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## FROM ENEMIES TO ALLIES: THE MYSTERY OF PRINCE OLEG'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST CONSTANTINOPLE\*

**Abstract.** This article proposes a rethinking of the main patterns of Rus-Byzantine relations at the turn of the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Christianization of some groups of Rus' elite after 860 seems to be plausible, but short-lived. The crisis in relations with Khazaria prompted a search for new trade privileges in Byzantium. The so-called Oleg's campaign on Constantinople was nothing other than his joining the military service. During the constant struggle with Arabs, the Empire needed to receive new military forces from Rus'. Possibly the recruitments were accompanied by a provocative demonstration of strength. This action was rethought in Rus'ian chronicle writing as the great victory of "Oleg the Prophet". The joining of Rus' troops to the Byzantine navy occurred no later than 906, when logothetes Himerios was able to defeat the Muslims. The Rus-Byzantine treaty of 911 strengthened the partnership and fostered the baptism of some Rus mercenaries.

**Keywords:** Prince Oleg, Byzantium, Khazaria, Russian Primary Chronicle, Byzantine-Arab wars, Rus-Byzantine treaties

In 1951, the famous scholar Alexander Vasiliev published a paper, dedicated to the "second Russian attack" on Constantinople<sup>1</sup>. Since that time many refinements and new hypotheses have taken place, but the mystery in general has remained unsolved. Frequent attempts to find a mention about this campaign in Byzantine texts have failed, and the sources' grounds are overall the same as some seventy years ago. It is therefore worth posing new questions to old testimonies.

The only source of information about this campaign is the Russian Primary Chronicle, but the issue is that the methods, which were used to build a narrative, do not inspire any confidence. While describing the previous and the subsequent military expeditions (in 860 and 941 AD), the chronicler relied on Byzantine

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\* The first version of this study was partially published, but had to be refined: А.А. РОМЕНСКИЙ, *Хельги у ворот Константинополя. Русь между Хазарией и Византией в начале X в.*, ХА 15, 2017, p. 166–198. I am very grateful to Professor Constantine Zuckerman, who read this paper in a draft and shared with me his critical comments.

<sup>1</sup> A.A. VASILIEV, *The Second Russian Attack on Constantinople*, DOP 6, 1951, p. 163–225.

materials mainly, such as one of the versions of the work of Symeon the Logothete and the Life of St. Basil the Younger<sup>2</sup>. These texts are silent about any actions of Oleg “the Prophet”, who seemed to be a significant political figure. Where could the monk of the Kievan Caves Monastery borrow the information? Some researchers suggest that the description of Oleg’s enterprise mainly uses the Scandinavian epic tradition<sup>3</sup>. Skeptics believe that this narrative is based on other similar evidence, just like the so-called “preliminary treaty” of 907 appeared in the Chronicle as a result of compilation<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, if the legendary “shield on the gates of Constantinople” is nothing more than fiction, how to explain the privileges granted to the Rus’ians, the protection of their property rights and personal security in an authentic 911 treatise?<sup>5</sup> The 911 agreement begins with a notice of “love and peace” between the Byzantines and the Rus’, which also indicates a certain previous conflict<sup>6</sup>. Gennadij Litavrin believed that the norms favorable to Rus’ regarding duty-free trade, which was mentioned in the Russian Primary Chronicle under 907, could appear only due to pressure by reason of force on Byzantium<sup>7</sup>. It is noteworthy that the treaty of 944, much less advantageous for the northern barbarians, was concluded after the impressive, albeit unsuccessful, campaign of Prince Igor in 941 and a new demonstration of force three years later. The agreement of Svjatoslav with Emperor John Tzimiskes in 971 also marked the outcome of a long war in the Balkans<sup>8</sup>.

In contrast to hypercritical opponents, the “optimists” pointed out that the campaign did take place<sup>9</sup>, and the silence of the “flattering Greeks” was affected either by the “mediocrity of the event”, or by their tendentiousness and unwillingness

<sup>2</sup> П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Топография походов Руси на Константинополь в IX–XI вв.*, ВВ 74, 2015, p. 84–86.

<sup>3</sup> A. STENDER-PETERSEN, *Die Varägersage als Quelle der altrussischen Chronik*, Aarhus 1934 [= А]у, 6], p. 99; Е.А. МЕЛЬНИКОВА, *Устная традиция в Повести временных лет: к вопросу о типах устных преданий*, [in:] *Восточная Европа в исторической ретроспективе. К 80-летию В.Т. Пашуто*, Москва 1999, p. 161; Л.В. ВОЙТОВИЧ, *Олег Віщий: історіографічні легенди та реалії*, НПКПНУ 23, 2013, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> S. RUNCIMAN, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his Reign*, Cambridge 1929, p. 110; H. GREGOIRE, *La légende d’Oleg et l’expédition d’Igor*, BCLSMР 23, 1937, p. 80–94; IDEM, *L’histoire et la légende d’Oleg prince de Kiev*, NCL 4, 1952, p. 280–287; G. DA COSTA-LOUILLET, *Y eut-il des invasions Russes dans l’Empire Byzantin avant 860?*, В 15, 1941, p. 235; R. DOLLEY, *Oleg’s Mythical Campaign against Constantinople*, BCLSMР 35, 1949, p. 106–130; О.М. ФИЛИПЧУК, *Studia Byzantino-Rossica. Експансія, війна та соціальні зміни*, Чернівці 2013, p. 233; А.П. ТОЛОЧКО, *Очерки начальной руси*, Киев–Санкт-Петербург 2015, p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись*, ed. Е.Ф. КАРСКИЙ, Ленинград 1926 [= ПСРЛ, 1], col. 32–38.

<sup>6</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 33; G. OSTROGORSKY, *L’expédition du prince Oleg contre Constantinople en 907*, SK 11, 1940, p. 53–55.

<sup>7</sup> Г.Г. ЛИТАВРИН, *Византия, Болгария, Древняя Русь*, Санкт-Петербург 2000, p. 63–65.

<sup>8</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 44–46, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Б.Д. ГРЕКОВ, *Киевская Русь*, Москва 1953, p. 454–455; М.В. ЛЕВЧЕНКО, *Очерки по истории русско-византийских отношений*, Москва 1956, p. 98–121; В.Т. ПАШУТО, *Внешняя политика*

to recall this unfortunate fact<sup>10</sup>. Boris Rybakov, a well-known leader of Soviet archaeology, even assumed that two campaigns had occurred: one in 907 and the second on the eve of the conclusion of the “big” Rus'-Byzantine treaty in 911<sup>11</sup>. The search for even an indirect reflection of this conflict in Byzantine texts led to the attraction to information about the “Rhos-Dromitai” in Pseudo-Symeon the Logothete, but the persuasiveness of such an interpretation nevertheless leaves much to be desired<sup>12</sup>. It was necessary to admit that the military operation near the walls of Constantinople in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century was significantly inferior in scale to the events of 860, 941 and 1043, being only a raid or local conflict<sup>13</sup>. Experts also dispute the date of 907, justifiably doubting the chronological reliability of the Primary Chronicle for this period<sup>14</sup>. Before joining the discussion, let's look at the main challenges facing Byzantium and Rus' in the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> – the early 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Rus'ians, as well as other northerners, are rarely mentioned among the Byzantine authors of this period. The campaign of 860, which left a deep mark in historical memory of Eastern Europe, can be considered as the beginning of their close acquaintance. After an unsuccessful attempt to capture Constantinople, some Rus'ians expressed a desire to be baptized. It is noteworthy that Patriarch Photius testifies to this success with enthusiasm and exaggeration, considering recent enemies among the subjects and hospitable peoples<sup>15</sup>. The struggle of various versions of imperial propaganda was reflected in Theophanes Continuatus: the fourth book

*Древней Руси*, Москва 1968, p. 60; А.Н. САХАРОВ, *Поход Руси на Константинополь в 907 г.*, ИСССР 6, 1977, p. 72–103; А.Н. САХАРОВ, *Дипломатия Древней Руси*, Москва 1980, p. 98–130; П.П. ТОЛОЧКО, *Древняя Русь. Очерки социально-политической истории*, Киев 1987, p. 26; И.Я. ФРОЯНОВ, *Князь Олег у стен Царьграда*, [in:] *Историческое познание. традиции и новации*, p. 1, ed. В.В. ИВАНОВА, В.В. ПУЗАНОВА, Ижевск 1996, p. 250–255.

<sup>10</sup> Н. УСТРЯЛОВ, *Русская история*, vol. I, Санкт-Петербург 1855, p. 42; А.Н. САХАРОВ, *Дипломатия...*, p. 128. Cf.: А.А. VASILIEV, *The Second Russian Attack...*, p. 195–218; П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега у Константинополя в 904 г.*, ПСВ 8, 2011, p. 8–11.

<sup>11</sup> Б.А. РЫБАКОВ, *Киевская Русь и русские княжества XII–XIII вв.*, Москва 1982, p. 311.

<sup>12</sup> R.J.H. JENKINS, *The Supposed Russian Attack on Constantinople in 907: Evidence of the Pseudo-Symeon*, S 24, 1949, p. 403–406. Cf. counterarguments: С. MANGO, *A Note on the Ros-Dromitai*, *Hel* 4, 1953, p. 456–462; В.Д. НИКОЛАЕВ, *Свидетельство хроники Псевдо-Симеона о руси-дромитах и поход Олега на Константинополь в 907 г.*, ВВ 42, 1981, p. 147–153; А. КАРПОЗИЛОС, *Рос-дромиты и проблема похода Олега против Константинополя*, ВВ 49, 1988, p. 112–118.

<sup>13</sup> А.А. VASILIEV, *The Second Russian Attack...*, p. 172, 224–225.

<sup>14</sup> В.И. ЛАМАНСКИЙ, *Славянское житие Св. Кирилла как религиозно-эпическое произведение и как исторический источник*, ЖМНП 351, 1904, p. 145–146; Г.Г. ЛИТАВРИН, *Византия, Болгария...*, p. 65; М.С. ГРУШЕВСКИЙ, *Исторія України-Руси*, vol. I, Львів 1904, p. 386; М.Н. ТИХОМИРОВ, *Исторические связи русского народа с южными славянами с древнейших времен до половины XVII в.*, [in:] *Славянский сборник*, Москва 1947, p. 142–143; П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега...*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Поход 860 г. на Константинополь и первое крещение Руси в средневековых письменных источниках*, [in:] *Древнейшие государства Восточной Европы 2000 г.: Проблемы источниковедения*, ed. Л.В. СТОЛЯРОВ, Москва 2003, p. 73.

of the source dates the baptism of Rus' to the reign of Michael III, while the fifth (the Vita of Emperor Basil) endows such merits to the founder of the Macedonian dynasty and Patriarch Ignatius, additionally announcing the mission of a certain archbishop to the north<sup>16</sup>. Most likely, this episode was only an outward acceptance of Christian paraphernalia in order to establish stronger and more profitable trade and diplomatic ties with Byzantium<sup>17</sup>. In this context, the testimony of Ibn Khordadbeh is extremely symptomatic. He reported about the tricks of Rus' merchants who pretended to be Christians in Baghdad to pay "jizya", lighter than "ushr" per capita taxation<sup>18</sup>. In addition, the long absence of church organization is inherent in the phenomenon of "Varangian Christianity" in Northern and Eastern Europe<sup>19</sup>.

At this time large-scale political changes begin in the middle Dnieper region. Two groups of Scandinavian warriors clashed in the struggle for power. At the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, having settled affairs in the north, the squad of "Varangians", possibly led by representatives of the famous Skjöldungar dynasty, paid attention to a strategically important point in the middle reaches of the Dnieper – Kiev, where they had to overcome the resistance of their rivals<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur*, rec. M. FEATHERSTONE, J. SIGNES CODOÑER, Berlin–Boston 2015 [= CFHB, 53], p. 278; *Theophanis Continuati liber V. Vita Basilii imperatoris*, rec. I. ŠEVČENKO, Berlin–Boston 2011 [= CFHB, 42], p. 312–316.

<sup>17</sup> О.Б. Головкин, *Входження Русі до Pax Christiana Orthodoxa і формування християнської церковної організації у слов'ян Східної Європи (VIII–XI ст.)*, [in:] *Actes testantibus. Ювілейний збірник на пошану Леонтія Войтовича*, Львів 2011, p. 239; С.А. Иванов, *Концепція К. Цукермана и византийские источники о христианизации Руси в IX в.*, *Слав 2*, 2003, p. 20–21.

<sup>18</sup> ИБН ХОРДАДБЕХ, *Книга путей и стран*, ed. Н. Велихановой, Баку 1986, p. 38–42, 124.

<sup>19</sup> J. LIND, *Varangians in Europe's Eastern and Northern Periphery. The Christianization of North and Eastern Europe c. 950–1050*, <http://www.ennenjanyt.net/4-04/lind.html> [3 VII 2020]; I. GARIPZANOV, О. ТОЛОСНКО, *Introduction: Early Christianity on the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks*, [in:] *Early Christianity on the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks*, ed. I. GARIPZANOV, О. ТОЛОСНКО, Kyiv 2011, p. 13–14.

<sup>20</sup> The legendary chronicle's date of 882, of course, has no rationale and reflects only the ideas of the compiler. Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard place the arrival of Rus' in the middle of the Dnieper region between the 890s and 910s, while Constantine Zuckerman pushes it some ten years later. According to Aleksei Shchavalev, the capture of Kiev by Oleg and Igor go to the time of about 900; it is noteworthy that the first buildings of Podol appear only from the last quarter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century (the oldest dendrodate is 887). Cf.: S. FRANKLIN, J. SHEPARD, *The Emergence of Rus, 750–1200*, London–New York, p. 91–100; C. ZUCKERMAN, *Deux étapes de la formation de l'ancien État russe*, [in:] *Les centres proto-urbains russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient*, ed. M. KAZANSKI, A. NERCESSIAN, C. ZUCKERMAN, Paris 2000, p. 117; А.С. ЩАВЕЛЕВ, *К датировке захвата Киева князьями Олегом и Игорем Рюриковичем (летописная дата, византийские источники и археология)*, [in:] *Вспомогательные исторические дисциплины в современном научном знании. Материалы XXVIII Международной научной конференции*, ed. Ю. ШУСТОВА, Москва 2016, p. 533–536. All these versions remains albeit controversial. Finds of Arab dirhams, the earliest of which date back to the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (ca 905), can serve as an important indicator of the time of the emergence of Rus': T.S. NOONAN, *The Monetary History of Kiev in the Pre-Mongol Period*, HUS 11, 1987, p. 396.

These were the founders of a new state, Oleg (Helgi) and Igor (Ingharir)<sup>21</sup>. The discussion about the status of the first Princes of Rus' is far from over. The Novgorod First Chronicle of younger recension (NFC) represents Igor as the full successor of the legendary Rurik, and Oleg as only his military subordinate, while the author of the Russian Primary Chronicle (RPC) ranked the latter as a "member of the princely family" without indicating the exact degree of the relationship<sup>22</sup>. Both versions represent the later interpretations of the intellectuals that arose in the scriptorium and it is difficult to see in them the features of reality.

Historiographical speculations about Askold, who possessed Kiev this time as a "khagan" or "tsar" of Rus' have no sufficient grounds<sup>23</sup>; this ruler, like his companion Dir, most likely, was the same Varangian konungr as his opponents. It was not the only center of power. The alternative ones existed in Gnezdovo, Shestovitsa and other fortified settlements on the Baltic-Black Sea and Baltic-Volga trade routes<sup>24</sup>. The Varangians from Ladoga had to establish acceptable rules for the "game", to fight or negotiate with local leaders. The Scandinavians, who settled in Kij's "town", preferred confrontation and were defeated, but in Smolensk (most likely in Gnezdovo) and Liubech, the parties, as one might assume, managed to come to a compromise. The RPC very plausibly explains Oleg's military trick, who called himself a trading "guest" and hid the warriors in their ships<sup>25</sup>.

After defeating the contenders, Oleg and Igor were engaged in the internal arrangement and further territorial expansion of their holdings. The claims on the Dnieper region and attempts to subdue the tribes of Radimichs and Severians inevitably led to a conflict with the Khazaria, who also tried to get a tribute and

<sup>21</sup> On the name and origin of Ольгъ cf.: Е.А. МЕЛЬНИКОВА, *Ольгъ/Олег Веций. К истории имени и прозвища первого русского князя*, [in:] *Ad fontem. У источника. Сб. ст. в честь С.М. Капитанова*, Москва 2005, p. 138–146. Going back to the Scandinavian original form Ingharir, the form of the name Inger is attested by Liutprand of Cremona; in Byzantine sources, the Rus'ian prince is called Ἰγγωρος, in the genitive case Ἰγγωρος; *Die Werke Liutprands von Cremona*, ed. J. BECKER, Hannover–Leipzig 1915 [= *MGH.SRG*, 41], p. 138; КОНСТАНТИН БАГРЯНОРОДНЫЙ, *Об управлении империей*, ed. Г.Г. ЛИТАВИНА, А.П. НОВОСЕЛЬЦЕВА, Москва 1989, p. 44, 312, п. 9; *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem*, ed. С.-В. НАСИУС, Bonnae 1828 [= *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, 30] (cetera: ЛЕО), p. 106.5, 144.6. Constantine Zuckerman identifies Oleg of the Russian Primary Chronicle and certain Helgo of the Genizah Letter: С. ZUCKERMAN, *On the Date of the Khazars' Conversion to Judaism and the Chronology of the Kings of the Rus Oleg and Igor. A Study of the Anonymous Khazar Letter from the Genizah of Cairo*, *REB* 53, 1995, p. 259–270.

<sup>22</sup> *Новгородская первая летопись старшего и младшего изводов*, ed. А.Н. НАСОНОВА, Москва–Ленинград 1950, p. 108; *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 22–23; *Ипатьевская летопись*, ed. А.А. ШАХМАТОВ, Санкт-Петербург 1908 [= *ПСРЛ*, 2], col. 16.

<sup>23</sup> М.Ю. БРАЙЧЕВСКИЙ, *Хозария і Русь*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Вибране*, vol. II, Київ 2009, p. 222–230; ИДЕМ, *Аскольд – цар кийвський*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 419–464.

<sup>24</sup> Cf.: F. ANDROŠČUK, *Černigov et Šestovica, Birka et Hovgarden: le modèle urbain scandinave vu de l'Est*, [in:] *Les centres proto-urbains...*, p. 257–266; V. PETRUKHIN, *Les villes (gardar) sur la "Voie de Varègues aux Grecs"*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 357–364; V. KOVALENKO, *La période ancienne de l'histoire de Černigov*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 253.

<sup>25</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 23–24.

the resources of the Slavs<sup>26</sup>. It can be assumed that in response the Khazar Khagan stopped the Rus' trade along the strategically important Volga-Caspian route. It is noteworthy that in the last third of the 9<sup>th</sup> century the flow of Arab dirhams to Eastern Europe significantly declined<sup>27</sup>. The reasons for this cannot be seen in just one action: a complex of various economic and geostrategic factors acted, one of which, it is possible, was the complication of relations between the Rus' and Khazaria. The general political instability in the region was also facilitated by the appearance of the Pechenegs, who at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century struck the Hungarians (they had been provoked by the Khazars), forcing the latter to push into the northwestern Black Sea region — Atelkouzou, and then into the Pannonian plain<sup>28</sup>. It should be noted the strengthening of the Volga Bulgaria state, nominally dependent on the Khazar Khagan, whose ruler Almush, converting to Islam, was oriented toward an alliance with the Samanids (inheriting their coinage) and the Abbasids (a request for help in building a mosque and a fortress against the Khazars was called by the embassy of Ahmad Ibn Fadlan in 922)<sup>29</sup>. On the other hand, finds of Arab silver in Kiev come across only from the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, reliably marking the time when the Rus' appeared on the new trade route<sup>30</sup>. The introduced “sanctions” in the conditions of hostile relations with the Khazars and the steppe nomads did not leave the Rus' squad any other choice, turning them towards the rich and capacious Byzantine market. But getting into it and gaining privileges was a very difficult mission.

At the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Byzantium undoubtedly needed military force, reflecting the constant attacks of the Arabs, and the new allies arrived right on time. It is noteworthy that, after a long absence, the first mention of the Rhos people in “Naumachika” (a chapter of *Taktika*) of Leo VI is devoted precisely to

<sup>26</sup> В.Я. ПЕТРУХИН, *Начало этнокультурной истории Руси IX–XI вв.*, Смоленск–Москва 1995, p. 89–93; S. FRANKLIN, J. SHEPARD, *The Emergence...*, p. 91–110; А.А. ТОРТИКА, *Северо-Западная Хазария в контексте истории Восточной Европы (вторая половина VII – третья четверть X в.)*, Харьков 2006, p. 182–183.

<sup>27</sup> T.S. NOONAN, *Khazaria as an Intermediary between Islam and Eastern Europe in the Second Half of the Ninth Century: the Numismatic Perspective*, АЕМА 5, 1985 (1987), p. 183; А.П. ТОЛОЧКО, *Очерки...*, p. 308–309.

<sup>28</sup> The migration of the Hungarians to the Carpathian basin is usually dated to 896. Cf.: F. CURTA, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (500–1300)*, Leiden–Boston 2019 [= BCEH, 19], p. 256, n. 26. Cf. also: C. ZUCKERMAN, *Les Hongrois au pays de Lebedia: Une nouvelle puissance aux confins de Byzance et de la Khazarie ca 836–889*, [in:] *Byzantium at War (9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> c.) / Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο (9<sup>ος</sup>–12<sup>ος</sup> αι.)*, ed. K. Τσιγκάκης, Athens 1997, p. 51–74; I. ZIMONYI, *Préhistoire hongroise: méthode de recherche et vue d'ensemble*, [in:] *Les Hongrois et l'Europe. Conquête et intégration*, ed. S. CSERNUS, K. KOROMPAY, Paris–Szeged 1999, p. 40–42.

<sup>29</sup> А.П. СМИРНОВ, *Волжские Булгары*, Москва 1951, p. 39–40; Р.Г. ФАХРУТДИНОВ, *Очерки по истории Волжской Булгарии*, Москва 1984, p. 81–82; А.П. НОВОСЕЛЬЦЕВ, *Хазарское государство и его роль в истории Восточной Европы и Кавказа*, Москва 1990, p. 197–198; S. FRANKLIN, J. SHEPARD, *The Emergence...*, p. 64.

<sup>30</sup> T.S. NOONAN, *The Monetary History...*, p. 392–396.

their seaworthiness. The crowned author, who composed his work around 905–906, compares the fleet of “Saracens” and “so-called northern Scythians”: the Arab “koumbaria” are slow and large, while the “akatia” of Rhos are small, light and fast. Leo VI adds that the “Scythians” cannot have large ships when they go to the Euxinus Pontus<sup>31</sup>. This note shows that the Emperor was well aware of the conditions for navigation along the Dnieper and other rivers of the region. The treatise of Constantine Porphyrogenitus *De administrando imperio* describes the misfortunes of the “Scythians” in more detail. Possibly, this information was partially collected already during the reign of Leo VI<sup>32</sup>.

The adjacency of information about the fleet of Rus’ and Arabs in “Naumachika” is not accidental: in the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Empire had to deal with both barbarians. The expeditions of the Muslim fleet posed a direct threat to the main centers of Byzantium, which suffered a number of sensitive defeats. In 888, the eunuch Yazaman, ruler of Tarsus, captured four Byzantine ships; in 891, he attacked the town of Salandu in western Cilicia<sup>33</sup>. Between 891–893, the Arabs besieged Samos and forced it to surrender along with the *strategos*, Paspalas; in 898, another Muslim eunuch commander, Raghīb, captured three thousand Byzantine

<sup>31</sup> Οὐ γὰρ ὁ αὐτός ἐστὶν στόλος τῶν πλοίων τῶν τε Σαρακηγῶν καὶ τῶν λεγομένων Ῥῶς βορείων Σκυθῶν. Οἱ μὲν γὰρ Σαρακηγοὶ κουμβαρῖοις χρῶνται μείζουσι καὶ ἀργότεροις, οἱ δὲ οἶον ἀκαταίας μικροῖς καὶ ἐλαφροτέροις καὶ γοργοῖς, οἱ Σκύθαι δὲ διὰ ποταμῶν γὰρ εἰς τὸν Εὐξῖνον ἐπιπλέοντες πόντον, οὐ δύνανται μείζονα ἔχειν πλοῖα (*For the fleet of ships of the Saracens is not the same as that of the so-called Russians, northern Scythians. The Saracens use larger and slower koumbaria, while the Scythians use akatia, which are small, lighter and fast, as they cannot have larger ships when raiding down rivers to the Black Sea*): J.H. PRYOR, E. JEFFREYS, *The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ. The Byzantine Navy ca 500–1204*, Leiden–Boston 2006 [= MMe, 62], p. 512–515. However, this edition follows the version of Codex Ambrosianus B 119 sup. (139), which contains some different readings when compared with other manuscripts (such as, the specifying ethnonym Ῥῶς). There is no doubt that “northern Scythians” are precisely the same Rhos. Cf.: *The Taktika of Leo VI*, ed. et trans. G. DENNIS, Washington 2010 [= CFHB, 49], p. 532; J. HALDON, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI*, Washington, 2014 [= DOS, 44], p. 417. Cf. also: О.М. Филиппчук, *Studia Byzantino-Rossica...*, p. 69; А.С. ЩАВЕЛЕВ, *Известие о “северных скифах” (“росак”) в трактате “Тактика” византийского императора Льва VI Мудрого*, ИГ 3, 2016, p. 236–250.

<sup>32</sup> J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *The De administrando Imperio: a Re-examination of the Text and a Re-evaluation of its Evidence about the Rus*, [in:] *Les centres proto-urbains...*, p. 327–332; О.М. Филиппчук, *Studia Byzantino-Rossica...*, p. 112. On the contrary, Aleksei Shchavalev considers that the information about “Northern peoples”, including Rus’, was compiled by Emperor Constantine VII personally. The author dates the text of DAI between 952 and 959 and attributes it to the cooperation of the Emperor and his co-author, the “Anonymous Collaborator”: А. ШЧАВЕЛЕВ, *Treatise “De Administrando Imperio” by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus: Date of the Paris. gr. 2009 Copy, Years of Compiling of the Original Codex, and a Hypothesis about the Number of Authors*, SCer 9, 2019, p. 698, 701sqq.

<sup>33</sup> *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XXXVII, trans. P.M. FIELDS, New York 1987, p. 157, 175; А.А. ВАСИЛЬЕВ, *Византия и арабы. Политические отношения Византии и арабов за время Македонской династии*, Санкт-Петербург 1902, p. 108–109; S. TOUGHER, *The Reign of Leo VI. Politics and People*, Leiden–New York–Köln 1997 [= MMe, 15], p. 185.

sailors and burned their ships, having devastated a number of fortresses<sup>34</sup>. In 900, the renegade Damianos, on the orders of the Caliph, destroyed the fleet of Tarsus, which, it would seem, was supposed to bring consolation to Byzantium, but the effect of the intra-Muslim strife was short-lived<sup>35</sup>. The war continued with varying success: in 901, the same Damianos disrupted Demetrias, and in 902–903 the island of Lemnos was captured; in 902, Taormina fell, the last stronghold of the Byzantines in Sicily<sup>36</sup>. In the summer of 904, the Arab squadron, led by another Byzantine traitor, Leo the Tripolite, approached Constantinople itself, capturing Abydos and the harbor of Parion at the entrance to the Sea of Marmara. Established by the Emperor at the head of the fleet, *drungarios* Eustathios could not oppose Leo the Tripolite in anything, like his successor, *protoasikritos* Himerios. Pseudo-Symeon considered that the Hagarenes left the straits, fearing their narrowness (al-Masudi also hints at the reason for the changing course being the shallow water); but on the whole, *ghulam* Zurafa focused on the sea much better than the Byzantines, having captured on the way back the second most important city of the Empire, Thessalonica (July 31, 904)<sup>37</sup>. Emperor Leo VI could not take any effective countermeasures against this disaster<sup>38</sup>; in turn, Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus dedicated one of the sermons to the capture of Thessalonica, in which he addressed St. Demetrius, surprised that the city under his protection suffered so many troubles<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, rec. S. WAHLGREN, Berolini 2006 [= *CFHB*, 44] (cetera: SYMEON), p. 274; A.A. ВАСИЛЬЕВ, *Византия и арабы...*, p. 134–135, n. 6; *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XXXVIII, trans. F. ROSENTHAL, New York 1985, p. 73; S. TOUGHER, *The Reign of Leo VI...*, p. 185.

<sup>35</sup> *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XXXVIII..., p. 91.

<sup>36</sup> SYMEON, p. 282–283; A.A. ВАСИЛЬЕВ, *Византия и арабы...*, p. 125–126, 135–136; S. TOUGHER, *The Reign of Leo VI...*, p. 185–186; on chronology cf.: R.J.H. JENKINS, *The Chronological Accuracy of the "Logothete" for the Years A.D. 867–913*, *DOP* 19, 1965, p. 106–107.

<sup>37</sup> THEOPHANES CONTINUATUS, [in:] *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonnæ 1838 [= *CShB*, 45], p. 366–367; SYMEON MAGISTER, [in:] *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata...*, p. 707; ΜΑÇΟΥΔΙ, *Les prairies d'or*, vol. II, trans. C. BARBIER DE MEYNARD, A. PAVET DE COURTEILLE, Paris 1863 (cetera: ΜΑÇΟΥΔΙ), p. 318–319. Cf.: П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега...*, p. 16–21; *Ioannis Caminiatae De expugnatione Thessalonicae*, rec. G. BÖHLIG, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 1973 [= *CFHB*, 4]; *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XXXVIII..., p. 148; H. GREGOIRE, *Le communiqué arabe sur la prise de Thessalonique (904)*, *B* 22, 1952, p. 373–375; W. FARAG, *Some Remarks on Leo of Tripoli's Attack on Thessaloniki in 904 A.D.*, *BZ* 82, 1989, p. 133–139.

<sup>38</sup> A.A. ВАСИЛЬЕВ, *Византия и арабы...*, p. 141.

<sup>39</sup> NICOLAS I, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE, *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. et trans. L.G. WESTERINK, Washington 1981 [= *CFHB*, 20], p. 11–13: Ποῦ μοι, Δημήτρηε μάρτυς, ἡ ἀήττητος συμμαχία; Πῶς τὴν σὴν πόλιν ὑπερείδες πορθουμένην; Πῶς ὑπὸ σοὶ πολιοῦχῳ ἢ ἐχθροῖς ἄβατος, ἀφ' οὗ χρόνου ταύτην ἦλιος ἐθεάσατο, τοσοῦτων κακῶν εἰς πείραν ἐγένετο; Πῶς τῆς τῶν δυσσεβούντων ὀφρῶς ἡνέσχου κατορχουμένων τῆς ἱερᾶς προστασίας; Πῶς ὑπέμεινες ταῦτα καὶ διεκαρτέρισας; Ἡ πάντως ἄν εἶπες ἡμῖν, εἴπερ ἄξιοι [ἦμεν τῆς σῆς φωνῆς ἀκούομεν, δὲ ὅμως ἐκ τοῦ οικείου συνείδοτος λαμβάνοντες τὴν ἀπόκρισιν.



Noteworthy that St. Demetrius was a beloved saint of Emperor Leo VI, who devoted three homilies to him<sup>40</sup>.

The fight against the Arabs at sea remains the main military task of Byzantium in subsequent years. In 906, on the day of St. Phocas, the appointed *logothetes tou dromou* Himerios finally defeated the enemy fleet in the Aegean. This victory was overshadowed by the fact that, shortly after it, Andronicus Ducas, who was obliged to contribute to the Roman naval commander, rebelled and sided with the Arabs. The situation was aggravated by the intrigues of the *parakoimomenos* Samonas, who clearly sympathized with the soldiers of Islam<sup>41</sup>. Byzantine diplomacy often succeeded where the armed forces failed: for example, in 907 the famous Leo the Choirospaktes achieved the conclusion of a peace treaty favorable to the Empire in Baghdad and the exchange of prisoners<sup>42</sup>. Three years later, *logothetes* Himerios undertakes the largest military expedition to Syria. Rus'ian mercenaries are also widely used in this theater of operations: in 910, 700 of their soldiers were part of the Byzantine fleet<sup>43</sup>. Since that time, information about the military service of the "Tauroscythians" in Byzantium has been appearing more often; it is provided by an agreement concluded with Rus' on September 2, 911<sup>44</sup>. The still unsolved enigma is the prehistory of the appearance of the Rus' in the naval expedition of Himerios.

Possibly, it is in the context of the mention of the Arabs' marine activity that we encounter the evidence on the Rus' in Byzantine sources again. Scholars repeatedly analyzed the note about the "Rhos-Dromitai" and saw in it a reflection of Oleg's campaign<sup>45</sup>, the raid of a certain "Slavic-Varangian squad" on the Byzantine capital, which happened simultaneously with the attack of Leo the Tripolite<sup>46</sup>, or even the reflection of the sending of "Rus-Varangian" troops by the Prince Vladimir the Great at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>47</sup>. Some academics even compared this text with the narration of Thietmar of Merseburg about the "swift Danes" in Kiev at the

<sup>40</sup> *Leonis VI Sapientis Imperatoris Homiliae*, ed. T. ANTONOPOULOU, Turnhout 2008 [= CC.SG, 63], p. 243–266.

<sup>41</sup> *Theophanes Continuati Chronographia*, p. 371–372; СΥΜΕΟΝ, p. 289–290; cf.: А.А. ВАСИЛЬЕВ, *Византия и арабы...*, p. 160.

<sup>42</sup> *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XXXVIII..., p. 181; А.А. ВАСИЛЬЕВ, *Византия и арабы...*, p. 162–163.

<sup>43</sup> CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENNETOS, *The Book of Ceremonies*, vol. I–II, trans. A. MOFFATT, M. TALL, Canberra 2012 [= BAus, 18], p. 651; cf.: H. AHRWEILER, *Byzance et la mer*, Paris 1966, p. 113, n. 4; J. HALDON, *Theory and Practice in Tenth-Century Military Administration. Chapters II, 44 and 45 of the Book of Ceremonies*, TM 13, 2000, p. 203; C. ZUCKERMAN, *On the Byzantine Dromon (with a Special Regard to De Cerim. II, 44–45)*, REB 73, 2015, p. 73–91.

<sup>44</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 36.

<sup>45</sup> R.J.H. JENKINS, *The Supposed Russian Attack...*, p. 403–406; А.А. VASILIEV, *The Second Russian Attack...*, p. 188.

<sup>46</sup> В.Д. НИКОЛАЕВ, *Свидетельство хроники Псевдо-Симеона...*, p. 151–152.

<sup>47</sup> А. ΜΑΡΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Encore les Rhos-Dromitai et le Pseudo-Symeon*, JÖB 23, 1974, p. 97–99.

beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>48</sup>. The potential of Pseudo-Symeon's message has not yet been exhausted: the mysterious "Dromitai" could also be associated with the Thracian Memnos, the Argonauts, Augustus' victory over Anthony and Cleopatra, Heracles or the Pharos lighthouse, since references to them are also contained in the scholia under consideration, which are a repository of etymological and toponymic records<sup>49</sup>. The compiler of the scholia became interested in the origin of the ethnonym "Rhos" and the term "Dromitai"; recording certain information about them:

Ῥῶς δὲ, οἱ καὶ Δρομίται φεράωννυμοι, ἀπὸ ῥῶς τινὸς σφοδροῦ διαδραμόντες ἀπηχήματα τῶν χρησαμένων ἐξ ὑποθήκης ἢ θεοκλυτίας τινὸς, καὶ ὑπερσχόντων αὐτοῦς, ἐπικέκληνται. Δρομίται δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀξέως τρέχειν αὐτοῖς προσεγένετο, ἐκ γένους δὲ τῶν Φράγγων καθίστανται<sup>50</sup>.

Researchers who interpreted the source considered this record in the chronological context of events related either to Leo the Tripolite's campaign in one way or another<sup>51</sup>, or as an insert lacking a strong connection with previous information<sup>52</sup>. The options for its translation are radically different<sup>53</sup>. Cyril Mango translated the passage into English as follow:

The Russians, who are also called Dromitai, have been so named after certain mighty (or crafty) Ros, after they had escaped the consequences (lit. echoes, repercussions) of the oracles made about them through some admonition (perhaps magical doctrine) or revelation from above, and which had overpowered them. The name Dromitai accrued to them because they run fast<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> P. KARLIN-HAYTER, "Swift Danes", В 35, 1965, p. 359; O.M. ЛУГОВИЙ, "Дани" на Русі та у Візантії на початку XI ст., ДХИАЕ 13, 2015, p. 69–76.

<sup>49</sup> On the methods of the narrative's construction used by Pseudo-Symeon, cf. W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, Basingstoke 2013, p. 217–224; C. ZUCKERMAN, *Emperor Theophilos and Theophobos in Three Tenth-Century Chronicles: Discovering the Common Source*, REB 75, 2017, p. 101–150, esp. 149–150.

<sup>50</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata...*, p. 707; cf.: A. ΜΑΡΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Encore les Rôs-Dromitai...*, p. 91–93; A. ΚΑΡΠΟΖΙΛΟΣ, *Ροσ-δρoмиты...*, p. 113–116; П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега...*, p. 16–21.

<sup>51</sup> A.A. VASILIEV, *The Second Russian Attack...*, p. 188; П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега...*, p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> Ф.И. УСПЕНСКИЙ, *Патриарх Иоанн VII Грамматик и Русь-дрoмиты у Симеона Магистра*, ЖМНП 267, 1890, p. 1; A. ΚΑΡΠΟΖΙΛΟΣ, *Ροσ-δρoмиты...*, p. 116–117; A.A. ГОРСКИЙ, *Русь "от рода франков"*, ДРВМ 2, 2008, p. 55–56.

<sup>53</sup> Cf.: A.A. VASILIEV, *The Second Russian Attack...*, p. 187–195; В.Д. НИКОЛАЕВ, *Свидетельство хроники Псевдо-Симеона...*, p. 148; A. ΚΑΡΠΟΖΙΛΟΣ, *Ροσ-δρoмиты...*, p. 117; П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега...*, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> C. MANGO, *A Note on...*, p. 459.

We will nevertheless propose another version of the translation:

The Rhos, who are also called Dromitai, have originated from a certain mighty Rhos; [they] are called in a divinatory response from a certain admonition or divine prediction that had overcome them. [The Name] Dromitai is given from their [ability] to run fast; they originate from the clan of Franks.

The text in question, it seems, can be considered an allusion to the message of the book of Ezekiel, mistakenly translated in the Septuagint, and the “mighty Rhos” is none other than Gog, “the archon of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal” (Ez. 38: 3–6)<sup>55</sup>. This assumption also makes it possible to understand why the “divine prediction” is associated with the Rus’ people: the biblical prophet predicted the death of Gog and the devastation of the land of Magog, the final victory of Israel over its northern enemies. The closing part of the scholia, which is about the etymology of the word “Dromitai”, and their origin from the Franks, most likely, was invented by the author of this note<sup>56</sup>. Alexander Vasiliev believed that the name Δρομίται originally indicated the toponym Ἀχίλλειος δρόμος at the mouth of the Dnieper, and such a meaning of the word cannot be excluded<sup>57</sup>. As witnessed by Leo the Deacon, the Byzantines associated Achilles with “Scythia” and the “Tauroscythians”<sup>58</sup>. Obviously, the compiler of the note about the “Dromitai” did not know anything specific about them, except for their ability to move fast. It is noteworthy that in version A of the Pseudo-Symeon etymological list, this evidence is placed in the context of information about the successors of Alexander the Great; the same legend about the swift “Dromitai” is also found in the description of the well-known and credible attack of the Rus’ on Constantinople in 941, probably precisely this passage was the original<sup>59</sup>. Thus, the insertion of information about the “Rhos” in the text of the narration about Leo the Tripolite’s attack

<sup>55</sup> Γῶγ... ἄρχοντα Ρῶς, Μοσὸχ καὶ Θοβὲλ. Cf.: *Septuaginta*, ed. A. RAHLFS, Stuttgart 2006, p. 1462. The comparison of the Rus’ with the biblical Gog and Magog is repeatedly used in Byzantine literature of the 10<sup>th</sup> c., such as, in the Life of St. Basil the Younger and in the *History* of Leo the Deacon: *Житие Василия Нового в древнейшем славянском переводе*, vol. I, ed. Т.В. ПЕНТКОВСКАЯ, Л.И. ЩЕГОЛЕВА, С.А. ИВАНОВ, Москва 2018, p. 412; ЛЕО, p. 150.

<sup>56</sup> Anton A. Gorskiy supposed that Princess Olga invented the genealogy “from the Franks” with the aim of success in the planned matrimonial union of her son, Svjatoslav, with one of the daughters of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, but it is too unreasonable a hypothesis. Cf.: А.А. ГОРСКИЙ, *Русь “от рода франков”*..., p. 59. Perhaps we are faced with the error of a scribe who wrote Φράγγων instead of the original Φαράγγων or Φαργάνων? Such distortions of the word Βαράγγοι are found in Byzantine literature, including in the 10<sup>th</sup> century: *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata*..., p. 815.

<sup>57</sup> А.А. VASILIEV, *The Second Russian Attack*..., p. 193.

<sup>58</sup> ЛЕО, p. 150.

<sup>59</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata*..., p. 746; А. КАРПОЗИЛОС, *Рос-дромиты*..., p. 115–117; А.А. ГОРСКИЙ, *Русь “от рода франков”*..., p. 55–56.

does not indicate any real actions taken by the Rus' against the Byzantine capital; it concerns mythology, but not history<sup>60</sup>. This confusing fragment provides only an additional argument in favor of the fact that information about Rus' became relevant in the times of Pseudo-Symeon's work on the chronicle.

Let us go back to the problem of Oleg's campaign. Scholars have drawn attention to the contradiction in the story of the Russian Primary Chronicle: on the one hand, Prince Oleg acts as an adversary of the "Greeks", who achieved victory, a profitable peace and a rich tribute, after which he was named "the Prophet". At the same time, the Byzantines unexpectedly compare the leader of the barbarians with St. Demetrius, the patron saint of Thessalonica; he hangs his "shield on the gates", which in the medieval sense symbolized protection over the city rather than victory<sup>61</sup>. The symbol of victory was most often the offensive weapon: for example, in 813 the Bulgarian Khan Krum intended to thrust a spear into the Golden Gate of Constantinople<sup>62</sup>. The Wielkopolska Chronicle tells us that the coronation sword of the Polish kings, "Szczerbiec", got a notch after hitting the Golden Gate of Kiev in 1018, which, of course, is an anachronism, but corresponds to the ideas of the era<sup>63</sup>. Gallus Anonymous confirms the fact that the Polish prince Boleslaw the Brave struck with the sword at the gates of the captured city, in commemoration of the impending disgrace of the sister of Kievan Prince Yaroslav<sup>64</sup>.

At the same time, a colorful description of the cruelty of pagan Rus' in the RPC, obviously, dates back to the Byzantine source, possibly, the Continuation of Hamartolos. The later editor transferred a part of the information about Igor's campaign in 941 to Oleg's earlier, created by him; so, the phrase "еликоже ратнии творять" (as warriors do) appeared in both Novgorod First and Russian Primary Chronicles because of an incorrect translation<sup>65</sup>. In addition to the Continuation

<sup>60</sup> On the geographical glosses in Pseudo-Symeon, cf.: J. SIGNES CODOÑER, *A Note on the Dossier of Geographical Glosses Used by the Compilers of the So-called Version B of the Logothete Chronicle under the Macedonian Emperors*, JÖB 69, 2019, p. 303–321. The author correctly claims that Pseudo-Symeon was not attentive to the content and did not realize that most names of the list belonged to other passages, *ibidem*, p. 316.

<sup>61</sup> И.Н. Данилевский, *Повесть временных лет. Герменевтические основы источниковедения летописных текстов*, Москва 2004, p. 157; А. Чернов, *Хроники изнаночного времени*, Санкт-Петербург 2006, p. 60–61; А.М. Домановский, *Князь Олег и принятие христианства: причинки до питання і спостереження у візантійському контексті*, СК 1, 2011, p. 211.

<sup>62</sup> *Theophanis Chronographia*, vol. I, rec. C. DE BOOR, Lipsiae 1883, p. 503.

<sup>63</sup> *Chronica Poloniae maioris*, rec. B. KÜRBIŚ, Warszawa 1970 [= MPH.NS, 8], p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> *Galli Anonymi Chronicae et gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum*, ed. C. MAŁEZYŃSKI, Cracoviae 1952 [= MPH.SN, 2], p. 22–23.

<sup>65</sup> In the Greek text of the Continuation of George Hamartolos, there is a phrase ἕσους δὲ τοῦ ἱερατικοῦ κλήρου συνελάμβανον; the Slavic scribe understood the word ἱερατικός by consonance as "ратный" (warrior). Then, this mistake was borrowed in the Primary Chronicle. Cf.: В.М. Истрин, *Книги временных и образных Георгия Мниха. Хроника Георгия Амартола в древнем славяно-русском переводе*, vol. II, Петроград 1922, p. 61.23; П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега...*, p. 29–30.

of George Hamartolos, the chronicler also used the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, as well as the Life of Basil the Younger<sup>66</sup>. The texts of the Kievan and Novgorod chronicles represent different versions of the reconstruction of an event about which (at the time of the creation of the narrative), very little reliable information has been preserved<sup>67</sup>.

In general, the compiler of the RPC constructed a narrative more successfully: unlike the Novgorod colleague, he knew the reliable date of Igor's campaign in 941 and examined the texts of the Rus'-Byzantine treaties. Therefore, he led to the conclusion that a similar action by Oleg took place before 911 (the treaty referred to peace after the previous conflict). He borrowed some information about the cruelties of the Rus' from the available evidence on the campaign of 941, adding to them the legendary motifs of Oleg's tricks, the folklore-epic nature of which is obvious (moving ships on wheels; the miraculous detection of the Greek's deception)<sup>68</sup>. Further, in RPC we find the text of the so-called "preliminary agreement" of 907, the insertion character of which was shown by Alexei Shakhmatov<sup>69</sup>. The author of the NFC placed Igor's campaign at first, which is well known from Byzantine sources (The Life of Basil the Younger and the Continuator of Hamartolos)<sup>70</sup>, mistakenly attributing it two decades earlier, and then described Oleg's expedition three years

<sup>66</sup> И.Н. Данилевский, *Повесть временных лет...*, p. 158.

<sup>67</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 29–32; *Новгородская первая летопись...*, p. 107–109. Overall, there are two main schemes of the early history of the chronicle writing in Rus'. Having compared the Russian Primary Chronicle with the Novgorod one, Alexei Shakhmatov considered that the earlier version of the text is partly preserved in the First Novgorod Chronicle of the Younger Recension. He referred to this hypothetical narrative as the "Initial Compilation". According to the other point of view, the differences in the Novgorod Chronicle are only the results of later alterations. Anyway, most researchers agree that the Russian Primary Chronicle was constructed on the basis of some earliest narration or, at least, annalistic notes. Cf.: А.А. ШАХМАТОВ, *Разыскания о древнейших русских летописных сводах*, Санкт-Петербург 1908, p. 1–13; К. ЦУКЕРМАН, *Наблюдения над сложением древнейших источников летописи*, [in:] *Collectanea Borisoglebica / Борисоглебский сборник*, ed. ИДЕМ, Paris 2009, p. 183–306; А.А. ГИППИУС, *До и после Начального свода. ранняя летописная история Руси как объект текстологической реконструкции*, [in:] *Русь в IX–X вв. Археологическая панорама*, ed. Н.А. МАКАРОВ, Москва 2012, p. 50–51; А.А. GIPPIUS, *Reconstructing the Original of the Povest' vremennykh let: a Contribution to the Debate*, RLin 38, 2014, p. 341–366; А.В. НАЗАРЕНКО, *Достоверные годовые даты в раннем летописании и их значение для изучения древнерусской историографии*, [in:] *Древнейшие государства Восточной Европы. 2013 год: Зарождение историописания в обществах Древности и Средневековья*, ed. Д.Д. БЕЛЯЕВ, Т.В. ГИМОН, Москва 2016, p. 593–654. The survey of counterarguments: D. OSTROWSKI, *The Načalnuj Svod Theory and the Povest' vremennykh let*, RLin 31, 2007, p. 269–308; А.П. ТОЛОЧКО, *Очерки...*, p. 20–34.

<sup>68</sup> Д.В. АНИКИН, *Исследование языковой личности составителя «Повести временных лет»*, Барнаул 2004 (PhD dissertation), p. 115.

<sup>69</sup> А.А. ШАХМАТОВ, *Несколько замечаний о договорах с греками Олега и Игоря*, ЗНО 8, 1915, p. 385–400.

<sup>70</sup> В.М. ИСТРИН, *Книги временья...*, vol. I, p. 567; vol. II, p. 60–61; *Житие Василия Нового в древнейшем славянском переводе...*, p. 412–418.

later. The mechanism for constructing information in this part of the Initial Compilation raises doubts not only in chronology (which, of course, was constructed artificially), but also in most details of the events under consideration<sup>71</sup>. According to RPC, Oleg's campaign on Constantinople was carried out both by pedestrians and horsemen; NFC of the Younger recension is silent about the land component of the route<sup>72</sup>. Attention to this information prompted the belief that the war with Byzantium happened no later than the conclusion of peace with the Bulgarian tsar Symeon the Great in 904, after which the movement of nomad equestrians to the capital of the Empire would have been impossible<sup>73</sup>. However, it cannot be ruled out that the chronicler borrowed the information about the horse campaign from the description of Igor's military preparations in 944, who was assisted by the Pechenegs in a similar situation<sup>74</sup>. The list of the participating ethnic groups subordinate to Oleg also cannot be considered authentic. These ethnonyms are found already in the ethnographic introduction of the RPC, which the chronicler often operated on later<sup>75</sup>. The use of military cunning (moving ships overland on wheels) and blocking the Golden Horn (or the Bosphorus) by Byzantines with a chain seems likely due to the existing parallels<sup>76</sup>, but one cannot be completely sure that the chronicler did not transfer them arbitrarily from his available sources to the constructed narrative about the campaign. Summing up these observations, we can conclude that at the time of the compilation of the annals, the chronicler only reliably knew that during the reign of Oleg and Igor, there were two military travels to Constantinople. However, he has conflicting information on the time and circumstances of these events.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny completely the reflection of realities in the ideas of the second campaign of Rus' on Constantinople. The text of the treaty of 911 convinces that shortly before the conclusion of the agreement a certain conflict between Byzantium and Rus' occurred and a new peace conclusion was needed<sup>77</sup>. The clauses of 911's treaty on Rus'ian and Byzantine captives are noticeable: the

<sup>71</sup> М. КАЗАНСКИЙ, К. ЦУКЕРМАН, *Уличи*, Psl 25, 2017, p. 19–24.

<sup>72</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 29; *Новгородская первая летопись...*, p. 108.

<sup>73</sup> П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега...*, p. 13.

<sup>74</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 45.

<sup>75</sup> It is noteworthy that the chronicler use choronym “Великая Скуфь” (Μεγάλη Σκυθία), borrowed from the late antiquity. Cf.: А.С. Щавелев, *От позднеантичного хоронима Μεγάλη Σκυθία к древнерусскому этнохорониму «Великая Скуфь»: обзор текстов*, [in:] *Скифия: образ и историко-культурное наследие. Материалы конференции 26–28 октября 2015 г.*, ed. Т.Н. ДЖАКСОН, И.Г. КОНОВАЛОВА, А.В. ПОДОСИНОВ, Москва 2015, p. 117–125; М. КАЗАНСКИЙ, К. ЦУКЕРМАН, *Уличи...*, p. 24–26.

<sup>76</sup> Е.А. РЫДЗЕВСКАЯ, *К летописному сказанию о походе Руси на Царьград в 907 году*, ИАН СССР. ООИ 6, 1932, p. 478–479; П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега...*, p. 26–30.

<sup>77</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 33–34.

very presence of such conditions indicates the recent hostility of the parties<sup>78</sup>. It seems that the contradictions can be resolved if we assume that Oleg's journey to the Royal City was not originally intended to damage him: presumably, the Rus'ians were sent to Byzantium to be hired for military service in order to strengthen the Empire's position in the war against the Arabs. The search for new allies in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century was obviously one of the main tasks of Byzantine diplomacy. This does not exclude that there were some dissensions during the negotiations between the parties, because of which the Byzantines blocked the sea approaches to the City for safety, and the "Scythians" launched a demonstration of force, which made it possible to achieve more favorable terms of employment, as well as later preferences. Not by chance, John Skilitzes noted a similar situation that happened in the last years of the reign of Basil II, when a certain "relative" of Prince Vladimir, Chrysocheiros with a detachment of 800 people made an unsuccessful attempt to apply for military service, which ended with his death<sup>79</sup>. Usage of foreign "military specialists" in the service was common for the Empire and naturally did not attract the attention of the Byzantine chroniclers: the incident with Chrysocheiros was recorded only because he was related to the son-in-law of the born in the purple Byzantine Emperors. Oleg and his squad could not boast of the existence of such blood ties. Subsequently, the fact of hiring and concluding a profitable contract together with the possible use of force in a skirmish before was rethought in Rus' as a grand victory for Oleg and forcing the "Greeks" to pay tribute. Despite this, the chronicle's text also retained several signs that Oleg's action was not initially hostile: this is evidenced by the complimentary comparison of the leader of the barbarians with St. Demetrius and the placing of the shield on Constantinople's Gates as a sign of protection over the city<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 36; Е.А. РЫДЗЕВСКАЯ, *О военных отношениях скандинавов и Руси к Византии по греко-русским договорам и по сагам*, [in:] ЕАДЕМ, *Древняя Русь и Скандинавия в IX–XIV вв.*, Москва 1978, p. 153.

<sup>79</sup> *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. THURN, Berlin 1973 [= *CFHB*, 5], p. 367; Н. АНРВЕЙЛЕР, *Вузансе...*, p. 128; Г.Г. ЛИТАВРИН, *Византия, Болгария...*, p. 223–227; А.М. ФИЛИПЧУК, *Русь и Византия в последние годы правления Василия II: Хризохир и его воины*, *СРу* 5, 2015, p. 55–70. It is noteworthy that the number of Chrysocheiros' warriors, 800, was approximately the same as the one that princes of Kiev had at their disposal. For example, in 1093 prince Sviatopolk Iziaslavich has 700 or 800 "fellows" in his "druzhina": *Лаврентьевская летопись...*, col. 218; *Ипатьевская летопись...*, col. 209. This is also consistent with the number of Rus' mercenaries, 700, in the marine expedition of Himerios: J. HALDON, *Theory and Practice...*, p. 203.

<sup>80</sup> Scholars often found in this plot the influence of some lost Bulgarian or Byzantine source. Cf.: А.А. ШАХМАТОВ, *Разыскания о древнейших...*, p. 466; G. OSTROGORSKY, *L'expédition du prince Oleg...*, p. 57–58; А.А. VASILIEV, *The Second Russian Attack...*, p. 174.

The context of Byzantine-Arab relations (the increased threat from the Arab fleet after the raid of Leo the Tripolites to Constantinople and the capture of Thessalonica), as well as Oleg's comparison with St. Demetrius, indicate that the summer of 904 can be considered as the *terminus post quem* of the campaign. In our opinion, only the aggravation of military danger and defeat forced the Byzantines to make a deal with Rus'. From the point of view of contemporaries, the arrival of Oleg's army and an agreement with him came together as the evidence of returning God's grace after a sudden catastrophe that occurred with the second city of the Empire. It is no coincidence that there is a similarity between the words of Nicholas Mysticus, addressed to the spiritual patron of Thessalonica, and the annalistic comparison of the Prince of Rus' to the Christian Saint. The *terminus ante quem* is 910, the undoubted participation of Rus'ians in the Syrian campaign of the logothetes Himerios. It is noteworthy that the turning point in the war at sea and the transition of the initiative to the Byzantines took place after the battle of October 6, 906, in which, according to Pavel Kuzenkov, new allies were also used<sup>81</sup>. If so, the summer of 906 or sometime later seems to be the most likely time of the campaign and agreement. Oleg's detachment replenishes the strength of the Byzantine fleet and successfully manifests itself in the war, because of which it achieves favorable conditions for trade and increases the legal status of its colleagues. In 911, the parties concluded a "big treaty" that secured the partnership.

The connection between Oleg's Byzantine campaign and the Caspian raid of some Rus'ians in 300 (912/913), information about which is reported by Masudi, is disputable. According to Alexander Kazhdan, the baptism of certain Rus'ians after the conclusion of the treaty with Byzantium in 911 and joining the service of the Byzantines are very likely<sup>82</sup>; this idea seems sound. The establishment of allied relations between Rus' and Byzantium changed the balance of forces in the region. It is possible that the Khazar Khagan let the boats of the Rus' to the Caspian Sea in agreement with the Byzantine Emperors<sup>83</sup>. The strike on the territories of the Southern Caspian region, which were dependent on the Samanids, as well as the Transcaucasia, was beneficial to the Byzantines, weakening their Muslim antagonists, and to the Khazars, with whom the Rus'ians agreed in advance on the division of the spoils. Further events showed the duplicity of the Khazar leader. On the way back, the Rus'ian fleet was ambushed by the Khazars at the mouth of the Volga. Al-Masudi, obviously, exaggerates the number of Rus'ians killed (30 thousand), reporting that some of them found a way through to the Burtases

<sup>81</sup> П.В. КУЗЕНКОВ, *Русь Олега...*, p. 35.

<sup>82</sup> Cf.: А.П. КАЖДАН, *К характеристике русско-византийских отношений в современной буржуазной историографии*, [in:] *Международные связи России до XVII в.*, ed. А.А. ЗИМИН, В.Т. ПАШУТО, Москва 1961, p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> А.П. НОВОСЕЛЬЦЕВ, *Хазарское государство...*, p. 193.



and Volga Bulgars, where they were murdered later<sup>84</sup>. However, there is no certainty that Oleg himself headed the Caspian raid: the surviving legends make him die due to his own horse after victorious celebrations in Kiev or Ladoga<sup>85</sup>.

So, the scheme of the main events can be represented as follows: at the turn of the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> c. Rus' were established in the Middle Dnieper region, and the Oleg and Igor group murdered the rival Varangians Askold and Dir. After 904, Byzantium again drew attention to the “northern Scythians”, in dire need of their military services. In 906, on the day of St. Phocas, the imperial fleet defeated the Hagarenes. Around this time, Oleg's detachment had already arrived in Constantinople to serve the Emperors and replenished the forces of the *logothetes tou dromou* Himerios. In 910, Rus'ians again supported the Byzantines during the operation in Syria, and on September 2, 911, the parties entered into a full-scale cooperation treaty, because of which some of the barbarians converted to Christianity. The defeat of the Rus' detachment by the Khazars after the Caspian campaign in 912/913 briefly halted their expansion, but did not change the main trends in international politics in Eastern Europe, in which the “Rurikids state” began to play an increasing role.

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<sup>84</sup> МАҶОУДИ, р. 22–24; В.Ф. МИНОРСКИЙ, *История Ширвана и Дербенда X–XI вв.*, Москва 1963, р. 198–201.

<sup>85</sup> Е.А. МЕЛЬНИКОВА, *Сюжет смерти «от коня» в древнерусской и древнескандинавской традиции*, [in:] *От Древней Руси к новой России. Юбилейный сборник, посвященный чл.-корр. РАН Я.Н. Щанову*, ed. А.Н. САХАРОВ, Москва 2005, р. 95–108.

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