) was **Rōs**. And the result, after transmission, was **Rus**; in a palatalized form, though, which remains to be explained:

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1. in particular by Tunkelo 1946.

2. Thomsen 1869, 1870, Collinder 1932-41, Fromm 1957-58. Of lesser importance to the present end is Joki 1971.

3. Mullonen & Zajceva 1972.

4. Norén 1923, 432.

If this palatalization is Slavonic, or Veps, it may prove decisive. This we inspect presently. But first:

What if transmission had been by Slavs, not Norsemen, and the Slavs rendered the Greek *‘Rōs* (long vowel) by *Ros* (short)? This would not have produced Veps (and subsequently Slavonic) *Rus*. Where Russian has a short *-o-*, we generally find Veps *-o-*.

There are indeed a number of instances of Veps *-u-*.<sup>1</sup> **buč** (Russian *bočka*), **butkutada** (*bodat´*), **gurbač** (*gorbač, gorbatyj*), **astta gurbiškos** (*idti sgorbivšis´*), **gurbištuda** (*gorbit´sja*), **guum** (*grom*), **kuhmoi** (*komolyj = byk*), **murašk** (*moroška*), **rugž** (*rož´*, both words being loan-words from an Indo-Aryan term), **rugol´** (*rogal´*), **suloim** (*solod*), **sused** (*sosed*), **suuk** (*sovok*), **šuuk** (*šelk*), **tusk** (*toska*), and probably some more. Yet these are not relevant. They arose from the Old Slavonic sound *-ǐ-*, which in turn reflected an original short vowel *-u-*. Another instance of the same phenomenon is the name of the Finnish city of **Turku**, borrowed by the Finns<sup>2</sup> from itinerant Veps merchants, yet reflecting of course Old Slavonic *torgъ*, which in Scandinavian came to be **torg** ‘market’.

There are also Finnish words containing an *-o-* with a corresponding Veps form with *-u-*, such as **kolmi** ‘three’, in Veps **kuume**, cf. Mari **kum** ‘three’; yet here we are in the presence of an *-l-* changed into *-u-*.<sup>3</sup>

On purely linguistic grounds we may conclude that the transformation of the Greek-and-Latin-attested form *‘Rōs* into Old Ladogan *Rus-* may have taken place through Slavonic-speaking as well as Veps-speaking intermediaries. It occurred by way of Old Norse, as subsequently assimilated (or somehow represented, through interpreters) by the ancient Veps and/or the local Slavs (Slovenes). We shall see whether archaeological materials bespeak this second alternative, in Old Ladoga and its vicinity: Norsemen swallowed up by their (Veps) surroundings.

As a result of the foregoing we conclude: The change of the Byzantine and Norse-conveyed form *‘Rōs* into the form *Rus* by way of a Veps (subsequently Russified) environment in Ladoga is linguistically impeccable; the last question, viz. its palatalization, will be addressed below.

## 19.6. Veps ‘Reds’

Before leaving our Veps venue we note its possible relevance to the Byzantine ‘reds’ up north. For ‘red’ in Balto-Fennic is **ruskea** (Finnish), or **rusked** (Veps), making for or reinforcing the Slavonic **ruskij** (Old Russian **rus´skij**), if the meaning of the latter was originally ‘red’.

Wholly independently of our ‘red’ Greek tradition, and with no thought of explaining *Rus´* and *ruskij* (or rather, originally, *rus´skij*), Finnish and Veps linguists have analysed some Veps names of places and persons:<sup>4</sup>

**Ruskonicy:** A village in the northern Ojat´ region. A. Ahlquist, who visited the village

1. Mullonen/Zajceva 1972.

2. according to Valonen 1981, 75, 114.

3. Lytkin et al. 1975, II, 45, Mullonen/Zajceva 1972, 744.

4. Mullonen 1994, 97, citing Tunkelo 1946, 5 (*re* Ahlquist), Nissilä 1975, 142.

in the mid-19th century, found it still inhabited by the Veps and registered the Veps origin of this placename – *Rusttal*... At the basis of this name there is the Veps anthroponymic \**Rusked*, which in turn goes back to the adjective *rusked*. (The Veps form of the name is explained by the basic form of the oblique cases of the word – **rusked** > **rusttan** ‘red, ruddy-blond, handsome’ ...)

Analysing the analogous anthroponymics *Ruske*, *Ruskia*, *Ruskiainen*, V. Nissilä deems that they arose because of the colour of the hair or beard of the name’s carrier... The semantics of the Veps lexeme does not exclude another interpretation as well – ‘handsome, ruddy-blond’; cf in this connection the Norther Veps ‘street’ surname *Käbedahne* (Veps *käbed* ‘red, handsome’).

The double meaning of **rusked** is neatly paralleled in mediaeval Russian **krasnyj** ‘red, handsome’ (cf Moscow’s Red Square, *Krasnaja Ploščad’*, originally understood as ‘the beautiful square’). Yet whereas this ‘double-entendre’ apparently became tiresome to speakers of Russian, who now reserve *krasivyj* for ‘handsome’ and *krasnyj* for ‘red’ only, Veps retains it. Who influenced whom?

As secondary input, Veps **rusked** is highly relevant. The first Norse intermediaries doubtless carried with them the prestigious *Rōs* (*Rhos*) attested in the Bertinian Annals, at least as their ‘main’ name, rather than ‘oi’ *Rūs[ioi]*; their ‘redness’ probably being something they took along home in the bargain.

### 19.7. The Joint Ladogan Venue

Old Ladogan society was multiethnic, the town itself being predominantly Norse, its surroundings to the East next to purely Veps. When the name of Russia struck root here, even though its initial carriers were Norse (‘Swedes’), a multiethnic explanation is appropriate: not the Slav idiom of Novgorod territory on its own, certainly not the Gothic alone, let alone the Norse, nor the Balto-Fennic (Veps) on its own, but a composite solution. After all, people did *talk* (from Russian *tolk*), and across several language barriers. The inhabitants of Old Ladoga, we must assume, were nearly all of them multilingualistic.

So we assay what may be termed the Ladogan venue, meaning:

- a) that the Greek-and-Latin-attested term ‘**Rōs**,
- b) possibly learned in its Gothic pronunciation by Norsemen,
- c) and ‘accompanied’ by the ‘vulgar’ Greek tradition ‘rous > **Rus**,
- d) transported north by Norsemen,
- e) also struck root in the Veps tongue,
- f) and in the Slovene lingua franca of trade,
- g) which in its Ladogan version bore a Veps imprint,
- h) resulting in the otherwise anomalous **Rus’**.

This review of the stages by which the name of Russia was both formed and appropriated the name does not do full justice to Slavonic. After all, Old Norse was hardly in use at the Byzantine chancery around 840 AD. So the Norsemen from Old Ladoga surely had along an interpreter or two, someone trustworthy, and quite probably Balto-Fennic, i.e. Veps. He was, or they were, not brought along for the ride because they spoke Veps. Whatever the tongue of the *Rhōs* among themselves, the medium of interpretation utilized between the *Rhōs* and the Greeks was Slavonic; just as was

the case farther east, in the Caliphate, between ar-Rūs and Muslims;<sup>1</sup> and also between the peoples up north, in Russia itself.

For in their contacts with the Slavs, and even with other non-Slavs, the aborigines of the North in the main utilized Slav dialects. This we see in the original text of Ibrāhīm b. Ya‘qūb’s much discussed wording: *yatakallamūna bi-ṣaḡālibīya li-ḥtilātihim bihim* (not *bihī*). Or: “*They speak in Slavonic regarding their common relationships.*” Talk here is of intercourse between nations, not of their merger. A misleading translation is found in a number of authors.<sup>2</sup>

Norsemen in Old Ladoga were rapidly assimilated in their Balto-Fennic, Veps surroundings. This has been established by Soviet archaeologists.<sup>3</sup>

Both the Veps and other Balto-Fennic peoples up north continued to pronounce Slavonic words in their own way, as is the case even today.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, the Slavonic dialects of North Russia – meaning those of the Novgorod Slovenes and the Pskov (etc.) Kriviči – still show up substratums from the Fennic and Baltic aborigines who populated the land before the coming of the Slavs. We may rest assured that what the Norse learned of Slavonic too, which first took place in Old Ladoga, was of the kind spoken by, and in intercourse with, the local Veps.

What imprint could this have left, perhaps palpable still? We pass on to the so to speak crowning glory, literally the final touch, to the name.

A touch ever so soft:

## 19.8. *The Palatalized Ending*

Leaving the vowel problem, and considering it solved, we delve into the second hitherto unsolved quandary, viz. the softening of the final consonant: why **Rus’** and not simply **Rus**? Whence this peculiarity, how did it come to occur in Church Slavonic and Old Russian?

Up to now, the general view has been, in a commentary to the very word **Ves’** ‘the Veps people’:<sup>5</sup> “Rather, the form with -’ is a Russian collective name of the type *Čud’, Serb’*.”

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1. Cf Ibn Ḥurdādbih on the Rūs traders, “*a species of the Slavs*”, and their Slavonic interpreters: Birkeland 1954, 10.
  2. e.g. Birkeland 1954, 44, Gumilev 1956, 175 (referring to Kunik/Rozen 1878, 54).
  3. Golubeva 1973, 252; Kirpičnikov/Bul’kin/Dubov/Lebedev/Nazarenko 1981, 72. Not updated is Graham-Campbell 1994, 190: “Staraya Ladoga ... served a mixed population of Scandinavians and Slavs”, “The whole settlement is ringed by cemeteries of various kinds.... ..each of the cemeteries had a specific character, containing either rich or poor, Scandinavian or Slavic burials.”
  4. Specialist literature in Pimenov 1966, Salo 1971, Lapin 1995, 70. Much valuable work has been published by dr. A. Gerd.
  5. Vasmer 1986, I, 305.

This is simply wrong; there is no such form as **Serb´** (palatalized), nor is there a collective form, only the singular **Serb** ‘a Serbian’, plus the genitive plural *Serb* (not *Serbov*).<sup>1</sup> **Čud´**, though, does belong to the same group as **Ves´**.

Proceeding from this, another venue will be pursued.

We first demonstrate the functioning of a Veps phonetic law, using as an example the name of the river connecting the Ladoga and Onega, and thereby also the Baltic Sea and the Volga. This was the far-northern east-west ‘highway’ so diligently plied by the Vikings. In Veps it originally was **Sjuvjar´**, from **sjuvja** ‘deep’ plus **-jar´**, **jarv´** ‘lake’ (cf. Finnish *siuväjärvi*). This in Russian (Novgorod) resulted in **Svir´**.<sup>2</sup>

Or we may choose another likewise Russified toponymic: the name *Pid´ma*, from \***Pidämaa**. The suffix *-ma* is commonplace in toponymics. In Veps it loses the final **-a** (which in a Russian loan from the Veps reappears as a mark of gender, referring to a village in the feminine). In Veps this gives us **Pid´m**, pronounced **Pid´m**.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, Finnish *Valkea-järvi* in Veps becomes **Vougedjar´** or **Vaagar´**.<sup>4</sup>

In order to approach the term *Rus´* itself, let us look at the phonetically related ethnonym **Ves´**, or originally \***Vepsja**. This is what one specialist on Veps notes:<sup>5</sup>

“The thing is that M.I. Hämäläinen in the Vinickij region of Leningrad province succeeded in discovering knowledge of the ancient term **veps´** with a soft final *s´*. This fact bespeaks the onetime, subsequently elided forward vowel, i.e. the end vowel **-ä**.”

This latter phenomenon is wholly regular from the point of view of the Veps language, as in Veps the end vowel of a word in other than the first syllable always falls away if the first syllable is historically closed or long; which is what we have in the word **veps(ä)**.”

This is also the case with the Greek *´rūs(íoi)*, while the word *´Rōs* is monosyllabic. Yet *Rus´* is not to be treated in splendid isolation. It belongs to a whole group of ethnonyms with three characteristics in common:<sup>6</sup> **Ves´**, **Lib´** (or **Liv´**), **Sum´**, **Jem´** (or **Jam´**), **Vod´**, **Žmud´**, **Kors´**, **Čud´**, **Prus´**, **Lop´**.

1. same, II, 611. Already N. Lambin remarked that the reading **Serb´** is unfounded: *Žurnal Min. Naradnago Prosveščenija*, 191, SPb 1877, 255 note. Genitive plurals akin to *Serb* are of course common.
2. Mavrodin 1945, 30-31 lists a number of such placenames without however noting their explanatory potential: “Even farther up in the headwaters of the Dnepr, Oka, Volga and farther eastwards to the Don and beyond the Don the toponymics are as a rule of Fennic origin. To the north lies the lake *Il´men´* (Old Russian *Il´mer´*, *Ilmer´*) which in the Fennic tongues denotes a ‘stormy’, ‘inclement’, ‘open’ lake. To the southeast of it stretches the vast swamp *Nevij Mox*, covering several hundreds of square kilometers (Finnish *neva* ‘swamp’)... The name *Tver´* (Old Russian *T´xver´*) is analogous to *Tixvari* in Karelia and *Tihverä* in Finland. The name of the river *Svir´* doubtless stems from *syöväri* ‘deep’...”
3. cf. Bogdanov 1949.
4. cf. Virtaranta 1981, 73.
5. Bogdanov 1951, 26 n. 1; cf. Pimenov 1965, 40-41.
6. Other potential candidates, according to Kunik 1859: *Ser[e]b´*, *Volyn´* or *Velyn´*, *Goljad´*, *Ceremis´*. Yet there was no *Serb´* (palatalized), only *Serb´*: Vasmer 1958, II, 611. And the remainder of these names are multisyllabic. There is also **Skuf´** – which also occurs as **Skuf**, just like *Kozar* (see e.g. the Lavrent´evskaja Chronicle: Müller 1977, 11).

The most commonly utilized contemporary self-appellation of the Veps and southern Karelians, reflecting the Russian *ljudi* ‘people’, likewise was transformed among the Veps into **Ljud**.<sup>1</sup> In multisyllabic context the initial form is retained; thus *ljudikel* ‘(linguistic self-appellation of Veps and a main South Karelian dialect group)’.

Similarly, the word **Čud** is the linguistically impeccable result of the Norse *þjóð* ‘people, or [more specifically,] warriors, men’, though clearly calquing the Gothic **thiuda**. We recognize at once that the linguistic transformation here parallels that of **stór** > **sur** ‘big’.<sup>2</sup> The name **Ljud** ‘people’ in turn comes across as a translation into Russian, in a ‘Vepsified’ form, of precisely the Germanic (Gothic and Norse) term **thiuda** / *þjóð* ‘people’.<sup>3</sup>

The three traits common to this group of ethnonyms are:

- 1) All of them, like Rus’, are monosyllabic.
- 2) All are palatalized.
- 3) All refer to Baltic or Balto-Fennic, ‘Finnish’ peoples.

To the above list should be added **Perm**, the Veps origin of which has been treated by specialists.<sup>4</sup>

A multisyllabic word like **Samojad**, **Syrojad** is historically explicable from its Veps, or joint Veps-Slavonic, background.<sup>5</sup> Copious materials regarding the myth on the Veps as *syrojedy*, *samojedy* (reflecting the onetime rôle of the ‘Biarrians’ as Ya’gūg-Ma’gūg in the eyes of their Muslim trading partners) will have to await future study.

We underscore once more: It is inadmissible to discuss the name Rus’ without taking into consideration its group ‘context’; and the ‘group’ consists not of all Russian (Slavonic) words ending in a palatalization, but of the monosyllabic Baltic and Fennic names mentioned, including *Perm* – and *Rus*.

1. Bubrix 1971, 9.

2. We here follow Bubrix, versus a newer theory propagated by Finnish specialists that **Čud** derives from **Suudin** ‘wedge’; the theory being that a ‘wedge’ was a manner of ‘trade-mark’ for Balto-Fennic travelling traders. The Finnish word **suudin** however is itself an adjectival or derivative form, signifying properly ‘belonging to the Suud’. The least cumbersome explanation is simply that *Suudin* derives from *Čud*, and not vice versa. This seems to be borne out also by the Inari-Saami word **vepsä** ‘wedge’, indicating that the wedge trade-mark got its name from the Veps, and not vice versa.

3. An extra argument in favour of a theory where the wedge is derivative, not constitutive, of the name **Čud**.

4. Pimenov 1965, Stang 1977.

5. As for *syrojad* (*syrojedy*), I believe that, in addition to the Islamic eschatological background, and probably superseding it, Veps dietary and religious-calendarian practises were taken into – humorous – account by their Slav neighbours. Thus, while the period from Easter to Trinity was known as “the springtime meat-eater”, in June soured milk was sacrificed to the dead ancestors (*kisel* in Russian, the day being termed *kiselev den*), and later on sour *tvorogs* were strewn out upon the fields as a sacrifice to the goddess in the rye: Vinokurova 1994, 10, 69, 85-86, 91.93. “In ancient Russia by this word one designated both cheese and tvorogs”: Arcixovskij & Janin 1979, 129, on *syri*, *siry*.

## 19.9. Palatalization from Slavonic?

In our 1994 discussion, Maria I. Mullenon raised the possibilities that a) the above type of palatalization may be a phenomenon that arose in Veps under the influence of Slavonic; and b) that the above group of ethnonyms may perhaps be explained not as a result of Veps (including Slavonic-influenced Veps) historical phonetics at all, but as a purely Slavonic phenomenon. (After all, one might add, these names are met with in a Slav context, viz. the *Tale of Bygone Years* and other Russian chronicles.)

Nina I. Zajceva (herself a Veps from the one of the easternmost Central Veps villages in a roadless wilderness of the Vologda region) answered that she considered this palatalization a case of parallel development, as it is not particularly prominent in the most Russified populations of the Veps but found just as markedly among the least Russified (including her still very ‘pagan’ and isolated home village).

All our above investigations point to a Veps transmission into Slavonic, as against a purely and directly Slavonic one, of the Byzantine > Norse ‘nucleus’. And of course, once again, the question of this final palatalization cannot be treated in splendid isolation. Yet let us try all the same! In the process, what we are hoping to come up with is some additional material either falsifying, or confirming, or modifying through the addition of nuances and novel shades and salients, the picture or landscape that has arisen before our eyes.

What of other names in Slavonic, then, with and without palatalization?

The classical argument *for* a Slavonic explanation of *Rus’* etc. runs:<sup>1</sup>

“The word *rus’* does not by its form show a Fennic provenance, from *ruotsi*. There are many other names analogous in form, from not merely Fennic but also Greek, Lithuanian and Slavonic words – *Skuf’*, *Jam’*, *Sum’*, *Lib’*, *Ves’*, *Perm’*, *Vod’*, *Čeremis’*, *Goljad’*, *Kors’*, *Žmud’*, *Čud’*, *Sereb’*, *Volyn’*, *Velyn’*. The Russian tongue has many words in the feminine gender ending on an ´ and having the same sort of collective meaning as the tribal names just mentioned: *znat’*, *gnil’*, *dič’*, *drjan’*, *padal’*, *pogan’*, *pyl’*, *svoloč’*, *čern’*, *čeljad’*...”

This is neither exhaustive nor tenable.

First, the first instance cited, *Skuf’*, meaning ‘Scythia’, is untenable. Scythia and the Scythians crop up three times in the *Tale of Bygone Years* and its derivative chronicles. In the Preamble, we are first of all introduced to *Skufija*, i.e. the *land* of Scythia. Then there is *Velikaja Skuf’*, clearly designating, again, the land. Finally, there are the people, the Scythians, occurring in the genitive form, viz. “*ot Skuf, rekše ot Kozar...*”<sup>2</sup>

The latter form, unpalatalized, and in the nominative *Skufi*, *Skufy*, is akin to a number of other ethnonyms in Russian – for instance, precisely *Kozar* (from the nominative *Kozary*), or *Varjag* (from *Varjagi* or *Varjazi*), or *Greki* (from *Greki*) – confer the famous ‘Way from the Varangians to the Greeks’, *put’ iz varjag v greki*.

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1. Lamanskij 1859 (unavailable to me), as paraphrased by Mošin 1931, 359-361.

2. Palauzov 1871, 2, 6, 7, etc.



Just like another name-form given above, which we have treated already, *Ser[e]jb*, this simply vitiates, instead of proving, the ‘Slavonic’ argument:

‘The Scythians’ is a purely literary form, and for this reason not the best of examples. But **Serb** proves the point: If Church Slavonic and Old Russian were predisposed to treat ethnonyms, and particularly the mono-syllabic ones, as palatalized feminine nouns in the singular, why then does not this hold good for the Serbians? Or the Croatians for that matter, the Hrvaty: why not *Hrvat’*? *Češ’* and *Ljaš’* would have been perfectly possible too. So why the “*Ljaxove i Prusi i Čud’*”<sup>1</sup> – with only the last form, belonging to our Balto-Fennic group, in the palatalized feminine singular?

Why, furthermore, to pick a far-off name, do the chroniclers write of *Ind*, meaning the Hindus or Indians and India, and not of *Ind’*? Why, to take the Germanic-Baltic approach, do we meet the series “*Varjazi, Svei, Urmane, Gote, Rus’, Agljane*”,<sup>2</sup> etc., where only *Rus’* belongs to ‘our’ group? Why *Gote*, as well as *Goty*,<sup>3</sup> but never and nowhere *Got’*? And why *Dane*, not *Don’*?

Why, circling in our Balto-Fennic group even closer, do we encounter *Litva* for Lithuania,<sup>4</sup> and not *Litv’*? Why, if *\*rōtsi* or *ruotsi* be the parentage of *Rus’*, do we meet with *Nemcy* for the Germans, and not *Nemc’* or *Nems’*?

Third, we turn to the ethnonyms that **are** palatalized feminine singulars, such as **Čeremis’, Goljad’, Volyn’** (or **Velyn’**). The first of them, designating a Fennic people on the Middle Volga (now known as the Mari), may even have arisen by extension from our Balto-Fennic group. Being multi-syllabic, it strictly speaking falls outside the purvey of our group study.

The second and third instances cited are simply unfounded. There is no *Goljad’*, the *Tale of Bygone Years* speaking instead of a people *Goljadi* near Smolensk, under the year 6566 = 1058 AD; likewise, *Volyn’* or *Velyn’* is just a toponymic,<sup>5</sup> mentioned under the year 6526 = 1018 AD and later, whereas the local inhabitants are named in the Preamble to the *Tale of Bygone Years* as the *velynjane*.<sup>6</sup>

The palatalizations here go back upon learned Latin forms in the feminine. Likewise, *Vatr’*, reflecting Bactria.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, fourth, unpalatalized names like *Kupr* (meaning Cyprus), *Krit* (Crete), *Ind* (India), *Efes* (Efesos), *Dnepr*, *Bug* and other river-names, and of course *Pont* (the Pontos, the Black Sea), go back upon names in the masculine gender..

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1. same, 2.

2. same, 2.

3. same, 2, 11.

4. same, 2, 6, 108, etc.

5. Noted also by Schramm 1982, 40 n. 114.

6. Lixačev 1950, I, 13, II, 222.

7. Schramm 1982, 42-43, 49, enumerates also *Sur’, Mur’, pogan’* (alongside *pogane*), i.e. Syrians, Moravians, pagans, rightly judging them to be late and ‘learned’ forms modelled on *Rus’*, not vice versa. Strangely (same, 38), he also adduces **don’** ‘Danes’, a form not found in the *Tale of Bygone Years*.

Fifth, leaving the above, and homing in the Balto-Fennic peoples, it is striking that the Russian ethnonym for the Karelians, *Korela*, reflects the Karelian phonetics embedded in the self-appellation **Karjala**, plus Novgorodian (Slovene) change of stressed -a- into -o- (the northern *okan'e* phenomenon). Forms based on Veps phonetics, such as \***Korl'**, \***Karl'**, are not met with.

This may be explained by the relatively late formation of the Karelians as an ethnos – in part upon the ruins of the old Veps/ Čud' commonwealth. Yet that in turn willy-nilly raises the question: Why were the 'earlier' ethnonyms formed on the above group basis, and not **Karjala** > \***Korl'** also? Why was this Slavonic (Slovene, Novgorodian) rule (if such it were) discarded when the Karelians came along – in the early 12th c. AD, as it seems, up the Volxov and into the Ladoga-Onega region?

This provides a powerful argument in favour of a Veps as against a Slavonic explanation of the palatalization in the above group of ethnonyms.

Sixth, even the Veps name now in use for the Russians viz. **ven'a**, (a borrowing from Karelian) preserves the original Karelian phonetics.<sup>1</sup> The reason for the occurrence of this comparatively late ethnonym among the Veps lies in a fact coming in for discussion in our final chapter below: The Veps word based on Balto-Fennic \***rōtsi** is **roč'**; in addition, from the form *Rōs*, there is **rus'**. Both words preserve very archaic meanings, strong enough in the popular mind, evidently, to demand yet another word to designate the everyday and more modern meaning of 'Russian'.

Seventh, taking for our example half of the defunct Soviet symbol, the Russian word is the unpalatalized **serp** 'sickle'; whereas the Veps, a loan from the Russian, is the palatalized **sirp'** or **cirp'**.<sup>2</sup> This is a decisive argument in favour of a transmission of 'Rōs > Rus' into Slavonic by way of the Veps tongue.<sup>3</sup>

Eighth, for an example of how comparable Veps lexicology passed into Novgorodian Slavonic we turn to the dialect term **xor'** from the Novgorod and Beloozero regions, designating 'an islet in a river or lake',<sup>4</sup> from Balto-Fennic **kari**, Veps **kar'**, originally borrowed from Old Norse *sker*.<sup>5</sup>

Characteristic of terms such as **xor'**, **Vod'** (from *vadd'ja*) and **Lop'** (from *lappi, lapte*)<sup>6</sup> is the North Russian change from an original -a- into -o-. This is refound, as it appears, in the two Greek place-names **Korsun'** and **Solun'** mentioned in the Nestor chronicle. Why are these cities thus named? The transformation of the initial -a- into an -o- indicates a far-northern transmission, as does the substitution of the initial *ch-*, unknown among Scandinavians and Norse alike, into a *k-*; while the change of the -o- in the second syllable into a -u- plus palatalization is what we have witnessed in the passage from '*Rōs* to *Rus'*'.

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1. Bubrix 1971, 12.

2. Zajceva/Mullonen 1972, 513.

3. I dismiss out of hand the (theoretical) possibility that the 839 'Rōs were Slavs, and that they and their Slavonic pronunciation were subsequently assimilated by the Ladoga Veps – who in turn bequeathed the form *Rus'* to the Slavs!

4. Vasmer 1953, III, 267.

5. In the Novgorodian 'birch-bark letters' too, lexicology of the type discussed here surfaces, e.g. the proper name *Vigar'* (Balto-Fennic *Vihari*): Novgorodskie gramoty na bereste, M.-L. 1985, 256.

6. Valonen 1981.

In sum: Both the Greek origin of the name Rus' and the fact that it first referred to inhabitants of Old Ladoga are still to be inferred from the form of the name itself. The name was transmitted from Byzance to Old Ladoga by the 839 'envoys from the *qaḡān* of 'Rōs', subsequently entering into northern Slav speech on a par with other ethnonyms formed on the basis of the Veps language, which was used beside the Novgorodian Slavonic and Norse tongues in Old Ladoga and the entire northern periphery of the Novgorod and Eastern Kriviči regions.

### 19.10. On Russia

When writing a study *on* the name of Russia, we must feel obligated (if nobody else does) to analyse and perhaps explain that singular usage: Instead of *in* Russia (*v Rusi*),<sup>1</sup> the idiomatic expression is **on** Russia – **na Rusi**.<sup>2</sup> Strange to say, this quaint convention has never caught the interest of historians. Why is this? Is it because it does not fit into any preconceived, Normanist or Anti-Normanist, scheme?

It was with some trepidation, at the very end of the present work, that I asked a Finnish linguist colleague about the Balto-Fennic 'scheme' of things: which grammatical cases are used for nouns and names when saying *in* a place, *in* a garden, *in* Oslo, *in* Sweden, or *in* Russia?

Her answer surprised me: There are two cases, the inessive being the normal usage and meaning *in* a place, in Finnish marked by the suffix *-ssa/-ssä*. The other case is the adessive, and its use is the exception to the – inessive – rule: it means *on*. And one of the very few exceptions cited by her, at my prodding, was *Venäjäillä*; literally, '**on** Russia'.

Now Norse, and modern Scandinavian too, has a corresponding phenomenon: In Norwegian we say *i Oslo* ('in Oslo') but *på Lillehammer*, *på Hamar*, *på Gjøvik* ('on Lillehammer', 'on Hamar', 'on Gjøvik', being three inland towns, the explanation springing to mind being their mountainous or hilly setting in relation to the lowland, normsetting areas); elderly locals also stick to *på Moss* and in particular *på Horten* (two towns named after farms, a farm always being an 'on' place), as against the common *i Horten*, *i Moss*.<sup>3</sup>

In Swedish and Danish, a similar picture obtains.

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1. This usage does indeed occur, at least in the accusative, meaning **to** Russia; thus, *The Tale of Bygone Years*, 971 AD: Lixačev 1950, II, 51, 318.
  2. There are two other instances, seemingly analogous, viz: **na** *Ukraine*, i.e. 'on [the] Ukraine', as well as **na** *Kavkaze* i.e. 'on the Caucasus'. Upon closer consideration, these are however far from analogous. The first translates as, originally, 'on the periphery'; cf. Paszkiewicz 1954, 305-306: The expression *okraina* (= *ukraina*) is found in many principalities, such as Kiev, Xalič, Pskov, Polotsk, Moscow and others, in the sense 'periphery', showing that it is "a simple noun, and by no means a proper name". Likewise, **on** the Caucasus is wholly understandable, meaning **on** top of the mountain, just like in English.
  3. I am indebted to dr. philos. Tor Guttu, Nordic Institute, University of Oslo, for this information. Institute for Name Research, and Gamalnorsk Ordboksverk (both University of Oslo), have a wealth of additional materials.

This distinction was present in Norse too, only with a greater use of **à** (> **pá**) than in its Scandinavian successor tongues today.<sup>1</sup> And the transmitters of the Greek name into an Old Ladoga and subsequently greater Russian setting were Norsemen (plus, we have concluded, a trusted, probably Veps Slavonic-speaking, translator or two). But why **'on Russia'**? The later (indeed very much later) Norse form was invariably *i Ryzaland, i Ruscia*, etc.

One explanation, or a major part of the it, I believe resides in the Norse usage *à Aldeigjuborgar, à Áluborgar, à Palteskja, à Holmgarðar, à Koenugarðar, à Garðar* (meaning in Old Ladoga, in Olonec, in Polotsk, in Novgorod, in Kiev, in 'the Towns', i.e. Russia), even *à Bjarmalands, à Jötunheimar* (in Biarmia, in the Ogre Land) – versus the later (again, very much later) *í Garðaríki* (in 'the Town-realm', meaning in Russia).

This then is wholly in keeping with common Norse usage, like *à Oslos* (i.e., **'on Oslo'**) or *à Sciringsals* (**'on'** the port preceding Tunsberg). The explanation is mainly found, to my mind, in the commonplace for 'residing in a place', which was 'sitting **on** a place' (originally, a farm).

There are even instances, wholly parallel to the **na Rusi** construction, regarding country names as well: Thus, *sú borg stendr á Italia i Rómariki*, literally "so a castle is standing **on** Italy, in the Roman realm".<sup>2</sup>

This is, by itself, a perfect, wholly exhaustive, explanation; we may even say: **the** perfect explanation. There is but one *additional* bit of explanation around: The *topos* of the island, from the times of the Goths and Eruls all the way down to the quagmire setting found in Ibn Rusta and other Arabic authors. "*No man is an island*" – yet the Russian founders *were*. And the Norse usage on any island, just like the English, is just that: **on** an island.

Whether or not these first 839 visitors to Byzantium did discuss the boggy island *topos* when, and after, returning home, and whether this talk in that case influenced the subsequent usage **on Rus'**, we do not and cannot know. What we now do feel that we know is the following:

These 'eight-thirty-niners' applied the name they carried home with them to what was meaningful to them there: their own petty locality, Old Ladoga and its immediate surroundings. This is what we have inferred already, from e.g. the *Všivyj kondjuk* folk-tale. In so doing, they naturally conformed to, indeed were willy-nilly dictated by, the Norse usage of their time, meaning **'on'** the place. Through their interpreter(s), this passed into Veps and, later on, the Balto-Fennic tongues, including present-day Finnish.

This usage evidently proved irresistible to Slavonic-speakers.<sup>3</sup> To them it was so to speak presented at the victorious tip of the tongue and the sword.

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1. Fritzner 1954 + Supplementum 1975. Oral confirmation from Tor Guttu and Erik Simensen, Gamalnorsk Ordboksverk.

2. Fritzner 1954, I, 1, citing Unger 1877, I, 365, line 26.

3. Exceptions do obtain; thus, the *Tale of Bygone Years*: Lixačev 1950, II, 318: поиду в Русь...

### 19.11. Rjurik & Bros. Revisited

Characteristically, the Norse name **Hroerek(r)** – attested in Latin sources as *Rorik*, *Roric*, *Rorih*, *Rorich*, *Roricus*<sup>1</sup> – did not, as might be expected, produce **Rorik** or **Rurik** in Slavonic (cf. *Rurik* in Tatiščev)<sup>2</sup>, but **Rjurik**; cf. **Kjurik** and other similar palatalized Veps (or sometimes possibly Votic, or common Balto-Fennic) personal names, such as *Aljuj*, *Veljut*, *Gjuvij*, *Tjulpin*.<sup>3</sup>

We go on to Rjurik's two colleagues according to the *Tale of Bygone Years*. Now whereas Truvor is an acceptably straightforward rendering into Slavonic of a Norse name (*Pruvar*, or possibly *Porvarðr*),<sup>4</sup> the name of the third brother summoned to rule by the tribes of Northern Russia, is definitely not: This name, Sineus, has traditionally been taken for a rendering of *Signjótr* (literally, 'Victory-enjoyer'); or of "sine hus", meaning that Rjurik came along with his 'true guard' (whence *Pruvar*) and with 'his houses' ("sine hus").<sup>5</sup> The latter 'name' is of course no Norse name at all: It is modern Norwegian. In Norse it would have been instead *með husum sinum*. The plural 'houses', moreover, signifies just that: buildings. Clearly, this suggestion is rubbish.

A Slavonic alternative (from *sinij* + *us* = 'Bluebeard'!) is hereby launched. Yet I hasten to say that it is improbable as a name for a Norse chieftain ruling, in Beloozero, among the Veps.

Instead, it evokes Balto-Fennic names still current, such as *Armas* or *Tolas*,<sup>6</sup> or *Olas-* and *Turas-*,<sup>7</sup> or perhaps some now lost name akin to the word *sir'es* 'next, nearby'.<sup>8</sup> We simply cannot say today. Our material is too slender. We can say, however, that the standard Norse (Normanist) explanation is not tenable.<sup>9</sup>

The classical name-forms of other 'founding fathers' might repay attention too. Why did the name *Igor'* develop the way it did? There is no reason in Slavonic for the Norse *Ingvarr* to result in the said form. On the other hand, according to the rules of Veps phonology given above, precisely *Igar'* or *Igor'* would ensue.

This is not to suggest that the majority of his men were Veps; yet it is not inconceivable that he did come to be known by the pronunciation they, as part of his army, bequeathed to his name.

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1. Beljaev 1929, 241-242 n. 123, 270 n. 233.

2. same.

3. Janin & Zaliznjak 1981, 256-258.

4. Beljaev 1929, 244-245.

5. Why 'his houses' in the one instance, and not 'his true guard' in the other, is anybody's guess.

6. Mullonen 1993, 88. Finnish ones, not Veps, on streetboards in Petrozavodsk! Veps names have generally long since been superseded by Russian ones.

7. same, 80: *Olas-boloto* and *Turas-boloto*, in Taržepol' area, right west of new (1994) Veps self-governing district by Onega Sea, southern Karelia.

8. Zajceva/Mullonen 1972, 513.

9. Schramm 1982, 22: Transmission Old Norse *Sigineótr* > *Sineus* presupposes that the ending **-tr** was "heard as **-ts** by the Slavs or their name-transmitters the Veps, over whom Sineus is said to have ruled from Beloozersk" (sic).

## 20. Ruotsi: The Phonetics

“Rus’: In the 9th-10th cc. the name of the state formed by the eastern Slavs upon the middle Dniepr..... Already in the 12th c. by the term ‘Land of Russia’ was understood all Slav tribes dwelling throughout Eastern Europe.”  
Great Soviet Encyclopaedia 1975, 22: 433.

Вопрос ‘откуда есть пошла Русская земля’, постановленный древнерусским летописцем начала XII в., оказался вечным... За почти 900 лет приближения к истине получены определенные результаты, но предстоит еще немалая работа...  
Kučkin 1995, 74.

### 20.1. Rus’ from \*rōtsi ‘Rowers’? First Try

The traditionally dominant approach to the problem is the Normanist one:

“True, the view regarding the transmission from Balto-Fennic \***rōtsi** to Eastern Slavonic **Rus’** is still going strong...” The sole complication here consists in explaining the correspondence between a Fennic -ts- and the Eastern Slavonic s’. The change from -ō- into -u- is however wholly regular. Thus, “Balto-Fennic long *ō* (or the diphthong **uo**), not found in the Old Russian tongue, was most closely represented by the Old Russian sound -u-.” An impeccable instance is given in the transposition of Finnish *Suomi*, historically \***Sōmi** (with a long vowel), into the **Sum’** of Russian chronicles.<sup>1</sup>

May not the appellation **Rus’** be explained from the Finnish **ruotsi**, Estonian **root’s**, originally Balto-Fennic \***rōtsi** ‘Swede’, as reflecting a Norse word?

That is what most textbooks say.<sup>2</sup> It is often repeated by specialists. Two leading Russian historians now simply preface an article with the words: “The known hypothesis deriving the name Rus’ from Finnish Ruotsi is examined and its Scandinavian etymology accepted.”<sup>3</sup>

In a more detailed argument we read:<sup>4</sup>

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1. Šaskol’skij 1967, 157, espousing the view of Thomsen 1891, 87, and Ekblom 1957, 48-49.
  2. Krohn 1871 refers instead to Estonian **rōtsi-veri** ‘the northern lights’, **rōtsi hobu** ‘Ursus Minor’ (a constellation), and **vana Rōtsi** ‘North Norway’ (literally, ‘Old’ Norway).
  3. Mel’nikova & Petrušin 1991, 203. Disfigured with misprints, this article is clearly not authored by linguists; it repeats the ‘first try’ derivation **rus’** < **roψs(menn)**: same, 208, 214, 219, 221 plus, strangely, 216-217 (based on the late translation of *Dromitai* by the Slavic *skedii*: “... the word *Dormitai* (sic) can be associated with the rowing vessels and the rowers, which corresponds to the meaning of the aforesaid term \**rōp(e)R*.”
  4. Mel’nikova & Petrušin 1989, 28. Same, in their commentary to Constantine Born-in-the-Purple’s *De Administrando Imperii*, Moscow-Len. 1989, 296-304, give basically the same argument.

“The transition from Finnish **ruotsi** to Old Russian **rus´** is phonetically convincingly founded. Western Finnish **-uo/oo-** was regularly reflected in the Old Russian **-u-**, which is confirmed by a series of analogies (e.g. Finnish *suomi* > Old Russian *sum´*) and the general correspondence between Old Russian **-ū-** and Finnish **-uo/oo-**. The possibility of a transition from Finnish **-ts-** to Old Russian **-s-** has some supremely likely explanations: First, the loan may have taken place before the sound **-ts-** was formed in the Old Russian tongue. Second, if the borrowing took place later, the **-s-** in the word *Rus´* may have arisen as a simplification of the consonantal group **-ts-** (compare *vepsä* > *ves´*).”

A simplification indeed.

According to one prominent Russian specialist in the Soviet epoch,<sup>1</sup> the Normanist hypothesis regarding the derivation of the **Rus´** name from Balto-Fennic **ruotsi** “meets with ever greater linguistic, but particularly historical, misgivings”. Which are these misgivings? His conviction was not shared by two Finnish specialists,<sup>2</sup> who however evidently have not read his argument.<sup>3</sup>

The treatment by this Russian specialist is singularly incisive, presenting a conspectus of the specialist literature on the theme up to his time, on the basis of which it is evident that the foundations of the *ruotsi* theory were in dire need of revision. His criticisms of the traditional Normanist position may be compressed as follows:

1. It is inexplicable why the Slavs, knowing the two Norse self-appellations *Svei* and *Varangians* (sic) should take recourse to the Baltic Finns in order to seek out an additional name, unknown to Slavs and Scandinavians alike, not once met with in all of ancient Scandinavian literature.

2. If such really be the case, why did the Slavs have to seek this name among the farthest-off of all Balto-Fennic peoples, namely the *Suomi* and *Hämä* Finns?

3. Did not the Finns know about the existence of Swedes, under this or that name, long before the reputed expedition to and subjection of the Slavs by these Swedes in the mid-9th century?

4. The consonant **-ts-** in the word *ruotsi* does **not** correspond to the Eastern Slavonic, ancient Russian sound **-s´**. (Although the apparently parallel change from *Veps´* into *Ves´* should be taken into account.)

5. It cannot be proven that the Finnish word *ruotsi* derives from the ancient Swedish tongue.

Conceding the three first points without reservation, we inspect the two latter ones. According to another Russian specialist,<sup>4</sup> the Finnish sound **-ts-** had to result in an Old Russian **-ts-** or **-c-**. According to a third,<sup>5</sup> the Old Russian **-ts-** was a palatalized sound, not corresponding to the Finnish **-ts-**, whereby the latter would most likely be rendered by a (palatalized) **s´** in Russian. This remains a moot point, and the position held by this latter researcher is far from universally accepted.

The connection between Balto-Fennic **ruotsi** (etc.) and *Rođen*, *Roðslagen*, first suggested by Bureus, is even more problematic, having been subjected to devastating

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1. Šaskol'skij 1970, 33.

2. Itkonen & Joki 1967, III, 875-876.

3. Šaskol'skij 1967, 128-176.

4. Černyx 1956, 100.

5. Šaxmatov 1916, 67.

criticism on the part of Scandinavian philologists of a Normanist persuasion. The nickname *Rospiggar*, preserved until our days within the area of the one-time Roslagen military call-up, as well as *Roslep*, *Rosta* and the likes in Esthonia, are not derivatives of the form *\*rōþer* ‘rowing, shipping’ as suggested,<sup>1</sup> since the composite with the genitive case is not *rōþ(er)s-byggjar* but *rōþar-byggjar*; which is commensurate with neither the Swedish names in question nor with the Finnish *ruotsi*.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of the impossible form *\*rōþer*, another suggestion has been a word in the nominative case, *\*roþra*, with the same meaning, which purportedly would give rise to a genitive form *rots-*.<sup>3</sup> This proposition was however subjected to harsh criticism on a number of scores, a new proposal being *\*roþr* ‘a vessel for rowing’ in the *leidang*.<sup>4</sup> In turn, this construction was proved to be wholly unfounded.<sup>5</sup> Finally, there was an effort at returning to the form *\*rōþer*, but then presupposing some follow-up word beginning with an -s, such as *\*Rōþ-swear* ‘rower-Swedes’; the suggestion being that the Finns formed *ruotsi* from the first syllable plus the initial *s-* of the subsequent one, jettisoning the remainder of the latter!<sup>6</sup>

All the forms suggested by these philologists, including the last one, remain purely hypothetical, wholly unproven, each one of them giving rise to grave objections. Consequently, at the University of Oslo, one specialist, having worked long on this problem in an as yet unpublished ms., ended up by concluding that *\*rōtsi* is not to be derived from Swedish lexicology.<sup>7</sup>

## 20.2. *Rus’ from \*rōtsi ‘Rowers’? Second Try*

A novel approach was launched in 1958 and 1981.<sup>8</sup> Rejecting all other, older explanations, Ekbo maintains that Fennic *\*rōtsi* “was borrowed not from a composition but directly from the Old Swedish *rōþer*, rowing. ... In the 6th and 7th centuries this Swedish word must have had the form *\*rōðR* (or *\*rōðz*, *\*rōðeR*, *\*rōðez*, *rōþeR*, *rōþez*).”<sup>9</sup> The sound *R*, or ‘palatal r’, probably being close to the voiced alveolar (*z*), was lacking in Finnish, “and then no doubt *s* was nearest at hand as a substitute”. The same correspondence has been observed in Saami,<sup>10</sup> and Ekbo adds that, according to previous research,<sup>11</sup> “a Protoscand. *-ðz* would give a Finnish *-tsi*, i.e. exactly the rendering that is suggested here in the case of *\*rōðR*, *\*rōðz*.”

This analysis has won general acclaim. It is a major improvement over the preceding ‘rower’ suggestions. The author is not basing himself on composites that have never existed, but on a quite common word of assured authenticity. Still today in

1. Thomsen 1891, 84-86, cf. 344-345.

2. as pointed out by Stender-Petersen 1953, 80-81.

3. Ekblom 1957, 47.

4. Hjärne 1947.

5. by Ekblom & Hafström 1957.

6. Ekbo 1958.

7. Dr. Ottar Grønvik: Personal communication.

8. or more precisely, little noticed, a decade before Ekbo, by Hellquist 1948: *ryss-*.

9. Ekbo 1981, 144.

10. Sköld 1953-54, 45.

11. Wiklund 1911, 241.



Swedish, as he points out, *rodd* means ‘water for rowing, esp. for fishing’, ‘rowing’ in both abstract and concrete contexts, and also ‘rowers of a boat’, i.e. the crew, even ‘an expedition of rowing ships’. A single Runic inscription, from the 11th c. (now lost), attests to this latter sense; it reads: **han: was : buta : bastr : iruþa : hakunar** – “he was the best man in Hakon’s expedition of rowing ships”.

Yet nothing in this world is perfect, or free from criticism. Consider the following:<sup>1</sup>

1) Still highly hypothetical is the semantical transition **\*rōðR** ‘the act of rowing’ > ‘rowing expedition’, ‘crew of rowers’ > ‘Swedes’.

2) Ekbo’s Normanist helping hand comes too late. The transition can only have taken place some time after c. 650 AD, when the root vowel **-u-** had disappeared. And by that time the Baltic Finns and the Saami had long had contacts with North and East Germanics, as loanwords demonstrate. Naturally, the Finns and Saami must have had names for the Scandinavians; and even if these names did come to be superseded by a novel term, viz. **\*rōðR** > **\*rōtsi**, then it is wholly unthinkable that all traces of the previous name(s) were erased over such a wide area as that of the Balto-Fennic-Saami population.

We may add:

3) Still strictly unproven is Ekbo’s view (despite his 1958 paper) that the ending **-R** was “probably a fricative r-sound standing very near a voiced velar (z)”; and no single instance of a loan is given proving the passage **-R** > Fennic **-s**.

Over and above sheer linguistics, it is highly implausible that Finns would call Swedes for ‘the Rowers’, for at least two reasons:

4) Before the early 9th c., all Viking vessels were rowed, not sailed. Why choose an appellation stressing the obvious – that the Swedes came along by rowing? What other kinds of Swedes did they encounter (driving or galloping Swedes, running or flying Swedes)?

5) Tribal names obtained, deeply rooted in common daily use and, more important, in trade relations. Thus, Swedes would call themselves just that when rowing across the Baltic – cf. *Suehans* and *Suetidi* already in classical authors – and were thus called by others too.

This last argument is really quite a strong argument that perhaps **\*rōtsi** originally did not designate ‘Swedes’ at all, but something else: other seafarers, possibly (on whom a subchapter below), whose name or nickname was subsequently applied to the Swedes.

We conclude that the Balto-Fennic designation **ruotsi** (etc.) has still not been convincingly explained. Of course it **may** yet have another (Swedish, Scandinavian, or even Gothic?) origin, yet that this still remains to be proven.

Worse, as Ekbo’s thesis or hypothesis goes, the above is just for starters. The really big, backbreaking hurdle remains: the transition **\*rōtsi** > **Rus**.

Here, abandon hope: Proof of this transition and transmission has not come forth. It has on the contrary been decisively refuted:<sup>2</sup> The Slavs (Slovenes and Kriviči) necessarily learned the name from the Baltic Finns with whom they first came into con-

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1. Schramm 1982, 14-15.

2. Argument and literature in Schramm 1982, 17-19.

tact, meaning the Ests, Vots and Veps – who all retain the **-ts-** (or, in Veps, **-č**) of the **\*Rōtsi** name. There is no reason why the Slavs would reduce this to an **-s**; there are indeed instances proving the opposite (thus, Finns felt that Russian **-ts-** equalled their own **-ts-**, as in Russian *kotec* > Finnish *katits*).

Strangely, having pulled down the traditional Normanist temple, the same scholar tries to reerect it: First, by saying that in the 6th-7th cc. the Slavs *may* still have retained consonant clusters ending in an **-s**, such as in *Vepsä*, or **\*roudso-** ‘red’, or **\*Rōtsi** then. Second, that if this was not the case, then perhaps the **-ts-** we today know from Russian had not yet become available – as it did through the phenomenon called the second palatalization.<sup>1</sup> Yet the view that this second palatalization was particularly late up among the northernmost Eastern Slavs is quite unsubstantiated; as is the tacit assumption that, if they did have a chance to acquire the name **\*Rōtsi** within a brief spell before being stricken by the said palatalization, then these Slavs would be forever immune to the oft-reiterated correct pronunciation of the name **\*Rōtsi**, from their Balto-Fennic neighbours.

On the contrary these northernmost Slavs, the Slovenes and Kriviči, would be prone to contract nuisances of pronunciation endemic to these Finns, viz. the Ests, the Vots and the Veps – including *their* palatalization and *their* terminology, such as **\*Rōtsi**, or Veps *Roč*.

At the end, our critic is reduced to *guessing* – and to admitting it to himself and us. All we are left with is Rus´ as “the most probable sound resemblance”.<sup>2</sup>

Resemblance is the word:

The relationship between **ruotsi** and **Rus´** is one of similarity in sound only.

### 20.3. Or is Rus´ interethnic?

An ingenious theory, launched on the eve of *perestrojka*, is as follows:<sup>3</sup>

“Alongside the southern, more ancient form **ros, ros´**, connected in the Middle Dniepr area with the name of the Rosomones (before 375 AD), the Roxolani (before 568) and, probably, the much later **Rochousco** (Orosius, by King Alfred, end of 9th c.), the northern form of the name expands, viz. **Rus´**, superseding [the southern form].

Over the last 20 years, Soviet linguists have studied the origins of this northern form in detail... Their conclusions are unanimous: the name Rus´ arose in the Novgorod region. Here it is attested by rich toponymics, such as are not found in the South: Rusa, Porus´e, Okolorus´e in the southern Il´men area, Rusa near the Volhov, Rusynja on the Luga, Russ´ka in Volozbe in the Ladoga area. These names delineate the original territory of the ‘tribal rule’ of the Slovenes...

In content and linguistic form alike, **Rus´** is a name which arose in the zone of intensive Slav contacts with the bearers of ‘other tongues’, as a result of Slavonic-Fennic-Scandinavian linguistic interplay, in the course of which a group of originally related terms

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1. Same, 19-23.
  2. Same, 22: “Insgesamt möchte ich meinen, dass ein Philologe, der die russische Nachfolgeform von Rōtsi (in Unkenntnis der tatsächlich überlieferten Lautung) durch Erraten bestimmen wollte, gerade auf Rus´ als wahrscheinlichstes, normgerechtestes Klangbild verfallen müsste.” Criticized by Dralle 1985.
  3. Kirpichnikov/Dubov/Lebedev 1986, 202-205.

arose, close to each other in meaning, yet later on developing separately in different languages, and most fully and multifariously in Old Russian.

The original significance of the term is apparently 'army, armed retinue'; a possible specification is 'outfit of a military vessel, rowers', or 'foot soldiers, soldiery'. In this array of meanings, the closest to the chronicler's **rus'** is the Finnish **ruotsi** and the Old Icelandic **rōþs**, the Runic **ruþ**. Having existed among diverse peoples by the Baltic as a designation for 'armed force, army', in Russia this name already in the 9th c. led a life of its own, having broken itself off from the Fennic as well as from the Scandinavian word close to it in meaning. During the early formative stages of the Old Russian state, *Rus'* became the designation for the early feudal Eastern Slavonic 'kighthood' defending 'the Russian Land'..."

This unfortunately is neither here nor there. Though imaginative to the point of being ingenious, it is clearly not penned by a philologist. The purely philological arguments partly militating against and partly vitiating the above are as follows:

1) The toponymics given are wholly incommensurable. One cannot treat e.g. *Rusa* and *Okolorus'e* as belonging to the same period, which they to all appearances do not (the latter of the two, a composite, being clearly the younger). It is wholly untenable that most of the names listed belong to the pre-Rjurik and pre-860 'tribal principality of the Slovenes'. With the possible yet undecided exception of the two *Rusa*, these place-names are all younger.

2) The above list has one conspicuously missing candidate: *Staraja Russa* in the Pskov region. The sole reason it has been omitted is, evidently, that it does not fit the 'tribal principality of the Slovenes' theory. It is always included in other, standard discussions of the *Rus'* name; as indeed it merits, its second element **Russa** being recognized as one of the oldest relevant place-names there is (*how* old is however unclear).

3) The existence of the two *Rusa* plus *Staraja Russa* would seem to belie rather strongly the theory they were meant to support, viz. that the name *Rus'* arose hereabouts: What characterizes them is their lack of palatalization. The suffix **-a** is explicable as the feminine gender marker for a village; yet *Rus[s]a* points back to *Rus[s]* and not to *Rus'*. If the palatalized **Rus'** were indeed the point of departure, the derivative would be *Rus'ja* (cf. *Russ'ka* above). It is not.

4) No reason is (or indeed can be) given for the discrepancy (for as such it must be billed, if both forms are Slavonic) between an unpalatalized *Ros* and the palatalized *Rus'*; nor for the vowel fluctuation **u > o**, or **o > u**.

5) If both these forms are purebred Slavonic, as the above theory appears to assume, and the 'southern' one *Ros* is the elder of the two, how come it is 'superseded' by an 'expansionist' northern form? Indeed, how and why does this 'northern form' come to arise at all?

6) The 'southern form' **Ros'** listed above (i.e. the palatalized variety) is not hitherto known or anywhere attested. It can only be understood as an embarrassing attempt by the Soviet authors to gloss over the existence of a palatalized form up north as against a non-palatalized one (*Ros*) down south.

7) The Novgorodian dialects are characterized by the *okan'e* phenomenon (the -o- in unstressed syllables is pronounced as -o-, whereas in more southerly dialects it comes across as -a-, i.e. Novgorodian *koněšno* versus the contemporary standard

pronunciation *kaněšna* ‘of course’). Why then should Novgorodian, which more than the southern dialects retains the **-o-**, in this one case change it into an **-u-**?

8) Leaving ‘Novgorodian’ *Rus’* to its own hapless devices, we turn to the even less convincing Balto-Fennic and Norse parts of the theory. For one thing, the supposed link between *ruotsi* and *Rus’* still remains unproven. How the former is ‘closest’ to the latter is wholly unclear.

9) There is no Old Icelandic **rōþs**. Not only is such an occurrence not attested; it is impossible too, running counter to Icelandic and Norse rules of word formation (as *rōþs* is genitive, it presupposes a noun – or a pronoun steering the genitive case).

10) The form **ruþ** is known only from one relatively late occurrence – on the runestone in Uppland, already mentioned, from the mid-11th c. This alone is a slender basis on which to pin a theory.<sup>1</sup>

In sum, this was a wild goose-chase; one of the wilder ones.

There is however more to the theory:

“Second, ... the chronicle version uses the terms *rus’* and *družina* as interchangeable. The connection between the original meaning of the name *rus’* with the concept of ‘army, armed retinue’ explains the chronicle formula *vsja rus’* [‘all the *rus’*’]. In our opinion, in the reconstituted source, something like *allan roþ* corresponds to it, a type of well-known formulas [like] *allan ledungr*, *allan almenningr*, in the sense of ‘all the troops’...”

This is generally convincing, only that the composite *allan roþ* is nowhere attested. The argument deserves being carried one further step: The expression **vsja rus’** militates against an ‘original’ territorial meaning of the name, as a designation for ‘the Rus’ Land’. As correctly observed here, *vsja rus’* simply signifies the armed body accompanying Rjurik and his immediate successors on military campaigns. And the expression *vsja Rus’* is not of Norse origin; it has as parallels “all the Bolgars”, “all the Serbs”, “all the Serb land”.<sup>2</sup>

## 20.4. Veps & Komi roč

Does this then mean that the Balto-Fennic \***rōtsi** are a sheer blind alley as regards the ‘Normanist’ problem? Far from it!

We first look into certain aspects of Veps philology in the posthumous work of that grand old man of eastern Balto-Fennic philology, Bubrix:<sup>3</sup>

“The Komi call the Russians **Roč**. We here are in the presence of a Balto-Fennic term, represented in the Finnish **ruotsi**, Karelian **ruoč’č’i**, etc. What is peculiar here is that Finnish **Ruotsi**, Karelian **Ruoč’č’i** and the likes designate Sweden or some part of the former possessions of Sweden, whereas in the Balto-Fennic source of the Komi **Roč’** the same word designated Russia. Reasoning by way of elimination, we come to the conclusion that the such a meaning of the term in question is conceivable only among the Ves’, who dwelled farther east than all other Balto-Fennic tribes and had less contact with Sweden

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1. Dr. G.S. Lebedev has refined this theory several times, and most recently at the Varangian Symposium in honour of Dr. Lev Klejn in St. Petersburg, December 13-15, 1995, cf forthcoming *Proceedings*.

2. Solov’ev 1957, 141.

3. Bubrix 1971, 8-12.

than all others. Unfortunately, it is precisely among the Veps – the direct descendants of the Ves’- that this term has not been preserved. Instead of it the term Ven’ja is used, borrowed (as phonetics prove most indubitably) from the Karelians in the 13th c. or somewhat later...”

Two points raised by Bubrix in the above invite misgivings.

Firstly, in Old Ladoga and its environs the Veps had close contact with Swedes.

Second, three Veps forms of the term have actually been preserved. One toponymic has been registered as follows:<sup>1</sup> **Rot’š’ide** (pl. gen.) **koumad**, as meaning “the graves of the Russians”, close to the village Petsojla. Another registration runs:<sup>2</sup> “**ročo** 1. ‘unbaptized child’, 2. pl. *ročid* ‘Finns’ (word registered by E. Setälä at the end of the 19th c.)” The latter meaning ‘Finns’ was registered in the village of Šokša in the Veps National Region of Karelia.<sup>3</sup> Recently the toponymic **Ročinkor’b** has been added to our list:<sup>4</sup>

“It is not excluded that the terminology pointing to a cult of the forefathers was diverse in the various parts of the ‘Between-the-Lakes’ [Veps heartland]. For instance, to it may refer the Ojat’ region toponymics **Ročinkoumad** (*koumad* ‘graves’, i.e. ‘the graves of the Roči’), **Ročinkor’b** (*kor’b* ‘forest’), and **Ročid**, all including a common element **roč**, echoing an ancient mythological meaning which up to now has been preserved in the sense of ‘non-baptized (child)’.

The mythological import of the word may be shown also by [the fact that] some of the places with a name including the element **roč** are linked to traditions about giants who once lived there behind massive iron gates.”

These ‘giants who once lived there behind massive iron gates’ are the latest echo we so far have of the scare voiced in the letter by the Veps (Wīsū) to the ruler of the Bulḡār on the Volga in 921 AD: When the iron gates of the North open up, the Ya’ḡūḡ-Ma’ḡūḡ issue forth. In Bulḡār, the size of these giants was in evidence in the shape of a monstrously huge man recently dead when Ibn Faḡlān visited the place.

In the above registration, interestingly, these latterday Gog-Magog ogres are associated not merely with the Iron Gates of, originally, Alexander the Great, but also with the name **Roč’**. Here, like in mediaeval sources which have been reviewed in the present work, the Gog-Magog and the Rus’ are lumped and located together. Interestingly, in this recording, it is not a form deriving from the Biblical ‘Rōs (> Rus’) but one reflecting \**rotsi* (> Roč) that is used. This in our opinion demonstrates that the Biblical-and-Qur’anic traditions on ‘Rōs-plus-Gog-Magog gravitated to the founding fathers of Russia – who were known by the name (beforehand, evidently) of \**rotsi* (which in the Veps developed into **Roč’**).

The latest treatment of the term adds an interesting observation concerning the graves of the ancestors, usually called the Pans; here however another name surfaces:<sup>5</sup>

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1. Itkonen & Joki 1967, III, 876.

2. Mullonen/Zajceva 1972, 477.

3. *Näkm* 36. On another Veps toponymic, see Mägiste 1958, 209 note.

4. Mullonen 1993, 10.

5. Vinokurova 1994, 73, citing Mullonen 1985, 86.

“The Ojat´ Veps in the neighbourhood of the village Pelduši have preserved the memory of a certain people *ročid* and the place of its interment under the name of Ročinkoumad, literally ‘the graves of the *roči*. *Ročid* among the Veps, besides being an ethnonym, carried a second meaning too – ‘unbaptized children’. In this fact we see anew the intricate connection between the ancient cemeteries of the ancestors and primogenitors, and the burial-place for unbaptized children.”

Unbaptized children were relegated to this burial-ground, one would conclude, because the people lying there beforehand were unbaptized too, meaning from pre-Christian times. Are these *ročid* (to be considered) the ancestors of the local Veps? If so, does not this logically imply that the Veps on the Ojat´ in pre-Christian times, meaning in the 9th-10th centuries, prided themselves on belonging to the *Roč´* < ‘Swedes’ (in Finnish, *ruotsi*)?

This is in no way far-fetched, as it is precisely in the onetime Veps settlements on the Lower Ojat´ and Sjas´ rivers that archaeologist have found a culture so ‘Scandinavian’ that it for long was considered just that; the now-accepted reappraisal being that here lie Veps comrades-in-arms and close allies of the Scandinavians involved in the rise of Russia: precisely ‘Swedes’, in quotation marks.

Second, a transmission of Veps *roč´* to Komi *roč[´]* (whence in turn the Udmurt and Trans-Ural forms), meaning ‘Russians’, can in no way be said to reflect non-knowledge or lack of links between Veps and Swedes. If so be it, why use precisely this term, giving it a wholly novel meaning at that? Instead, only one inference is admissible, and even possible, as has been noted long since by philologists of Normanist ilk:<sup>1</sup>

It is in a Veps milieu that the transformation in the meaning of this term from ‘Swede’ to ‘Russian’ took place. Whether we like it or not, this militates in favour of a ‘Normanist’ conclusion (albeit not quite the standard one):

Inhabitants of Old Ladoga or of its Veps surroundings, of Swedish origin, did in fact become ‘Russians’; and judging from the exclusive use of this ‘Swedish’ term, they became the very first Russians at that – the historical nucleus, dwelling first among the Veps, who in turn were assimilated by the Slovene Novgorodians and the Kriviči, of what became the Slavonic-speaking Russian people.

## 20.5. *Saami Ruoš´ša from Veps*

This inference is borne out not merely by the above Komi word, but also by a Saami one. In Finmark province of Norway and on the Kola peninsula we find Saami terms of the type **Ruoš´ša** ‘Russian, Russia’. These are well-nigh identical with the South Karelian (historically Veps) forms the beginnings of which may be sought in a Veps-Swedish symbiosis in the Ladoga area. Of this Šaskol´skij writes in a negative vein:<sup>2</sup>

“The attempt of E. Itkonen and J. Mägiste at using data from Saami dialects with a view to strengthening the Normanist theory is wholly untenable... A direct loan relationship can hardly obtain between the Saami of the South-Eastern Ladoga district in the 9th-10th centuries and the contemporary Saami of the Kola peninsula and Finmark one thou-

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1. Itkonen 1946, 403, Mägiste 1958, 202.

2. 1967, 146-148.

sand kilometres and more to the North. Hence, it is impossible to search in earnest among phenomena in contemporary Saami dialects for phenomena which arose one thousand years earlier in the dialects of the Ladoga Saami...”

In this Šaskol’skij is manifestly mistaken, as demonstrated by Soviet ethnographic materials. We inspect the traditions regarding Raxta Ragnozerskij. On the one hand, this cycle exists among the South Karelian descendants of the ancient Veps within a narrow strip some 10-15 kilometres in diameter around the village of Ragnozero, as well as in the Russified region of Pudožgor’e 25-30 km away, with traces of it “present also among the Veps”.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the same cycle is met with among the Kola Saami.<sup>2</sup> Noting place-names formed from the name of the hero Raxka near the Veps habitations of Vytegra and Vodlozero, Čistov concludes:<sup>3</sup>

“The places where these traditions have been written down, the Onega area and the Olonec isthmus, are 1,500-2,000 km away from the Kola peninsula... Not only does the plot of the story coincide... so does the text itself, not merely a splinter, but the entire tradition. And here the Saami tradition turns out to be closer to the Karelian one than to the Russian...”

## 20.6. Age and Meaning of \*Rōtsi

Second, as regards the spread of the Balto-Fennic term \*rōtsi (or Finnish ruotsi,) three philologists argue that it probably arose before the Viking age, let alone the *leidang* (fleet muster) institution. One linguist indicates that it may have arisen in the 7th-8th centuries;<sup>4</sup> while the others speak up in favour of an even earlier period:<sup>5</sup>

“In the lexicology borrowed from Germanic which began to pour into the Balto-Fennic tongue... not earlier than the beginning of our era, Balto-Fennic root forms ending with an **-i** predominate... The wealth of roots in **-i** is hardly a function of the Germanic point of departure in the majority of instances, but on the contrary demonstrates that in the age of the ancientmost Germanic lexicological borrowings – according to consensus from the beginning of our era and throughout the subsequent millennium – the indigenous roots in **-i** in the Balto-Fennic proto-tongue and its successors became so widespread that not only did the Germanic roots in **-i** succeed in preserving their original root type, but diverse other Germanic roots also were able to join this most virulent type. More than by anything else the formation of roots in **-i** in the proto-Finnish language was furthered by the Balto-Fennic diminutive suffix **-i**...”

Thus the Balto-Fennic word \*rōtsi... in all probability may belong to the Germanic loan-words received into the Balto-Fennic tongues during the first millennium of our era. It is far from excluded that at first this was either a term of endearment or an invective, or a euphemistic term; hence a quite free reworking ...of the original Scandinavian word is conceivable. Thus it is not to be inferred that the ending of the term \*rōtsi has to slavishly reflect its Scandinavian source...”

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1. Pimenov 1965, 236.
  2. Senkevič-Gudkova 1956, 105, *MSFO* 1931, 304-307, and also, unnoticed by Soviet specialists, Poestion 1886, 185, 188.
  3. 1958, 373-375.
  4. Ekbo 1958, 197-199.
  5. Here, Mägiste 1958, 206-207; the other being Schramm 1982, above.

When approximately may this term have been coined among the Baltic Finns?

We have already seen that Jordanes provides us with a most valuable cue and clue: His enumeration of the eastern peoples subject to Ermanaric attests to an age of close contacts between these and the Germanic Goths. Thus, the Goths and, following them, the Swedes applied the nickname *Thiuda*, *Piðð* (whence *Čud'*) to the closest-dwelling Baltic Finns.

He mentions *Thiudos*, *Inaunxis*, *Vasinabroncas*, *Merens*, *Mordens*, etc.. The latter two are the Merja and the Mordva (Mordvinians); the **Thiudos in-Aunxis** have been deciphered as the *Čud'* '**in Olonec**', or in Balto-Fennic: **Aunuksessa**; while there is also a consensus that the appellation **Vasina** – refers to the ancient Veps (in the composite, genitive case).<sup>1</sup>

This then is what the Goths and probably the Eruls and other Scandinavians called *them*. What of the opposite need? During this, the first period of such contacts known to us, the foresaid subject peoples had to coin a term or terms designating the Goths as well as their allies. On the part of subjugated, oppressed peoples one would expect either neutral or derogatory terms, preferably the latter, and most likely in the form of some play or pun on the self-appellations of their subjugators. Of such a play on the name of the Goths there apparently is no trace. How is it with the Eruls?

As has been demonstrated,<sup>2</sup> the Finnish verb **ruotsia**, meaning 'to clean fish', may on all formal grounds be connected with the name **ruotsi**, whereby **\*rōtsi** may be analysed as precisely a diminutive, derogatory transformation of the Scandinavian-Byzantine term *Rūs(ioi)*, cf. the Rosomones of Jordanes, into a defamatory play on the maritime comings and goings of this 'people of the fish-bones'.

Like the Finnish specialist who first suggested it, we hasten to underscore the evident: the solution suggested here is but a hypothesis, in no wise proven. It does however possess two intrinsic merits: The historical context is clear, and plausible too. And the lexicological point of departure is attested, being itself no mere hypothesis.

Thus it is conceivable (and no more convincing solution has as yet been proffered) that the Balto-Fennic terms **ruotsi**, **rōts**, **roć**, **ruoš'ś'a**, etc., originally derived from this very nickname **\*rōtsi** 'fish-bone people', in the way of a slur referring to the incessant sea-faring<sup>3</sup> and maritime habitations of these dreadful proto-Vikings.<sup>4</sup> May similar reflections and a similar word have obtained in the antecedents to the word-pair *Suomi* and *suomus* 'fish soup'?<sup>5</sup>

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1. Pimenov 1965, 20, *versus* Schramm 1974, 6: "Bewohner eines flachen Landes mit üppigem Rasen, reicher Bewässerung und stellenweiser Sumpfbildung". The identification by Pimenov (*ibid.*) and Petrušin (Lovmjan'skij 1985, 185) of *-broncas* in *Vasinabroncas* with 'Biarmlia' is however pure fantasy.
  2. Mägiste 1958, 208-209.
  3. Clearly an object of derision to Fenno-Ugrians, cf al-Marvazī (probably reflecting al-Ġayhanī, 926 AD) and al-Bīrūnī (1025 AD), on seafarers (= North Norwegians) "aimlessly" faring hither and thither on the Ocean solely in order to brag about it, thereby showing "their stupidity": Stang 1990.
  4. Lovmjan'skij 1985, 185 suggests that Balto-Fennic tribes got to know the Black Sea Goths of Ermanarich's age as *ruotsi*. However, "less wellknown are the reasons for the transfer of the term *Ruotsi* to Sweden."
  5. Schramm 1982, 16.



The term **Ruots mo mies**, ‘man from the land of Ruots’, preserved in the Livlandic tongue of Kurland in present-day Latvia,<sup>1</sup> is noteworthy; yet a direct nexus with the \**Rusmu-*, *Rosmo-* name of the Eruls (if such it was) is not to be inferred.

In accepting this solution, we must nevertheless ask: Why was precisely **this** term chosen? The answer is: Possibly for two reasons. Because it has a bearing on a form for organization germane to both the Fennic peoples and these Scandinavians. And because it resembles a name already in use by these seafarers.

As for organization, the theory of a number of Finnish scholars<sup>2</sup> is worthy of attention: A whole series of ethnonyms for Balto-Fennic populations may be tentatively traced to ‘trade-marks’, in part *brand*-marks, used by these populations when trading furs and other goods with more southerly peoples.

One such mark was triangular, much in the shape of the dorsal fin of a fish. And one word for dorsal, preserved in the Inari Saami dialect, was \***vepsä** – whence the ethnonym Veps.<sup>3</sup> The similar word among the Vod’ or Vatja was precisely, in their own tongue – Vatja; whence again, according to this theory, the name of the people. Likewise, Viro- among the Estonians; *Sabme* and *Suoma* (two forms of one word?) among the Saami and Finns respectively.

The Norse word for the dorsal of a fish, and the Scandinavian word still today (cf also English, *fin*), is **finne**: Whence possibly Finn, Finnish, Finland.

The name of the Karelians, *Karjala*, according to this theory derives from \***garja** ‘pointed stake, pike for making holes in the ice’ (i.e. for fishing).<sup>4</sup>

What has this to do with the Rus’? It explains, with a humorous wheeze, the one-time diminutive \***rōtsi** ‘fish-bone people’. Whereas, possibly, the Fennic populations proudly sported the dorsal triangle as their stamp of quality on the goods they won a-hunting, the seafarers were left to clean out the very fish-bones themselves! In a word: No ‘fishy’ trade-mark, like several Balto-Fennic peoples apparently had, but only the paltry remains of a fish meal!

One of the most numerous objects in e.g. the Illerup ‘bog find’ is fishing hooks – made from fish-bones. For landlubbing Finns by the shores of the Baltic, this would be a cue; not necessarily defamatory but more in the nature of banter, a rough and indirect acknowledgment even – between peoples in close contact yet with highly disparate ways of subsistence.

The other element in this picture is the appellation used by the Erul seafarers themselves, on which \***rōtsi** then was a play of words. Here we return to the theories of Gschwantler – plus the *Rosomones* of Jordanes. The Eruls certainly did not call themselves *Rus’* (which is the Slavonic, Novgorod-Ladogan Slovene, form); nor *Rōs*, one would think (being erudite Byzantine); nor of course *Hrūs* or *ar-Rūs* (which are the Syriac and, later, the Arabic). They may have termed themselves ‘the fleet,

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1. Mägiste 1958, 202, Šaskol’skij 1967, 146.

2. from Valonen 1981 to Tuomo Pekkanen and Jorma Koivulehto 1990-93.

3. *Suomen kielen etymologinen sanakirja*, Helsinki 1970-78, 1674, 1703; Pimenov/Strogal’sikova 1989, 6 n.

4. Pekkanen and others, cited by Dr. Gleb Lebedev in Old Ladoga 1994. Personal communication.

the impetuous' – **hraustr**. In Balto-Fennic, through a metathesis, this would produce precisely **\*rōtsi**.

Or they may have seen themselves in the rôle of 'the Reds' – in Gothic **raups** 'red', cf. Lithuanian **raudas** 'reddish', **rūdas** 'brown-red', Lettish **ruds** 'reddish'.<sup>1</sup> In late Gothic, in the 5th-7th cc., this would sound **rōps**; which would result straightforward,<sup>2</sup> without metathesis, in **\*rōts[i]**.

One can easily imagine Balto-Fennic neighbours of the fearsome Earls sniggering, even roaring with laughter, at this 4th-5th c. AD double-entendre. A most apt and apposite word-play, it is infinitely more refined and elegant than the hopeless misunderstanding of a Hebrew word that once led the intelligentsia of the greatest power on earth down the wrong track – to the 'prince of Ros'.

There are moments in history. One such, I feel, was when one inhabitant of the wooded waterways east of the Baltic one day winked (or whatever the appropriate gesture was at that time and place) to a fellow tribesman – and coined this 'funny' on the *Rotsi*, in one of the first centuries of our era.

For it will bear stressing that the seafarers with whom the Balto-Fennic and Saami populations met in any great number in the eastern and northern Baltic were not the Suiones, nor the Dani, nor the Gothi (who early pressed on south through what is now Poland and White Russia). It was the Eruls, who were wont to assemble as it seems on and around Bornholm but who surely were on the prowl around all the Baltic littoral as well.<sup>3</sup> Their return thither after their defeat at the hands of the Langobards in the first half of the 6th c. is when they certainly did impinge upon the Finns and Saami; who got every ample reason to twist their puffed-up name or names in a laughable way.

## 20.7. What Happened?

Whatever the background to and semantics of *\*Rōtsi* – this is not our theme. It is interesting enough in its own right, and relevant too insofar as it has been used to provide a longstanding answer to *our* question. And for sure, it is still *part* of the answer, only in quite another way than previously.

For this is as far, and as close, as we get:

In 839, when Michael began to reign, the Russians got their name. This we know of from a Latin chronicle, the Bertinian Annals, in combination with the Greek ones.

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1. Walde/Pokorny 1966, I, 872-873. Walde/Hofmann 1954, II, 444-445, 455-456.
  2. Cf Ekbo 1981, 144: "Parenthetically, I also mention here as in every respect untenable the newly advanced theory that the Finnish and Estonian words should emanate from the Gothic **raups**, meaning 'red' and assumed to be a designation of a branch of the Goths." Why this is untenable Ekbo does not say. Linguistically it is wholly acceptable, even impeccable. *Our* point is however no strict and direct derivation, but a view that here a play on words took place, on the near-homophony of *ruotsia* and Late Gothic *\*rōts[i]*.
  3. One view is that the homebound Eruls first amassed in Funen, around Odense (cf Snorri's Ynglingatal on Óðinn moving there), only to be crushed by the Danes: Bugge, von Friesen 1924, 46-63, Marstrander 1929, 105. Part of the desolation recorded by archaeologists from the mid-6th c. around the Baltic, cf. Näsman 1988, is perhaps to be explained by the 'homelessness' and lack of subsistence of these 'home-bound' Eruls.

It is most telling, for Normanism and Antinormanism alike, indeed for this entire ‘Cold War’ up north through some 250 years now, that the very wording of the Ber-  
tinian Annals has not been valued for what it is worth: *se Rhos vocari dicebant* does  
not translate “who called themselves Rhos”, as both schools have seen fit to believe;  
it means, instead: “who were called Rhos” – by others.

It is high time these others are heard.

Likewise, that capital piece of information in the Russian *Tale of Bygone Years*,  
under the very first year specified (though specified wrongly, as 852), has not been  
lain under due contribution: The year when the Rus’ got their name was the year  
when the emperor Michael first began to rule. Meaning 839. This we are told of, as  
the Russian chronicle says, in a Greek chronicle.

For starters these simple facts could have, should have, been seen decades ago,  
even centuries ago. Only they did not fit within the blinkered parochial sights of two  
scholarly armies both bent on fighting it out up north.

Being confronted with the appearance of some unknown far-northerners in 839,  
the Byzantines first carefully interviewed them, noting their name or names; of these  
there were probably several, and perhaps several variants of the same names too – as  
these newcomers hailed from a multi-ethnic town in a non-defined region. Yet one  
name caught the Greek fancy. It was recorded with the precision accorded by the  
Greek alphabet and language, not too impressive to posterity. This name, for which  
scholars still have different explanations nearly twelve hundred years later, was  
something akin to *Rōts* – or rather *Rōtš*. As Greek is lacking in the sound, and more  
important the grapheme(s) for *-š* but not for *-ts* and *-dz*, we conclude that what the  
839 travellers mentioned was not the west-Finnish \**rōtsi* – because this could and  
probably would have been rendered most aptly in the Greek. If however the Greeks  
were presented with the east-Finnish, Veps *rōč*’ (from the mouth of a Veps or Norse  
Slavonic-speaking translator) then this had to come out, through the pen of a Greek  
scribe, as *Pōς*.

Possibly also that old Gothic name for the Volga, and for the reeds in the  
‘Swamp’, in the Greek precisely *Pōς*, played its part.

It was with trepidation that the name was recorded, being a close call, too close  
for comfort, to the Biblical call-up name of *Pōς*.

Then it was for the Byzantines to reach for the past.<sup>1</sup> They did what good Byzan-  
tines were prone to do: scurried into their library, leafing through tome upon tome  
until they **discovered**.

What these ‘past-masters’ found was the Red ones and the Fleet, the Dromitai  
and the Tavroscoythians, the swamp- and island-dwellers of Jordanes, the Eruli and  
the Eluri, the Amazons, etc., and of course the prince of ‘Ros of prophecies and ser-  
mons from military crises of the past, along with that future forefather of Kiev, Ma-  
gog. They may even have taken the trouble to ask the newcomers how applicable  
they found some of the clichés and names. What our far-northerners answered, if an-  
ything, we do not know. Yet given the subsequent Arabic testimonies to the quag-

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1. Proclus managed to read this name into that of *Rougas* (*Rugila*), the leader of the Huns, c.  
432, cf. ch. 5.4 above. The nickname of the Swedes would lie much more open to such an  
interpretation.

miry island of ar-Rūs, the ‘swampy’ heritage of old was probably prominently present.

Howbeit: Now the logical, philological and historical circle is complete.

That circle leads us all around Europe – not least thanks to the Arabs who, as flies on the wall, or on the way, let us hear and see and sense what once passed – and was past, otherwise irretrievably lost.

The intrepid 839 voyagers made it home. And the name they left us still shows the telltale traces of how it ‘made it’ there – thanks to Norsemen, Veps and Slavs. Pure philology secures this explanation: from the *Rōtsi* or preferably *Roč* up north (whatever its origin); which inspired the Capital of the World to so to speak hand over the prestigious ‘*Ros* plus ‘*Rōs*, as well as tales on the ‘*rousioi*’; upon return producing first *Rós*, then *Rus*’. To the extent that the ‘Reds’ of the ancients played their part, it was on a popular, folk-etymological basis, ensuring the popularity of the nameform from Ladoga. It cannot be too strongly stressed: These were not minds of the 20th c. AD, wholly compatible with ours; nor were they philologists, nor linguists.

The greatest state on earth was set on its path. According to the present thesis, then, its name belies the petty theories of ‘local’ relevance that have hitherto been launched, both the Normanist and the Anti-Normanist ones. Launched by the Byzantines, by the ‘Second Rome’ in European and Mediterranean history, this ‘Third Rome’ known to all as Russia received its name some day or days in 839 AD.

This is surely not the whole picture; nor is this perhaps the beginning of the end, as regards the ‘Varangian question’, to use a misnomer. Yet the line pursued in the present study is quite novel, and most ‘classical’ too. It should contribute to a fuller picture.

So now, more than eleven hundred and fifty years farther down the track, after the miraculously peaceful disbandment of a 70-odd-years old system of ‘Red’ rule, we may perhaps say to the people of Russia, with the warmest of felicitations:

Here is your name.

## Bibliography

*Out of all the extant multifarious attempts at an etymological explanation of the term Rus' not a single one deserves the slightest grain of acknowledgment for being convincing."*  
Popov 1972, 109.

- AO = *Acta Orientalia (Hungarica)*, Budapest  
ASSF = *Acta societatis scientiarum fennicae*, Helsinki  
CGADA = *Central'nyj gosud. arxiv drevnix aktov, Piscovye knigi po Novgorodu*  
CSHB = *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, ed. BG Niebuhr  
DA = *Deutsches Archiv zur Erforschung des Mittelalters*, Köln/Wien  
DG = *Drevnejšie gosudarstva na territorii SSSR*; Moscow  
DOP = *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Harvard UP, Cambr. Mass.  
GDV = *Die Geschichtsschreiber der deutschen Vorzeit*, Lpz.  
IJALI = *Institut jazyka i literatury Akademii nauk SSSR*, Petrozavodsk  
KKTJ = *Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja*, Hels.  
MGH = *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum*, Hannover.  
NAIJLI = *Naučnyj arxiv Instituta jazyka, literatury i istorii*, Petrozavodsk  
PG = *Patrologia Graeco-Latina Cursus Completus, seria Graeca*, ed. Migne  
PIK = *Problemy istorii i kul'tury vepsskoj narodnosti*, Petrozavodsk 1989  
PSRL = *Polnoe sobranie russkix letopisej*, SPb.  
RSI = *Rodnye serdca imena (Onomastika Karelii)*, Petrozavodsk 1993  
SE = *Sovetskaja étnografija*  
SKS(T) = *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura (Toimituksia)*, Helsinki  
SUSA = *Suomalaisen-ugrilaisen seuran a.*, Helsinki  
TKF = *Trudy Karel'skogo filiala AN SSSR*, Petrozavodsk  
VI = *Voprosy istorii*, M.-Leningrad  
ZNMP = *Žurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosvetšeniya*, M.-SPb.
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