

Finding the Finnic in the Varangian Narrative



**UNIVERSITY
OF OSLO**

Gabriella Rymshaw

Master's Thesis in Viking and Medieval Norse Studies – MAS4091

Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

30 credits

Spring 2023

Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies (ILN), University of Oslo

Abstract:

There is very thin scholarship regarding the activities of the people of medieval Finland and their contribution to the Varangian period. The history of medieval Finland is affected by thin historiography, due to a combination of having an oral tradition until about 1500 and relying on their neighbors to produce written histories on their behalf, as well as having been colonised by these same neighbors from the early Middle Ages to the beginning of the twentieth century. Though they are occasionally mentioned in both medieval and modern literary source material, they are conflated as one general unit by the chroniclers. This is harmful to minority cultures living in and around Finland who suffer doubly from voids in historic records. Therefore, historians must consult other forms of evidence, including archaeological and linguistic evidence, to glimpse into the priorities and identities of medieval Finns. This allows for examination of how they interacted with their neighbors and within the geographic networks of their time.

This thesis aims to ascertain the avenues through which Finns contributed to Varangian travels and subsequent development of medieval Eastern Europe through linguistic and archaeological means by pinpointing evidence that tracks their movements eastward by way of trading settlement documents, their appearance in the slave trade, and religious development. It is essential for historians to seek out marginalised experiences in medieval narratives through the lens of identity in order to generate a more nuanced and diverse history. In the context of this paper, examining how Finns might have interacted with and influenced their neighboring territories in Baltic and Eastern Europe during the Varangian period provides insight into how medieval people experienced identity and understood their own culture and ethnicity in relation to others, as well as how Finns contributed to cultural history across the greater Varangian sphere.

Keywords: Varangians, Rus', Viking Age, Finnish history, medieval Finland, medieval Karelia

Foreword:

I would like to sincerely thank my two advisors on this project, Bjørn Bandlien and Karl G. Johansson. Bjørn's kindness and willingness to step in as an advisor at the last minute was essential to this thesis, and his helpful insight allowed me to determine the directions the paper required. Karl was kind enough to provide additional consideration at the end of the journey. I am also deeply grateful to my mother Violet for her encouragement, proofreading, and sympathetic coffee cups.

Gabriella R. Rymshaw 27.05.2023

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 Background on Topic.....	4
1.2 Scope.....	7
1.3 Clarification of Main Terms in Use.....	7
1.4 Method.....	8
2. The Varangians vs. The Rus’.....	10
2.1 The Normanist and Anti-Normanist Theories in Varangian Scholarship.....	13
3. Diversity in Varangian Ranks.....	17
4. Medieval Identity.....	20
5. Extracting Finnish and Karelian Movements.....	22
5.1 Introduction.....	22
5.2 Linguistic Evidence of Birch Bark Sources.....	22
5.3 Sourcing Movement and Agenda through the Slave Trade.....	27
5.4 Religious Similarity in Perkunas, Perkele, and Perun.....	29
6. Difficulties in Pinpointing Finnic Presence.....	31
6.1 Mapping Extent of Movement.....	31
6.2 Bias, Gaps, and Voids in the Records.....	32
7. Effects on History on Contemporary Finnish Scholarship.....	37
8. Conclusion.....	40
Bibliography.....	43

1. Introduction

1.1 Background on Topic

During the eighth and ninth centuries, Norse populations began to experience a variety of factors which urged them to expand outwards. Record climate change in the ninth century caused severe warming of the north Atlantic territories, which halted agricultural output, therefore drastically reducing available resources. Coupled with considerable population growth, scant resources caused conflict to erupt within settlements as hungry people struggled to acquire adequate sustenance.¹ Thus, locating fertile lands elsewhere seemed necessary for survival. Further, the social climate of the ninth to eleventh centuries oversaw the emergence of a new political structure replacing petty chieftains with the leadership of local kings. In order to gain prestige and respect as valid rulers, these men realized that they needed to secure the severely needed resources and land to attract and maintain followers.² Larger settlements with greater populations prompted many younger sons with little hope of demonstrative inheritance to join these new authorities as they promised opportunities to accrue wealth.³ Multiple rune stones left along the coasts of the Black and Marmara Seas have marked Miklagård, or Byzantium, as one of the most prized destinations of these early medieval Scandinavian opportunity seekers.⁴ They would become known as the Varangians.

The Varangian Guard began as a phenomenon of mercenary nomads and raiders moving eastward towards Russia, appearing in multiple writings as far back as the mid-800s A.D. Eventually, Varangians evolved into one of the foremost Byzantine army corps and even were trusted as the personal bodyguard of emperors as soon as 988 A.D.⁵ These sailors facilitated

¹ Judith M. Bennet, *Medieval Europe: A Short History* (New York: McGraw Hill Education, 2011), 107.

² Anders Winroth, *The Age of the Viking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 44.

³ Bennet, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 108.

⁴ Antje Bosselmann-Ruickbie, "Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums 'The Varangian Way' (2007) and 'Stand Up and Fight' (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas," in *Wege der Kommunikation zwischen Byzanz und dem Westen 2: Menschen und Worte*, ed. Falko Daim, Dominik Heher, and Christian Gastgeber (Mainz: Romisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 2018), 398.

⁵ Bosselmann-Ruickbie, "Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia

widespread trade and exchange between ninth and tenth century Scandinavia to Constantinople, Baghdad to Russia. The so-called ‘Varangian Way’ reached from the Gulf of Finland to the Neva River, from Lake Ladoga to the Bosphorus, culminating in Constantinople.

While many have argued for the Varangians being of strictly Scandinavian or Slavic background, the fact that Baltic Finnic populations were also involved in the movements eastward is severely underrepresented in current scholarship. While they are mentioned in passing in the midst of Slavic and Scandinavian narratives, they do not take a starring role, and modern scholarship has not been moved to rectify that. It makes no real academic sense to put aside medieval Finnic populations from mainstream Varangian scholarship, simply due to geography itself. It is hugely unlikely that there were no Finnish-inclusive expeditions to the east. The Austrvegr was central to the fur and slave trades as it connected traders from Scandinavia to the Volga and northern Russia to Constantinople, facilitating spread of the Muslim silver and other coveted materials.⁶ The majority of the Finnic populations lie between Scandinavia and the Slavic lands. Finland sits directly between the ports of Birka and Aldeigjuborg and its southern coast flanks the Gulf of Finland. It seems quite unreasonable to attest that explorers and trade-minded seafarers would somehow skip the coasts and lands along the Gulf of Finland throughout the entirety of the Varangian period. Further, northeastern Russia was predominantly populated by Finnic peoples in the medieval period.⁷ Therefore, not only would it be reasonable that the Finnic peoples were in contact with anyone who was traveling through their domain to explore and trade; but also, the Finnic peoples themselves would have been moving and trading in the area, contributing to Varangian markets.

Thus, this paper aims to combat gaps in the representative historiography of Finnish contributions in Varangian narratives by evidencing their participation in, and benefaction to, the cultural development across the east marked by Varangian movements. The Finnic populations

and Byzantium in the Albums ‘The Varangian Way’ (2007) and ‘Stand Up and Fight’ (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas,” 400.

⁶ Jukka Korpela, “The Last Vikings: Russian Boat Bandits and the Formation of Princely Power,” *Russian History* 48 (2021): 91.

⁷ Roman Zakharii, “The Historiography of Normanist and Anti-Normanist theories on the origin of Rus’: A review of modern historiography and major sources on Varangian controversy and other Scandinavian concepts of the origins of Rus’” (Master’s Thesis, University of Oslo, 2002), 18.

themselves operated under an oral tradition, and were thus not in a position to transcribe their own histories, leaving the documentation of their cultural, linguistic, and social developments to the mercy of their foreign counterparts, who undoubtedly lacked insight when chronicling them. Regarding pre-historic Finland, there is still discord surrounding the degree of cultural influence imparted by the heavy and constant Scandinavian presence in western and southern coastal regions. Further, Finland belonged to Sweden for an extended period. However, the Finnish national movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries pushed for the need to uncover a prehistoric Finnish identity at any and all costs. Therefore, there is a general sparsity in the histories of many Finnic populations regarding their place in the early Middle Ages. Thus, the historian must be prepared to read between the few written lines and consult other avenues of evidence, such as archaeological and linguistic, to generate an idea of the movements, priorities, and modes of self-determination of the Finnic peoples.

In the midst of conquest and expansion narratives, it is easy to overlook the contribution of non-combatant parties in the settlement and cultural development of new areas. Throughout history, slaves, craftsmen, and merchants have had remarkable impact upon linguistic developments, slave trade narratives, and the religious beliefs shared by Finnic populations in and around Eastern Europe in Varangian strongholds. Consequently, during the era of the Varangian expeditions, there is evidence of Finnic influence, largely by way of linguistic influence on eastern Slavic place names and terminology for occupational identity. Likewise, there are traces of Finns having been involved in the medieval slave trade across the Austrvegr, as well as evidence of similarities between Balto-Finnic religious cults in comparison to others discovered across eastern Slavic lands. Further, both trading and raiding marked the period. The archaeological footprint of slavery is always one fraught with the knowledge that only a partial idea can be gleaned of both the numbers and the actualities of the trade itself. Correspondingly, the Finnic peoples also found themselves in certain situations where they engaged in slave trade as was standard for the period; however, because the Scandinavians and the Slavs dominated the military and political arenas, they were far more inclined to be the enslavers: namely, of their Finnic neighbors.

Thus, the mission of this discussion is two-fold: to illuminate pathways Finnic people used to interact with the east during the period marked by Varangian exploration; and to attest why this investigation is crucial to the historian's understanding of the changing world throughout these expeditions.

1.2 Scope

The peak period for the Varangians was considered to be the ninth to eleventh centuries, as the twelfth century gradually gave way to the high medieval period, which was governed by more firmly established political entities. As such, the evidence in this paper will largely center around the ninth to eleventh centuries. The people living in Fennoscandia, what is now northern Russia, Ukraine, and the present-day eastern Baltic states, were all active players in facilitating the long-distance communication and trade networks to the east; thus, mainly Finnic populations will be discussed. However, establishing what ethnically constituted a Varangian is necessary to the paper, as it will contextualise the Finnic in relation to the Varangians.

1.3 Clarification of Main Terms in Use

Perhaps one of the most central issues that immediately arises is that of defining terminology. While the period marked by raids in and around the Baltic waters has been termed 'The Viking Age,' it was not solely the Scandinavian practice to sail and sack neighboring realms. All throughout the early medieval period, the practice of raiding neighboring groups and competing for resources was commonplace. 'Viking' in and of itself is a misleading term, as it conflates all Northern Germanic tribes as one unified ethnic body with the same customs, agendas, and actions, rather than serving as a term to distinguish a performative role that Scandinavian seafarers underwent, hoping to achieve renown and fame through seafaring and military action. Thus, to give the so-called Varangians a singular ethnic source when those termed 'Varangians' were of a mixed demographic motivated by various goals is inherently imprudent. These men were often both a product of their time and an evolution of 'Viking' raiders from previous decades and evolution of power networks and figureheads. The term

“Varangian” itself (*Væringjar* in Old Norse and Βάρανγοι or *Várangoi* in Greek) merely refers to people bound by an oath of a military nature.⁸

The use of the term ‘Finnic’ in this paper largely refers to the material and linguistic culture of the groups operating in and around, and originating from, what is culturally and ethnically considered to be Finland proper today. The evidence addressed in the paper mainly centers around people living within Finland proper, and to an extent Fennoscandia as a whole. If parallels are drawn to other Finno-Uralic groups which occupied territory beyond Finland proper, it will be specifically explained. Further, the author of this paper is aware of the harm in collectively conflating historically marginalised Finno-Uralic groups such as the Sámi, Kvens, and Karelians with the term ‘Finnish’ due to colonialism and structural violence and therefore wishes to avoid that in this paper; however, due to the lack of historical self-documentation by medieval Finnic populations as well as the unwitting ignorance of contemporary foreign chroniclers citing any Finnic person under the same ethnonyms, there exists a degree of uncertainty. Yet in widening the discussion to ‘Finnic’, examination of all possible actions taken by Finnic groups may be studied for their wider impact on the greater Varangian narrative.

1.4 Method

As the paper deals with the Varangian period, the paper will begin with an explanation of what marked the time period as distinctly thus. As the Varangian journeys were not solely centered around conquest and pillaging, but also involved great discovery, opening of trade routes, and settling of eastern territories, a brief description of the extent of their reach, various goals, and ethnic evolution is necessary to establishing how such a grand narrative would have room for many ethnic actors beyond merely the Scandinavian or the Slavic. This will make it possible to hypothesise the degree to which Finnic involvement impacted the economic and domestic spheres of the east. It will also be necessary to explain how identity, a central factor to

⁸ Bosselmann-Ruickbie, “Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums ‘The Varangian Way’ (2007) and ‘Stand Up and Fight’ (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas,” 398.

this paper, was perceived very differently in the medieval period than it is today; and therefore, context-based examination is imperative to the integrity of the paper.

Then, evidence for Finnic appearance in the historical record will be introduced. A discussion of linguistic culture based on documents found around Finnic-inhabited northern Russia will reveal the great number of Finnic in a dominant trading location in Varangian territory. Next, a discussion of the Varangian slave trade and the Finnic participation - both willing and unwilling - will be introduced and examined for the sheer magnitude of Finnic along the eastern trade routes. The third point illustrates the similarity between a Baltic Finnic sky deity and the Russian version that the Varangians became enamored with, who slightly differs from Thor, as an example of cultural diffusion.

Finally, there will be a discussion of the issues which inhibit scholars from seeking out further information about the topic, such as historical colonisation considerations, biases, and the degree of availability of accessible sources. Precisely because of these challenges, this author argues there is clearly work to be done in order to continue building a crucial historical narrative.

2. The Varangians vs. The Rus'

One begins with, of course, the ever-debated matter of what constitutes the “Rus’.” Though the term remains ambiguous to the present day, the one thing academic evidence points to is that they were neither strictly Slavic nor Scandinavian. Initial records of the Varangians dating back to 800 A.D. point to the Swedish background of many warriors.⁹ The first mention of the Varangians in relation to the Byzantines in Frankish records dates to 839 A.D.¹⁰ Guardsmen identifying themselves as “Rhos” men from Sweden journeyed with the Byzantine Emperor Theophilos to the court of Emperor Louis the Pious for a diplomatic visit at Ingelheim. Archaeological records corroborate that the Byzantines and Nordics had been in contact throughout the ninth century.

However, the Varangian ranks included a variety of warrior-merchants from Balto-Finnic ethnic origins.¹¹ Regarding the dynamism of the Rus’ identity, one can approach this through establishing a historical timeline through which different ethnic groups emulated the name. From roughly 750-860, a political power arose which traded with the Khazar khaganate according to Arabic fragments which mentioned these individuals.¹² That political power employed trading agents who were referred to as the ar-Rus. When this trading entity fell from power, another entity moved in and instituted a more aggressive foreign attitude to the south. They were referred to as the Rus’. The ar-Rus and early Rus’ both maintained a Scandinavian core, but by the mid-tenth century, the dominant cultural and ethnographical influence shifted to Slavic. At this point, ‘Varangian’ became a term meant to delineate those of Scandinavian origin moving about in eastern Europe; however, the usage of this term is still very inconsistent and was used as early

⁹ Bosselmann-Ruickbie, “Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums ‘The Varangian Way’ (2007) and ‘Stand Up and Fight’ (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas,” 398.

¹⁰ Bosselmann-Ruickbie, “Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums ‘The Varangian Way’ (2007) and ‘Stand Up and Fight’ (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas,” 399.

¹¹ Csete Katona, “Co-operation between the Viking Rus’ and the Turkic Nomads of the Steppe in the Ninth-Eleventh Centuries” (Master’s Thesis, Central European University, 2018), 2.

¹² Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin and Mats Roslund, “Identity Formation and Diversity: Introduction,” in *Identity Formation and Diversity in the Early Medieval Baltic and Beyond*, ed. Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin, and Mats Roslund (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 8.

as the eighth century. Once the tenth century hit, especially in the later half, Rus' began to shift from being solely a name relegated to a political jurisdiction and instead allowing for all inhabitants in the spaces they occupied, including Finns, Balts, and Slavs. Thus, Finns became part of the Rus' identity through active geographical interaction with players of a constantly growing and changing ethnonym.

Throughout the ninth to mid-tenth centuries, the Varangians were sometimes referred to as the "Rus'," likely derived from *rods-*, the Old Norse term for oarsmen.¹³ The Byzantines then adopted the term *Ῥῶς* (Rhōs) to delineate the original Nordic members of the Guard. In a tenth-century treatise concerned with the governance of an empire, the Byzantine Emperor Constantine described the Rhōs, a people ethnically different from the Slavs, as notoriously bold and persistent, willing to conduct trade on the fearsome eastern rivers despite the infamous dangers of the Varangian Way. Many other ethnic groups at the time besides the Nordic sailors were generally far less inclined to attempt such an endeavor, at least not on such a constant basis as the Varangians, that history remembers them specifically for their travels. However, as greater numbers of Scandinavian Varangian warlords decided to settle within the Eastern lands, it became harder to distinguish the Rus' and their followers from the Slavs who also inhabited their settlements, and the term "Rus'" began to apply to anyone who dwelled within a Varangian-ruled territory.¹⁴ Thus, the terms "Rus'" and "Varangian" eventually became functional rather than ethnic terms towards the second half of the Varangian Guard's career.¹⁵

Though it is evident that the Varangian state of Kyiv was founded with heavy Scandinavian involvement, it is important to note the surrounding populations held influence over its makeup as well. Kyiv was surrounded by neighboring Slavic groups, as well as being

¹³ Bosselmann-Ruickbie, "Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums 'The Varangian Way' (2007) and 'Stand Up and Fight' (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas," 399.

¹⁴ Angus A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, *The Viking Age: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 309.

¹⁵ Bosselmann-Ruickbie, "Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums 'The Varangian Way' (2007) and 'Stand Up and Fight' (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas," 399.

situated closely to Khazar-inhabited steppes.¹⁶ Kyiv lay outside of the standard Scandinavian routes in use toward the Middle East and Asia.

Of course, Scandinavians self-identifying as “Rus” did reside in Kyiv, even those of a princely nature with a military following. These people maintained their good fortune by way of sending out ships in the winter to trade goods acquired in markets of Constantinople in the summer,¹⁷ which fits with the Scandinavian stereotype of the Viking period. Further, these people were considered markedly different from the surrounding Slavs on the whole; however, the names of the Rus’ inhabitants of Kyiv mentioned in treaties are not only of Scandinavian origin, but also of Slavic, Baltic, and Finno-Ugric origins. Thus, Eastern Slavs contributed much in the way of political organization in later medieval Russian kingdoms, but formation of the Rus’ state was developed in large part on a domestic scale by Baltic Finnic populations.¹⁸

In the eighth century, the Slavic population around the Dnepr to the Oka River was expanding, and northeastern Europe began urbanising.¹⁹ By the late ninth century, the watershed between the Baltic and Pontic drainages was reached, and Slav groups began to settle around the Moskva River. The soil conditions and climate better suited to agriculture motivated many of the Baltic and Finno-Ugric groups from the woods to live alongside the Rus’. The expansion inspired cultural dynamism due in large part to the increasing density of settlements and contributed to the rise in Rus’ urban centres from the ninth to eleventh centuries.

¹⁶ Oleksiy P. Tolochko, “The Primary Chronicle’s ‘Ethnography’ Revisited: Slavs and 169 Varangians in the Middle Dnieper Region and the Origin of the Rus’ State,” in *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*. ed. Ildar Garipzanov, Patrick Geary, and Przemysław Urbańczyk (Brepols: Turnhout, 2008) 186.

¹⁷ Tolochko, “The Primary Chronicle’s ‘Ethnography’ Revisited: Slavs and 169 Varangians in the Middle Dnieper Region and the Origin of the Rus’ State,” 187.

¹⁸ Marika Mägi, *In Austrvegr: The Role of the Eastern Baltic in Viking Age Communication across the Baltic Sea* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2018), 23.

¹⁹ Johan Callmer, “Urbanisation in Northern and Eastern Europe, ca. AD 700-1100,” in *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium*, Ed. Joachim Henning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 256.

2.1 The Normanist and Anti-Normanist Theories in Varangian Scholarship

Regarding scholarship on the dominant ethnic parties involved in the Varangian period, there are two camps backing either the Slavic influence or the Scandinavian influence. The anti-Normanist view puts forth the idea that the Scandinavian influence in the East is disproportionately overstated, and that the Varangians were only partially involved in the form of mercenaries and merchants, and easily adapted to Russian culture. The Normanist viewpoint maintains that Scandinavians were essential to the emergence of a Russian state in the role of Varangians. Naturally, international scholarship tends to lean more towards the Normanist side, while Russian nationalists favor the latter, and did especially during the peak of the Soviet era. The reality is always somewhere in the middle, and neither camp is overly concerned with any other ethnic contributions to the eastern cultural development in the Varangian period. While Scandinavians were dominant in the military arena, the Slavs excelled in religious and political institutions. However, Baltic Finnic populations who were not known for a measurable influence in these areas during the medieval period are not given enough credit for their influence in spaces more domestic, such as the material and linguistic. Naturally, both viewpoints affect Finnish history scholarship, as they represent two of modern Finland's previous historical overlords.

The anti-Normanist, or Native theory, was championed in 1837 by Ukrainian historian M. Maksymovych.²⁰ Originating from ideas from the Hustynian Chronicle of 1670, the theory advocates that the term 'Rus' is connected to names of rivers such as Ros', Rosava, Rusna, and Rostavytsya. The Varangians are thus believed to be military personnel and commercialists consisting of not only Swedes, but also Slavs.

Anti-Normanists put forth that the Eastern Slavs referred to the Vikings as "varyagi" or Varangians specifically rather than "Rus'."²¹ Further, supporters of the theory question how great the Scandinavian presence could be considering the constant mentions of the Varangians

²⁰ Zakharii, "The Historiography of Normanist and Anti-Normanist theories on the origin of Rus': A review of modern historiography and major sources on Varangian controversy and other Scandinavian concepts of the origins of Rus'", 25.

²¹ Zakharii, "The Historiography of Normanist and Anti-Normanist theories on the origin of Rus': A review of modern historiography and major sources on Varangian controversy and other Scandinavian concepts of the origins of Rus'", 25.

swearing to Slavic gods rather than to Germanic deities in the Primary Chronicle. Further, the Primary Chronicle maintains that “on account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of the Rus’. The present inhabitants of Novgorod are descended from the Varangian race, but aforetime they were Slavs”,²² which suggests that the term ‘Varangian’ was being applied as more of a job description than of a racial connotation.²³ Constantine Porphyrogenitus maintained that the language of the Rus’ who were part of trading expeditions through the Dnepr to the Black Sea and Constantinople was of Scandinavian origin.²⁴

Further, the Primary Chronicle is a main source of Varangian era history, but contains some traces of anachronism. The Primary Chronicle dates back to the twelfth century; however, when listing ethnic groups involved amongst Varangian populations, the English are included.²⁵ While this does not fit with historical records of the ninth century, it fits the time of the Chronicle, as many Englishmen did venture east following the Norman conquest of England, which occurred two centuries after the beginning dates of the Varangian era listed in the Primary Chronicle.

In opposition, the Normanist theory, also referred to as the Varangian Theory, considers the Norse to be the founders of the Kyivan Rus’ state. Normanists believe Scandinavians were central actors in political formation in Slavic-inhabited areas within the area spanning between Lake Il’men near Novgorod to the Dnepr shores near what is now Kyiv in Ukraine. The founders of the Normanist theory were the historians G. S. Bayer, G. F. Miller and A. L. Schlözer, all of

²² *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, 59-60.

²³ Zakharii, “The Historiography of Normanist and Anti-Normanist theories on the origin of Rus’: A review of modern historiography and major sources on Varangian controversy and other Scandinavian concepts of the origins of Rus’”, 27.

²⁴ Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, “Introduction”, in *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*. trans. and ed. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 40.

²⁵ Zakharii, “The Historiography of Normanist and Anti-Normanist theories on the origin of Rus’: A review of modern historiography and major sources on Varangian controversy and other Scandinavian concepts of the origins of Rus’”, 26.

whom operated out of St. Petersburg Academy of Science in the late eighteenth century.²⁶ These scholars based the theory around written sources, largely the Primary Chronicle, focusing on the period beginning around the year 862 when three Varangian dukes, Riurik, Sineus, and Truvor, were summoned to rule the Slavs.

The Normanists believe that both the state of the Rus' and in fact the very term of Rus' itself are rooted in Norse culture. They theorise that state creation is incited by the actions of a prominent figure; in the Varangian era, a Scandinavian duke fits this criteria. The theory, though initially operating under the assumption that Eastern Slavs were not capable of state formation to any degree, evolved over time to suggest that foreign rule over the Slavs was a gradual process of peaceful Scandinavian colonization.²⁷ The Varangians achieved this through establishing the social elite class of Kyivan Rus' which pushed for the development of a state.

The Normanist theory, though focused on Scandinavian action during the Varangian era, does support the term 'Rus'' having an etymological root in Finnic language. The Normanists maintain that 'Rus'' comes from *Ruotsi*, the Finnish term for Sweden since the mid-ninth century.²⁸ *Ruotsi* is thought to originate from the name of a Swedish district in Uppland which was known as Roslagen (*Róðslagen*). Swedes arrived most frequently as merchants, and as trade became more lucrative yet more dangerous, these merchants began to bear arms to protect themselves.²⁹ Eventually, the weapons contributed to their eventual famed piracy. These Vikings who went *Austrviking* abducted their eastern neighbors and sold them into slavery in other territories. Scandinavian sea raiders undoubtedly crossed through territory lying between Lake Il'men' and the headwaters of the Volga, where not only Slavs but Finns had settled.³⁰ At the outset, these Scandinavians acted as traders along Staraja Ladoga through the Oka-Volga route,

²⁶ Zakharii, "The Historiography of Normanist and Anti-Normanist theories on the origin of Rus': A review of modern historiography and major sources on Varangian controversy and other Scandinavian concepts of the origins of Rus'", 18.

²⁷ Zakharii, "The Historiography of Normanist and Anti-Normanist theories on the origin of Rus': A review of modern historiography and major sources on Varangian controversy and other Scandinavian concepts of the origins of Rus'", 18.

²⁸ Omeljan Pritsak, "The Origin of Rus'", *The Russian Review* 36, no. 3 (July 1977): 250.

²⁹ Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium*, trans. Benedikt S. Benedikz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

³⁰ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetor, "Introduction," 48.

territories occupied by Finnish people.³¹ While a large number of Russia's original inhabitants were ethnically Slavic, there were also many Finno-Ugrian tribes, such as the Permians and the Estonians, living in and around the northwestern region. As such, the Slavs might have easily borrowed the terms used by their Finnish neighbors from the visiting Scandinavians. As Norsemen became more frequently welcomed in many parts of modern-day Russia, they were more inclined to trade peacefully with them and sell easier marks along with other desired goods.

³¹ Duczko, Wladyslaw Duczko, *Viking Rus: Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2004), 2.

3. Diversity in Varangian Ranks

By the height of their peak period, the Varangian Guard came to encompass a far more diverse body than it had at its beginning. In fact, it was advantageous to associate with people of non-Swedish or non-Scandinavian backgrounds and let them join the ranks, as long as they were strong and had fruitful connections for greater reward. The Varangians were generally incredibly open to increasing their ability to communicate with other ethnic groups. They were enthusiastic to learn other languages, specifically of people they wished to jointly cooperate with.³² They established strong relationships with Turkic nomadic groups, who, besides the Slavs, were some of their greatest allies with whom they constantly traded and aided in battle.³³ They generally made deals for territories rather than forcefully taking them over on every occasion, notably exemplified in their procurement of Normandy in 911 A.D.³⁴ As such, the Varangians were not consumed by the motivation by ethnic solidarity, as they were incredibly culturally curious - enough to sail all throughout the Mediterranean as well as the eastern rivers to explore new lands. The spirit of adventure, the promise of reputation, the goal of treasure, and the admiration of the strength and cultures of other societies aligned the Scandinavian Varangians in tandem with their Finnic, Baltic, Slavic, Mediterranean, and even Arabian recruits and allies.

Nordic Varangians also valued the social warrior code of bravery, loyalty, and camaraderie with one's fellow warriors.³⁵ Because the sailing and raiding life was so fraught with danger and uncertainty, their caution, realism, and pragmatism encouraged the Varangians to cultivate friendship with the men within their ranks. This ultimately meant increasingly establishing friendships with men who were of other ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, many of the Nordic Varangian recruits had not started out as warriors, but had been traders who had, in part, decided to travel great distances with their mercenary fellows due to their curiosity about other cultures.

³² Katona, "Co-operation between the Viking Rus' and the Turkic Nomads of the Steppe in the Ninth-Eleventh Centuries," 83.

³³ Katona, "Co-operation between the Viking Rus' and the Turkic Nomads of the Steppe in the Ninth-Eleventh Centuries," i.

³⁴ Francois Neveux, *A Brief History of The Normans* (London: Constable and Robinson Limited Publishers, 2006), 62.

³⁵ Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 350-352.

Along the routes they sailed on diplomatic and defensive missions for the Byzantine emperors, the Scandinavians came into contact with people originating from all across Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and other distant lands. The Varangians also largely respected the strength and organization of the Caliphate, and they tended to trade rather than fight with them, begetting treasures such as amber, weapons, honey, and hunting falcons from the Arab world due to their great curiosity of Middle Eastern cultures.³⁶ Some men died in Serkland, or the land of the Saracens, somewhere near the Caspian Sea, as evidenced through rune stones detailing their death. These rune stones also offer insight into how devoted the Varangians were to exploring the lands of other people.³⁷

Further, having a diversified Guard would allow for trading between genetically-related peoples. As Finno-Ugric languages are quite different to Germanic and Slavic languages, having Finnic members of one's trading party would undoubtedly facilitate easier trade with Finnic populations spread out across the northern regions of Fennoscandia and Western Russia. Not only was the fledgling Rus' identity rooted in bilingualism; but in fact, Baltic Finnic linguistic prowess was a vital tool in the ability of the Rus' to network with Finno-Ugric speaking groups further east.³⁸ The Scandinavians harnessed the communication networks already in place to benefit their own trading networks.³⁹

Even still, the Varangians accepted positions as mercenaries and palace guards, showing evidence of pragmatism and adaptability. The "axe-bearing barbarians"⁴⁰ from Scandinavia were even mentioned positively by Anna Komnene, twelfth-century historian and daughter of

³⁶ Bennet, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 109.

³⁷ Bosselmann-Ruickbie, "Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums 'The Varangian Way' (2007) and 'Stand Up and Fight' (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas," 401.

³⁸ Mägi, *In Austrvegr: The Role of the Eastern Baltic in Viking Age Communication across the Baltic Sea*, 24.

³⁹ Mägi, *In Austrvegr: The Role of the Eastern Baltic in Viking Age Communication across the Baltic Sea*, 24.

⁴⁰ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. Elizabeth A. S. Dawes (Cambridge, ON: In Parentheses Publications, 2000), 46.

Byzantine Emperor Alexios I, in her chronicle *Alexiad*.⁴¹ Komnene wrote that the Varangians from Thule or Scandinavia,

“naturally cherished a great affection for the Emperor and would sooner lose their lives than be persuaded to adopt any treachery against him. The Varangians, too, who carried their axes on their shoulders, regarded their loyalty to the Emperors and their protection of the imperial persons as a pledge and ancestral tradition, handed down from father to son, which they keep inviolate and will certainly not listen to even the slightest word about treachery.”⁴²

This demonstrated the manner in which the Nordic social ideals of fierce loyalty and devotion to allies and comrades extended not only to people of Nordic ethnic backgrounds, but even to the people of varied descent who ruled and inhabited Constantinople.

⁴¹ Bosselmann-Ruickbie, “Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums ‘The Varangian Way’ (2007) and ‘Stand Up and Fight’ (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas,” 407.

⁴² Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 46.

4. Medieval Identity

At no point in history has a group's identity ever been fixed, as humans are dynamic in their interaction and movement. Archaic nationalist histories no longer serve the humanities well, as present ethnic and national groups do not always correspond in neat proportionate ways with borders and populations of the past. However, for a historian investigating missing history a thousand years after the fact, setting up parameters in identifying specific areas of discovery can be useful in honing in on specific answers. Tracking material culture origination points and the extent of their spread outwards can aid historians in understanding cultural shifts and developments in different regions.

Additionally, there are several different facets to an individual's identity. Cultural identity refers to how an individual conducts their daily proceedings within a group, whereas ethnic identity can manifest around wider aspects of the individual's life, such as shifting necessities and social processes - such as political, geographic, and religious interests - as well as factors such as the understanding of kinship and geography.⁴³

In the context of this paper, communication and trade of ideas and goods throughout the Baltic coast had been occurring far before the early medieval period and the so-called Viking times; therefore ascribing a distinctly Scandinavian centralisation to movements of many practices and materials and beliefs is a misrepresentation of the spread of cultural influence. The eighth to tenth centuries were notoriously marked by a general increase in long-distance communication.⁴⁴ From the tenth century onwards, more territorialised forms began to appear across the greater Baltic and Eastern territories.

Developments in the communicative networks reveal important processes related to expansion and conquest in medieval Europe, including Germanic movements into the Eastern Baltic areas, Swedish conquest in Finland, and the development of a Slavic identity in Russia.⁴⁵

⁴³ Callmer, Gustin and Roslund, "Identity Formation and Diversity: Introduction," 4.

⁴⁴ Callmer, Gustin and Roslund, "Identity Formation and Diversity: Introduction," 7.

⁴⁵ Callmer, Gustin and Roslund, "Identity Formation and Diversity: Introduction," 7.

Additionally, there is the possibility of dynamic identities within specific historical spheres. In the East, the Rus', Varyags, Finns, and Slavs were constantly influencing and interacting with each other in a closed sphere, and thus each of their ethnic identities were constantly evolving and influencing the others.

Medieval authors did not understand ethnicity to the same degree that modern historians do. The culture, era, locale, and individual bias of a medieval author indicated which terminology they used for the people they wrote about. This terminology indicates how the author considered their relationship to the subject as well as how they perceived the subject's otherness, and often did not align seamlessly with how their subjects would have chosen to identify. This is the case with the perceptions of the Finns and the Karelians in Arabic, Greek, Norse, and Slavic sources.

Therefore, the medieval tendency to conflate the term "Finn" with a great many groups of people under the wider "Finno-Ugric" umbrella requires careful attention. For example, the Uralic Hungarians operated at the center of Eastern European medieval slave trading,⁴⁶ proving that all Finno-Uralic peoples were not of one set agenda operating from shared desires - certainly Finns traded by Hungarians were not all on board with this outcome. Further, it does not immediately mean that all Finnic peoples stuck together, as Karelians capitalised on Novgorodian raiding missions by in turn conducting their own raids and selling people from Southern Finland for profit, suggesting that the revenue of selling them was far more valuable than any cultural affinity they may have shared with their southern neighbors.

⁴⁶ Jukka Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 22.

5. Extracting Finnish and Karelian Movements

5.1 Introduction

Because there is very little written evidence of Finnish pre- and medieval-history beyond mentions from other writing peoples, the task of the historian is that much more difficult in uncovering it. Additionally, the medieval primary source texts will always suffer from unspecificity related to the locality of language and concept. As medieval culture was not globally literary, many of the realities are lost.

However, archaeology and literary cues may yet be found to bring forth light. Linguistic evidence in three forms: birch bark documents; slave trade archaeology; and evidence of the influence of a major Baltic Finnic deity on the collective belief system held by the Varangian Guard reveal some of the experiences, communicative networks, and settlement practices of Finns and Karelians during the Varangian period.

5.2 Linguistic Evidence of Birch Bark Sources

One of the hallmarks of the Varangian period was the development and facilitation of more diverse and far-reaching international trade networks. The Finnic can also be spotted as some of the players in this mercantile arena. While it is true that no Finns or Karelians were writing down their own histories in Finnic languages, their influence in eastern trade in and around Novgorod can be traced using documents left behind in northwestern Russia which explain their business and estimate their influence.

Towards the latter half of the Varangian period, further evidence of Finnic trade and subsequent settlement within Varangian areas may be observed in the form of people and place names inscribed on birch bark documents left behind. Around 959 birch bark document fragments have been found around Northern Russian towns and Novgorod dating between the

eleventh and fifteenth centuries, which in part overlaps with the height of the Varangian period.⁴⁷ In these fragments, information about Finnic and Slavic communications can be learned.

Of course, more complex ethno-linguistic classification is not easily observed in this body of documents. However, there is still value in these documents to a historian searching for Finnic activity, as it allows one to speculate the reasons for Finnic activity to show up in so many of these documents, and what roles they occupied in Varangian territories. While these birch bark documents cannot all unequivocally identify the ethno-linguistic identities of their writers, they do allow scholars the chance to follow the general movement of Finnic traders eastward to other major Varangian outposts. They provide an excellent opportunity for critical thinking regarding how seemingly-Finnic anthroponyms and toponyms are found in such important cross-cultural sites. The sheer volume of mentions of Finnic names reveals that they were active in such a large space as Novgorod, which suggests that Finnic activity might have perpetuated trading and settling activities in other territories of lesser magnitude as regular players in the greater Varangian sphere. In fact, birch bark itself was a valuable raw material desired in Varangian trade networks.⁴⁸

Most Finnic proper oikonyms are generated from personal names. Village names derived from personal names are often reflected with the suffix *-la*.⁴⁹ For example, the archaic personal name *Asikka* generates the oikonym *Asikkala*. This would suggest that when a settlement's etymology is unknown, if it contains *-la*, the base was at one point a personal name.

Russian settlement names, especially those ending in *-ovo-* /*-evo-*, are frequently formed from anthroponyms.⁵⁰ There are numerous examples of such anthroponym bases, specifically northern Russian oikonyms, found in the birch bark letters of with this ending. There are a

⁴⁷ Janne Saarikivi, "Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents," in *Topics on the Ethnic, Linguistic and Cultural Making of the Russian North: Voprosy etničeskogo, jazykogo i kul'turnogo formirovanija Russkogo Severa: Beiträge zur ethnischen, sprachlichen und kulturellen Entwicklung des russischen Nordens* (Slavica Helsingiensia 32), ed. Juhani Nuorluoto (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 2007): 197.

⁴⁸ Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 46.

⁴⁹ Saarikivi, "Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents," 204.

⁵⁰ Saarikivi, "Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents," 204.

number of villages in what is presently the Arkhangelsk Oblast, reflecting this practice, such as the root *Igala* turning into village names *Ihala* or *Ihalovo*, amongst others. This suggests that even in cases wherein the bases of the *-ovo/-evo*-settlement names are not attested as anthroponyms, they could contain archaic personal names seeming to be of Finnic origin.

Surnames of Finnic-speaking peoples can reveal further insight concerning extinct personal names. Some surnames were developed out of old personal names or estate names taken from old anthroponyms. In some cases, surnames taken from verb participles still bear archaic Finnic anthroponyms in their original form, such as *Vallittu*, ‘possessed’, or *Parantaja*, ‘healer’⁵¹). In other instances, suffixes are connected to existing anthroponym bases; a common example being the originally eastern Finnic suffix *-nen* for proper names ending in *-se-*. One again using the example of *Asikka*, the personal name *Asikka* has a root *Asikaise* which leads to the surname *Asikainen*.⁵² Therefore, in order to source whether the origin of a name in a birch bark document is from a Finnic personal name, one can search for matches in names given to surrounding settlements or environmental features or parallels with other Finnic surnames in the area, especially names with these grammatical structures. Strong matches suggest previously literally unattested anthroponyms; weak or no parallels might suggest not.

There is also the matter of substitution of letters from Finnic for others in Slavic during transcription. For example, the Finnic **h* that seems likely to have occurred in several cases based on dialectal vocabulary and toponyms was represented differently in the birch bark documents.⁵³ Almost always, the Finnic **h* was instead represented by the Slavic *g*. Examples of this may be observed in how the Finnic **Ihala* was represented in Slavic as *Igala*, or the Finnic **Vihoi* was transcribed in Slavic as *Viguj*. Further, studying substitutions in vocalism in the birch bark documents reveals how the Novgorodian dialect may have been different from other dialects in northwestern Russia. For example, the Finnic **u* appears to be substituted with *oy*, *u* and *o* in the birch bark documents.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Saarikivi, “Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents,” 205.

⁵² Saarikivi, “Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents,” 205.

⁵³ Saarikivi, “Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents,” 205.

⁵⁴ Saarikivi, “Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents,” 207.

There is also the fact that there must certainly have been bilingual non-Slavs or people with mixed Slavic heritage living in and around Novgorod, as it was such a diverse and central city. As an important center of trade, it is not likely that all people writing letters and conducting business in Slavic would have been ethno-linguistically Slavic; however, as Slavic was the official administrative language, a literate person hoping to be successful in an official capacity would have benefitted well from learning to conduct passable written communication in Slavic. In letter 403 of these birch bark fragments, a Finnic-Slavic business document lists many trading phrases in Novgorod Slavic with their colloquial Finnic counterparts,⁵⁵ suggesting that there was a legitimate need for speakers of Slavic to be able to communicate with Finnic trading counterparts. Because of this, foreign Finnic dialects in Novgorod would have been considered rural but not used in official avenues. Still, even if Finnic languages did not have a literary tradition in the medieval period, there would have been Finnic-speaking people living and trading in or around Novgorod who would, if literate, been writing in Slavic and further Slavicised their names in official documents.⁵⁶

In such a bilingual city, mixed marriages and bilingual families would have undoubtedly been present as well. What is to say that Finnic did not both trade as well as settle and cohabitate in the Varangian waves just as their western, southern, and eastern neighbors did? Evidence of cultural mingling in Novgorod through these birch bark documents bears the question, to what extent should these documents be strictly demarcated between Slavic and Finnic, and where might medieval Karelia and Savo have factored into these documents, as a multi-ethnic Slavic city could have experienced cross-mingling through intermarriage and cohabitation with, and influence of Finnic neighbors. This can, however, present a challenge regarding where in Finnic territories the writers of these documents are thought to have originated from, as eastern regional Finnic dialects such as Karelian and Savo may reflect different preferences for delineating sounds lying between overtly Finnic-speaking and Slavic-speaking areas.⁵⁷ Transcription in the documents of Finnic sounds to Cyrillic letters resulted in occasional mixups in letters such as *o* and *o*, and *e* and *o*.⁵⁸ This affected the

⁵⁵ Saarikivi, "Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents," 197.

⁵⁶ Saarikivi, "Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents," 201.

⁵⁷ Saarikivi, "Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents," 200.

⁵⁸ Saarikivi, "Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents," 207.

transcription of some personal names which were only recently discovered to have been Finnic. This could have been a deliberate colloquialisation by Finnic speaking authors. This makes it difficult to attest strongly to a writer being undoubtedly of purely Slavic or purely Finnic origin in every case.

Also, far more Finnic speakers must have existed and operated in Novgorod than were written of in the birch bark documents found. There could have been many other Finnic traders and travelers once written about who have been lost to time due to the organic material of the birch bark itself. Some travelers may have arrived in groups who did not stay long enough to leave records of their visits to the city. Some people may simply have been just that - simple people who lived without a need or desire to leave a record of their activities. Even still, some Finnic could have been illiterate in Slavic; possibly due to the non-literate tradition they were culturally familiar with, and possibly due to having found a community of other Finnic to speak with, requiring little to no Slavic to get by in their daily lives. The greater Novgorod area was, after all, mainly Finnic-speaking up until the High Middle Ages.⁵⁹ Still others may have had names previously unattested to before in written material which scholars have not yet sourced with certainty. Some people referred to with Slavic-presenting names could have been Finnic as well due to Slavicisation for ease of transcription, Slavic cultural influence due to geographical proximity, or even some names might have happened to hold a valid possible meaning both in Finnic and Slavic contexts and therefore it is hard to identify which the name originates from. From the other end, Finnicised Germanic names such as Valtari might have either have stemmed from Western Finnic areas or have been brought eastward from Sweden by way of the Austrvegr. Therefore, scholars opt to focus on pre-Christian names of distinctly Finnic origin.

⁵⁹ Korpela, "The Last Vikings: Russian Boat Bandits and the Formation of Princely Power," *Russian History* 48 (2021): 99.

5.3 Sourcing Movement and Agenda through the Slave Trade

Unfortunately, the Finns seemed not to have always met the eastern world on their own terms. The archaeology of slavery is one fraught with many questions and estimations, but if one is very determined, one can still observe descriptions of people matching stereotypical Finnish descriptions in the chronicles of the period. Medieval slavery was not strictly a consequence of raids and warfare, but a commonly known and utilised system. It was complex as well, as slavery could be delineated between kidnapping and slave trading to keep in mind when estimating its extent in an area. It was a common practice for families to sell their children into slavery in the medieval period, which is not the same as slavery by way of military campaign or occupation. Even Christians, monasteries, and churches kept slaves.⁶⁰ People could end up enslaved via various avenues including birth, selling oneself or one's children, captivity, and war spoils. Therefore, it was probable that Finns occasionally sold family members to slave traders who took them east. Additionally, in an age marked by piracy and raiding, slaves would have been convenient to come by in Finland due to its position between Sweden and Russia and proximity to the Baltic via the Gulf of Finland.

The eastern European slave trade thrived under the Varangian period. Kidnapped people from Finland and Karelia were mainly taken to Novgorod during the Middle Ages, as Novgorod was deeply connected to the trading world of the Dnepr.⁶¹ Finns and Karelians were commonly traded by Scandinavians to eastern Europeans and then onwards to Middle Eastern markets. Their fair skin, blond hair, and blue eyes were considered unique and made them highly sought after and expensive luxury goods in the eastern and southern slave markets. The Central Asian markets prized slaves with rare physical features. A slave's linguistic background was not important to the prospective buyers, as they were not familiar with the differentiation between German, Swedish, Estonian, Finnish, Sámi, and Karelian tongues.⁶² Nor would it have mattered. The sought-after features merely created an intense demand for slaves from northern Europe. Further, as Finns were neither Christian or Muslim, it made them even more exotic to prospective buyers.

⁶⁰ Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 4.

⁶¹ Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 243.

⁶² Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 206.

However, raiding was standard practice during the Viking period, and thus, Finnic raided their neighbors as well. The Karelians were notorious in the medieval record for their raidings, sailing into Yem' in a particularly noteworthy 1143 expedition, and then pursuing the Votians in 1149 in what is now northwestern Russia.⁶³ Karelian traders were even refused protection in Novgorod. Karelian raiders often travelled north, benefitting from the Viking trade routes in and around the Volga.

The Russian medieval chronicles attest to roughly ninety raids conducted collectively into what is presently modern Finland and Karelia. Additionally, further raids were conducted into other northern spaces occupied by Finno-Ugric east of Lake Onega. These raids usually ended in the capture of many slaves from these local populations.⁶⁴ In 1042, a group of Rus' undertook a great raid into Yem'⁶⁵, understood as Southern Finland, and took a great number of prisoners there.⁶⁶ The tenth and eleventh centuries saw the Novgorodians constantly undertaking raiding missions through Korela to South Finland in pursuit of acquiring numerous slaves.⁶⁷ These raiders were even known to roam all the way up to southern Lapland.

Another item to consider is that a slave's opportunity for social movement in western and eastern slavery during the medieval period was different. In the western world, a former slave was generally unable to return to their former status or society without being negatively marked for life.⁶⁸ In this eastern world, where a slave could be married to a ruler or gain position at royal court. In clan society, the status of the clan outweighed the status of the individual. Thus, Finnish and Karelian slaves, originating from tribal communities neither related to Scandinavians of western Europe nor Slavs of eastern Europe, were caught between western and eastern spheres and did not fit neatly into the eastern European slave trade.

⁶³ Korpela, "The Last Vikings: Russian Boat Bandits and the Formation of Princely Power," 96.

⁶⁴ Jukka Korpela, "Finno-Ugric Captives in Trade of Slaves on the Volga Way", *Средневековые тюрко-татарские государства* 4 (2012): 159.

⁶⁵ Korpela, "The Last Vikings: Russian Boat Bandits and the Formation of Princely Power," 95.

⁶⁶ *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, trans. and ed. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 138.

⁶⁷ Korpela, "The Last Vikings: Russian Boat Bandits and the Formation of Princely Power," 95-96.

⁶⁸ Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 3.

5.4 Religious Similarity in Perkunas, Perkele, and Perun

Another aspect of Varangian cultural development may be observed amongst the religious sphere in the form of the god Perun. Despite originating as an Indo-European template, this Slavic sky god who gained a rise in popularity during the peak of the Varangian period has much in common with the Baltic Finnic sky god. A sky deity of the early medieval Balts, Perun was initially known to the Lithuanians as Perkūnas and to the Latvians as Pērkons, meaning “thunder” or “thunder god”.⁶⁹ The same root can be found in the Finnish Perkele, understood as the Finnish name for the same Baltic sky god. Perkele is also interchangeably used with Ukko depending on the source, but the root of Ukko shares similarity to the Lithuanian “ugnis” for fire.⁷⁰ The Ugro-Finnic Mordvins of the Volga basin also believed in a thunder god called Purginepaz prior to the introduction of Christianity. Of note is that this god is not evidenced to have been borrowed from the neighboring Slavs as the Mordvins had not passed through the middle Volga before Christian times.⁷¹ The root “purg” shares affinity with the Baltic “perk” and refers to a striking thunderbolt. Even still, Perun of the Russians has a further evolved equivalent in Finnish as Piru.⁷²

What is of even greater significance is that the Baltic Finnic god wields an axe rather than a hammer as the Germanic thunder deity Thor would have. The Lithuanian Perkūnas wielded an axe,⁷³ as did Perkele in references as Ukko with his “tappara” or “battle-axe” in Finnish.⁷⁴ Perun too wielded an axe, which became so central to the Varangian belief system that it became the Varangian hallmark to be associated with axes, as Anna Komnene would chronicle the Varangians as men “who carried their axes on their shoulders”.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Martti Haavio, “The Oldest Source of Finnish Mythology: Birchbark Letter No. 292,” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 1, no. 1/2 (1964): 57.

⁷⁰ Roman Zaroff, “Organized Pagan Cult in Kievan Rus’. The Invention of Foreign Elite or Evolution of Local Tradition?”, *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 2 (1999): 55.

⁷¹ Zaroff, “Organized Pagan Cult in Kievan Rus’. The Invention of Foreign Elite or Evolution of Local Tradition?”, 56.

⁷² Haavio, “The Oldest Source of Finnish Mythology: Birchbark Letter No. 292,” 57.

⁷³ Haavio, “The Oldest Source of Finnish Mythology: Birchbark Letter No. 292,” 54.

⁷⁴ Haavio, “The Oldest Source of Finnish Mythology: Birchbark Letter No. 292,” 58.

⁷⁵ Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 46.

Varangian merchants and settlers increasingly swore their oaths to the god Perun, rather than the Thor of the Scandinavian part of the Guard's homelands. The Russian Primary Chronicle asserts that the Rus' swore "to their god Perun"⁷⁶ to validate treaties with Byzantium in 907, 945,⁷⁷ and 971.⁷⁸ Regardless of the thunder god similarity between Thor and Perun, the fact that Perun was repeatedly chosen for oath-swearing indicates a heavy easternisation of Varangian beliefs. Other major Slavic gods during this period such as Veles were thought to be of more provincial importance, whereas Perun evolved into a distinctly Varangian god.⁷⁹ Further, Perun was "the god in whom [the Varangians] believe[d]"⁸⁰ by the tenth century throughout the Primary Chronicle, rather than mentioning Thor, which is telling of a martial group of once considerably Swedish background.

The idea that Scandinavian influence over the foundation of the Kyivan Rus' is often disproportionately inflated, because while Scandinavian military organisation was more than renowned; the Slavs had the advantages in centralised religious institutional organisation. It would also be incorrect to say that greater Scandinavian religion had a large impact on the Slavic as both cultural belief systems were subject to constant dynamism and regional variation. While not exclusively a Finnic god, the fact remains that the Varangians from abroad were influenced so greatly by the local cultures along the eastern Baltic and into Slavic territories enough to venerate and swear oaths to the Baltic Finnic deity. It contributes to the evidence of Finnic influence on the Varangians in the domestic sphere. As slaves can influence the culture around them on a domestic level, the importation of Finnic slaves meant the importation of Finnic customs and beliefs to the far reaches of Central Asia and Russia; therefore, this might account for similarity between a sky deity present in the beliefs of various peoples along the Eastern half of the Austrvegr.

⁷⁶ *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, 65.

⁷⁷ *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, 77.

⁷⁸ *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, 90.

⁷⁹ Edward Oswald Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 96.

⁸⁰ *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, 90.

6. Difficulties in Pinpointing Finnic Presence

6.1 Mapping Extent of Movement

The general lack of varied sources has hurt the capacity for knowing things about the period overall. Finns did not write, and thus, scholars must rely on other literate cultures to make mentions of them; further, their viewpoints were largely focused elsewhere. Swedish and Russian colonisation have effects on Finnish cultural memory. Both nations controlled the administration and records of Finland, and therefore official histories were susceptible to coloniser bias. Further, the medieval European sources favor Christian populations in their history writing, and thus shamanistic groups living in Finland were simply not seen as a priority to chronicle.

Further, place names in northeastern and Baltic Europe often have modern names in the local language, but were named differently during the time of events described, often with Swedish and German medieval nomenclature.⁸¹ Many of the historic Swedish and German forms of place names were used more frequently during the Middle Ages; such as Åbo being used to refer to the Finnish city in contrast to the more modern Finnish name Turku, which rarely appeared in records of the time.⁸² Medieval delineation of ethnicity is also hard to gauge from sources as the concept was understood differently. The culture, time and locale of the author dictated the terminology they assigned others, as well as how they perceived otherness and how they related to their subject.

It is hugely problematic to the historian that much of Nordic history was orally transmitted until the late twelfth-century when written accounts began to appear. As such, written examination of the Varangian Guard is often left to those who chronicled in Greek and Latin in Byzantium. These sources can only be compared to any existing written Old Norse sources. Another factor in the skewed presentation of Varangians is that the very nature of the chronicles of their deeds are often narrated in a reverent legendary manner years after they had taken place.

⁸¹ Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 22.

⁸² Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 22.

6.2 Bias, Gaps, and Voids in the Record

Perhaps one of the most frustrating tasks of the historian in mapping out narratives of non-writing medieval cultures is eliminating bias from their literate neighbors when chronicling their antics, while still recognising that there may be some truth to what the writers say. Fennoscandia during the Nordic Iron Age is marked by a lack of contemporary written accounts by many of its inhabitants. Such is the nature of the oral tradition that the content of poems, sagas, and stories as well as the pathways through which they are transmitted ultimately shift according to the development of the language and cultural values of the societies that create them. If and when oral sources finally did fall to paper in the peripheral regions of medieval Europe, they were often written by foreigners from continental Europe, or who had traveled there, These writers lacked inside knowledge of the people whom the source material concerned. Even sources which were chronicled in the later centuries by those of similar ethnic backgrounds were generally of Christian authorship, so they are also subject to bias or lack of understanding.

Another aspect of difficulty in sourcing the Finnic movements of the time period is that the sources who have chosen to speak of them have outsider bias, thus muddying the realities of the Finnic. The lack of written history by Finnic authors, much less history in Finnic language, means that the few literary authorities on the medieval Finnic are at the mercy of other groups who happened to mention Finnic in their own chronicles. This results in their history being an afterthought and a supplement, and subject to local bias misinterpretation on cultural and linguistic levels.

While the Finns do appear in medieval Arab, Greek, Norse, and Slavic sources, the cultural otherness experienced by the writers describing them provide a modern scholar with another challenge in portioning out what might be truth and what might be misinterpretation. A foreign practice might be explained out of context resulting in misunderstanding. Different cultural priorities might result in dismissal of important historical material that are lost to present-day scholars. As the Scandinavians and the Slavs were two of the cultures which interacted most closely with the Finnic during the Varangian period due to geographic proximity, their sources are crucial to the historian's understanding of Finnic activity during the

period, but must also be screened for generalisation and othering for as accurate of a glimpse into the past as can be possible.

Medieval Norse sources about Finnic participation in Nordic history are too often skewed by othering, which both distorts their nature as well as leaves them largely out of the proceedings on the whole. In fact, all people across Finnic-speaking territories were collectively referred to as the *Finnar* in Norse sagas. While it is not unreasonable that chronicles about medieval Scandinavians would have an internal focus, it is done by delineating what they are not. Therefore, the *Finnar* dwelled outside the greater Scandinavian fold. As a contemporary reflective “expression of Norse mentality,”⁸³ Norse writers were not deeply concerned with the complexities of the Finno-Uralic world of present-day Finland, the Kola peninsula, and the historic county of Finnmark, nor was it important to understand the differences between their Sámi and Finnish neighbors.⁸⁴

The term *Finnar* itself presents difficulties for scholars to distinguish with absolute certainty between Sámi and Finnish groups across the sagas,⁸⁵ not to mention other populations living around them, such as the *Bjarmar*, *Kvænir* and *Kirjálar* (Bjarmians, Kvener and Karelians),⁸⁶ understood to be other Finnic groups speaking connected languages. For groups known for varying semi-nomadic herding practices, spread across the territory which is now Finland, as well as the historic county of Finnmark in Norway and the Kola peninsula in Russia, using the single term of *Finnar* for all of the diversity present in the region clearly does not generate enough complexity. Of course, chronicles such as *Heimskringla* do not focus on genealogy or geographical studies connected to Finnic groups nor what made them geographically or culturally different from each other. As such, one usually must resort to inference using geographical knowledge based on context clues of a destination visited by Norse protagonists in a particular saga.⁸⁷ Further, archaeological evidence suggests the Sámi were

⁸³ Sirpa Aalto, “Encountering ‘Otherness’ in the Heimskringla,” *Dies Medievales - Conference Issue 4*, no. 4 (2004): 1.

⁸⁴ Sirpa Aalto, “Finns in the sagas,” in *Footprints in the Snow: The Long History of Arctic Finland*, written by Maria Lähteenmäki (Helsinki: Prime Minister’s Office, 2017), 24.

⁸⁵ DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the ‘Finnar’ in the Icelandic Sagas,” 257.

⁸⁶ Aalto, “Finns in the sagas,” 24.

⁸⁷ Aalto, “Finns in the sagas,” 24.

largely willing to adapt to parts of the cultural shifts, which is quite different from their recorded opposition to Norwegian kings within *Heimskringla*.⁸⁸ Only later on in the transition phase did the relations between themselves and the Norwegians appear to darken once the Norwegians began to exploit and subdue neighboring peoples.

Finally, when Sweden entered and took over Finland proper in the twelfth century, Swedish scribes even identified three distinct cultural gentes spread across Finnish land. These were understood as the Finns, or *Suomalaiset*, who occupied the southwest coastal region; the Tavastians or *Hämäläiset* of Finland's interior, and the Karelians or *Karjalaiset* to the east near Lake Ladoga.⁸⁹ This reveals that there were clear enough cultural differences within medieval Finland for an incoming polity to observe cultural diversity across the territory.

Even in modern scholarship, the movements of separate Finnish, Sámi, and Karelian populations living in what is now Finland proper between the period of 200 A.D. to 900 A.D. are subject to being compared against the cultural development of their Germanic neighbors. In addition to the lack of written source material revealing shifts in culture and language, distinctive shifts in stylistic features of material culture, as well as notoriously low archaeological finds in settled Sámi areas, make it hard to pin down localities in nomadic hunting populations.⁹⁰ Any changes in pottery, for instance, are hard to ascribe with certainty to any one population in a region wherein many different ethno-linguistically-related groups were constantly moving around and establishing contact with the other.

The Slavic sources also present complications in their treatment of various Finno-Ugric populations in hagiographies and histories rooted in religious bias. Slavic chronicles were written from educated Christian perspectives and not from those of trafficked peasants, despite slaves

⁸⁸ Sirpa Aalto, "Categorizing Otherness in the Kings' Sagas," (PhD diss., University of Eastern Finland, 2010), 129.

⁸⁹ Derek Fewster, "Approaches to the Conversion of the Finns: Ideologies, Symbols and Archaeological Features" in *The North-Eastern Frontiers of Medieval Europe: The Expansion of Latin Christendom in the Baltic Lands*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Routledge: London, 2014): 44.

⁹⁰ Lars Ivar Hansen and Bjørnar Olsen, *Hunters in Transition: An Outline of Early Sámi History*, (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2014), 45-46.

being central to medieval Eurasian labor structure.⁹¹ Many early Russian sources refer to the whole of Orthodox Christians as *Rus*’, while people of shamanistic cultures were ascribed other ethnic labels.⁹² For example, the Finno-Ugric Permians were referred to as Permians in chronicles until they were baptised and received the right to the *Rus*’ name as well. Likewise, those who lived in the Karelian town of Korela were called *Koreli* or Karelians, but *Rus*’ were also said to inhabit the town as well, signifying that there were both shamanistic people as well as Christians, the latter of which could easily have been Slavic. This reinforces the idea that the ethnonym “Rus” really cannot claim any singular ethnic background across all medieval sources. Conflating all peoples in the greater Christian fold across northern Russia under one term snuffs out the diversity in the area. Further, it withholds background information of some Finno-Ugric groups who had experienced for themselves or interacted with neighboring populations who had undergone conversion. It does, however, reveal cooperation and interaction between Slavic and Finno-Ugric people in the early Varangian period.

Another difficulty in tracking the fates of all Finnic slaves is that when slaves were brought into Christian societies, they were usually baptised.⁹³ In Muslim societies, the slaves experienced more religious tolerance on the whole, but converted for better marriage prospects and social standings. In such cases, slaves were given new names respective to their new religions, which would obscure their ethnic origin if they were written about. In other cases, geographical names were used as personal names, but not usually places from which the slaves originated. Because so many Finns, Karelians, and Sámi were trafficked along the Varangian slave routes to the Middle East, there are likely quite a few Finnic people who are lost to time as a result of this practice.

Even still, during the Viking Age, it was a common practice in the Baltic region to have two or three names, regardless of ethnicity.⁹⁴ This practice was necessary for merchants, travelers, and sailors to operate within different spheres or to reflect marital connections.

⁹¹ Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 8.

⁹² Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 23.

⁹³ Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*, 23.

⁹⁴ Pritsak, “The Origin of Rus”, 267.

Therefore, a scholar cannot always be sure whether the name someone went by according to a written record was the same one they were given by their parents, or assumed later in life.

One must also keep in mind that terminology for both people and places changes over time, which further complicates tracking the movements of tribes and travelers throughout the Middle Ages. The toponyms in northeastern Europe were generated from local native languages, such as the languages spoken in early medieval Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. Medieval transliteration was not without its flaws. A lack of standardised spelling, as well as the Latinisation of local language, resulted in varied forms of the place names. Additionally, many of the places in records have been renamed throughout time due to factors such as linguistic change, migration, landmark historic events, and warfare. For example, many regions which were living and operating within the Varangian areas during the medieval period were conquered by the Soviet Union during the twentieth century, and were renamed in modern Russian.

7. Effects on History on Contemporary Finnish Scholarship

The expansion of eastern and Baltic Finnic peoples throughout present-day northwestern Russia during the Varangian period are often caught in the crossfire of scholarship focused on mapping out relationships between strictly Scandinavians and Slavs. While Finns and their neighboring relatives are mentioned occasionally in the records, they never dominate them. This is hugely unfair to their historical narrative, and in fact hurts the wider historical narrative by not taking into account any linguistic and cultural influences and unity.

One of the most frustrating problems for a scholar of Finnic histories comes in the form of a general lack of written sources. Part of this is due to the Finnish written language only being around 500 years old. Prior to that, its speakers lacked a way to express their history in their own words in a manner that stood the test of time.⁹⁵ Further, nestled between Sweden and Russia, both of whom have laid claim to the land, history writing about Finland has been subject to colonial narratives. Further, this has led to a Finnish drive to have a cultural history at all costs, resulting in uncertainty over the ‘true’ ethnic origin of the epic mythological poem Kalevala and matters of general pre-histories. However, as medieval people did not conceptualise identity in the same way that a historian would over a thousand years later, ascribing modern ideas of statehood to early medieval Finns and their belief systems is inherently flawed. All of these issues together present as burrs in the heel of the historian looking for more solid evidence.

Another issue regarding the lack of scholarship regarding the medieval period around the Baltic Finnic areas is that they have been subjected to a biased idea of backwardness and therefore have been of less interest to western scholars. The evolutionist viewpoint puts forth that societies of egalitarian social nature come before hierarchical counterparts, as Iron Age Finland and Estonia were egalitarian societies they have been dismissed as stunted and behind their Scandinavian neighbors.⁹⁶ However, archaeology shows that in not only Finland and Estonia, but

⁹⁵ Sirkku Latomaa, “The Language Situation in Finland,” *Current Issues in Language Planning* 3, no. 2 (May 2002): 101.

⁹⁶ Marika Mägi, “Societies East and West of the Baltic Sea: Prehistoric Culture Contacts Revisited,” in *Identity Formation and Diversity in the Early Medieval Baltic and Beyond*, ed. Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin, and Mats Roslund (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 19.

in other eastern Baltic regions, Scandinavian cultural influence may be easily observed in coastal areas, while the heartlands remain relatively unchanged to outside influence on material culture.⁹⁷ Certain coastal regions of present-day western Finland, Estonia, and Åland, despite reflecting a Scandinavian-influenced identity and outlook and sharing some spaces, were not ethnically cohesive.⁹⁸ Further, there was no such thing as a national Swedish culture in the eighth to tenth centuries. Norse, Slavic, Baltic, and Finnic were constantly moving and shaping the lands around the Baltic Sea.

Another issue in pinning down accuracies in Finnish history is that Finns were subjugated for hundreds of years in their history. Finland was part of Sweden for nearly 700 years from around 1150 until the Finnish War of 1809 with Russia.⁹⁹ From then on, Finland became part of the Russian Empire as the Grand Duchy of Finland from 1809 until 1917.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, Finland has not truly been in control of its own history writing until very recently. Moreover, in modern society, the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland enjoys a noticeable role in Finnish state and culture. Their position as a minority in history undoubtedly affected the magnitude of their contributions to the narratives of their ruling polities. At worst, they were bypassed; at the very least, they were afterthoughts. The period of time through which Finland has been under its own jurisdiction has also been heavily influenced by an intense Finnish nationalist movement, which drew heavily up romantic ideals of strength and unity of the Finnish people, perhaps at the cost of some historical accuracy. The intense need for a definitive Finnish national identity post-colonisation certainly had a negative impact on the history writing of the Sámi and Karelians, as their special separate identities were either lost or conflated with those of Finland proper under an ideal of a unified Finnish race¹⁰¹.

⁹⁷ Mägi, “Societies East and West of the Baltic Sea: Prehistoric Culture Contacts Revisited,” 33.

⁹⁸ Mägi, *In Austrvegr: The Role of the Eastern Baltic in Viking Age Communication across the Baltic Sea*, 23.

⁹⁹ Marko Lamberg, “Finns as Aliens and Compatriots in the Late Medieval Kingdom of Sweden,” in *The North-Eastern Frontiers of Medieval Europe: The Expansion of Latin Christendom in the Baltic Lands*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Routledge: London, 2014), 248.

¹⁰⁰ Suvi Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences, Colonial/Racial Histories, and National Narratives: Rewriting Finnish History,” *Scandinavian Studies* 91, no. 12 (2019): 164.

¹⁰¹ Veli-Pekka Lehtola, “Sámi Histories, Colonialism, and Finland.” *Arctic Anthropology* 52, no. 2 (2015): 28.

Ethnicity is always a complex concept, as it is guided by political and nationalistic motivations. Interpretations of ethnicity in the prehistoric times result in challenges to the present-day scholar. Therefore, the question of what the term 'Varangian' ethnically covers sparks controversy as it pertains to nationalist ideals in comparison to historic state formation.

8. Conclusion

One of the main issues which surround historians in establishing spotty historical narratives involves how much inference may be allowed. While it is true that historians must be cognisant of the possibility of projecting ideas onto the unknown areas even out of pure intent or through unconscious problem-solving attempts, there is merit in setting up parameters through which one might hone in on a particular thread of knowledge requiring further attention.

The reason why it is important to constantly reevaluate a historical period for previously unconsidered agents is that the field of history is harmed by not examining diversity and communication between different players for more inclusive and accurate ideas of the past; and in turn, how the past affects the present. Working to target pieces that are weakly represented in the historical narrative and flesh them out further can help to uncover lost histories by way of carving out what is and isn't known, and then making proactive plans to rectify these gaps.

In the case of figuring out where Finns and their neighboring related populations factored into the east during the peak of Varangian movement, it is helpful to single out any mention of them and their actions in order to best assess intricacies in material cultural shifts. This in turn aids the effects on their self-determination and -perception. Once these actions and shifts are assessed on a local level, they can once again be compared against the historical records of their neighbors, and then put into the greater historical narrative.

Regardless of how a historian approaches the issue of gaps in history, they will always run into difficulties regarding the development of a missing narrative. A historian cannot ask people from the past how things occurred, nor can they assume that those people all shared one opinion on the topic at hand. However, the reverse may be true: If a historian is too afraid to try to identify a cultural origin point or historical memory for people without written histories, then history will lose any and all opportunities for provision of more information, avenues through which to engage with and rethink their own identity, and history which is inclusive and robust.

The development of a missing narrative gives historians more opportunities to discover other facets of study which haven't previously been considered. That said, it is important not to

confidently state, without further proof, a general estimate of the part played by Finns and their cousins when only certain amounts of evidence are currently known and analysed. There is an urgent need to establish a more persistent field of study towards Finnish medieval history and prehistory. In this case, the author exhorts more investigation into Viking Age; and more specifically, Varangian era expeditions and cultural development of the non-Scandinavian Baltic players.

Though Scandinavian warriors and sailors may have begun conceptualizing their identity based on territorialized kin, ethnicity waned in importance to the Varangian identity, and was instead replaced by identity through cultural ideology of conquest, power, and ability. nor identity constructed specifically through ethnic background, but allowed both intermarriage and camaraderie between Varangians of Scandinavian descent and recruits from outside cultural backgrounds due to the inherent cross-cultural nature of their nomadic lifestyle. In fact, the Scandinavian Varangians came to realize it was advantageous to associate and let people of non-Scandinavian backgrounds join their nomadic society, as long as they were strong and had fruitful connections for greater reward. Though for many ancient societies, especially those of partial to full sea-faring nomadism, the lack of ethnic cohesion proved to spark discord and required class divisions when they were off the seas. The Varangians ended up using the diversity to expand their reach further throughout the latter half of their peak period and acquire greater wealth and renown due to their unification through their diversity.

Finnic medieval history is notoriously enshrouded in shadow due to the lack of written source material. However, this should not stop scholars from trying to pull at loose threads which may reveal holes in the narrative which may be joined with missing Finnic actions. Varangian scholarship often centers around the Swedish position; thus, the Varangians are often thought to be ethnically Swedish. Unfortunately, this leaves out important contributions made by other ethnic groups in the spread of people and ideas throughout the territories explored and settled during the period. Due to their positions flanking the Baltic Sea and therefore constituting the Austrvegr, it is highly improbable that Balto-Finnic populations were not involved in these expeditions in any capacity. Furthermore, there are roles beyond that of the purely mercenary in

the settlement and cultural evolution of territories. Traders and slaves were also both important actors in the Varangian narrative.

Ethnicity waned in importance to the Varangian identity, and was instead replaced by identity through cultural ideology of conquest, power, and ability. Many medieval Scandinavian raiders, so becoming known as Varangians, were quick to adopt the cultures, languages, and local traditions of the east, especially when it was economical or contributed well to the consolidation of power. Yet for many early medieval societies, especially those of partial to full sea-faring nomadity, the lack of ethnic cohesion proved to spark discord and enforce class divisions when away from maritime settings. The Varangians often ended up using the diversity to expand their reach further throughout the latter half of their peak period and acquire greater wealth and renown. As military pragmatists, they were not often concerned with the ethnic background of the groups they attacked; opting instead to attack the obviously poorly-defended groups. Further, Varangians were not entirely consumed by their need to control and dominate; in fact, they valued their cross-cultural encounters and were incredibly curious about the many worldly wonders awaiting them in Constantinople and the lands further east. In many cases, trade was seen as a more lucrative activity to pursue with others whom they found culturally interesting and militarily sound. Nonetheless, while it is true that Viking action and influence were in large part responsible for connecting Finnic populations to further reaches of Europe and to the Middle East, none can say with certainty that no Finn ever desired to explore the lands to the east, merely because there have not been documents left by Finns stating this in writing.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Comnena, Anna. *The Alexiad*. Trans. Elizabeth A. S. Dawes. Cambridge, ON: In Parentheses Publications, 2000.

The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text. Trans. and ed. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor. Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953.

Secondary Sources

Aalto, Sirpa. "Categorizing Otherness in the Kings' Sagas." PhD diss., University of Eastern Finland, 2010.

https://erepo.uef.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/11539/urn_isbn_978-952-61-0238-2.pdf

Aalto, Sirpa. "Encountering 'Otherness' in the Heimskringla." *Dies Medieuales - Conference Issue* 4, no. 4 (2004): 1-10. <https://journal.fi/ennenjanyt/article/view/108259/63280>.

Aalto, Sirpa. "Finns in the sagas." In *Footprints in the Snow: The Long History of Arctic Finland*, written by Maria Lähteenmäki, 24-26. Helsinki: Prime Minister's Office, 2017. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/80043/VNK_J1217_Footprints%20in%20the%20snow_net.pdf.

Bennett, Judith M. *Medieval Europe: A Short History*. New York: McGraw Hill Education, 2011.

Blöndal, Sigfús. *The Varangians of Byzantium*. Trans. Benedikt S. Benedikz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Bosselmann-Ruickbie, Antje. "Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact Between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums 'The Varangian Way' (2007) and 'Stand Up and Fight' (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas." In *Wege der Kommunikation zwischen Byzanz und dem Westen 2: Menschen und Worte*, ed. Falko Daim, Dominik Heher, and Christian Gastgeber. Mainz: Romisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 2018.

Callmer, Johan, Ingrid Gustin and Mats Roslund. "Identity Formation and Diversity: Introduction." In *Identity Formation and Diversity in the Early Medieval Baltic and Beyond*, ed. Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin, and Mats Roslund, 1–16. Leiden: Brill, 2017.

- Callmer, Johan. "Urbanisation in Northern and Eastern Europe, ca. AD 700-1100." In *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium*, Ed. Joachim Henning, 233-270. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007.
- Cross, Samuel Hazzard and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor. "Introduction." In *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*. Trans. and ed. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 3–50. Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953.
- DeAngelo, Jeremy. "The North and the Depiction of the 'Finnar' in the Icelandic Sagas." *Scandinavian Studies* 82, no. 3 (2010): 257–86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25769033>.
- Duczko, Wladyslaw. *Viking Rus: Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*. Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2004.
- Fewster, Derek. "Approaches to the Conversion of the Finns: Ideologies, Symbols and Archaeological Features." In *The North-Eastern Frontiers of Medieval Europe: The Expansion of Latin Christendom in the Baltic Lands*, ed. Alan V. Murray, 43-54. Routledge: London, 2014.
- Haavio, Martti. "The Oldest Source of Finnish Mythology: Birchbark Letter No. 292." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 1, no. 1/2 (1964): 45-66.
- Hansen, Lars Ivar and Bjørnar Olsen. *Hunters in Transition: An Outline of Early Sámi History*. Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2014.
- Jones, Gwyn. *A History of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Katona, Csete. "Co-operation between the Viking Rus' and the Turkic Nomads of the Steppe in the Ninth-Eleventh Centuries." Master's Thesis, Central European University, 2018.
- Keskinen, Suvi. "Intra-Nordic Differences, Colonial/Racial Histories, and National Narratives: Rewriting Finnish History." *Scandinavian Studies* 91, no. 12 (2019): 163-181.
- Korpela, Jukka. "Finno-Ugric Captives in Trade of Slaves on the Volga Way." *Средневековые тюрко-татарские государства* 4 (2012): 159-169.
- Korpela, Jukka. "The Last Vikings: Russian Boat Bandits and the Formation of Princely Power." *Russian History* 48 (2021): 89–117.

- Korpela, Jukka. *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the East European Slave Trade: 900–1600*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.
- Lamberg, Marko. “Finns as Aliens and Compatriots in the Late Medieval Kingdom of Sweden.”
- Latomaa, Sirkku. “The Language Situation in Finland.” *Current Issues in Language Planning* 3, In *The North-Eastern Frontiers of Medieval Europe: The Expansion of Latin Christendom in the Baltic Lands*, ed. Alan V. Murray, 247-258. Routledge: London, 2014. no. 2 (May 2002): 95-202.
- Lehtola, Veli-Pekka. “Sámi Histories, Colonialism, and Finland.” *Arctic Anthropology* 52, no. 2 (2015): 22-36.
- Mägi, Marika. *In Austrvegr: The Role of the Eastern Baltic in Viking Age Communication across the Baltic Sea*. Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2018.
- Mägi, Marika. “Societies East and West of the Baltic Sea: Prehistoric Culture Contacts Revisited.” In *The Making of the American Essay*, ed. Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin, and Mats Roslund, 17–47. Leiden: Brill, 2017.
- Neveux, Francois. *A Brief History of The Normans*. London: Constable and Robinson Limited Publishers, 2006.
- Pritsak, Omeljan. “The Origin of Rus’.” *The Russian Review* 36, no. 3 (July 1977): 249-273.
- Saarikivi, Janne. “Finnic Personal Names on Novgorod Birch Bark Documents.” In *Topics on the Ethnic, Linguistic and Cultural Making of the Russian North: Voprosy etničeskogo, jazykogo i kul'turnogo formirovanija Russkogo Severa: Beiträge zur ethnischen, sprachlichen und kulturellen Entwicklung des russischen Nordens* (Slavica Helsingiensia 32), ed. Juhani Nuorluoto, 196–246. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 2007.
- Somerville, Angus A. and R. Andrew McDonald. *The Viking Age: A Reader*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Tolochko, Oleksiy P. “The Primary Chronicle’s ‘Ethnography’ Revisited: Slavs and 169 Varangians in the Middle Dnieper Region and the Origin of the Rus’ State.” In *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*. ed. Ildar Garipzanov, Patrick Geary, and Przemysław Urbańczyk. Brepols: Turnhout, 2008. 169-188.

Turville-Petre, Edward Oswald Gabriel. *Myths and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.

Winroth, Anders. *The Age of the Viking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Zakharii, Roman. "The Historiography of Normanist and Anti-Normanist theories on the origin of Rus': A review of modern historiography and major sources on Varangian controversy and other Scandinavian concepts of the origins of Rus'." Master's Thesis, University of Oslo, 2002.

Zaroff, Roman. "Organized Pagan Cult in Kievan Rus'. The Invention of Foreign Elite or Evolution of Local Tradition?" *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 2 (1999): 47-76.