

Scythian Christianity

by *Henrik Janson*

In connection with the treaty of 944 drawn up between the Byzantine Empire and the Rus' at the command of Prince Igor, the *Povest' vremennykh let*, known variously in English as the *Primary Chronicle* or *The Tale of Bygone Years* (from here on = *PVL*) mentions two categories of Rus', 'the Christians' and 'the pagans'. This indicates that by this time there was a Christian group among the leading Rus'. However, it is important to note that the word 'pagan' does not appear in the treaty itself but only in the chronicler's commentaries and embellishments from the early twelfth century. The treaty itself speaks of 'Christians' and 'non-Christians', but the division that it makes most often is in fact between 'the baptised' and 'the un-baptised'.¹

By this time, one of the more distinguished individuals in Rus' who could be described as a 'pagan', 'non-Christian', or an 'un-baptised person' must have been Olga, Prince Igor's wife and later the grandmother of Volodimer the Great who was to become famous for having brought Christianity to Rus' in 988/89. However, Olga was baptised before this time, in fact sometime during the years when she was the *de facto* regent in Rus' from her husband's death in around 945 to the early 960s.

The details of Olga's baptism have been discussed extensively, and I do not intend to go into these details here.² However, it should be mentioned that one of the main points of the story about her baptism in the *PVL* is that Olga, by accepting baptism, outwitted the Byzantine Emperor because she understood what he did not, that since he was the sponsor at her baptism he could not, according to Christian law, marry her afterwards as he wished, due to the spiritual kinship they entered through the baptismal ceremony. This says, of course, very little about what actually happened, but it illustrates a point I want to make in this paper: Olga, as part of the Varangian world, was not, before her baptism, unacquainted with the more complex levels of Christian doctrine.

1 *Lavrentevskaia letopis'*, ed. by A. F. Karskii, PSRL, 1 (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1926–28), cols. 46–54; *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, ed. by Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz Wetzor (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), pp. 73–77.

2 For a recent discussion see Francis Butler, 'Olga's Conversion and the Construction of Chronicle Narrative', *The Russian Review*, 67 (2008), 230–42, with further references.

In 1992 Andrzej Poppe wrote regarding Olga: ‘To be sure, as the treaty of 944 indicates, there was already a Christian community in Kiev during the reign of her husband Igor, and Christianity had already penetrated the upper strata of Rus’ society.’³ The Christian community that Poppe here refers to is what John Lind has described as ‘Varangian Christianity’,⁴ which was evidently the Greek Orthodox community among the Rus’. Olga does not seem to have belonged to this community in 944, as she was not baptised at that point, but then the question is as follows: to what religious context did she actually belong?⁵

Frankish Christianity among the Varangians

Not too far away in space and time from Olga and the treaty of 944, Archbishop Unni of Bremen visited Birka, where he died in 936. This was a somewhat spectacular ending to a grand missionary tour in the North following the victory of the East Frankish king Henry I in 934 over the Danish king Gnupe. Only a few years earlier, Henry had pushed back the Hungarians. The importance of

3 Andrzej Poppe, ‘Once Again Concerning the Baptism of Olga, Archontissa of Rus’’, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 46 (1992), 271–77 (p. 271).

4 John H. Lind, ‘Reflections on Church Historians, Archaeologists and Early Christianity in Finland’, in *Arkeologian lumoa synkkyteen: Artikkeleita Christian Carpelanin juhlapäiväksi*, ed. by Mervi Suhonen (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 2006), pp. 68–74; id., ‘The Importance of Varangian Traditions for East–West Collaboration and Confrontation in the 12th–13th centuries’, in *Expansion – Integration? Danish-Baltic Contacts 1147–1410 AD*, ed. by Birgitte Fløe Jensen and Dorthe Wille Jørgensen (Vordingborg: Danmarks Borgcenter, 2009), pp. 27–37. The concept of ‘Varangians’ in itself was however closely connected — and at least sometimes synonymous with — that of ‘Latin Christians’. For more information, see Stanisław Rożniecki, *Varægiske minder i den russiske heltedigtning* (Copenhagen: Pios Boghandel, 1914), pp. 197–99; and John Lind, ‘Varangians in Europe’s Eastern and Northern Periphery: The Christianization of North- and Eastern Europe c. 950–1050 — A Plea for a Comparative Study’, *Ennen & nyt*, 2004, no. 4, 1–18 (p. 12) <<http://www.ennenjanyt.net/4-04/lind.html>> [accessed 8 August 2011], where attention is drawn to an event that took place in the late 1060s or early 1070s when a prominent Varangian in Kiev by the name Shimon, a nephew of a certain Hakon (Iakun), decided together with his household of no less than 3000 souls, including his priests, to stop being a ‘Varangian’ and instead become a ‘Christian’ by exchanging his Latin rites for Orthodox rituals. Gerhard Podskalsky, *Christentum und theologische Literatur in der Kiever Rus’ (988–1237)* (München: Beck, 1982), p. 20, mentions an example where the Latin Christians were treated as equals of pagans. It is quite comic when Patriarch Photius I in his clash with the Papacy in the 860s called Latin a barbaric and Scythian tongue; see Francis Dvornik, *The Photian Schism: History and Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 105 with note 2.

5 As modern concepts of the ‘Old Norse’ and ‘Old Slavonic’ religions say much more about the period of romantic nationalism in European history during which they were formulated rather than about the religious conditions of the Viking Age itself, I think that it is meaningless to consider whether Olga might have worshipped *Perun* or *Thórr*, the former mentioned in the treaty of 944. See A. P. Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom: An Introduction to the Medieval History of the Slavs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 145–45; Edgar Hösch, ‘Das altrussische Heidentum’, in *Millennium Russiae Christianae: Tausend Jahre Christliches Russland 988–1988*, ed. by Gerhard Birkfellner, Schriften des Komitees der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zur Förderung der slawischen Studien, 16 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1993), pp. 95–107; Henrik Janson, ‘The Organism Within: On the Construction of a non-Christian Germanic Nature’, in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions*, ed. by Anders Andrén and others, *Vägar till Midgård*, 8 (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), pp. 393–98.

Henry's victory over King Gnupa has been played down sometimes, but from a contemporary perspective it was a major event that made Henry I famous in Europe as the first ruler to have subjugated the Danes and made them tributaries.⁶ King Henry also forced Gnupa to be baptised, and soon after a new aggressive diplomatic 'missionary' campaign was directed to the North under the command of a Saxon nobleman, Archbishop Unni of Bremen. According to Adam of Bremen, writing in the 1070s, Unni's first measure was 'to ordinate priests for every single church in the kingdom of the Danes'.⁷

In view of the picture that can be drawn from sources of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, of a great clash between a monolithic form of paganism and an even more monolithic form of Christianity, it might seem a little surprising that a well-informed cleric, the head of the cathedral school in one of the major Saxon metropolitan sees, expressed himself in these words about the conditions in the North in the early tenth century, which indicates that churches already existed in Denmark by that point. The impression otherwise given in overviews of this period is that Christianity had suffered a devastating setback in Scandinavia after the death of Archbishop Ansgar in 865. However, this picture, which is still dominant today, is mainly the result of the vehement propaganda disseminated by the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen. Bremen had been severely weakened after Ansgar's death due to the powerful Archbishop of Cologne's resistance to the unification of the Archbishopric of Hamburg with the Bishopric of Bremen. It was only in Archbishop Unni's days and with the backing of Henry I that Bremen regained its position, but even with the support of Henry I, Hamburg-Bremen still lacked the proper papal privileges needed to claim any ecclesiastical rights in the North.⁸

These circumstances have certainly contributed to the very dark picture painted by Adam of Bremen — refined still further by his followers — of the position of Christianity in Scandinavia during those years when Bremen lacked influence. Nevertheless, as has been alluded to above, even Adam of Bremen looked upon this region during these years as a distinct area with its own churches, and while its relapse to paganism is elaborated further by additional twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources, the Christian elements of Adam's account have, as we shall see, strong support in sources more contemporary to the events.

The fact that Adam was very tendentious in his attempts to portray the years between Ansgar and Unni in the worst possible light is evident in his account of

6 Liutprand, *Antapodosis*, 3. 21, in *Liutprandi Cremonensis opera omnia*, ed. by P. Chiesa (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), pp. 1–150 (p. 76): 'Hic [i.e. Heinricus rex] etiam Sclavorum gentem innumeram subiugavit sibiue tributariam fecit; primus etiam hic Danos subiugavit sibiue servire coegit; ac per hoc nomen suum multis nationibus celebre fecit'; and also 3. 48, p. 93: '[...] cuius [i.e. Heinricus rex] ex hoc apud Italos nomen maxime tunc clarebat, quod Danos, nulli ante subiectos, solus ipse debellaret ac tributarios faceret.'

7 Adam, *Gesta*, 1. 59, p. 58: 'Ordinatis itaque in regno Danorum per singulas ecclesias sacerdotibus [...]'.
 8 Henrik Janson, 'Konfliktlinjer i tidig nordeuropeisk kyrkoorganisation', in *Kristendommen i Danmark for 1050*, ed. by Niels Lund (Roskilde: Roskilde Museums Forlag, 2004), pp. 215–34.

how Unni entered the Baltic Sea and arrived in Birka. Since the death of Ansgar, he declared, no teacher had gone there for seventy years, except for Rimbert, so devastating had been the persecutions of the Christians. According to Adam, the *Sueones* and the *Gothi* had first been converted by Ansgar but then they had relapsed and the Christian religion was ‘totally forgotten’ (*penitus oblitū*) until they were called back by Archbishop Unni in the 930s. ‘This is sufficient to know’, he stated, ‘because if I say more it will be claimed that I lie’.⁹

Comparing Adam’s words with those of his sources reveals that he was moving beyond the limits of accuracy in his account. He contradicts, for instance, *Vita Ansgarii*, the life of Ansgar, which Archbishop Rimbert, Ansgar’s immediate successor as Archbishop of Bremen, had written in the early 870s. According to Rimbert the ecclesiastical conditions among the *Sueones* during the first years of his own pontificate were still prosperous, and the priests sent out from the Empire were received readily by the king and the people.¹⁰ A few decades later we are told in *Vita Rimberti* that Rimbert himself also visited frequently these regions beyond the Sea, that is, in *Sveonia*, and he had always appointed priests to the churches there. These churches were founded (*constitutae*) among the pagans themselves, far from their episcopal seat in Bremen. Yet even more problematic was the fact that they were separated from their metropolitan see by the sea. However, the conclusion of Rimbert’s anonymous biographer — writing probably within a decade or so after Rimbert’s death in 888 — was that through the priests in these churches the pagans could hear the word of God and Christian captives could have consolation.¹¹

These are contemporary statements about the religious life among the *Sueones* covering approximately the period after Ansgar’s death in 865 to the end of the ninth century. They show that even during this period there were Frankish churches present in the Varangian world of the North, and in spite of the dark rhetorical colours used by Adam of Bremen to depict this period he is not all together contradicting this information. In fact, according to Adam it was only

9 Adam, *Gestae*, I. 61, p. 59.

10 Rimbert, *Vita Ansgarii*, 33. ed. by Georg Waitz, in *Vita Ansgarii auctore Rimberto*, MGH, SRG, 55 (Hannover: Hahn, 1884), pp. 64–65.

11 *Vita Rimberti*, 16, pp. 80–100 (pp. 94–95): ‘Preterea legationis suae officium, quod ad praedicandum gentibus verbum Dei primitus a decessore suo susceptum est et postmodum sibi successione iure quasi hereditarium provenit, impigre executus est; ipse quidem per se, quociens occupationes aliae sineret, eisdem legationi insistens, semper autem constitutos habens presbiteros, per quos et verbum Dei gentiles audirent, et solatium captivi christiani haberent, ad ecclesias inter ipsos paganos constitutas longe ab ecclesia sedis suae, quodque gravissimum erat, marinis discriminibus adeundas. Quae discrimina ipse frequentius et habundantius sustinens, saepe, tamquam de se testatur apostolus, naufragium pertulit, saepe in proximo erat [...]’; and again in *ibid.*, 20, pp. 96–97: ‘Fertur etiam antiquorum more sanctorum quedam fecisse miracula, frequenter videlicet, dum iret ad Sueoniam, tempestatem maris orationibus suis sedasse, caeci cuiusdam oculos illuminasse per confirmationem, quam episcopali more cum chrismate sacro in eodem. Set et filium quendam regis dicitur a demonio liberasse; cui etiam affirmationi hoc astipulari videtur, quod multatis astantibus episcopis clamor ab ore vexati saepius sonabat Rimbertum solum inter eos digne commissum egisse officium, ipsumque sibi esse cruciatui, auctor vocis testabatur.’

in the years immediately preceding the victory of Henry I over the Danes in 934 that King Gnupa (called *Hardecnut Worm* by Adam) tried to destroy Christianity in Dania entirely, by driving ‘priests’ from his borders — specifically Frankish or even only East Frankish priests, or perhaps even only priests under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Bremen — killing and torturing quite a few of them.¹² If so, these actions might very well have been provoked by the war itself, and these were obviously the churches to which Unni, according to Adam, delegated priests again after the East-Frankish victory.

In light of this, an oft-discussed passage concerning the conversion of King Harold Gormsson and the Danes in the mid-960s becomes more explainable. Harold’s conversion was probably one of the comprehensibly arranged conversions in Scandinavian history. It was arranged by Otto the Great, and the evidence from Harold’s famous rune stone in Jelling suggests that it was the king’s intention for his conversion to be remembered by posterity as the decisive step when the Danes were made Christians, for he states on it that he was the one who had made the Danes Christians, *kristna*.¹³

King Harold’s statement can be seen in agreement with Adam of Bremen’s dark picture of the period after Ansgar. As a result of this, a comment from the contemporary observer Widukind of Corvey has always been treated as a confusing anomaly. Writing about the conversion of King Harold, Widukind explicitly contradicts the Jelling stone and says that this event was not what had made the Danes Christians, for ‘the Danes had been Christians since ancient times, but nevertheless they were serving idols with a heathen rite.’¹⁴ Exactly what these idols were and what this heathen *ritus* might have been is not very clear, but it is quite clear that to this Benedictine monk from the mid-tenth century the Danes had actually been *christiani* for much longer than the Jelling stone implies. In the heading of the chapter in question, Widukind, or an almost contemporary copyist, wrote: ‘About the Danes, how they were made fully Christian’ (*De Danis, quomodo Christiani perfecte facti sunt*).¹⁵

A generation later, Widukind’s statement received support from Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg who explained that the *Christianitas* of the Danes was, as he says, ‘renovated’ through the conversion of King Harold. According to Thietmar King Harald and the Danes were accused of having ‘deviated from the *cultura* of their forefathers’ (*antecessorum cultura suorum deviantem*) and by this deviation

12 Adam, *Gestae*, 1. 55, pp. 55–56.

13 Henrik Janson, ‘Pagani and Cristiani: Cultural Identity and Exclusion Around the Baltic in the Early Middle Ages’, in *The Reception of Medieval Europe in the Baltic Sea Region: Papers of the XIIIth Visby Symposium, held at Gotland University*, ed. by Jörn Staecker (Visby: Gotland University Press, 2009), pp. 171–91.

14 Widukind of Corvey, *Rerum gestarum Saxoniarum libri tres*, ed. by Georg Waitz and K.A. Kehr, MGH, SRG, 60 (Hannover: Hahn, 1904), p. 65: ‘Dani antiquitus erant Christiani, sed nichilominus idolis ritu gentili servientes’.

15 Widukind, *Rerum*, 3. Inc. cap., pp. 101–4.

from the proper cult they had opened up for ‘gods and demons’ (*dii et demones*).¹⁶ It therefore seems fairly obvious that neither Widukind in the 960s nor Thietmar in the early eleventh century considered the Danes, as a collective people, to be non-Christians before the baptism of Harold, only bad Christians. Nevertheless, King Harold claimed to have made his people Christian when he formed an alliance with Otto the Great and the East Frankish Church and was baptised as a result.

According to Widukind, the results of Harold’s conversion were threefold: firstly, the king promised to worship Christ alone, which was part of the baptismal act. Secondly, he ordered his people to reject idols, which was also part of the baptismal act; the rejection of idols was a purely personal matter only when the baptised individual was not king. Thirdly, from then on the king showed priests and ministers of God appropriate levels of respect. This last matter was not a part of the baptismal act, but it shows that even if King Harold had not treated them with the sufficient respect before, Frankish priests had indeed been present in his kingdom.

Furthermore, in the case of Sweden specifically, it can be noted that even if Adam in a certain moment states that the Christian religion after Ansgar had been ‘totally forgotten’ when Unni arrived in Birka, he later seems to confirm the picture painted in *Vita Rimberti* when speaking about the three bishops — also known from the synodal acts from Ingelheim in 948 and whom Adam claims Unni’s successor Adaldag appointed to the bishoprics of Hedeby, Ribe and Aarhus on Jutland — when he declares that these three bishops were also delegated to ‘those Churches that are beyond the Sea, on Funen, Zealand, and Scania, as well as in *Sueonia*’.¹⁷ Just as *Dania*, so is *Sueonia* also referred to as a region with churches in the first half of the tenth century, even by Adam of Bremen. In this way he lends support to the picture given in *Vita Rimberti* in the late ninth century concerning churches among the pagans in *Sueonia*, and for long it has been accepted among leading Swedish archaeologists that the picture presented by the more contemporary written sources about the Christian presence in Sweden in the late ninth and early tenth centuries is supported by archaeological material.¹⁸

Looking beyond the sources of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to more contemporary material actually seems to show that the Frankish Church was

16 Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, 2. 14, ed. by Robert Holtzmann, MGH, SRG n.s., 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1935), pp. 53–54.

17 Adam, *Gestae*, 2. 4, pp. 64–65: ‘Quibus etiam commendavit illas ecclesias, quae trans mare sunt, in Fune, Seland et Scone ac in Sueonia.’

18 See for example Sune Lindqvist, ‘Slesvig och Birka’, *Fornvännen*, 21 (1926), 245–65 (p. 257). Recently the location of what might be one of these Frankish churches was identified. On the site where one of Sweden’s most important monasteries stood from the middle of the twelfth century, the royal burial-church Varnhem in Västergötland, the remains of a much older stone-church were found, dated to the early years of the eleventh century. What was more surprising though was that even older Christian graves were found around this church, going back as far as the ninth century; see Maria Vretemark, ‘Tidiga kristna spår i Varnhem – hur tolkar vi det?’, *Historieforum: Tidskrift för historisk debatt*, 2 (2009), 2–16. This is the first time a Christian burial place of such a respectable age and following West European customs has been identified with certainty in Sweden.

present in the North in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, but it was probably only a marginal phenomenon during this time, especially among the *Sueones*. Yet even if the Frankish Church was only a marginal phenomenon during these years, it can be safely assumed that some leading ‘Varangian’ families had joined the Frankish Church in the ninth century. In fact, this branch of Varangian society was probably even more influential in the first half of the ninth century. A little known fact is that there was indeed a Frankish Archbishop appointed for the *Sueones* in the early 830s, named Gautbert Simon.¹⁹ From a letter written by Abbot Hrabanus Maurus of Fulda we also know that during these years there was a Frankish metropolitan church under construction somewhere among the *Sueones*, but this grandiose project ended abruptly when the Frankish priests were either killed or thrown out in around 840.²⁰

After his escape from *Sueonia* (Arch)bishop Gautbert Simon was granted the position of Bishop of Osnabrück. He was respected as head of the Church of *Sueonia* until his death in 859/60, but there were never any claims from his successors in Osnabrück to this position. Instead it was Archbishop Ansgar and his see that provided continuity, for example with a second visit by Ansgar (in his role as Papal Legate) to *Sueonia* around 850, when good relations seem to have been restored. In the early 840s, the attacking Northmen had also forced Ansgar to flee and give up his metropolitan seat in Hamburg. He then took over the Bishopric of Bremen, and in spite of stern objections from the Archbishop of Cologne to whose church province the bishopric Bremen belonged, he continued to claim his position as Archbishop and work intensely to unite the Bishopric of Bremen and the Archbishopric of Hamburg into one juridical body. He actually managed to get papal privileges in this matter in May 864, and since he also worked to induce metropolitan power in Scandinavia, including in Gautbert’s *Sueonia*, he tried to squeeze such a papal privilege out of Rome. However, he failed in this attempt and in February 865 he died, still as Papal Legate in the North. His successors, however, beginning with Archbishop Rimbert (865–88), struggled for centuries to maintain their position as Papal Legate — which had been Ansgar’s personal title — and to win the position of Metropolitan of the North. They did not succeed to get papal privileges for these claims until Archbishop Adalbert (1043–72) in the middle of the eleventh century.²¹

Consequently, after the failure of the great plans of the 830s there was a minor role for the Frankish Church in the North in the weaker period from the middle of

19 A. D. Jørgensen, *Den nordiske kirkes grundlæggelse og første udvikling* (Copenhagen: Selskabet for Danmarks kirkehistorie, 1874–78), p. 113; Lauritz Weibull, *Nordisk historia: forskningar och undersökningar*, 1: *Forn tid och vikingatid* (Lund: Natur och kultur, 1948), pp. 167–73 and 184; Janson, ‘Konfliktlinjer’, pp. 218–19.

20 Albert Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), II, p. 700, note 2; Janson, ‘Konfliktlinjer’, pp. 218–19.

21 See Janson, ‘Konfliktlinjer’, pp. 219–26.

the ninth to the beginning of the tenth centuries. This weaker period ended with the regained strength of the East Frankish realm under the Ottonians and the victory of Henry I over King Gnupa in 934.

Byzantine Christianity among the Varangians

The weaker period of Frankish influences coincided with the increasing political turmoil of the Frankish Empire and also with the progress of ‘Varangian Christianity’ among the Rus’. Jonathan Sheppard has recently brought attention to the intensified contacts between Byzantium and Northern Europe from around 900,²² and this is probably an important factor behind the strengthened position of ‘Varangian Christianity’ in the treaty of 944, if we take ‘Varangian Christianity’ to be the orthodox branch of the religion within Varangian society.

Yet even before 900 there seems to have been at least a section of Orthodox Christians among the Rus’. At the very time around 840 when hostilities were breaking out in *Sueonia* against (Arch)bishop Gautbert and the young Frankish church structure, it was reported in contemporary and well-informed Frankish annals that envoys who called their people *Rhos* had arrived at the Byzantine imperial court, sent by their king, called *chacanus*,²³ for the sake of friendship. They were brought from Constantinople in the early summer of 839, with an imperial Byzantine delegation to the court of the Frankish Emperor Louis the Pious. In an enclosed letter from the Byzantine Emperor Theophilos, the Frankish ruler was asked to help this *Rhos* embassy through his realm on their way home, since the route by which they had arrived in Constantinople went through barbarian and very ferocious peoples (*gentes*), a route that Theophilos did not want them to take again. Louis the Pious made careful investigations about the reasons for their visit and found out that they actually belonged to the people of the *Sueones*. This fact seems to have been enough for the Frankish Emperor to suspect that they had come as spies to the Byzantine Empire as well as to his own, not for the sake of friendship. He therefore decided to detain them until it could be established conclusively if they were to be trusted or not. In a response letter to Constantinople he reported his decision, stating that if they were found to be trustworthy and a suitable occasion presented itself, he would help them home to their *patria*. Otherwise he would return them to Constantinople so that Theophilos could deal with them as he saw fit.²⁴ Nothing more is heard in the matter, but, as already mentioned, the Frankish priests were now violently thrown out of the kingdom of the *Sueones* to-

22 Jonathan Shepard, ‘From the Bosphorus to the British Isles: The Way from the Greeks to the Varangians’, in *Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy: 2009 god* (Moscow: Indrik, 2010), pp. 15–42.

23 Cf. Ildar Garipzanov, ‘The Annals of St. Bertin (839) and Chacanus of the Rhos’, *Ruthenica*, 5 (2006), 7–11.

24 *Annales Bertiniani, s.a. 939*, ed. by Georg Waitz, MGH, SRG (Hannover: Hahn, 1883), pp. 19–20; Jonathan Shepard, ‘The Rhos Guests of Louis the Pious: Whence and Wherefore?’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 4 (1995), 41–60.

gether with their newly appointed metropolitan Gautbert Simon. Thus, the climate for Frankish connections in *Sueonia* was decidedly chilly at this time.

Repeated political difficulties caused by the Huns, Avars, Bulgarians, Magyars, and Petchenegs must have hindered more stable diplomatic relations between Constantinople and more distant parts of the continent from time to time during the Early Middle Ages. Whatever the reasons might have been in this case, the Rus' delegation seems not to have continued beyond 838/39, and the Rus' did not make any lasting impression on this occasion. Nevertheless, the next time that the Rus' paid a visit to the Imperial City, they certainly would.

In 860, vast numbers of vessels — in later Rus' sources said to have been under the command of the princes Askold and Dir — poured into the Black Sea, harried all the way to the eastern Mediterranean and even attacked the Imperial City before the Emperor Michael III returned from a campaign against the Caliphate to defend his people. It was a shock, and the Patriarch Photius expressed the shame that the attack inflicted on the Empire, especially since 'that nation was obscure, insignificant, and not even known'.²⁵

The Rhos' delegation of 839 and Patriarch Photius' reference to the attack of 860 demonstrate that in the mid-ninth century there had not been any relations between the Byzantine Church and the regions of the far North, at least in recent times. Since the early 830s Gautbert Simon held the position of archbishop among the *Sueones*. Consequently, by 839 these lands were under influence of the Frankish Church. There was no room for a Byzantine Church in this region, which was at the time and until Emperor Theophilos' death in 842 unwaveringly iconoclastic. Yet (Arch)bishop Gautbert's death in 859/60 left the *Sueones* without an ecclesiastical head, and in spite of the fact that Archbishop Ansgar received an important letter bestowing papal privileges from the Roman curia of Pope Nicholas I in May 864, he was not established as Gautbert's successor, only confirmed as papal legate in these parts of the North. His death in February 865 made the power structure of the Latin Church in the North even more obscure than it was already. At this time Ansgar's successor Rimbart felt the need to write *Vita Ansgarii* as a statement of Bremen's key role in the North, citing the crucial papal documents.

25 *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*, 4. 1, trans. by Cyril Mango (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 96. Cf. *ibid.*, 3. 2, p. 88: '[...] the unbelievable course of the barbarians did not give rumour time to announce it [i.e. the attack], so that some means of safety could be devised, but the sight accompanied the report, and that despite the distance, and the fact that the invaders were sundered off from us by so many lands and kingdoms, by navigable rivers and harbourless seas [...]', and 4. 2, p. 98: 'An obscure nation, a nation of no account, a nation ranked among the slaves, unknown, but which has won a name from the expedition against us, insignificant, but now become famous, humble and destitute, but now risen to a splendid height and immense wealth, a nation dwelling somewhere far from our country, barbarous, nomadic, armed with arrogance, unwatched, unchallenged, leaderless, has suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, like a wave of the sea, poured over our frontiers, and as a wild boar has devoured the inhabitants of the land like grass, or straw or a crop (O, the God sent punishment that befell us!) sparing nothing from man to beast [...].'

From his own *Vita* we learn that he also acted in the North as if he had ‘inherited’ Ansgar’s privileges.

From a canonical point of view, however, the privileges in question — metropolitan of the *Sueones* (Gautbert) and papal legate (Gautbert and Ansgar) — would return to Rome under these circumstances. Yet the situation in Rome in the middle of the 960s was anything but clear. During this time, as a result of being in turmoil, the papal curia was paving the way for the great divide between the Eastern and the Western Churches through a fierce clash with Constantinople — the so-called ‘Photian schism’ — which included among other things the *Filioque* Controversy and the intense supremacy quarrel concerning the Bulgarians.²⁶

It cannot be a mere coincidence that it is precisely in these years that we hear about envoys sent from the Rus’ to Constantinople to declare their readiness to be baptised.²⁷ It is not possible to establish exactly what happened, but the attack of 860 had obviously sparked intense diplomatic activity. The consequences of this event can be seen in an encyclical letter from Patriarch Photius to all the Oriental patriarchs, written in the early summer of 867. Photius speaks with great anger about terrible dogmatic novelties that the Latin Church had recently introduced, such as adding *filioque* to the creed. Threatening to exclude the entire West from communion with all ‘Christians’, he was especially infuriated by the fact that less than two years after the baptism of the Bulgarians by the Byzantine Church, honourless men appeared ‘out of the darkness, i.e. the West’, and were, like wild boars in God’s newly planted vineyard, laying it waste ‘with hoof and tusk, that is with their disgraceful lives and corrupted dogmas’. He condemned these ‘so called Bishops’ and precursors of apostasy as servants of the enemy, i.e. the Devil, and enemies of God. He called upon his fellow patriarchs to help wipe all this evil from the West out of the Church. When this corrupt and ‘Godless’ preaching had been rooted out, there was, according to Photius, hope that the Bulgarians would return to the Faith they had initially accepted, while there was also hope for those formerly most evil of men, the Rus’, who had only a few years ago dared to attack Constantinople. They had already replaced their ‘pagan and godless worship’ (*Ελληνικής και αθέου δόξης*)²⁸ with ‘the pure and uncorrupted religion of the Christians’, i.e. the Greeks (*των Χριστιανών καθαράν και ακίβδηλον θρησκείαν*). Instead of continuing to thieve, they had placed themselves among

26 See Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*.

27 Ludolf Müller, *Die Taufe Russlands: die Frühgeschichte des russischen Christentums bis zum Jahre 988* (Munich: Erich Wewel, 1987), pp. 57–60.

28 Cf. Rom. 3. 9–23, and the concept *κενόδοξοι* in Phil. 2. 3. Could Photius’ formulation be a reference to the glory and fame that the Rus’ had won through the attack? Photius had spoken vividly about this unworthy glory in his Homilies, see the quote above. Most commentators of this passage have read *δόξης* as ‘religion’ which has no firm basis; the translation ‘worship’ is possible though, and seems to fit with the context, but in my opinion it risks making the reader miss the point of the passage, which is the reference to Rom. 3. 23: glory and worship without the consent of God/Constantinople, brought nothing but vain glory and *vana superstitio*. ‘*Ελληνικής*’ had already lost all ‘ethnic’ significance in late Roman times and had assumed the more general meaning of ‘pagan’ or ‘non-Christian’.

the friends and adherents of the Empire, and they had become so eager in their faith that they had received a bishop and shepherd, and enthusiastically embraced all of the Christian customs from Constantinople.²⁹

This reference to the ‘conversion of the Rus’ in the middle of the 860s in a contemporary source has not always received due attention.³⁰ There are several reasons for this, such as the prevalent myth transmitted in later sources of the ‘Christianisation of Rus’ under Volodimer the Great, and the fact that the treaty of 911, cited in the *PVL*, still speaks of the distinction between the Christians and Rus’ (which actually seems to be a synonymous expression for ‘Greek and Rus’). A third reason, however, is another good source, the *Vita* of Emperor Basil I, which was instigated by Basil’s own grandson Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the 950s. Emperor Basil had come to power in September 867 by killing his predecessor Michael III. He immediately deposed Photius as patriarch and reinstated Patriarch Ignatius whom Photius and Michael III had deposed in 858, which had been an unlawful act according to both Ignatius and the papacy.³¹

In *Vita Basilii* it is clearly stated in direct opposition to the encyclical letter of Photius that it was after Photius’ deposition under Basil’s emperorship that a peace agreement was made with the Rus’. Furthermore, in connection with this agreement we are told as well that Basil had also persuaded the Rus’ to take baptism, and to accept an archbishop who had been ordained by Patriarch Ignatius.³²

There is evidence to suggest that good relations were indeed established during these years between the Greeks and Rus’, because a substantial number of Rus’ did military service in the Empire before the treaty of 911.³³ This supports the information in our two sources about a peace treaty, but if the Rus’ were actually Christianised by Patriarch Photius and had received a bishop from him, then why did they have to be Christianised by Basil and receive an archbishop from Ignatius? Recently, an explanation was suggested by Constantine Zuckerman. According to Zuckerman, this was a two-step conversion. Photius had succeeded in creating a good relationship with the Rus’, and had made them accept Christianity, but he also made a serious mistake of the same kind that he had done in relation to the Bulgars a few years earlier: disappointing the new converts by sending only a bishop rather than an archbishop. In the case of Bulgaria this had

29 *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, Ep. 2, ed. by B. Laourdas and L.G. Westerinck, I (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983), pp. 40–53; on the conversion of the Rus’ see p. 50, ll. 293–305.

30 Müller, *Die Taufe Russlands*, p. 60: ‘Dieser Text bezeugt zweifelsfrei, dass zur Zeit der Abfassung dieses Briefes eine regelrechte, von Byzanz eingesetzte und der byzantinischen Kirche unterstehende Kirchenorganisation in Russland begründet worden war.’

31 Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*, passim.

32 Theophanes Continuatus. *Chronographia*, 5, 97, ed. by I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838), pp. 342–44.

33 Alexander A. Vasiliev, *The Russian Attack on Constantinople in 860* (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1946), pp. 231–32; and Sigfús Blöndal and Benedikt S. Benedikz, *The Varangians of Byzantium: an Aspect of Byzantine Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 27.

the disastrous effect that Khan Boris turned to Rome instead. In the case of Rus', we do not know of such events, but after a few years — around 870 according to Zuckerman — they got their archbishop from Basil and Ignatius.³⁴

Nevertheless, there might be another side to this problem as well.³⁵ One question that became acute immediately after the deposition of Photius was whether or not his legal acts could still be held as valid. If Ignatius' deposition in 858 had been illegal, had Photius in fact been the patriarch? One thing in this respect was clear enough: the Papacy did not accept Photius, and the Frankish assertion in 839 that the *Rhos* was a part of the *gens Sueonum* was an indication that any ecclesiastical intrusions into this sphere of influence — to which the Papacy had confirmed Ansgar as Papal Legate as late as May 864 — might well lead to a clash with the Latin Church. Under these conditions, to have had the Church in Rus' established by Photius was not a good starting point for the Byzantines. Obviously, it was not a solid legal foundation to build on, for at any time it could be challenged as being schismatic, since the papacy did not accept Photius as patriarch. This circumstance might very well have called for a revision of the church structure among the Rus' around 870, and a simple way to solve the problem was to re-establish the Rus' Church with an archbishop at its head. This was also a strategy of attack that took advantage of the weak and unclear position of the Latin Church and the Episcopal powers among the *Sueones* after the deaths of Gautbert and Ansgar in around 860 and 865 respectively.

Putting the pieces together, we can conclude that there must have been two metropolitan Churches under construction among the *Sueones* and the *Rhos* in the ninth century, one Latin-Frankish under Gautbert in the 830s and one Byzantine among the Rus' from the 870s. We do not, however, know where they were placed. In the first case, Birka or its surrounding area seems to be a likely hypothesis, while in the second case the most natural place would certainly have been Kiev,³⁶ which by this time had started to become the key focal point of the Rus' world. The first of these churches (Latin-Frankish) seems to have been abandoned in around 840, but in the case of the Byzantine Church the situation is much more unclear. The perspective displayed in *Vita Basilii*, representing the circle around Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the 950s, does not seem to reflect any break at all.³⁷ The fact is, as is well known to experts in Rus' history but probably less well

34 Constantine Zuckerman, 'Deux étapes de la formation de l'ancien état russe', in *Les centres proto-urbains russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient: Actes du Colloque International tenu au Collège de France en octobre 1997*, ed by M. Kazanski and others, *Réalités byzantines*, 7 (Paris: Lethielleux, 2000), pp. 95–120.

35 Müller, *Die Taufe Russlands*, p. 65.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 60–62; Josef Bujnoch, 'Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der Missionierung Russlands', in *Millennium Russiae Christianae: Tausend Jahre christliches Russland 988–1988*, ed. by Gerhard Birkfellner, *Schriften des Komitees der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zur Förderung der slawischen Studien*, 16 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1993) pp. 25–41 (pp. 32–33); cf. Podskalsky, *Christentum und theologische Literatur*, p. 27, on the reasons against Tmutarakan.

37 We are told in *Vita Basilii* (Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia*, 5. 97, pp. 342–44) that after a miracle had been performed by the Byzantine Archbishop in front of the Rus', the Rus' abandoned all

known in wider circles, that from the Byzantine perspective there was no decisive ‘Christianisation’ of the Rus’ with Volodimer’s baptism around 989.³⁸ This event, so famous in later Rus’ and even Scandinavian historical writings from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards, went totally unnoticed in Byzantine sources.³⁹ From their perspective, an Archbishopric had been established among the Rus’ around 867/70 and existed there continuously,⁴⁰ and some scholars have considered it reasonable to assume that, in reality, there actually was such continuity.⁴¹

Thus, behind the simplified picture presented in twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources, both Frankish Christianity and Orthodox — ‘Varangian’ — Christianity were important factors in the early stages of Christianity in Scandinavia and Rus’. Nevertheless, neither of these two were of any importance before the 830s and neither succeeded in establishing a dominant position before the end of the tenth century. In light of this, I will now turn to a possible third factor.

doubts and began to be baptized. The formulations imply that they had continued with that ever since. Constantine’s grandfather, Emperor Basil I, Patriarch Ignatius, and the unnamed Archbishop had, from this perspective, converted the Rus’ once and for all.

- 38 A few decades into the eleventh century, the Arabic-Christian historian Yahya of Antioch mentions the baptism of Volodimer and those in his realm (Peter Kawerau, *Arabische Quellen zur Christianisierung Russlands* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasswitz, 1967), p. 14–19), but this does not contradict the official position of the Byzantine authorities since it concerns only the baptism, not the foundation of a new church. Greek clerics might have had a hard time among the Rus’ during the previous years since, as Yahya of Antioch implies, Volodimer had parted with the Bulgarians in hostilities against the Byzantines. For more information on the role of baptism among the Rus’ (and Varangians), see later in this article. The whole operation must be seen in the light of the rebellion of Bardas Phokas, when Emperor Basil II badly needed the Varangian/Rus’ troops, but could not lay the fate of the Empire in the hands of the unbaptised, which in the propaganda would have had the same semantic meaning as ‘pagans’, see Andrzej Poppe, ‘The Political Background to the Baptism of Rus’: Byzantine-Russian Relations between 986–89’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 30 (1976), 195–244 (p. 201); and Podskalsky, *Christentum und theologische Literatur*, pp. 17–24.
- 39 Andrzej Poppe’s judgement in this connection seems to address the core of the problem: ‘The idea of “source” has been rather freely interpreted by many historians: later materials (from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries) have been evaluated on the same level as the primary sources’ (‘The Political Background’, p. 201, note 15).
- 40 Poppe, ‘The Political Background’, p. 201, Podskalsky, *Christentum und theologische Literatur*, p. 14, note 61; and Müller, *Die Taufe Russlands*, pp. 65–66.
- 41 See for instance Samuel H. Cross’s review of G. Laehr, *Die Anfänge des russischen Reiches (Politische Geschichte im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert)* (Berlin: E. Ebering, 1930) in *Speculum*, 7 (1932), 138–40 (p. 140): ‘it is not so certain that Christian activities ceased entirely in Kiev after its capture by Oleg, especially on account of the proofs of the existence of a considerable group of Christians in Kiev supplied by the Treaty of 944’. The Russian tradition is of course on this point governed by the idea of a conversion of Rus’ under Volodimer, and the beginning of the Metropolitan see of the Rus’ is lost in the distant past, but here too the Patriarch Photius is identified as providing a starting point for the conversion. The information in the chronicles is however very confused from a chronological point of view, placing Photius in the time of Volodimer, see Müller, *Die Taufe Russlands*, p. 61; Oleg M. Rapov, *Russkaia cerkov v IX — pervoi treti XII veka: priniatie christianstva* (Moscow: Vysshshaia shkola, 1988), pp. 281–82; Fedor B. Poliakov, ‘Die Auffassung der byzantinischen Mission in der lokalen hagiographischen Überlieferung über den Heiligen Leontij von Rostov’, in *Tausend Jahre Christentum in Russland*, ed. by Karl Christian Felmy and others (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), pp. 445–59 (pp. 450–53); Edgar Hösch, ‘Griechische Bischöfe in Altrußland’, in *Zwischen Christianisierung und Europäisierung: Beiträge zur Geschichte Osteuropas in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Festschrift für Peter Nitsche zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by Eckhard Hübner, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des östlichen Europa, 51 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998), pp. 201–20 (pp. 210–14).

Medieval Scythia

From the latter part of the ninth century there seems to be a clear tension between Rome and Constantinople over the concepts of *Sueones* and *Rhos*; Patriarch Photius acted almost like a first Anti-Normanist by disregarding the claims of the Latin Church among the Rus'. Yet there is also a third concept in play: when in 936 Archbishop Unni of Bremen died in Birka in what today is central Sweden, an almost contemporary monk in the Saxon monastery Corvey noted this, but instead of Birka or *Sueonia* he referred to the place of his death as being *in Scythiam*.⁴² The question, then, is what did this tenth-century Frankish monk have in mind?

Scythia is a geographical concept of impressive durability. As a name for the part of Europe north of the Black Sea from the Danube to the Don, it was already well-established when Herodotos wrote about it in the fifth century B.C., and it was probably already very old by then.⁴³ One thousand years later, it had the same meaning when Jordanes wrote about the Goths in the middle of the sixth century.⁴⁴ By this time, it is certain that the term 'Scythians' had started to be attributed to any group beyond the Danube coming into contact with the Greek-Roman world.⁴⁵ For instance, the Goths are said by Procopius to have been called Scythians previously, because all groups who lived in that area were called Scythians.⁴⁶

To Jordanes, *Scythia* was a political entity over which *Ermanarik* had ruled (*imperavit*) and over which Attila had been *regnator*. He treated *Germania* and *Scythia* as two equal entities separated by a border in Weichsel, stating that Ermanaric 'ruled over all nations in *Scythia* and *Germania*'.⁴⁷ Several centuries later *Germania*'s eastern border still went in Weichsel.⁴⁸ Even when Otto III

42 *Die Corveyer Annalen*, s.a. 936, ed. by Joseph Prinz (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1982), p. 113 and table 7.

43 Cf. Esther Jacobson, *The Art of the Scythians: Interpenetration of Cultures at the Edge of the Hellenic World*, *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 8,2 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 29–51; Boris N. Grakow, *Die Skythen* (Berlin: Deutscher Vlg. der Wissenschaften, 1978); Ellis H. Minns, *Scythians and Greeks: A Survey of Ancient History and Archaeology on the North Coast of the Euxine from the Danube to the Caucasus* (New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1971[1913]).

44 Jordanes, *Getica*, 30–32, 45, and 123–25, in *Jordanis Romana et Getica*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, *MGH, Auctores antiquissimi*, 5,1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1882), pp. 61–62, 65, and 89–90, the latter of which demonstrates the eastern borders of *Scythia* through the story of how the Huns entered this land that until then was unknown to them, over the Sea of Azov. For more on this subject see Henrik Janson, 'Nordens kristnande och Skytiens undergång', in *Från Bysans till Norden*, pp. 165–217 (p. 185). The concept could also be used more loosely to designate most of the North-Central Eurasia, but in a stricter sense the region spanned from the Danube (and Weichsel) to the Don (and the Urals).

45 In my opinion it had always been the case, see Janson, 'Nordens kristnande', pp. 178–86; and Henrik Janson, 'The Christianisation of Scandinavia and the End of Scythia', in *Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy: 2009 god* (Moscow: Indrik, 2010), pp. 197–210 (pp. 207–8).

46 Procopius of Caesaria, *Werke 2: Gotenkriege*, 4. 5–6, ed. by O. Veh (München: Heimeran, 1966), pp. 736–55 (p. 738).

47 Jordanes, *Getica*, 120, p. 89: '[...] omnibus Scythiae et Germaniae nationibus [...] imperavit'.

48 Janson, 'Nordens kristnande', p. 186.

in 997 called for Gerbert d'Aurillac — Archbishop of Reims and later Pope Sylvester II — to join his court, Gerbert, often regarded as the most learned of men in the tenth century, enthusiastically penned the famous words 'Ours, ours is the Roman Empire', naming the realms in question, i.e. Europe outside the Greek Byzantine Empire and the Muslim Spain: *Italia, Gallia, Germania* and *Scythia*.⁴⁹

Accordingly, both *Scythia* and *Germania* seem to have been territories with an extremely stable position in the European geography well into the Early Middle Ages. However, Scandinavia's position in this respect was not as stable. In 98 A.D. Tacitus had included major parts of Scandinavia and the Baltics in his *Germania*, but in the Early Middle Ages the perspective seems to have shifted somewhat. The sources now distinguished between *Scythia minor* and *Scythia (maior)*. *Scythia minor* designated the former Roman province on the western Black Sea shore south of the Danube, now known as Dobrogea. Its ecclesiastical centre was in the Metropolitan town *Tomis*, founded during the Gothic era. *Scythia (maior)* was Scythia proper; the position of *Tomis* on the very edge of the huge *Scythia (maior)* but beyond it, is reminiscent of the position of Mainz in lesser *Germania* on the Roman side of the Rhine, later the base for Boniface, who became 'the apostle of the Germans' in *Germania* proper, *Germania magna*. To some extent, it also has resonances with Hamburg (and Bremen) on the edge of the Frankish Empire, and perhaps also Dory (*Doros*) on Crimea in the eparchy of *Gothia* in the eighth century.⁵⁰ However, due to the continuous invasions and violence in the Danube area during the Early Middle Ages, *Tomis* was often isolated and eventually ended up under the rule of the Bulgarian princes.

In late Roman times and in the first centuries of the Middle Ages, there is sometimes a certain degree of uncertainty as to whether the name *Scythia* in the sources refers to *Scythia minor* or *Scythia (maior)*. In the seventh century, however, due to large social and political changes that were taking place in the area beginning in the late sixth century,⁵¹ the name *Scythia minor* largely fell out of use. Around 700 we instead find the anonymous geographer of Ravenna identifying the island of *Scandza* — mentioned by Jordanes as the place from which the Goths originated — as 'Old Scythia' (*Scythia antiqua*).⁵²

Under the year 907 the *PVL* mentions the Varangians first among the peoples that the Greeks counted as being part of *Scythia maior*.⁵³ Furthermore, it can be noted that immediately after the attack on Constantinople in 860 Patriarch Photius

49 *Lettres de Gerbert (983–997)*, ed. by Julien Havet, Collection de textes pour servir à l'étude et à l'enseignement de l'histoire, 6 (Paris, 1889), p. 237.

50 Alexander A. Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea*, Monographs of the Medieval Academy of America, 11 (Cambridge, MA, 1936), pp. 97–104.

51 Alexandru Madgearu, 'The End of Town-life in Scythia Minor', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 20,2 (2001), 207–17.

52 *Ravennatis anonymi cosmographia et Guidonis geographia*, 1. 12, ed. by J. Schnetz, *Itineraria Romana*, 2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1940), p. 11.

53 PSRL, 1, cols. 30–31; *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, pp. 64–65.

had referred to the aggressors as Scythians.⁵⁴ It was only when he got back to the subject in his encyclical letter of 867, and boasted that they were now allies of the Empire and had received a bishop, that he called them ‘Rhos’.

Another example that indicates Scandinavia’s close link to the geographical concept of *Scythia* comes from the mid-eleventh century. According to the Byzantine chronicler John Scylitzes, Prince Volodimer of Novgorod unleashed his fury against the Byzantines in 1043, and Scylitzes declared that the reason was that an ‘illustrious *Scyth*’ had been killed in a conflict that arose amongst traders in the Empire. The focus of his account lies with the still-young Prince Volodimer, and there is no mention of his father Grand Prince Iaroslav the Wise of Kiev, even though there can be no doubt that the whole operation was directed and sanctioned by Iaroslav.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Scylitzes places the responsibility for the episode solely with Prince Volodimer stating that he had exploded in anger and decided to attack Constantinople. Scylitzes describes how the prince immediately gathered all his troops, and called in also ‘a considerable number of the people inhabiting the islands to the north of the ocean’, which obviously refers to Scandinavia. Scylitzes furthermore informs us that the ‘Scythian’ merchants dwelling in the capital were dispersed into the themes and placed under armed guard. Speaking of Volodimer’s fleet, he states that the ‘Scythians’ dwelled in their ships at a location on the southern shore of the Black Sea.⁵⁶

There was a reason why Scylitzes did not use the concept of Rus’ explicitly in this account. There was a special relationship between the illustrious *Scyth* that had been killed, the *Scythian* merchants in Byzantium, Volodimer of Novgorod, and finally the peoples from the islands north of the ocean. A conflict with them was to some extent a conflict with the Rus’, but they did not actually fit Scylitzes’s political concept in the middle of the eleventh century; rather, in his eyes they were *Scythians*. It all seems to be part of a desire to free Grand Prince Iaroslav and the Rus’ from all responsibility for the attack, and instead lay the blame on Volodimer and the ‘Scythians’. In all probability this also would have been the version that Iaroslav himself preferred.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *The Homilies of Photius*, 3. 3, p. 89.

⁵⁵ For the political background and the intense, far-reaching network of alliances that was built up in Europe around the attack of 1043 — which actually became something of a turning point for the political development of the North — see Henrik Janson, *Templum nobilissimum: Adam av Bremen, Uppsalatemplet and konfliktlinjerna i Europa kring år 1075*, Avhandlingar från Historiska institutionen i Göteborg, 21 (Göteborg, 1998), pp. 133–52; cf. Jonathan Shepard, ‘Why did the Russians Attack Byzantium in 1043?’, *Byzantinisch Neugreichische Jahrbücher*, 22 (1977–84), 147–212.

⁵⁶ Johannes Scylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, ed by I. Thurn, *Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae* 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), pp. 430–31. Cf. Janson, ‘Nordens kristnande’, p. 200, with notes 134 and 135.

⁵⁷ Whether or not it was because of his role as scapegoat, Volodimer actually never recovered from the catastrophic experience of 1043, and neither were the relations between northern Rus’ and Scandinavia ever to be the same again, see Janson, *Templum nobilissimum*, pp. 155–62 with note 533.

In the mid 1070s, approximately at the same time as Scylitzes gave this report, Adam of Bremen, writing from a more western perspective, stated that beyond the Danish islands, ‘another world’ (*alter mundus*) was opening up that was almost unknown in his part of the world.⁵⁸ The traveller here entered into what he called the *Scythian Sea*,⁵⁹ and here began the Scythian world. From here, the Scythian Bay ‘stretched over long distances through Scythian regions all the way to Greece’ (*longo tractu per Scithicas regiones tendatur usque in Greciam*).⁶⁰

This scattered evidence seems to suggest that up to the middle of the eleventh century the concept of *Scythia* and the *Scythians* could be used as something more than merely a learned reference to an antiquated ethnonym. It could contain still some cultural — and, in some cases, perhaps even political — significance, and the sphere it designated could include Scandinavia. In this respect the evidence from the written sources is supported by the archaeological material, which indicates strong eastern connections for Scandinavia until the end of the tenth century.⁶¹ Consequently, when in the middle of the tenth century a monk from Corvey referred to Birka in Lake Mälaren as a place located *in Scithiam*, there is reason to believe that to him *Scythia* was something more than a mere learned allusion to classical literature. There are good reasons to think that as far as this monk was concerned, *Scythia* referred to a vast cultural sphere beyond the horizon of the Frankish and the Byzantine Empires, in which at least the eastern parts of Scandinavia could be included.

Scythian Christianity

As was addressed in earlier paragraphs, in connection with the baptism of Harold Bluetooth Widukind of Corvey said that the Danes had been *christiani* since ancient times. Writing on the same subject some decades later, Thietmar of Merseburg indicated not only that they had been Christians before but also that they had deviated from the proper religion of their forefathers. Seen from this perspective, the religion of the Danes was a mutation of the proper form of Christianity held by their predecessors. This was the perspective on the Danish religion before Harald’s conversion around the end of the first millennium, and how this is to be understood is still open for discussion.

58 Adam, *Gestae*, 4. 21, p. 250.

59 Adam, *Gestae*, 2. 18; 2. 21–22; 4. 10, with Schol. 116, pp. 73–81 and 237–38. In Schol. 123 we find an interesting distinction between *Scythia* and *Sueonia* proper, for Emund, King of the *Sueones*, sent his son King (!) Anund to *Scythia (in Scithiam)* to expand the Empire (*ad dilatandum imperium*).

60 Adam, *Gestae*, 4. 10, p. 237.

61 T. J. Arne, *La Suède et l’Orient: études archéologiques sur les relations de la Suède et de l’Orient pendant l’âge des vikings*, Archives d’études orientales, 8 (Uppsala, 1914); Sture Bolin, ‘Muhammed, Karl den store och Rurik’, *Scandia*, 12 (1939), 181–222; Ingmar Jansson, ‘Situationen i Norden och Östeuropa för 1000 år sedan – en arkeologs synpunkter på frågan om östkristna inflytanden under missionstiden’, in *Från Bysans till Norden*, pp. 37–95.

In *Vita Ansgarii* we are told that what triggered the intense ‘missionary’ activities from the Frankish side around 830 was an embassy from the *Sueones* to the Frankish Emperor, probably in 829. Among other things, this embassy had informed the Emperor that there were ‘many among their people’ (*multos in gente sua*) who wished to receive ‘the cult of the Christian religion’ (*christianae religionis cultum*), and even the king was inclined to allow God’s priests to reside there if they were found worthy.⁶² These are the words of the *Sueones* as filtered through the language of a high ranking cleric of the Frankish Church. The *Sueones* have most certainly not spoken of ‘God’s priests’, but of Frankish priests, and most probably they did not speak of ‘the cult of the Christian religion’ but rather of services according to Frankish observance. What is clear though from this passage is that there were ‘many’ (*multi*) *Sueones* that were well-acquainted with and well-disposed to Christianity even before Ansgar’s arrival around 830. In fact, this should come as no surprise since the archaeological material has long indicated that there were Christian components in Scandinavian society for centuries before the official conversion.⁶³

Around 840, Walafrid Strabo, the abbot of Reichenau, tried to explain why there were Greek words, such as the rather fundamental word *kyrica*, ‘church’, in his own language, before turning to the matter of the Goths. According to the abbot, the Goths had been converted to Christianity early on, ‘if not the right way’, when they lived in the provinces of the Greek, and they had ‘our i.e. the Teutonic language’. Through the work of this people, according to Walafrid, holy books were translated into their language, and these monuments could still be found (that is, in the ninth century) among some peoples. Next came the most sensational information: trustworthy monastic brothers had informed him that ‘among some of the Scythian peoples’ (*apud quasdam Scytharum gentes*), especially the Tomitans, the Divine Service was still today (*hactenus*) celebrated in this language’.⁶⁴

62 Rimbart, *Vite Ansgarii*, 9, pp. 34–35. I have hesitated in translating the word *religio* as ‘religion’ here because the modern connotations of that word are more far-reaching than they were in the Middle Ages when *religio* rather meant something like ‘observance’, ‘reverence’ or ‘piety’.

63 Wilhelm Holmqvist, ‘Was There a Christian Mission to Sweden before Ansgar?’, *Early Medieval Studies*, 8 (1975), 33–55. See also Brita Malmer, ‘Kristna symboler på danska mynt ca 825–1050’, in *Kristendommen i Danmark før 1050*, ed. by Niels Lund (Roskilde: Roskilde Museums Forlag, 2004), pp. 75–85 (pp. 75–78), who identifies old Christian symbols on Danish coins from the 820s, which obviously had nothing to do with Ansgar, see Niels Lund, ‘Mission i Danmark før Harald Blåtands dåp’, in *Kristendommen i Danmark før 1050*, ed. by Niels Lund (Roskilde: Roskilde Museums Forlag, 2004), pp. 20–27 (p. 25). Malmer’s interpretation has however been challenged by Ildar H. Garipzanov, ‘Frontier Identities: Carolingian Frontier and Gens Danorum’, in *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by Ildar H. Garipzanov and others (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 113–42 (p. 136–39).

64 Walafrid Strabo, *Libellus de exordiis et incrementis quarundam in observationibus ecclesiasticis rerum*, ed. by Alfred Boretius and Viktor Krause, MGH, Legum Sectio, 2,2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1897), p. 473–516 (col. 927): ‘Si autem quaeritur qua occasione ad nos vestigia haec Graecitatis advenerint, dicendum et Barbaros in Romana republica militasse, et multos praedicatorum Graecae et Latinae locutionis peritos, inter has bestias cum erroribus pugnatos venisse: et eis pro causis, multa nostros

The question then is, which peoples in *Scythia* were celebrating the mass in Gothic in the early ninth century? There is no obvious answer to this question. Possibly such masses could have been celebrated in Tomis — if the ‘Tomitans’ were actually still in the city after the Bulgarian invasions — but Walafrid speaks about a plurality of peoples, and in that case there seems only to be two Germanic-speaking possibilities left:⁶⁵ the Goths in the Crimea region and the Scandinavian world. Yet Walafrid would have had hardly any knowledge about the Crimea.⁶⁶ It furthermore seems unlikely that with the phrase *quasdam Scytharum gentes* he would have been referring to the Goths themselves.⁶⁷ What was this Christianity of *Scythia* celebrated in a Germanic language?

The first (known) bishop of Tomis and *Scythia (minor)* was Theophilus, ‘bishop of the Goths’, who signed the statement of the Council of Nicaea against the Arians in 325.⁶⁸ When the Arian Goths under the next (known) bishop of the Goths, Wulfila travelled to more secure Roman areas during a period of insurrection from the Huns in the 370s, an Orthodox branch of the Goths still remained around and beyond the Danube.⁶⁹ In Constantinople by this time, the Goths were viewed as the filthiest of barbarians and it caused some resentment in the Imperial City when in around 400 Patriarch John Chrysostom provided a group of these Orthodox Goths with a church outside the City and allowed them to worship and preach in their own Gothic language. He even took part in some of these ceremonies himself and engaged, through interpreters, in intimate discussions with the Goths.⁷⁰

Consequently, at the beginning of the fifth century the liturgical Gothic tongue had been sanctioned by the highest authority, and this seems to have contributed

quae prius non noverant utilia didicisse, praecipueque a Gothis, qui et Getae, cum eo tempore, quo ad fidem Christi, licet non recto itinere, perducti sunt, in Graecorum provinciis commorantes nostrum, id est Theoticum sermonem habuerint. Et (ut historiae testantur) postmodum studiosi illius gentis, divinos libros in suae locutionis proprietatem transtulerint, quorum adhuc monumenta apud nonnullos habentur. Et fidelium fratrum relatione didicimus, apud quasdam Scytharum gentes maxime Tomitanos eadem locutione, divina hactenus celebrari officia.’

65 It has to be noted though that the groups using this liturgy must not necessarily have been primarily Germanic speaking.

66 The possibility cannot of course be totally ruled out, but until the 860s the knowledge in the West about the Greek world was astonishingly meagre. Even the envoys sent by Nicholas I to Constantinople in 861 to negotiate with Patriarch Photius I did not know Greek, see *Anastasioi bibliothecarii epistolae sive praefationes*, ed. by E. Perels and G. Laehr, MGH, Epistolae, 7 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1928), pp. 395–442 (p. 405).

67 Walafrid’s teacher was the learned Abbot Hrabanus Maurus of Fulda who in the 830s was engaged in (Arch)bishop Gautbert’s work on establishing a new Church in *Sueonia*, sending books, bells, priestly garments and so on to Gautbert in *Sueonia*, see Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, p. 700, note 2. As tutor of the young Charles the Bald, Walafrid would probably have been present at court when the delegation from the *Sueones* turned up in Worms in 829 and when Ansgar arrived with a rune-letter from the *rex Sueonum* a couple of years later. Archbishop Ebbo of Reims, one of the very few, maybe the only of higher rank in the Frankish church who had entered the Scandinavian world before the 830s might also have been a source of information.

68 Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea*, pp. 11–18.

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

to a strong Orthodox Gothic Church in the following generations. Well over a century later around the year 520, deeply learned and orthodox Gothic⁷¹ monks appeared in Constantinople and in Rome to instigate a long-lasting and extremely complicated discussion in the Imperial Church regarding the most subtle aspects of the Trinity. They were well suited for this task since in *Scythia minor* on the fringe of the Empire where they came from, they were constantly clashing with various heresies.⁷² In these years, the Church of *Scythia minor* seems to have operated as a consolidating and expanding missionary structure heading north and east, still with the bishop of *Tomis* as its metropolitan.⁷³ At the end of the sixth century, however, due to invading ‘barbarians’ (often referred to as Avars and Slavs) this structure was beginning to disintegrate. Only the coastal towns prevailed, and *Tomis* in particular, even if they were relatively isolated from its previous hinterland.⁷⁴

During these first Christian centuries, the word ‘Scythian’ became almost synonymous with ‘Gothic’. The Goths who were attacked by the Huns were called ‘Scythians’ by the contemporary writers Eunapius in around 400 and Zosimus in around 500, while the Goths whom John Chrysostom welcomed in Constantinople were called ‘Scythians’ by the contemporary writer Theodoret of Cyrus.⁷⁵ Even the Gothic monks who initiated the Trinitarian controversy around 520 were called ‘Scythians’. Indeed, the whole debate has been referred to as ‘the Scythian controversy’.⁷⁶ Perhaps the reluctance on the part of these writers to use the name ‘Goths’ for these Orthodox Christian Goths was the result of the intimate connection between this name and the Gothic Arians within the Empire.⁷⁷

71 Viktor Schurr, *Die Trinitätslehre des Boethius im Lichte der ‘skythischen Kontroversen’*, *Forschungen zur Christlichen Literatur und Dogmengeschichte*, 17,1 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1935), p. 143.

72 Cf. for example Schurr, *Die Trinitätslehre*, p. 148: ‘Sicher ist dass den Skythen [i.e. the Scythian monks and theologians] eine häretische Sinnedeutung ferne lag: Sie waren schärfste Gegner der Eutychaner, Severianer und Henotiker.’

73 Emelian Popescu, ‘Die kirchliche Organisation der Provinz Scythia Minor vom vierten bis ins sechste Jahrhundert’, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 38 (1988), pp. 75–94 (p. 93): ‘Die Missionstätigkeit der Donaunistümer der Scythia [minor] und vor allem die des Bistum von Tomis wird von zahlreichen christlichen Denkmäler bestätigt’. Linda Ellis, ‘Elusive Places: A Chorological Approach to Identity and Territory in Scythia Minor (2nd – 7th centuries)’, in *Romans, Barbarians and the Transformation of the Roman World: Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity: Biennial Conference on Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 241–52 (pp. 247–52).

74 Madgearu, ‘The End of Town-life’, p. 214: ‘Ruralization began in the last two decades of the 6th century and continued through the first two decades of the next. One of its final results was to wipe out the differences between the territory of the South-Danubian provinces and the barbarian North-Danubian area.’ Cf. Ellis, ‘Elusive Places’ (p. 251).

75 Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea*, pp. 24, 26, and 32.

76 Schurr, *Die Trinitätslehre*; Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, II, 1: *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604)* (London: Mowbray, 1987), pp. 317–43.

77 J. H. W. G. Liebschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 153; Ralph W. Mathiesen, ‘Barbarian Bishops and the Churches “in barbaricis gentibus” during Late Antiquity’, *Speculum*, 72 (1997), 664–97 (pp. 679 and 693, with note 193); and Janson, ‘Nordens kristnande’, p. 189.

Under these circumstances, when in the sixth-century church of Tomis was at its peak, the term *Scythia* had almost become a nation-building feature among the inhabitants of *Scythia minor*, and they began to be referred to as ‘Scythians’.⁷⁸ The invasions of around 600 brought a sudden end to this development, and the terms ‘Scythia’ and ‘Scythians’ rapidly returned to their broader geographical meaning, so that in the middle of the ninth century Patriarch Photius, as we have seen, was not afraid of any confusion when using the term ‘Scythians’ as designation for a new kind of ‘barbarians’ from the north, the Rhos. Subsequently, in 936 Archbishop Unni was said to have died in Birka *in Scythiam*.

What happened to the Orthodox Gothic Church in the turmoil of the invasions of the seventh and eighth centuries is not known. A solitary voice is the anonymous geographer of Ravenna who in around 700 gave voice to the associations that had developed around the Scythian name and identity during the previous period. He stated that several geographers called Scandinavia *Scythia Antiqua*⁷⁹ which indicates some kind of imagined Gothic connection between *Scythia minor* and Scandinavia, probably along similar lines to those expressed by Jordanes’ *Getica* at the time when the society of the very learned ‘Scythian monks’ was at its peak in the mid-sixth century. Only in the ninth century through Walafrid Strabo do we hear again about religious communities in *Scythia* that used books and liturgy written in ‘Gothic’.

Concluding Remarks

How far into Scythia had the Tomitan or ‘Scythian’ Church actually reached? Today there is no clear answer to that question. Nevertheless, what Walafrid says about books and liturgy written in the ‘Gothic’ language and used among some of the peoples of *Scythia* implies that these Scythian, i.e. ‘Gothic’, churches were still a factor in the religious life of *Scythia* towards the middle of the ninth century. However, if we look at *Scythia* in the classical sense as the region north of the Black Sea between the Danube and the Don in the first millennium AD, there were probably also many other factors. In fact, there is fairly good evidence to suggest that the Apostle Andrew, or others very close to him in time, had brought Christianity to *Scythia* only a few decades after the death of Jesus.⁸⁰ Additionally, just a century or so later, Tertullian explained that throughout the ancient world, people had come to believe in Jesus, and mentioning the Spainiards, the nations of the Gauls, the Britons — inaccessible to the Romans but subjugated to Christ — the Sarmatians, Dacians, Germanians and Scythians, ‘and of many remote nations, provinces, and islands, many unknown to us, which we can scarcely enumerate.

78 Ellis, ‘Elusive Places’, pp. 250–51.

79 *Ravennatis anonymi cosmographia*, 1. 12, p. 11.

80 Francis Dvornik, *The Idea of Apostolicity in Byzantium and the Legend of Apostle Andrew* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 199 and 208–9.

In all these places the name of Christ already arrived, to whom the city gates are open, and to whom none are closed'.⁸¹ This enthusiastic account may however be exaggerated somewhat, for a contemporary of Tertullian, Origen, writes that there still were 'very many' among the Britons, the Germanic people by the ocean, Dacians, Sarmatians, and Scythians who had not been reached by the Word.⁸² In the fourth century, Christian churches were well established on the northern shores of the Black Sea,⁸³ and by the seventh century it was probably hard to find any political body far beyond the Black Sea region that had never been subject to any Christian influences whatsoever.⁸⁴ The Huns, the Avars and the Magyars had all been exposed to Christianity before their entry into *Scythia* and the Danube area;⁸⁵ and indeed, by this time the Nestorians had even established a Christian Church in China.⁸⁶ What then about Christianity in *Scythia*?

It was pointed out many years ago by the Cambridge historian Nikolay Andreyev that the 'Christianisation' of Rus' under Volodimer was not made 'into an uncultured soil, into a wild desert, but into a powerful community [...] which in some sectors had long maintained contacts with other civilizations'.⁸⁷ The same goes of course for the Scandinavian North, and there is little doubt that one of these 'sectors' was Christianity. In *Scythia* proper — that is, the region north of the Black Sea between the Danube and the Don, and which sometimes included Scandinavia — there was probably a broad array of Christian influences during the first millennium AD, and probably a multitude of diverse internal developments, but there was no dominant institutionalised Church organisation during this period.

What traces might there be of such Christian influences? Let me end this discussion by pointing to two hypothetical possibilities. First, the *prima signatio* — or, as it is called in Swedish, *primsigning* — is a well-known component of the picture of the traditional violent Viking, who, still fundamentally an Old Norse pagan, suddenly discovers that it is easier to make good business with the Christians if you become *primsigned*. There are, however, reasons to think that it was more than just a practical matter, for in the early Church baptism was not seen as absolutely

81 Tertullianus, *Adversus iudaeos*, 7. 4–5, ed. by H. Tränkle (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1964), p. 14.

82 Origenes, *Commentary to Mathew*, cited after *A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth century A.D.: With an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies*, ed. by Henry Wace, and William C. Piercy (London: Hendrickson, 1911), p. 785. Cf. Mircea Pacurariu, *Geschichte der Rumänischen Orthodoxen Kirche*, Oikonoimia: Quellen und Studien zur orthodoxen Theologie, 33 (Erlangen: Lehrstuhl für Geschichte und Theologie des christlichen Ostens, 1994), p. 22.

83 Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea*, pp. 4–21.

84 Gyula Moravcsik, 'Byzantine Christianity and the Magyars in the Period of Their Migration', *American Slavic and East European Review*, 5, 3–4 (1946), 29–45.

85 Moravcsik, 'Byzantine Christianity', pp. 35–39.

86 Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1: *Beginnings to 1500* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), pp. 287–323.

87 Nikolay Andreyev, 'Pagan and Christian Elements in Old Russia', *Slavic Review*, 21, 1 (1962), 16–23 (p. 18).

necessary for salvation. Many postponed their baptism for years or decades because of the cleansing effects of the sacrament, and those who died unbaptised could still achieve salvation on the basis of their desire to be baptised.⁸⁸ What was necessary though was the catechumenate, known as *cristning* in Old English, a term that is evidence in itself of how important this ceremony actually was.⁸⁹

Infant baptism had become the norm in the Roman-Frankish and the Byzantine world already by the fifth century. It is all the more astonishing to find the catechumenate as an institution in the middle of the ninth century in Scandinavia practised just as it was in the fourth century. In Archbishop Rimbert's *Vita Angarii* from around 870 we read of a peculiarity of the Christian Danes in Slesvig around 850. Rimbert explains that they were willing to receive the sign of the cross in order to become catechumens. This gave them the right to enter the church and join in divine services, but they postponed the reception of baptism. They thought it better to be baptised at the end of their life, so that, after having been cleansed from sins and redeemed, they might enter the gates of eternal life pure and spotless without any delay.⁹⁰ How the Danes had come to embrace this old Christian idea — famous through the example of Constantine the Great — is not easily explained if their first contact with Christianity was with Ansgar and his successors.

This fact might very well explain, however, why King Gnupa, who — according to Widukind — ought to have been numbered among the Danes who had been Christians since ancient times, had to be baptised after his defeat against Henry I in 934. It might also very well explain how the Swedish King Olaf Eriksson 'Skötkonung' could be a Christian in the 990s as evidenced by his striking of Christian coins,⁹¹ even though a very good contemporary source proves that he actually was not baptised until 1008.⁹² It might in fact also explain how Olga could have been so aware of Christian law, if we were to believe the story about her baptism in *PVL*. She was at least baptised at a well chosen point in life, and seems to have made that decision herself. It might also throw new light on the distinction between the 'baptised' and 'unbaptised' in the treaty between Rus' and Constantinople of 944, with which I began this article.

What Rimbert spoke about in *Vita Angarii* might consequently have been something more than a temporary abnormality in the Christian world of the Northmen. In fact, it seems to have been the norm for the upper strata of society

88 Lawrence D. Folkemer, 'A Study of the Catechumenate', *Church History*, 15 (1946), 286–307 (p. 290, note 29): 'There was an intense fear of post-baptismal sin among many of the ancients'.

89 Joseph H. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 61–62.

90 Rimbert, *Vita Ansgarii*, 24, pp. 51–53.

91 Brita Malmer, *Den svenska mynthistorien: Vikingatiden ca 995–1030* (Stockholm: Kungliga Myntkabinettet, 2010).

92 Janson, 'Konfliktlinjer', pp. 216–17. Even Adam of Bremen seems to have been aware of this practice, since when speaking of the conversion of Harold Bluetooth, who as we have seen was baptised in the 960s, he says that Harold was converted already by Archbishop Unni in the 930s, even though he postponed the baptism, see Adam, *Gestae*, 1. 59, pp. 57–58.

through most of the tenth century, and in fact it was still preserved in the slightly lower social strata in some parts of Scandinavia until the second half of the eleventh century. By this time, phrases resembling the language of *Vita Ansgarii* were appearing on Upplandic rune stones about people who had died ‘in white robes’, i.e. in baptismal dress.⁹³

On the basis of *Vita Ansgarii* it could be suggested that the important role of the catechumenate in the ‘Scythian world’ might have been more than a temporary fraud on the part of the Old Norse — or Old Slavonic for that matter — ‘pagans’. It was possibly a fundamental part of Scythian culture in the Viking Age, and in eleventh-century Uppland it was perhaps a cultural trace (amongst others) of the old mixture that had comprised Christianity in Scythia.

As we have seen, it already posed a problem to Walafrid Strabo in around 840 as to how the Greek word *κυριακόν* could have ended up in his own language as the word for the house of the Lord, *kyrica* ‘church’. Indeed, this is the word for ‘church’ in all Germanic languages, except the language of Wulfila’s Arian Goths. For them as for all other Mediterranean Churches including the Nestorian Church of Persia, in the Arabic, and in the ‘Celtic’ Churches as far as Ireland, the word for God’s house was derived from the Greek word *εκκλησία*: which becomes the Latin *ecclesia* and the Arian Gothic *aikklesjo* or *basilica*. This is strange enough, but even more remarkable is that in Greek, usage the word *κυριακόν* peaked around the year 300, especially under Constantine the Great (306–37), but then disappeared during the fourth century.⁹⁴ It is furthermore quite clear that the word must have been taken up directly from the Greek into a Germanic language, obviously in a region bordering, or which interacted closely with the Greek Church.⁹⁵ Consequently there is overwhelming scholarly agreement from Walafrid Strabo onwards over the fact that the word *kyrica* was adopted before the end, or even middle of the fourth century among the Danubian Goths or the ‘Scythians’ as they were usually called in the fifth and sixth centuries.⁹⁶

93 Michael Lerche Nielsen, ‘Runesten og Religionsskifte’, in *Kristendommen i Danmark før 1050*, ed. by Niels Lund (Roskilde: Roskilde Museums Forlag, 2004), pp. 95–102 (p. 100).

94 Hadrian Allcroft, *Circle and the Cross: A Study in Continuity*, II: *The Cross* (London: Macmillan, 1930), p. 383; Knut Schäferdiek, ‘kirihha-*cyrica- *κυριακόν*: Zum geschichtlichen Hintergrund einer Etymologie’, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 106 (1984), 46–50 (p. 47); D. H. Green, ‘From Germania to Europe: The Evidence of Language and History’, *The Modern Language Review*, 92 (1997), xxix–xxxvii (p. xxxv); and Janson, ‘Nordens kristnande’, p. 198.

95 Elias Wessén, ‘Om den äldsta kristna terminologien i de germanska fornspråken’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 40 (1928), 75–108; Green, ‘From Germania to Europe’, p. xxxv: ‘That there is in fact a connection between the Greek word and Germanic word [...] there can be no doubt’.

96 Over the years there have been different isolated efforts to try to challenge this broad agreement. One of the more elaborate of these was an attempt to connect Church with the ‘*circus*’ as set forth by Allcroft, *Circle and the Cross*, pp. 382–422. However, this attempt to fit the word ‘Church’ into general ideas about sacred places and gatherings in circles is pure fancy and now hopelessly obsolete. A similar approach is represented by the various sophistic endeavours to disconnect the Slavonic word *criky* from the Germanic *kyrica*, for instance by deriving the former instead from Latin *basilica*; see Gunnar Gunnarsson, *Das slavische Wort für Kirche*, Uppsala universitetets årsskrift, 7 (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1937). The attempt to move the point of contact between Greek and Germanic to Western

As *κυριακόν* disappeared from the Empire in the fourth century and *aikklesjo* was chosen among the Arian Goths,⁹⁷ *kyrica* spread quickly on the other side of the Danube through all other Germanic languages all the way to the British Isles. Early on it was also taken up from Gothic into Old Slavonic — *црькѣи* (*crīky*) — along with other Gothic loanwords.⁹⁸ For Finnish, however, *kirkko* most probably entered the language from Swedish through a historically recognisable process. Furthermore, in Swedish *kyrka* is only one of the words in key church terminology that derives from the Gothic, with others being *döpa* (Goth. *daupjan* ‘to baptise’) and (probably) *påsk* (Goth. *paska* ‘Eastern’).⁹⁹

Consequently, the word *kyrica* in itself might possibly bear witness to the importance of the Gothic or ‘Scythian’ Church beyond the Danube. In any case, from late Antiquity onwards *kyrica* became the dominant term for the ‘house of the Lord’ not only in *Germania* but also in *Scythia*. It is still a challenge to explain why, when in the third century the need arose for a *terminus technicus* with which to denote the separate houses of Christian worship, the world north of the Roman Empire came to choose a word that was different to that employed by the rest of the Christian world. It was established in the languages of the British Isles and Scandinavia over the Germanic- and Slavonic-speaking settlements of the Continent and perhaps far beyond,¹⁰⁰ during a period that is sufficiently early to challenge the established views of the ‘Christianization process’.

Europe (see Schäferdiek, ‘kirihha-*cyrica- *κυριακόν*’, pp. 46–50; and Green, ‘From Germania to Europe’, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii) lacks empirical support to suggest that the Greek word was actually used by the Church of the Latin West in the fourth century. It also lacks a convincing explanation as to why this Greek word would have been taken up into Germanic from the Latin Church of the West and to why it then spread through the Germanic speaking world at such an early date.

97 See Knut Schäferdiek, ‘Der Germanische Arianismus: Erwägungen zum geschichtlichen Verständnis’, in *Miscellanea historiae ecclesiastica*, 3, ed. by D. Baker, Bibliothéque de la revue d’histoire ecclésiastique, 50 (Lovain, 1970), pp. 71–83.

98 Antoaneta Granberg, ‘Gotiska och tidiga germanska lånord i fornkyrkoslaviska’, in *Gotisk workshop: et uformelt formidlingstræf*, 2, ed. by Mette Bruus and others (Odense: Syddansk Universitet, 2010), pp. 11–24.

99 Wessén, ‘Om den äldsta kristna terminologien’.

100 See for example *Dictionary of the Turkic Languages. English: Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tatar, Turkish, Turkmen, Uighur, Uzbek*, ed. by K. Öztopçu and others (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).