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## **‘Blind Spots’ of the ‘Scandinavian-Centric’ Hypothesis on the Origin of the Old Russian State**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The author considers some of the ‘blind spots’ of the ‘Scandinavian-centric’ hypotheses on the emergence of the Old Russian state. He shows that adherents of the ‘Scandinavian-centric paradigm’ very often resort to ad hoc explanations without noticing the critical contradictions in their constructions. If we collect partial statements of the Scandinavian-centred hypotheses, we see how they begin to contradict each other. For example, according to Elena Melnikova, Old Russian ‘варяги’ comes from Scandinavian ‘væringi’, which in turn comes from Greek ‘βάρηγοι’, and Greek ‘βάρηγοι’ in turn comes from the Old Russian ‘варяги’. In the context of the processes leading to the formation of the Old Russian state, the author critically evaluates the ideas of the ‘Scandinavian control over the Baltic-Volga trade route’ and ‘Scandinavian colonies’ in Eastern Europe. The local polities of early medieval Eastern Europe, whether Slavic, Baltic or Finnish, obviously possessed sufficient power and military potential to close off uncontrolled movement along the river routes to the Scandinavians if they so wished. The author also raises the question of the initial political status and real role in the formation of the Old Russian state of the emerging settlements specialized in trade in Ladoga and Gnezdovo.*

**Keywords:** *Old Russian state, Scandinavian-centric hypotheses, варяги, væringi, Baltic-Volga trade route, polities of Eastern Europe, Ladoga, Gnezdovo.*

Recommended citation: Romanchuk, A. A. ‘Blind spots’ of the ‘Scandinavian-centric’ Hypothesis on the Origin of the Old Russian State. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 22 No. 2, September 2023, pp. 94–110. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2023.02.06.

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The origin of the Old Russian state is an interesting case in the question of the emergence of 'early states' (the question which, as we know, remained at the center of Henri Claessen's research interests; *cf.*, in particular Claessen 2016). Some articles previously published in 'Social Evolution & History' also reflect this (Romanchuk 2023a: 182). That is why, in accordance with the intention expressed earlier (Romanchuk 2023a: 191, note 2), I would like to point out (very briefly) some of the 'blind spots' which are so often overlooked by the proponents of the 'Scandinavian-centred' (the so-called 'Normannist') hypotheses on the question of the emergence of the Old Russian state. At that, I will cover a part, and only a small part, to the extent that the scope and nature of this text allow.

To begin with, it may be useful to consider the thesis that, with the light touch of Lev Klein, has become extremely popular among modern proponents of the 'Scandinavian-centric' hypotheses. They argue that 'there is no Normanism in the world and in Russia as well' (Klein 2014: 337). It is only anti-Normanism that exists, according to proponents of Klein's thesis. With all due respect to Lev Klein, I cannot agree with this statement. Elsewhere I have already explained the reasons for my disagreement (see, in particular, Romanchuk 2015: ch. 1).

Normanism as a scientific paradigm can be given a fairly clear definition (Romanchuk 2013b: 71, note 34). Whether the definition I have given is appropriate is for the reader to judge. But even if this definition can perhaps be clarified, supplemented, corrected, it is still obvious that it reflects a real phenomenon. This, however, was already recognized by Klein, who even gave a very structured (and realistic) description of it (Klein 2009: 121).

I would like to emphasize that, as I have repeatedly stated, I consider it is extremely positive for science (and especially for the question of the origin of the Rus' people and the Old Russian state) that Normanism exists as a scientific school. But at the same time, I absolutely disagree with the attempt of Klein and many other Normanists to deny the scientific nature of anti-Normanism (especially indiscriminately) (and to unilaterally 'close the discussion in their favour'). My position is to evaluate the statements of both Normanists and anti-Normanists as carefully and critically as possible. In other words, to find a kind of a 'middle way'. How successful my movement along this 'middle way' is, it is for others to judge. However, I must note that if I am an anti-Normanist to the Normanists, then I am a Normanist to the anti-Normanists (and the further away the more so). The situation seems funny and revealing in itself.

Well, the growth of scientific knowledge on the question of the origin of the Rus' people and the emergence of the Old Russian state in the last three hundred years was determined precisely by the dispute between Normanists and anti-Normanists. As I said, 'it was only thanks to three centuries of incessant and hard dispute with each other (starting with Lomonosov and Miller) that both Normanism and anti-Normanism gave up many (and very significant, up to fundamental) of their delusions' (for details see Romanchuk 2015: ch. 1). The extent to which Normanism changed its position during the nineteenth century under the influence of anti-Normanists critics is best demonstrated by Vasily O. Klyuchevsky's review of Mikhail P. Pogodin's book, which I cited in (Romanchuk 2015).

In fact, the scholarly positions of Normanism and anti-Normanism converged to a very large extent (and Lev Klein is right here). But, contrary to his opinion, it was by no means only in one direction (*i.e.*, in favour of Normanism).

However, on the other hand, our understanding of the situation in the discussion of Normanism and anti-Normanism will be incomplete if we do not pay attention to another important component. Namely, that in addition to scientific Normanism, there is also Normanism (as well as anti-Normanism, of course; and perhaps even to a greater extent), so to speak 'lay'. By the way, Klein has perfectly described this type (Klein 2009: 107–139). And, unfortunately, this 'philistine Normanism' (as well as anti-Normanism) is undoubtedly exists (and thrives) today. A guarantee of this are the articles that often appear in the Western media, in which the emergence of the Old Russian state is presented in a primitive Normanist way, at the level of the ideas of the nineteenth century.

There is no doubt that these 'philistine' versions of both scientific approaches are one of the decisive reasons for such a bitter dispute between them. Another reason for the bitterness, apparently, is the accumulated inertia (including the inertia of the bitterness itself), that prevents the participants of the discussion from hearing their opponents. And often, as I have noted (Romanchuk 2013a: 295; 2013b: 115), it encourages them to 'replace the analysis of arguments with the psychoanalysis of opponents'. It can also be assumed that it is precisely this 'philistine Normanism', exerting its influence at the level of the subconscious (at the level of the formation of a 'picture of the world'), that is in many ways the cause of those 'blind spots' that are present in the views of supporters of Normanist hypotheses (and even of truly excellent scientists).

To get to the actual discussion of these 'blind spots' in the Normanist hypotheses, I would like to start with the question that Klein also raised as the primary and fundamental one in his definition of the key provisions of the scientific creed of the supporters of the Normanist hypotheses. Namely, the thesis that the term 'Varangians' is synonymous with 'Scandinavians' (Klein 2009: 121).

This unconditional statement, which automatically equates the term 'Varangians' with the term 'Scandinavians,' can also be considered the primary and fundamental 'blind spot' of the Normanist hypotheses. Since there is no doubt about the carefully argued conclusion of many researchers (especially by Appolon Kuzmin and Vyacheslav Fomin) about the ambiguity of the term 'Varangians' in the Old Russian (annalistic and not only) tradition, and its evolution towards a wider meaning – to the designation of Western Europeans in general (for more details, with references, see Romanchuk 2013a: 290; 2013b: 105–107; 2015: ch. 6; 2016). Such a broadening of meaning was also expressed in the emergence of a parallelism between the terms 'Varangians' and 'Nemtsy', which is directly attested both in the annals and in the letter of Ivan the Terrible to the Swedish King Johan: 'Varangians are Nemtsy.' The very fact of this ambiguity of the term 'Varangians,' I think, requires us to decide separately in each case, whom this or that source means by Varangians. To paraphrase Mark Shchukin ('Bastarnae were Bastarnae'), in this situation it would be correct to say that 'the Varangians were Varangians'.

There is, moreover, another 'blind spot' in the question of who the Varangians were. Namely, the supporters of the Normanist hypotheses stubbornly refuse to notice that the 'Scandinavian' etymology of the term 'Varangians' itself, which they generally accept today (in its modern form, it has been formulated by Elena A. Melnikova), encounters insurmountable obstacles, primarily of a chronological nature (I outlined them in my other works, *e.g.*, in Romanchuk 2013a: 290; 2013b: 105–107; 2015: ch. 6; 2016). In other words, this hypothesis is based on anachronisms: the ethnonym 'Varangians' obviously appeared earlier (and much earlier) than the environment and situation that, according to Elena Melnikova, led to the formation of the ethnonym 'Varangians'. In fact, this was partly recognized by Melnikova herself (in particular, she notes the 'foreign nature and late origin of the Old Norse name 'væringi'): 'the later formation of the terms varang / vaering in Byzantium and Scandinavia indicates that it did not originate in Scandinavia itself and not in Rus' Land' (Melnikova 1998: 164). According to her, there is a 'significant para-

dox in the relationship ‘vareagi/væringi’ ... this word does not appear in Old Norse texts until the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, ... from the moment of its appearance and further, it does not refer to those warriors and merchants who visited Rus' Land, but only to Scandinavian mercenaries in Byzantium’ (Melnikova 1998: 159; 2023).

In his recent work, Anton V. Zimmerling (also one of the greatest Russian Germanists of our time) notes that, ‘the word “Varangians” does not appear at all in the runic inscriptions’,<sup>1</sup> and agrees with Elena Melnikova (and Vladimir Ya. Petrukhin) view of its origin ‘outside Scandinavia’ (Zimmerling 2021: 248). That is, as I wrote:

It turns out that the Scandinavians, known to the Eastern Slavs for more than two hundred years, are suddenly given a new name by them; this new name goes back to the self-naming of a small, by definition ephemeral group, formed according to a “professional” principle, with a variable composition of participants. ... The group quickly disappeared, the Scandinavians themselves did not accept this “special term, narrowly local”, but the Slavs nevertheless extrapolated it as a name for all Scandinavians (and not only for them), and in the shortest possible time it completely replaced their former designation (Romanchuk 2013a: 290).

Perhaps, even in the super-shortest, since from the twelfth century the term ‘варяг’ itself begins to be replaced by the term ‘немец’ (especially in the treaty letters from Novgorod to Gotland [Kuchkin 1966]).<sup>2</sup> In my opinion, this is a highly implausible explanation.

Moreover, if we take into account that the ethnonym Rus' (according to the Normanists, applied to the Scandinavians, with which I unfortunately cannot agree), on the contrary, appears at least as early as in the eighth century (Nikolaev 2017: 31, note 88; Romanchuk 2013a: 292; 2013b: 108; 2017: 253; 2018: 103, note 13; 2022: 337; 2023b). And with such truly Scandinavian ethnonyms, as the Svei, Danes or Guts (inhabitants of Gotland), the Eastern Slavs clearly met no later than the same eighth century.

Moreover, today Elena Melnikova even believes that the Scandinavian ‘væringi’ (‘væringjar’) ‘has a later (secondary) origin and goes back to the Greek ‘βάραγγοι’ (Melnikova 2023: Varangians in Scandinavian Sources). At the same time, in her opinion, the term ‘varangi’ which is presented ‘in Byzantine sources as [βάραγγος (pl. βάραγγοι)’, in turn, ‘probably comes from’ Old Russian ‘варѡгъ’ (Melnikova 2023: Varangians in Bizantium).

Thus, now the circle is complete. The Old Russian 'варѡгъ', according to the Normanists, comes from the Scandinavian *væringi*', which in turn comes from the Greek 'βάρηγοι', and the Greek 'βάρηγοι', in turn, comes from the Old Russian 'варѡгъ'.

It is 'brilliant'!

Earlier, I proposed another hypothesis of the origin of the ethnonym 'Varangians' (for details see Romanchuk 2016; today it needs some improvement, but I still stick to the key points of this idea). According to this hypothesis, the ethnonym 'Varangians' actually originated on the Germanic ground, but not on Scandinavian one.

Taking the same Germanic '*væringi*' as the initial form of the ethnonym 'Varangians' (but leaving open the question of its etymology; although it offers a possible option), I believe that '*væringi*' as an ethnonym arose among the Germanic tribes on the southwest of the Baltic region very early, in pre-Slavic times. At the same time, unlike my predecessors, I propose that the ethnonyms *varini*, *vari*, *vagri*, *vaigri*, etc., local to the south-western Baltic region, should be considered as derivatives (fundamental point!) of '*væringi*'.

That is, I do not propose to derive the ethnonym 'Varangians' from either 'Varyni' or 'Vagri' (and supporters of the Normanist hypotheses should notice this and argue precisely with what I propose but not with what they would like to see (cf. 'Other proposed etymologies of the word "varag", Baltic-Slavic (from the name of the tribe "Vagry" ...' [Melnikova 2023]). But all these ethnonyms, in my opinion, are obviously connected with each other by a common origin and etymology.

Let me note, that it is on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea (among the Balts) there were the ethnonyms of the same type as 'Vareagi' is (namely 'Yatvyagi' and, I believe, 'Kolbyagi' [Romanchuk 2012: 346–348]). We should also take into account here the Prussian socionim (the term for the military elite) 'Vitingi', which is thought to go back precisely to the Old Frisian source.<sup>3</sup>

Irrespective of the correctness of the hypothesis of the origin of the ethnonym 'Varangians' proposed by me, the correct conclusion seems to be that the ethnonym 'Varangians' did not originally mean 'Scandinavians'. And it was only later that it was applied to Scandinavians. As well as to the Rus' people (even before its Slavicization).

With regard to the question of the origin of the Rus' people, it should also be noted that in the actual key issue of this problem – the question of the etymology of the ethnonym Rus', – even the supporters (leading supporters) of the Scandinavian version of its etymology rec-

ognize the existence of some hardly insurmountable (and, I believe, insurmountable) obstacles (both in the phonetic and historical aspects of the problem) (Romanchuk 2022: 336–337). However, this does not lead them to critically re-assess this etymology as a whole.

Meanwhile, our knowledge of the various components of this issue has increased considerably in recent decades. Which, similarly to the issue of the origin of the ethnonym ‘Varangians’, has turned many of the arguments of the supporters of the Scandinavian etymology of the ethnonym Rus' into anachronisms. And the most significant one, in my opinion, is the recent discovery of Sergey L. Nikolaev (2017). He proved the existence of a separate dialect of the ‘Russian-Varangians’ (whose phonetics is also proved by the ethnonym Rus' [Nikolaev 2017: 31, note 88]). And, more importantly, as Nikolaev convincingly showed, this ‘Russian-Varangian’ dialect cannot be derived from the Old Swedish area at the required time, nor from any other known Old Scandinavian dialects and languages.

Developing Nikolaev's observations, I tried to show the possibility of the etymology of the ethnonym Rus' from the East-Germanic raups ‘red’ (Romanchuk 2022). And also the fact that the key phonetic features of the ‘Russian-Varangian’ dialect, which, as Sergey Nikolaev has shown, have no analogies in any of the known Old Scandinavian languages or dialects, find very exact matches precisely in the East-Germanic languages (Romanchuk 2023b).

Regardless of how correct I am in my hypothesis about the East-Germanic etymology of the ethnonym Rus' and the origin of the Rus' people themselves, I would like to draw attention to another circumstance. Specifically, that Nikolaev's epoch-making (no exaggeration) discovery, although it obviously required a linguist of such a high level to take up the subject, could, I believe, have been done purely technically another seventy years (or more) ago. Linguists (including Slavists) of the time, who could potentially solve this problem, did have enough competence (or some tools) to do this. However, they obviously lacked the ability to see the riddle in a question in which ‘everything has long been clear to everyone.’ That is, it was precisely another ‘blind spot’ of the scientific paradigm in which they were operating that prevented them from making the discovery. And, perhaps, it is precisely the inability (or unwillingness) of the proponents of the Normanist hypotheses to notice the above-mentioned ‘blind spots’ that leads them to the next ‘blind spots’ in their constructions. And this is especially true with regard to the problem of the emergence of the Old Russian state.

In order to show this, I would like to start my further argumentation with Elena Melnikova's key idea. I mean the claim that the legend of the calling of Rurik and his brothers reflects the 'Scandinavians' control' over the Baltic-Volga trade route (Melnikova 2015: 27). According to this thesis, the birth of the Old Russian state is considered as the result of the formation of transcontinental trade routes across Eastern Europe (primarily the Baltic-Volga route), which resulted from the activities of the Scandinavians. According to this point of view, in an effort to control these routes and the trade that followed, the Scandinavians eventually created the Old Russian state. In which, at an early stage of its existence, 'the elite and the professional army were Scandinavian'.

The points of crystallization of the emerging statehood are assumed to be 'emporia at the junctions of the trade route (Hedeby, Birka, Ladoga)' (Melnikova 2015: 20). It is also characteristic that, within the framework of this paradigm, Eastern Europe appears to the Scandinavians as a *terra nullius*, 'no man's land', where, in the first century of their advance along the Baltic-Volga route, the Scandinavians 'first of all, had to struggle with endless spaces.'

In fact, the same idea, yet in a slightly different form, is expressed by Vladimir Ya. Petrukhin, Melnikova's long-time academic colleague. He argues that, 'it is clear that the heterogeneous population, concentrated in urban ("proto-urban") points on the transcontinental waterways, mainly in Novgorod and Ladoga, had to negotiate with the Scandinavian troops sailing on boats along these routes' (Petrukhin 2014: 141).

I focus on the figures of Elena Melnikova and Vladimir Petrukhin, primarily because, as key figures among modern Normanists, they advanced the hypothesis that the chronicle legend of the 'Call of the Varangians' reflects precisely the agreement, the *ryad* [contract], between the local Slavic and Finnish population and the Scandinavians. As Petrukhin pointed out, 'the Slavs were an active party in the establishment of the agreement and in the formation of state power' (Petrukhin 2014: 165).

However, despite the constant mention and unconditional recognition of the role of the local, Slavic and Finnish elites in this process, the paradigm they elaborate, in which the whole set of available and newly discovered historical and archaeological data is further comprehended and interpreted, actually turns out to be Scandinavian-centric. It is natural that this 'Scandinavian-centric paradigm' de facto regularly leads to the idea of a very wide, large-scale and massive penetration



of the Scandinavians into Eastern Europe, up to the ‘Scandinavian colonization,’ when Ladoga, Gnezdovo or Timerevo are treated as ‘Scandinavian colonies.’

Thus, de facto, even the supporters of the idea of the ‘agreement with the Varangians’ (*i.e.*, of the idea that it was really an agreement) as the beginning of the Old Russian State, come imperceptibly to the idea that the Old Russian state arose as a result of the Scandinavian conquest (and colonization). Or, at best, to the idea once formulated by Vasily Klyuchevsky in the following form: ‘After fortifying themselves in a defended land, after building “cities” for themselves, ... the hired guards behaved like conquerors’ (quoted from: Petrukhin 2014: 155).

In their support of the idea of a large-scale and massive penetration of the Scandinavians into Eastern Europe and its ‘Scandinavian colonization,’ the proponents of the Normanist hypotheses obviously shift the emphasis in arguing this idea to archaeological data (as suggested by Lev Klein [2009: 124–126]). However, this is where their next ‘blind spots’ appear.

In fact, archaeological data, which in any other situation (and, I believe, by the same researchers) would be interpreted only as evidence of trade contacts (even if not always direct), are in this case unconditionally accepted as evidence of the direct and widespread presence of the Scandinavians (for a detailed criticism of this idea, see Romanchuk 2013a: 286–287; 2013b: 88–95). At the same time, it is ignored that the only reliable archaeological evidence of the presence of the Scandinavians (as well as representatives of any other ethnocultural environment) in Rus' Land can only be burials performed according to their characteristic rite (and such burials, as researchers which cannot be suspected of anti-Normanism have repeatedly pointed out, are actually few).

At the same time, adherents of the ‘Scandinavian-centric paradigm’ very often resort to *ad hoc* explanations without noticing the critical contradictions that arise in their constructions (Romanchuk 2015: ch. 4). In particular, interpreting the social composition of the Normans in Rus' Land is interpreted in very different ways (and, often by the same researchers), depending on the actual need.

The adherents of the ‘Scandinavian-centric paradigm’ place particular emphasis on the presence of Scandinavian female fibula in the burials at Gnezdovo (or Plakun). And this is quite understandable in view that the male burials that could be attributed to the Scandinavians in Rus' Land are ‘in an extremely small number’ (these words were used by Yuri E. Zharnov, one of the most active supporters, or

even authors of modern versions of the idea of the 'Scandinavian colony in Gnezdovo' (for more details, see Romanchuk 2013a: 287).

Having analyzed the issue of the female fibula in the context of the problem of the emergence of the Old Russian state in (Romanchuk 2020), I see neither the need nor the opportunity to repeat my conclusions and assessments here. But I would like to repeat once again the question I have asked several times (*e.g.*, *Ibid.*: 483): if we judge a 'very significant' (as the Normanists believe) number of Scandinavians in Rus' Land almost exclusively on the basis of finds of Scandinavian female fibula, then who moved to Rus' Land – Scandinavian warriors or Scandinavian women?

By exaggerating (and sharply exaggerating) the traces of contacts with Scandinavia in archaeological materials, the Normanists, on the contrary, belittle in every possible way the fact that between the south-west of the Baltic region and the north-west of the future Rus' Land in the pre-Slavic period, 'The system of priority interactions' developed (Romanchuk 2014).

At the same time, there is a curious fact: the fact that the types of pottery from Novgorod and Pskov that arose under the West Slavic influence make up about 10–11 per cent of the ceramic ensemble of these cities is considered as an 'insignificant amount' (often in this formulation) and as an evidence that 'the appearance of West Slavic pottery in Eastern Europe was not a mass phenomenon' (Musin and Stanisławski 2022: 366). While Klein's calculations (which, as I have tried to show, do not correspond to reality) for the Scandinavian presence in Rus' Land of '10–20 per cent' is proposed to interpret as 'this is already very significant' (Klein 2014: 338).

Similarly, the excellent article (cited above) by Aleksandr Musin and Błażej Stanisławski demonstrates very well, at the current level of knowledge, the archaeological traces of interactions between the south-west of the Baltic region and the north-west of the future Rus' Land (and, specifically, Volin and Ladoga).<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, when interpreting the West Slavic influences on the pottery of the north-west of the Rus' Land, Musin and Stanisławski repeat without the slightest doubt, the same 'Scandinavian-centric' version. When it comes to the problem of West Slavic ceramics of the 'Tornov-Klenitsa zone' type in Gorodok na Lovati, they join the old point of view: West Slavic potters 'could have come to Eastern Europe as slaves together with the Scandinavians' (Musin and Stanisławski 2022: 374). Natural questions: 'What evidence do we have that these

were the slaves?’ and ‘Why together with the Scandinavians?’ are unfortunately not even asked.

In the same way, until recently (in recent years, fortunately, there have been some shifts for the better), for example, Frisian items from the Plakun burials (the same jugs of the Tattling type) or from Ladoga itself were considered exclusively as delivered by the Scandinavians.

This situation, obviously, is a consequence of the tacitly implied (or even directly voiced) presumption of the creation of the "transcontinental trade routes of Eastern Europe" precisely and exclusively by the Scandinavians.

The fact that the Frisians were obviously active participants and, apparently, even the main creators of the Trans-Baltic trade was not taken into account. Meanwhile, early Frisian influences are apparently also found in the Old Russian area (Romanchuk 2018: 101–102, note 10). It was not taken (and is not taken) into account also that Arab merchants also reached the Middle Volga region (ibn Fadlan) and even Volin (ibn Yakub, albeit from Spain), and, obviously, participated in the creation of transcontinental trade routes in Eastern Europe of that era to no lesser extent.

Finally, the Slavs clearly played an extremely active role in this process, as evidenced by the fact that ‘Old Russian тѣргъ ... “market place” ... penetrates into the Old Swedish language, torgh, from where it enters other Scandinavian languages ..., indicating the antiquity of the borrowing, as well as into West Finnish: tori’ (Melnikova 1984: 70). Moreover, another important point: ‘targ > torg ... not only serves to designate trading areas in medieval Swedish cities, but also forms toponyms as a geographical’ (*Ibid.*: 75). I think it is difficult to explain this fact other than the fact that Slavic merchants created their ‘тѣргъ’ in the territories of the Swedes and Western Finns.

Assuming the ‘Scandinavian colonization’ of Rus’ Land, the adherents of the ‘Scandinavian-centred paradigm’ ignore the fact, which Fyodor B. Uspensky (he can be considered one of the most prominent modern representatives of the ‘Scandinavian-centred paradigm’) has repeatedly argued himself: ‘There is a specific poverty ... a lack of linguistic evidence of the Scandinavian presence’ in Rus’ Land (cited in: Romanchuk 2013b: 95).

Meanwhile, this is now a key point (and attention has been repeatedly drawn to it, starting with Stepan A. Gedeonov). If the Scandinavian presence in Rus’ Land was as significant as the supporters of the ‘Scandinavian-centred paradigm’ want it to be, then it should have proportional consequences reflected in language and culture.

And it just did not happen, unlike in Western Europe, where the Scandinavian conquest, which actually happened, led to the emergence of the Danelag and Normandy.

I have already quoted the conclusions of many researchers on this subject; there is neither the possibility nor the need to repeat them. Nevertheless, it is still curious to quote Melnikova's own assessment: 'Neither Thomsen, nor Stender-Petersen, nor Russian specialists in the history of the Old Russian language have noted a single case of phonetic, morphological or syntactic innovation in Old Russian that could have occurred under the influence of the Scandinavian languages. The only area in which the interaction of these languages can be traced is the vocabulary, *i.e.*, the most permeable and dynamic area of the language' (Melnikova 1984: 66). However, '... and the lexical interchange was not intense and extensive'. According to Clara Thörnqvist (whose work Melnikova considered the most rigorous and objective), only ten words in Old Russian were borrowed from the Scandinavian languages.

For comparison: '... the long-term conquest and domination of the eastern regions of England (Danelag) by the Danes, reflected in the English language in the form of numerous lexical borrowings (up to 10 per cent of the modern lexical fund) and a number of morphological innovations' (Melnikova 1984: 66). Or: 'The conquest of Normandy by the Scandinavians, which left significant traces in the toponymy and vocabulary of the region ...' (*Ibid.*).

So I think, it is hardly possible to believe in 'Scandinavian colonization' in the Old Russian area. Nor can we believe in the 'Scandinavians' control' over the trade routes of Eastern Europe as well. As well as seeing in Gnezdovo or Ladoga something more than the original settlements of merchants, 'торги,' which arose with the permission of the local, Eastern European polities (more on this see in Romanchuk 2018: 103, note 14; see also: Radin'sh 2003: 153–155; Petrukhin 2019).

The local polities of early medieval Eastern Europe, whether Slavic, Baltic or Finnish, obviously possessed sufficient power and military potential to close off uncontrolled movement along the river routes to the Scandinavians if they needed to do this.

A clear illustration of this is the 'zone of inaccessibility' for western Baltic and Scandinavian things that arose on the Western Dvina in the area of the Tusheml'a culture (Kazanski 2010: 104). Or a mass burial at Salma (Saaremaa Island), which is interpreted as the burial of the Svei, 'who died at the hands of the local Ests' (Melnikova 2019: 71).<sup>5</sup> According to the conclusions of A. Radin'sh (and, I think, quite con-

vincing), in the ninth–twelfth centuries the inhabitants of the lower courses of the Daugava managed to keep the river way under their control' (Radin'sh 2003: 158).

And it is no coincidence that Hauk Long Stockings sailed on a ship to Rus' Land, having freed his other companions. It is no coincidence that the Scandinavian expeditions to Eastern Europe were small and usually limited to one ship (Melnikova 2019: 67).

All this is radically different from the behaviour of the Scandinavians in Western Europe, where *Danelag* and *Normandy* emerged. The Scandinavians obviously behaved in proportion to their military and demographic capabilities in a given region. And if neither a separate *Danelag* nor a separate *Normandy* arose in Eastern Europe, then it is clear that Eastern Europe was not originally *terra nullius* even in the early Middle Ages.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Not quite so: 'In two inscriptions on runic stelae from Österjötland ... a person is named or nicknamed Væringr (Væringr) ... In general, the word 'væringi' / 'væringr' was rarely used in Old Norse prose literature and law books (found in less than 20 monuments ...) and in Skaldic poetry (two cases)' (Melnikova 2023: Varangians in Scandinavian Sources).

<sup>2</sup> Anton V. Zimmerling interprets the relation between these terms in the letter of the GVNP No. 28 in a slightly different way: 'Here the term "Varangian" is used in a broader sense in the sign "foreigner in Rus'": nevertheless, there are no direct grounds for identifying the terms Varangian and Nemtsy, which are used in parallel in this charter' (Zimmerling 2021: 250). However, it is obvious that this does not change the essence of the matter. We should speak of a change in the meaning of the term 'Varangians' at the time (more precisely, up to this moment) of the drafting of the Charter (c. 1189–1199). And precisely in the direction of parallelism with the term 'Nemtsy'. Moreover, Melnikova herself writes the following about the displacement of the term 'Varangians': 'From the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century the Varangians cease to be mentioned in the South Russian and North-Eastern annals, in the Novgorod annals after 1130 the names of certain Scandinavian peoples are given (свеи, урмане, донь, гъте)' (Melnikova 2023: The origin of ...).

<sup>3</sup> It was the Prussian 'Viting' that I proposed to link with the origin of the Proto-Slavic витязь (Romanchuk 2015: ch.3). As I noted, 'the Proto-Slavic витязь shows the closest proximity to the Frisian and Prussian forms. Moreover, with this variant of etymology (and the Baltic mediation) it is not necessary to explain the Proto-Slavic /t/ (instead of the expected /c/ from the Germanic /k/, when it is etymologized from vikingrR) as a result of dissimilation.' However, the Old English and Frisian forms, as well as the 'Prussian (\*) viting(a)s of Old Polish origin and -g- in Old Polish source' (Anikin 2013: 264–265), in connection with the etymology of витязь, also received the attention of some researchers earlier.

Recently, Zimmerling, in a very interesting article (although his attempt to explain the preservation of dz- in *внѣзь, князь, etc.* (Zimmerling 2021: 253) is witty but, in my opinion, completely unconvincing), also suggested that 'the main way of borrowing the word VikingrR and its assimilation by the Slavs took place west of the Rus' area and, possibly, went through the Baltic languages' (Zimmerling 2021: 254).

<sup>4</sup> In particular, most importantly, it provides an answer to the long-standing question of the origin of the so-called 'big houses' of Ladoga. Contrary to the established tradition of comparing them with the 'long houses' of Scandinavia, they are quite different from them. And it is obviously necessary to consider the 'big houses' of Ladoga in a broader context, taking into account, among other things, Friesland (Romanchuk 2013a: 287; 2013b: 98, note 49). Today, however, the closest analogues to the Ladoga buildings can be found only in the southwestern Baltic region, and especially in Wolin, Mecklenburg and Wrocław (Musin and Stanisławski 2022: 370–371).

<sup>5</sup> One could also mention here the 'Est Vikings' from the 'Sagas about Olaf Tryggvason'; they kept Olaf in prison for about six years.

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