

‘Varangian Christianity’ in Tenth-century Rus’

by *Oleksiy Tolochko*

Not long ago, John Lind stressed the importance of the ‘eastern’ dimension for understanding Christianization processes in what he rightly called ‘the periphery of Christendom’.¹ Stretching from Anglo-Saxon Britain to the Byzantine Empire, this periphery was a sphere where Scandinavians were extremely active during the formative decades of the ninth and tenth centuries, the period during which the first political entities emerged and first Christian influences arrived in this area. Seen from this perspective, the region possesses a certain unity, being bound by the commercial and military pursuits of the Scandinavians. Of these, the commercial aspects are generally regarded in scholarly literature as the most important for Eastern Europe. Recent investigations into the state-formation process in Eastern Europe assign a crucial role to long-distance trade by the Scandinavians who first formed wandering mercantile and military communities, then a network of proto-urban centres to support their trade, which later served as a bedrock for the emerging Kievan state. The Scandinavians apparently were the only international group active in Eastern Europe whose enterprises enabled them to transcend the local experiences of other communities in Eastern Europe. In the course of their long-distance trade Scandinavians moved goods, people and cash between the edges of this space, and it is only natural to consider them as carriers of the key innovations (social, military or political) in the region at this time. From a historical perspective, Christianity was perhaps the most important of these innovations, and Scandinavians (known as the *Varangians* in Byzantium and Rus’) appear to have been ‘natural’ carriers and disseminators of the new faith. Being exposed to Christianity in the furthest corners of this space and also being either indifferent to or unaware of dogmatic and institutional differences between the Latin and Greek churches — or perhaps simply opportunistic — Scandinavians created a phenomenon that John Lind has termed ‘Varangian Christianity’.

The concept of ‘Varangian Christianity’ appears to be a valuable tool for understanding early traces of Christianity in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the question is: was Christianity simply another commodity of Scandinavian trade,

1 John Lind, ‘The Christianization of North and Eastern Europe c. 950–1050 — A Plea for a Comparative Study’, *Ennen & nyt*, 2004, no. 4, 1–18 <<http://www.ennenjanyt.net/4-04/lind.html>> [accessed 8 August 2011].

just like the goods and cash transported into Eastern Europe from both the Latin West and the Greek East?

This paper tests this hypothesis for the period of the tenth century. It does so on two levels: that of perception (by analyzing the message and sources of the *Life of the Varangian Martyrs*) and that of actual practice (by revisiting the Byzantine-Rus’ treaty of 944). It argues that with regard to Christianity, the *Varangians*, their northern origins notwithstanding, were viewed as part of the Byzantine world.

How Varangian is the *Life of Varangian Martyrs*?

It is a well-established view that on the eve of the conversion (the 980s), the Christian community in Kiev consisted mainly of those Scandinavians who either travelled to Byzantium on a regular basis for commercial purposes or else served in the Imperial Army as mercenaries.² This, essentially, is a scholarly rendition of the concept advanced by our principal source for ‘pre-Conversion’ events, the *Primary Chronicle*, composed in the early twelfth century. The chronicle develops an image of the gradual penetration of Christianity into the still-pagan realm of the Rus’ princes, where each new step in the dissemination of this new teaching followed a known instance of contact with Byzantium. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, the Rus’ of Kiev were first introduced to the Christianity in the wake of the campaign against Constantinople (noted in the entry for 907) and the conclusion of the Rus’-Byzantine treaty of 911. The text of the treaty is followed by the story, seemingly composed by the chronicler himself, of the pagan Rus’ envoys being compelled to undertake a tour on the major Christian sites of Constantinople, as well as instruction in Christian faith, and even appreciating some of the most important Christian relics there, among them the Passions of Christ.³ The next opportunity

2 For a general survey of Christianization among the Slavs, see Jonathan Shepard, ‘Slav Christianities, 800–1100’, in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, III: *Early Medieval Christianities, 600–1100*, ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 130–57.

3 ‘The Emperor Leo honored the Rus’ envoys with gifts of gold, palls, and robes and placed his vassals at their disposition to show them the beauties of the churches, the golden palace, and the riches contained therein. They thus showed the Rus’ much gold and many palls and jewels, together with the relics of our Lord’s Passion: the crown, the nails, and the purple robe, as well as the bones of the Saints. They also instructed the Rus’ in their faith, and expounded them of the true belief.’ ‘The Russian Primary Chronicle’, trans. by Samuel H. Cross, *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philosophy and Literature*, 12 (1930), p. 154. The story is rightly believed to be apocryphal. On the relics described, their locations and fate, which provides us with the *terminus post quem* (1106) for the composition of the story, see John Wortley and Constantine Zuckerman, ‘The Relics of Our Lord’s Passion in the Russian Primary Chronicle’, *Vizantiiskii vremennik*, 63 (2004), 67–75. It is puzzling however that John Skylitzes reports a very similar incident that was said to have happened just six years before with the Arab Tarsoite envoys. In spring of 905, ‘there came from Tarsus and Melitene to the capital the notorious Abelbakes and the father of Samonas, sent to arrange the exchange of prisoners. The emperor received them in great style, especially decorating the Magnaura (palace) for the occasion. He also lavishly adorned the Great Church and took them there, where he showed them all the objects worthy of veneration and also the vessels, vestments and the like, which were used in divine worship. It was unworthy of a Christian state to expose to the eyes of persons of another race and of different religion those things which are even hidden from Christian men whose lives are less than orderly’, John Skylitzes,

for a chronicler to discuss the progress of Christianity in Kiev came after the following campaign in Byzantium (941) and the second Ruso-Byzantine treaty of 944. To the text of the treaty the chronicler adds the story of its endorsement in Kiev by both pagan and Christian Rus'. It is from this passage that we learn of 'numerous Christian Varangians in Kiev' and their cathedral church of St Elijah.⁴ The growing acceptance of Christianity and a sizable Christian community in Kiev prepared the ground for the next key step: in 955 (according to the chronicle chronology) Princess Olga travelled to Constantinople to accept baptism there.⁵ The climax of all these preparatory stages was Prince Volodimer's decision to convert to Christianity in 988. Yet once again, direct contact with Byzantium and its sacred sites proved crucial: before taking a final decision, Volodimer sent his envoys to Constantinople where they enjoyed Christian liturgy in the Hagia Sophia, and the stories of their extraordinary experience forced Volodimer to take the matter very seriously indeed.⁶

The chronicler's belief that, before the Conversion, the Christian population of Kiev consisted entirely of Varangians and that the source of their faith was Byzantium, is typified by insertion into the *Primary Chronicle* under the year 983 of the so-called *Life of the Varangian Martyrs*.⁷ It tells the story of martyrdom of two Varangians, a father and son, at the hands of the still-pagan Kievites. In the mid-twelfth century, another version of this *Vita* was included in the Rus' *Synaxarion (Prolog)* under July 12th.⁸ Naturally, the existence of two versions with slightly different details of the story gave rise to a debate on whether the *Vita* had existed as a separate piece outside the chronicle or was specifically written for the chronicle's narrative. The discussion generated a sizable body of literature,⁹ which explored all three combinations of the two texts' possible relationships: the chronicle version is original, the *Prolog* version is original, both are derived from a third text, now lost, which should be considered to be the original. At least one of these possibilities seems to have been abandoned in recent scholarship:

A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057, transl. by J. Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 183. Skylitzes, most certainly, had lifted the account from Symeon Logothete; see *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Caniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*, ed. by Immanuel Bekker (Bonn: Weber, 1838), pp. 711 and 868.

4 'The Russian Primary Chronicle', trans. by Cross, p. 164.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 168–69.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 198–99.

7 See Nikolai Nikolskii, *Materialy dlia povremennogo spiska russkikh pisatelei i ikh sochinenii (X–XI vv.)* (St Petersburg, 1906, pp. 4–6; Boris Kloss, 'Zhitie Fedora Variaga i ego syna', in *Pismennye pamiatniki istorii Drevnei Rusi. Letopisi, povesti, khozhdeniia, poucheniia, zhitii, poslaniia*, ed. by Iaroslav Shchapov (St Petersburg: Blits, 2003), pp. 213–14.

8 Olga Loseva, *Zhitii russkikh siatykh v sostave drevnerusskikh prologov 12 – pervoi treti 15 vekov* (Moscow: Rukopisnye pamiatniki Drevni Rusi, 2009), pp. 225–27; text published on pp. 424–25.

9 See recently Aleksandr Vvedensky, 'Zhitie variagov-muchenikov (funktsionirovanie legendy v letopisi i v Prologe', *Drevniaia Rus'*: *Voprosy medievistiki*, 33 (2008), 63–72. See also Pavel Lukin, 'Skazanie o variagakh-muchnikakh v nachalnom letopisanii i Prologe: tekstologicheskii aspekt', *Drevniaia Rus'*: *Voprosy medievistiki*, 38 (2009), 73–96, which adds very little to the discussion.

the *Prolog* version is now considered to be derivative of the chronicle text.¹⁰ It is much harder to establish whether the *Life* is contemporaneous with the *Primary Chronicle* (i.e. written by the same author and specifically as a part of the chronicle narration) or whether, in some form or another, it predates the chronicle text as we know it from copies of the *Primary Chronicle*. Here the ideas developed in the early twentieth century by Aleksei Shakhmatov are still the most influential. The scholar suggested that the story had been among the accounts of the earliest postulated chronicle text, the hypothetical ‘Most Ancient Compilation’ of 1039.¹¹

The quest for the *Life*’s date was driven, to a large degree, by attempts to uncover its ‘historical component’. The purposes of this paper do not require us to take a position in this debate: after all, whatever the origin of the *Life*, it postdates the actual event considerably and, as a hagiographic text, has a very limited value for historical reconstruction. Its early date, however, would be an important hint that the idea of pre-Conversion ‘Varangian’ Christianity was current long before the *Primary Chronicle* took its final shape. There are indications that its author knew the story of Varangian martyrs before he decided to insert it into the entry for 983. One of these is his reference to the ‘Christian Varangians’ dwelling in Kiev in the entry for 945. Another is the homily appended to the story, which stressed that the Apostles never visited Rus’ ‘in body’ but their teachings nevertheless reached the country and were spread here (apparently by the likes of the Varangian martyrs). This is the notion (also present in the *Sermon on Law and Grace* by Ilarion) that precedes the idea of St Andrew’s mission to Kiev and Novgorod, which the *Primary Chronicle* proudly boasts of in its very opening pages.

The *Vita*’s explicit message is clear enough: the Varangians suffered because they were Christians, and they were Christians because, in the chronicler’s words, they ‘came from the Greeks’.¹² I would suggest, however, that this message is further supported by the choice of the sources upon which the *Vita* is based.

A general outline of this story is as follows:

Upon conquering the city of Kiev, the as yet unconverted prince Volodimer encouraged all sorts of pagan practices among his subjects including such extreme forms of idolatry as human sacrifices. It so happened that the lot cast by the Kievites in order to choose their next victim pointed to the son of a certain Varangian, who was to be slain for the idols. The Varangian happened to be a secret Christian, and before being murdered, he instigated a debate with the pagans. He told them that their idols were not the real gods: they were made of wood that would soon rot away; they could neither eat nor drink; they could not speak, and all because they were made of wood by human hands and with human tools. Unlike the ‘God

10 Kloss, ‘Zhitie Fedora Variaga i ego syna’, p. 214; Vvedensky, ‘Zhitie variagov-muchenikov’, pp. 63–72; Loseva, *Zhitiia russkikh siatykh v sostave drevnerusskikh prologov*, p. 226.

11 Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Razyskaniia o drevneishikh russkikh letopisnykh svodakh* (St Petersburg, 1908), pp. 145–46.

12 ‘The Russian Primary Chronicle’, trans. by Cross, p. 182.

whom the Greeks worship,' the true Creator of all things, the pagan idols were themselves human creations.¹³

The sources for the Christian Varangian's preaching to the pagans have already attracted attention. In the 1920s, Viljo Johanes Mansikka noted that the speech alludes to Deuteronomy ('And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of men's hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell', 4. 28) and hence is one of the chronicle's numerous 'invisible Biblicisms'.¹⁴ The theme of idolatry is, of course, conspicuous in the Old Testament, and similar passages on the man-made origin of idols can be found in Psalms (115 and 135), in the Prophets (Jeremiah, 10. 3–5; Daniel, 5. 23). One or more of these texts might have suggested the wording of the Varangian's sermon. Yet in addition to these there exists a hagiographic source that provided the author of our *Vita* with the narrative model for his story.

The so-called *Vita of the First Cherson Martyrs* is a Slavonic text known in two versions: the shorter one found in the Rus' *Synaxarion (Prolog)* and an extended version that came down in two slightly different translations: one represented by the famous *Suprasl* manuscript of the eleventh century, another in the so-called *Menaion* of Metropolitan Makarios of the sixteenth century.¹⁵ In spite of a significant chronological distance between the two, both translations are now considered to have been made rather early and are attributed to the Bulgarian Preslav School of the tenth century.¹⁶

It is in this *Vita of the First Cherson Martyrs* that we find episodes upon which the story of Varangian's preaching before the pagan mob was apparently modelled. Actually, there are two episodes in this *Vita* that are of interest for us. Basil, the first bishop appointed for Cherson to convert the population of the city who was subsequently martyred, commenced his mission by preaching (with wording reminiscent of the Varangian's speech) to the pagans on the man-made nature of their idols: 'He started to teach the people of the city, telling them: those are not gods whom you respect and worship, but idols that cannot render you any help; there is God in Heavens by whose word everything was created'.¹⁷ For this,

13 'The Russian Primary Chronicle', trans. by Cross, p. 182; *Ipatevskaia letopis'*, ed. by A. A. Shakhmatov, PSRL, 2 (St Petersburg: Tipografiia M. A. Aleksandrova, 1908), col. 70: 'не су' то бзи но древо . днь есть а оутро изьгнило есть . не гадать бо ни пють . ни м^блвать . но суть дѣлани руками въ дрѣвѣ . сокирою и ножемъ . а Бъ единъ есть . смуже служить Грѣци . и кланяются . иже створилъ нбо и землю и члѣва и звѣзды и слнце и луну . и далъ есть жити на земли . а си бзи что сдѣлаша . сами дѣлани суть.'

14 Viljo J. Mansikka, *Religiia vostochnykh slavian* (Moscow: RAN, 2005), p. 81 (Russian translation of a work first published in 1922); Igor Danilevsky, *Povest vremennykh let: Germenevticheskie osnovy izucheniia letopisnykh tekstov* (Moscow, 2004), p. 104.

15 Published in Petr Lavrov, *Zhitiia khersonskikh sviatykh v greko-slavianskoi pismennosti*, Pamiatniki khristianskogo Khersonessa, 2 (Moscow, 1911), pp. 158–68.

16 M. I. Chernyshova, 'Zamechaniia o iazyke slavianskoi versii 'Zitiia khersonskikh sviatykh'', in *Ocherki istorii khristianskogo Khersonessa*, Khersoness khristianskii, 1 (St Petersburg: Nauka, 2009), 118–38.

17 Lavrov, *Zhitiia khersonskikh sviatykh*, p. 165: 'нача оучити градскыа мѣжа г҃ла, тако не сѣ вози нѣ лиити илчѣти и чести, но и кѣмши не могѣше вѣрѣ помощи, ѿ во вѣрѣ на нѣсѣ, иже слово его сотвори всащескаа и мѣростию его ѿ невытна в бытне приведе вса.'

the bishop was killed by an angry mob of pagans. Of more immediate importance for us is, however, the second episode. Here we have a family setting with father and a son as the main protagonists (as in the chronicle), the difference being that it is the son who makes the speech on the man-made nature of the idols: ‘Your gods cannot do this [resurrect the dead] because they are idols of stone and without a soul, by which the devil tempts people to destroy them’.¹⁸

If the *Vita of the First Cherson Martyrs* did serve as a template for the *Life of Varangian Martyrs*, that would mean that the textual composition of the latter is entirely ‘Eastern’, as it were, and so its implicit message is also ‘Greek’ rather than ‘Northern’.

I would not argue, of course, that the author of the Varangians’ *Life* had enjoyed the liberty of choosing between ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’ sources and deliberately opted for the latter. Most probably, he had not. Moreover, the very concept of being able to choose between placing Varangians in either a ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’ context almost certainly would seem alien to his mindset. It is precisely this absence of choice that is revealing; the Varangians, as Christians, are firmly placed within the world of Byzantine Christianity.

I would argue, however, that the choice of the model was not entirely incidental. After all, the author of our *Life* picked an obscure *Vita* of the first Cherson martyrs, and there must have been a reason for this.

One must bear in mind that the *Life of the Varangian Martyrs* is intimately linked to the Tithe Church, which was the first — and, for the first half-century after the Conversion, the largest — Christian edifice in Kiev. It was erected by Prince Volodimer as a triumphant monument to his achievement of converting the realm to Christianity, and for some time it served as the embodiment of the Church in Rus’, being practically synonymous with it. It housed the most important relics, those of Pope Clement, brought by the Prince from the city of Cherson upon his baptism. The *Life of Varangian Martyrs* is, in fact, the foundation myth for the Tithe Church. The martyrdom had occurred on the very spot where the Tithe Church was later erected and the exceptional holiness of the site placed the Tithe Church in the league of its own. In fact, for later readers, it was not the martyrs themselves but the link that their story had to the church that was the most important aspect of their *Life*.

The clergy of the Tithe Church, as we know, were imported in their entirety by Prince Volodimer from Cherson, the place where he had been baptised. In the chronicle they are referred to as ‘the Cherson priests’ (*popy korsun’skie*),¹⁹ which clearly indicates their status as the cathedral’s chapter. In the early days of Christianity in Kiev, they must have been a very important group indeed. It was

18 Lavrov, *Zhitiia khersonskikh sviatykh*, p. 165: ‘понеже вози нши сего сотворити не могъше, камене въздъшно и капища сще, таже днаво на прелесть и на погыне члкъ сотвори. но [...] вършита в ба [...].’

19 ‘The Russian Primary Chronicle’, trans. by Cross, p. 204; PSRL, 2, col. 101.

this group that served as the ‘memory community’ for the Tithe Church, shaping and translating its image, and it is tempting to think that the story of Varangian martyrs came from this milieu. The city of Cherson was the source of Kievan Christianity, and the first Cherson martyrs as models for the first Kiev martyrs would seem to be well-chosen.²⁰

It appears that the *Life of Varangian Martyrs* proved paradigmatic for the concept, prominent in the *Primary Chronicle*, of ‘Varangian Christianity,’ that is, the idea that in pre-Conversion Rus’ only the Varangians were Christians. However, the same concept also exerted influence outside the chronicle. The *Synaxarion (Prolog)* version of St Volodimer’s vita (from the mid-twelfth century) somewhat inexplicably introduces him as being ‘from the Varangian kin’ (*ot plemeni variashska*).²¹ Volodimer’s Scandinavian origins (which are correct, as it happens) are never stressed or even noted in the chronicle, and certainly they were not his defining characteristics. These origins are not even explicitly clear from the chronicle, for already his father had a Slavonic name. Among other princes’ possible attributes, by which he could have been introduced in a hagiographic text, his Scandinavian heritage was of minor importance, yet it is there, and intrinsically linked to his baptism. It would seem that the reason for this was the idea that the first Christian, be it Princess Olga, the Varangian martyrs or the prince who converted the Rus’, could only belong to the Varangians.

The Baptised Rus’ of 944 and the Christian Community of Kiev

The *Life of Varangian Martyrs* and texts that it influenced represent a retrospective image of Varangian Christianity, and the way it was looked at from a distance of a century or more. As with any concept found in medieval text, it should be carefully weighed against other reliable kinds of evidence before being admitted into a scholarly discourse.

For the whole of the tenth century, there are only three documents whose authenticity is not in doubt, all preserved within the *Primary Chronicle*. These are texts of the Ruso-Byzantine treaties of 911, 944, and 972. It is their evidence that should hold precedence over any account found in narrative sources. Historically, this was not the case, however: the canon of writing of Kievan history, established

20 A word of caution is necessary at this point. Whatever the ancient origin of the story, the way it now reads in the *Primary Chronicle* makes the *Life of Varangian Martyrs* too intimately linked to other fragments of the chronicle. The Varangian father’s description of pagan idols is echoed by the words of German missionaries to Volodimer: ‘We worship God, who has made heaven and earth [...] and every creature, while your gods are only wood’ (‘The Russian Primary Chronicle’, trans. by Cross, p. 184) and the famous description of the wooden idol of Perun erected by Volodimer while still pagan (itself modelled on Daniel 2. 32–33). All these might indicate that the *Life* was taking shape simultaneously with other passages of the chronicle and that all belong to the same authorship.

21 For the text see Loseva, *Zhittia russkikh siatykh*, p. 426.

at the turn of the nineteenth century, preferred to follow the fictitious storylines of the *Primary Chronicle*.

It is thought to be a well-established fact that by the mid-tenth century, there was a sizable Christian community in Kiev. This idea, which can be found in any survey or a special study of this topic (too numerous to be cited here), is based on the direct chronicle evidence to that effect and on chronicle reports that in 945 there stood in Kiev the church of St Elijah, which was considered to be the city’s cathedral. The existence of a cathedral church is explained in the chronicle by the great number of Christian Varangians in Kiev at the time. However, as was pointed out quite some time ago,²² the account of the St Elijah church in Kiev is erroneous, being found in the fictitious account of the treaty’s ratification supposedly held in Kiev. This invented story was based entirely on the idea of what protocol should look like, which was supplied by the text of the treaty itself. The actual St Elijah church mentioned there was the one in Constantinople where some of the signatories to the treaty from the Rus’ side took their oath immediately after having drafted the text.²³ The twelfth-century chronicler, having found the reference to the church in the treaty of 944, transplanted it, by mistake or design, onto the Kievan soil, most likely in order to create a procedure equivalent to the one that took place in Constantinople. If the entire story of the treaty’s ratification in Kiev (including the Christians and their cathedral) is taken as pure invention, the image of a large and rapidly expanding Christian community in Kiev loses its sole source base.

That leaves us with the texts of the two treaties (911 and 944) as our only reliable evidence. Their parallel reading, however, might suggest that in the thirty years between the treaties there did indeed occur radical changes in the composition of Kievan society.

In general, the treaty of 911 makes a clear distinction between the ‘Christians’ (as synonymous with the ‘Greeks’) and the ‘Rus’’. It never once mentions or even hints at the possibility that ‘Christians’ might belong to groups other than the Byzantines. The contraposition of the two terms (for example, in the phrases like, ‘Whatever Rus’ kills a Christian, or whatsoever Christian kills a Rus’ [...]’ or ‘If any Rus’ commit a theft against a Christian or vice versa [...]’²⁴) leaves no

22 It would seem that the first one to have made this observation was the great eighteenth-century chronicle scholar August Ludwig Schlözer in his *Nestor: Russkie letopisi na drevle-slavianskom iazyke*, 3 (St Petersburg, 1819), pp. 183–84.

23 Jana Malingoudi, *Die russisch-byzantinischen Verträge des 10. Jhds. aus diplomatischer Sicht* (Thessaloniki: Vaniias, 1994), pp. 46–47; ead., ‘Russko-vizantiiskie sviazi v 10 veke s tochki zreniia diplomatiki’, *Vizantiiskii vremennik*, 56 [81] (1995), Indrik 90, note 95; M. A. Vasiliev, ‘Stepen’ dostovernosti izvestiia Povesti vremennykh let o protsedure ratifikatsii russko-vizantiiskogo dogovora 944 g. v Kieve’, in *Drevneishii gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy, 1998 god* (Moscow, 2000), pp. 64–71; Jonathan Shepard, ‘Rus’’, in *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus’ c. 900–1200*, ed. by Nora Berend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 377.

24 ‘The Russian Primary Chronicle’, trans. by Cross, p. 152.

doubt that in 911 Byzantines considered all Rus' heathen and would not recognize any Christians among them. The treaty of 944 follows suit. Here too we find the contrast between the 'Christians' and the 'Rus'' in several provisions for incidents that might occur between the two groups (for example, if Christian captives are sold to Rus', or if a Christian kills a Rus', and vice versa).²⁵ These instances are not numerous, however. Mostly, the treaty resorts to the ethnic names, 'the Rus'' and 'the Greeks'. The shift in terminology in favour of ethnic rather than religious affiliations might be accidental, yet there seems to be a reason for it. Typically, the treaty of 944 treats the Rus' as still largely pagan, which is obvious from the general provision that in the case of a disputed court testimonies, 'our Christians [i.e. Byzantines] shall take an oath according to their faith, and non-Christians [i.e. the Rus'] according to their law'.²⁶ However, by 944, Byzantines knew that not all of the Rus' were heathen anymore and that one might come across Christians among them.

Indeed, in the sanction clause at the beginning of the treaty and also in the oath formula at the end of the text, we discover two groups among the Rus' signatories defined by their relationship to Christianity. The treaty calls them 'those who adopted baptism' and 'unbaptised Rus'' respectively.²⁷

The presence of these two groups in such critical parts of the document seems to support the idea that, between 911 and 944, the Christians emerged as a not only numerous but also politically important group in the Rus' community of Kiev. The signatories of the treaty were of two ranks: 'envoys' each representing a member of a royal clan and more numerous 'merchants', also apparently sent by the prince. As a group, they all must have belonged the uppermost stratum of society, those very close to Igor, prince of Kiev. It is within these two factions that scholars normally look for the 'baptised Rus''. The presence of Christians among the envoys would point to the existence of a Christian community at home, in Kiev. Among the fifty-odd names of the envoys and merchants listed in the treaty, not a single one is Christian.²⁸ It would be too risky, however, to infer the faith of individual Rus' according to their names: both Christians and heathens could and did use their traditional names, and the custom extended well into the times when the realm was firmly within the Christian sphere. Some of those listed may or may not have been Christian, but there is no way of judging this based on their names.

I would argue, however, that the 'baptised' Rus' refers to a third faction, which did not come from Kiev but was resident in Byzantium.

25 'The Russian Primary Chronicle', trans. by Cross, p. 162.

26 Samuel Cross, it seems, preferred in this case the reading of the Hypatian copy, which rendered his translation erroneous (*ibid.*, p. 161).

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 160 and 163.

28 The names are mostly of Scandinavian origin; see Elena Melnikova, 'The List of Old Norse Personal Names in the Russian-Byzantine Treaties of the Tenth Century', *Studia anthroponimica Scandinavica: Tidskrift för nordisk personnamnforskning*, 22 (2004), 5–27.

It is noteworthy that the division of the Rus’ into ‘baptised’ and ‘unbaptised’ factions only became visible because of the different manner in which they took their oaths. While the ‘unbaptised’ Rus’ swore on their weapons and armour, the ‘baptised’ Rus’, naturally, did it in the church and on the cross (‘have sworn in the Cathedral, by the church of St Elijah, upon the Holy Cross set before us’²⁹). Allusions to the ‘baptised’ Rus’ thus stand in contrast to the otherwise adamant treatment of the people of Rus’ as heathen in the treaty of 944.

More puzzling still is the fact that the two factions, ‘baptised’ and ‘unbaptised’ Rus’, serve as proxies for different communities. While the ‘unbaptised’ Rus’, as might be expected, took their oath on behalf ‘of prince Igor, and all the boyars, and all the people, and all the Rus’ land’,³⁰ the baptised Rus’ seem to represent no one but themselves. In taking the oath, they simply state that they accept and will honour the conditions of the treaty (‘to abide by all that is written herein, and not to violate any of its stipulations’³¹).

A close reading of the respective formulas of the oaths reveals a notable difference.³² While the treaty’s provision (i.e. the Byzantine side) simply requires the ‘unbaptised’ Rus’ to swear in the manner that they are used to (‘The unbaptised Russes shall lay down their shields, their naked swords, their armlets, and their other weapons, and shall swear [...]’³³), the formula of oath taken by the ‘baptised’ Rus’ is written in the first person plural: ‘We, those who had accepted baptism, swear [...]’³⁴). This looks very much like a notation of a statement or a declaration appended to the drafted text of the treaty.³⁵

Moreover, the text of the treaty provides no unambiguous evidence that the ‘unbaptised’ Rus’ did take an oath in Constantinople. The prescribed ritual, with its stress on weapons (namely shields and swords) directly contradicted the stipulation of the very same treaty that strictly prohibited the Rus’ from entering the city with their weapons.³⁶ The procedure, furthermore, required the oath to be taken with naked swords, which would seem quite out of place in the Imperial Palace.

The descriptions of the two oaths are set apart also grammatically. While the ‘baptised Rus’ was said to have sworn in the past tense (КЛАХОМСА, imperfect), the ‘unbaptised Rus’ was expected to swear at some point in future (да полагають... и да кльнуться; technically optative, but in this case denoting future tense). Does that mean that at the Palace only the Christian Rus’ took their oath

29 ‘The Russian Primary Chronicle’, trans. by Cross, p. 163.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

31 *Ibid.*; PSRL, 2, col. 41: ‘хранити же все еже есть написано на нси . и не преступати ѿ того ничто же.’

32 On formulas of oaths, see Malingoudi, ‘Russko-vizantiiskie sviazi v 10 veke’, pp. 79–80.

33 ‘The Russian Primary Chronicle’, trans. by Cross, p. 163.

34 PSRL, 2, col. 41: мы же елико насъ крѣтилиса есмы . клахомса цркъвию . стго Ильи въ зборнѣи цркви.

35 It is probably not accidental that in his translation Cross marked this passage out by setting it out as a separate paragraph and providing it with a heading.

36 ‘[The Rus’] shall enter the city through one gate in groups of fifty without weapons’, Cross, ‘The Russian Primary Chronicle’, p. 161.

and the heathens did not?³⁷ And were the latter group expected to do so after having returned to Kiev, together with Prince Igor, as stipulated by the treaty?³⁸

Thus the treaty of 944 would seem to indicate that at the moment of negotiations there were two different groups of Rus' present in Constantinople: those empowered by Prince Igor ('unbaptised') and another group, the 'baptised.' The impression is that the members of this group simply happened to be in Constantinople when the envoys arrived, which meant that their loyalty should be reaffirmed but they were not part of the embassy.

The question then is who this group of 'baptised' Rus' might be. It has been noted that the principal incentive for a Rus' to be baptised was a desire to enter the service of the Emperor, and that Varangians were encouraged by imperial authorities to become Christian.³⁹ Among the Rus' troops in Constantinople there was one detachment, which Constantine Porphyrogenitus in *Book of Ceremonies* referred to as the 'baptised Rhos'. On May 31, 946, just two years after the treaty of 944 had been concluded, a regiment of 'baptised Rhos' 'with banners, holding shields and wearing their swords' were standing as guards of honour outside of Chalke (in the Grand Palace) during the reception of the Tarsoite envoys.⁴⁰ It is these 'baptised Rhos' that have been identified recently as the group of 'baptised Rus'' who signed the treaty of 944.⁴¹ 'Baptised Rhos' are listed among other detachments of 'sailors' standing guard at the Palace that day, quite probably belonging to the same regiment of Rhos that took part in the Lombard campaign of 935.⁴² It remains only to speculate whether they made up a separate squadron or were selected for the occasion from among a larger (and mixed) detachment of Rus' mercenaries serving in the navy. Since only Christian barbarians were eligible for employment in the Palace guard, the second possibility seems more likely.

37 As Malingoudis notes, normally the envoys would have taken their oaths in one of Constantinople's churches and would include their formulas of oaths into the treaty (Malingoudi, 'Russko-vizantiiskie svyazi v 10 veke', pp. 79–80). However, the only available sources of evidence, other than our treaties, are those agreements signed in the twelfth century between Byzantium and the Italian republics of Genoa, Venice and Pisa. Here, both parties were Christian, but it is unclear what the practice was when heathen envoys were involved in negotiations.

38 The final clause of the treaty reads: 'Your representatives shall go with the envoys of our empire and conduct them before Igor, Great Prince of Rus, and to his subjects. Upon receipt of this document, they shall then bind themselves by oath to observe the truth as agreed upon between us and inscribed upon this parchment.' 'The Russian Primary Chronicle', trans. by Cross, p. 163. PSRL, 2, col. 41: 'а ѿходаче со сло^а цртва наше^а. да попроводать к великому князю Игореву Рускому и к людемъ его . и ти приимающе харотью на роту идуть . хранит^и истину . како же мы свѣщахо^а . и написахомъ на харотью сию.'

39 Shepard, 'Rus'', p. 377.

40 *De Ceremoniis*, I, ed. by J. J. Reiske (Bonn, 1829), p. 579, ll. 21–22; Sigfús Blöndal and Benedikt S. Benedikz, *The Varangians of Byzantium: an Aspect of Byzantine Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 21; and Shepard, 'Rus'', p. 377.

41 Aleksandr Filipchuk, 'Sotsialnyie gruppy rusov v Konstantinopole v 10 v.: kontakty, torgovlia i formirovanie politicheskoi elity', in *Vostochnaia Evropa v drevnosti i srednevekov'e, XIII* (Moscow, 2011), pp. 293–95. See also Oleksandr Filipchuk, 'Rusy sered 'viisk narodiv' u Vizantii 9 – 11 st.: naimatsi ta soiuzyky' (Unpublished dissertation, Chernivtsi University, 2010), pp. 123–30.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

The identification of the ‘baptised Rus’ of the treaty (944) with the ‘baptised Rhos’ of *The Book of Ceremonies* (946) robs the idea of an organized Christian community in Kiev of its second and last source of evidence. It would appear that it was only in Constantinople that a sizable group of Christian Rus’ existed at this time. It is quite conceivable that after having retired from the imperial army, some of the Christian mercenaries would come back to Kiev and settle there permanently. Since service in Byzantium, no doubt, was associated with a certain degree of prestige and would also result in considerable wealth, Christians Varangians, upon their return, must have joined the privileged classes of Kievan society. These individual Christians are probably responsible for the archeologically detectable traces of a Christian presence in Kiev and at other sites during the tenth century.⁴³ However, the idea of a strong link between Christianity and high social status, sometimes postulated in archaeological literature, should not be overstated. After all, Christian artifacts (such as cross-shaped pendants) are mostly associated with female graves,⁴⁴ and the only documented instance of the conversion of a member of the Rus’ elite is that of Princess Olga (and probably some of her female companions in Constantinople). Judging by the relatively detailed description of her son Sviatoslav’s campaigns against Byzantium, there were no Christians among the Rus’ military elite in the next generation.⁴⁵

Source traditions and scholarly reconstructions are not always happily reconciled. In our case, however, it would seem that the *Chronicle*’s idea was essentially sound: in pre-Conversion times, Christians were the Varangians who went to Byzantium and were baptized there. It was indeed the concept of ‘Varangian Christianity’ that has been developed in this volume, transmitted by individuals rather than social and political structures as part of a general pattern of cultural and economic interaction between Byzantium and Eastern Europe, and it was spread along the major communication networks established in the tenth century between the Baltic and Mediterranean worlds. The Varangian Christianity of the tenth century existed in the absence of established ecclesiastical structures and clear confessional distinctions. Yet its heterogeneity and cultural neutrality must not be exaggerated: for the Kievan state and its ruling elite, the principal influences came from Byzantium, and those few Varangian Christians that are known from the written sources were firmly associated with the ‘Greek’ world of Byzantium.

43 For a historical interpretation of these finds, see Shepard, ‘Rus’’, pp. 377–78.

44 See Fedir Androshchuk’s article in this volume.

45 The chronicle, too, seems to have sensed this ‘female’ nature of Christianity unbecoming to a warrior. Encouraged to convert by his mother, Sviatoslav reportedly answered that his followers would ridicule him for such an act (‘The Russian Primary Chronicle’, trans. by Cross, p. 110).