

Lugovyi O.M. Rhos and Varangians in Byzantium during the 10-12th Centuries: the Formation and Structural Role of a Mercenary Contingent.

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The process of forming a mercenary contingent from Eastern and Northern Europe in the Byzantine army during the 10-11th centuries, the structural features of its functioning, and its role in the domestic and foreign policy of Byzantine Empire are analyzed in the dissertation.

The origins and semantics of whole a diversity of Northern, Central and Eastern Europe mercenaries' names used by medieval Greek authors for designating foreign contingent (*Tauroscythians*, *Rhos*, *Varangians*, *Rosovarangians*, *Koulpings* etc.) are investigated. This material gives possibility to inquire into a question of their ethnical determination by the Byzantine authors and their self-determination in different episodes. Among such episodes are differences between *Rhos* and *Tauroscythians* cases, isolating *Varangians* from them, *Koulpings* problem, *Nordmans* of Italian writers, *Nemitzes* problem etc.

First row of these ethnonyms in Byzantine literature belongs to ancient culture, not to Byzantine reality. Authors of the 10-13th century used to call steep nomads (Bulgarians, Hungarians, Polovtsians) by the name of *Scythians*. But sometimes *Scythians* was the name for Russians. One of the first, who called Russians by this name, was Nicetas of Paphlagonia in his *Life of the patriarch Ignatius* (9th cent.). *Tauroscythians* was more commonly used to designate Russian expatriates. Leo the Deacon (10th cent.) was the inventor of this term in such a meaning.

Michael Psellos also called Russians by the name of *Scythians from Taurus*, but only in the case, when they were Roman allies. The only episode he used their original name *Rhos* in his *Chronographia* – was the description of the Volodimer son of Yaroslav campaign against Constantinople in 1043. *Rhos* here is a barbarian nation that “had consistently cherished an insane hatred for the Roman Empire” – nothing to compare with the image of *Tauroscythians* of the same author, as if they were two different nations.

Rhos appeared to the Greek literature (patriarch Photios homilies) in 860, when the Rhos fleet attacked Constantinople. New term was supported in it's use by three associations: “Gog and Magog the prince of Rosh” at the Greek text of the Book of Ezekiel; Medieval Greek word for ‘health, strength’ (Symeon the Logothet wrote that Rus’ descends from “some powerful Rhos”); *rousios* for ‘red colored’ because of the unusual number of red-haired among Rhos (this root was used for them by Constantine the Porphyrogenetos and was attested as widespread by Liutprand of Cremona).

Known sources do not give accurate answer on the question of ethnical composition of the Rhos detachments in Byzantine service. But indirect evidences and analysis of the 10th century ethnopolitical situation in the Eastern-European region determined it as mixed Slavonic-Scandinavian.

Alternative hypothesis about origin of the Varangian name is formulated. It travelled a long way of semantic metamorphosis from *Varg/Wargus*-werewolf of *leges barbarorum*, a word for offender and marginal, through *Varegang* – foreigner, stranger as in Longobardian Italy to the man-at-arms *Wargeng/Waregango*. Constant contacts between Italy and Byzantium gave way for new concept to proceed through Greek and to be attached to Scandinavian part of Rhos, now with Scandinavian root *vár* – “contract”. Accepting the contract person etymology and changing ending into more suitable northern –ing, they introduced *Væringr*, while Greek language of 11-12th preserved more close to Langobardian form – *Varang*. Scandinavians returning from Byzantine brought it finally to Kievan Rus and Scandinavia.

By the end of 11th century Rhos almost disappeared from the Byzantine texts. Scandinavian Varangians are partly substituted by English Varangians. Such mixture of different northern ethnic groups in one military contingent caused in 12th century changing their name to the neutral

Pelecyphoroi (Battle-axe bearers), sometimes added by geographically uncertain determinative *from Thule*. This designation is common for such authors as Anna Comnena and Nicetas Choniates.

A deduction is made, that medieval common Greek was rather receptive to foreign names. With time these words moved from the language of soldiers, peasants and mariners into the language of capital classically educated nobility.

Problems of soldiers' recruiting to the Byzantine army were observed in the context of the international relations of the 10-12th centuries. The significance of the military mercenary contracts with Byzantium on the policies of Rus', the Scandinavian and the British states, Holy Roman Empire is shown.

According to the traditions of Roman Empire Byzantine power engaged federates, allies, *ethnikoi*. This practice gained special actuality after the theme army decline in the 10-11th cent. Nothing unknown in the mercenaries using was also for Western Europe. In the same centuries hired personal bodyguard squads with the predominant foreign element were in use almost in every country.

The most detailed information concerning ethnical structure of the mercenaries' contingents in the Byzantine army is inserted in the emperor chrysobulls of the second half of 11th cent. Eight lists of Byzantine *ethnikoi* demonstrate the tendency of the variety growth. List of 1060 included *Varangians, Rhos, Saracens* and *Franks*. Since 1074 *Koulpings* have appeared, since 1079 – *Bulgarians*, since 1082 – *Inglins* (Englishmen) and *Nemitzes* (Germans). During 1080-s we can also see *Alans* and *Abaza* (Abkhazians). *Franks* (Italian Normans) appeared or disappeared from lists according to the international situation. Unfortunately the 12th century sources provide no information comparable by its detail.

Anyway Russian service for Byzantine generates from the Variagian squads experience at Rus'. Terms of contract are placed in the *Eymundar þáttre*, part of *Flatexjarbók*, that is entirely devoted to the activity of Norwegian Eymund Hringson in the time of great prince Yaroslav struggle against his brother Sviatopolk. His contract with Yaroslav included Variag's duties and payments for their service, measured in eyrirs (27 grams of silver, 1/8 of marka). Soldiers (liðsmenn) received one eyrir per year, steersmen (skipstjórnarmenn) half-eyrir in addition, besides lodging, food and trophy.

According to the *Tale of Bygone Years* information, till the death of Yaroslav Novgorod citizens yearly paid special duty (300 grivnas = 15 300 grams of silver) required for Variags payments. Comparing this source with payments, known from *Eymundar þáttre*, we can calculate, that Novgorod, the main economical centre of Northern Rus' and the main centre of Scandinavian presence, could constantly maintain the squad of approximately 500 hired warriors. *Novgorod I Chronicle* gives number of one thousand Variags and three thousands Slovenian levy in the Yaroslav army for the war time against Sviatopolk the Damned and Polish king Boleslav. It is quite reliable, cause for the time of war Variags squad had to be strengthened (doubled). In few cases Russian prince personally travelled to Scandinavian lands for hiring Variags.

Hiring process in Byzantine Empire was more complex. There were four known to sources typical forms of the hiring process organization: accepting of the ready-to-war military detachment on the basis of alliance treaty, forming of a mercenary unit by emperor emissary at the territory and by authority of the allied state (*donor state*), individual joining the existing detachments in the Byzantine army that was possible thanks to previous treaty, and detention of the pilgrims and crusaders for the military service.

Though diplomatic relations between Rus' and Byzantine empire were introduced for the first time in 838-839 (*Prudentii Trecensis annales*), only the Treaty with Rus' in 911 gave legal background to the fact that Russian mercenaries already were present in Byzantine army. At the

moment of its concluding (September, 2) Byzantine fleet of Hymerius acted in the Eastern Mediterranean with 700 Rhos among its crews. This is the first well documented (in *De ceremoniis* of Constantine the Porphyrogennetos) fact of Russian mercenaries actions in the Byzantine army.

The Treaty of 944 formalized the role of state power in the hiring process. Every guest from Rus' (mercenaries on default) had to show the Great prince's *gramota* with bullas. It is clear that all further cases of Russian squads participating in Byzantine wars were strait consequence of the 944 Treaty. According to its terms prince Volodimer sent his first Variags squad to Byzantium in 980. Inobservance of its terms led to the downfall of the Chrysocheir detachment in 1024. Among other effects of 944 Treaty prince Volodimer the Great military help to Byzantine emperor Basil II against rebelling Bardas Phokas and his Georgian allies was. 6000 Russian (and Scandinavians arriving through Rus') solders included then into the Empire forces in 989 were still active in Asia Minor and at Caucasian frontier in 1000.

Changing circumstances required sending the emissary off to the donor country aimed to come to an agreement with local rulers and to hire solders per se. Most known examples of such actions were unsuccessful – that was a reason, why this routine practice appeared into the sources.

One of them is Kalokyros mission to Rus' in 968. Kalokyros had received about 15 kentinarii of golden nomismata in order “to allot it to them and to bring them to Misia” (*History* of Leo the Deacon). Kalokyros mission kept within the norms of article XV of 944 Treaty, concerning Emperor request for solders assignment by the Great prince. With mentioned cash Kalokyros could hire about 10 thousands Rhos for one campaign. But reality appeared to be uncontrolled.

The most significant is the story of Byzantine embassy for Vaering hiring, contained in the *Sverris-saga*. Greek konung Kirialax (Alexios III Angelos) in the autumn 1195 dispatched among Scandinavian konungs the chrysobull with the request for military help – a thousand of Vaerings from every kingdom. Norwegian action had tragical effect – levy of Vik's bond, gathered by emissary Hreidar, Vaering himself, discontented by Sverri taxation policy, remained in Norway and joined the Bagals movement against konung – the reason, why this episode was remembered.

But the same diplomatic action accomplished by Peter IIska at Denmark by all appearance significantly enlarged the Danish contingent among Vaerings before the end of the 12th century – they were the same Danes, whom the crusaders of 1203 would have seen later on the Constantinople walls.

At the time of Crusades especially widespread became treaties about military service, made straightly with a monarch or a large feudal lord arriving to Byzantium ahead of his own crusading army. First was Robert the Frisian, count of Flanders, returning from his pilgrimage in 1089 he visited emperor Alexios and later sent him 500 knights for the struggle against Pechenegs and emir Chaka. Crusaders of the First Crusade not only fought for their own benefits and on Byzantine request, they swore allegiance to the Byzantine emperor and were his servicemen temporally. In 1159 Manuel Comnenos sent John Condostephanos to Jerusalem in order to hire detachments of crusaders (other were hired in Rhodes) for the great campaign against Seljuqs. Participants of the Forth Crusade interfered in the intestine strife in Byzantine on the side of the legal inheritor of the Constantinople throne Alexios IV and expected appropriate payment. Only when they hadn't received it, they began to act for their own.

Scandinavians were traditionally on the first place among crusader-mercenaries. Albert of Aix, William of Tyr and *Estoire des Eracles* tell us about Danish prince Sveno, who entered Byzantine army after the fall of Nicaea in 1097 with 1500 warriors but later he was encircled by Turkeys and fell in battled together with his men.

In 1103 Danish king Eric Ejegod died from fever on Cyprus at Pathos. The fate of his suite is unknown, but abbot Nikolas in his *Itinerary* (1150-s) asserted that on the place of Eric death in Basta (Pathos) Vaering garrison stood since then.

About 1110 Norwegian expedition of the king Sigurd Magnusson (later known as Jorsalfar)

reached the Holy land. This pilgrimage was minutely but with many incredible details described by Snorri Sturluson in *Heimskringla*. According to this source at the way home Sigurd stopped at Constantinople, where he donated all his ships to emperor Alexios and let most of his followers stay at Greek service. The role of emissary in this case was played by Norwegians – participants of the pilgrimage of 1102, significant part of whom also stayed in Constantinople.

Orkneyinga saga narrates the story, which also combines the motif of diplomatic mission and crusade. Somewhere between 1151 and 1153 Norwegian Vaering Eindríd the Young made a proposition to Rognvald, the jarl of Orkneys, to participate in Crusade. In reality just after passing Gibraltar Eindríd took five jarl's ships and made his way to Constantinople. Others also kept in mind such a possibility (Rognvald himself in his verses was going to 'receive payment'), but jarl never wanted to see Eindríd over himself and returned home leaving his men in Byzantium.

Every donor country had its own interests that urged it to the participation in the Byzantine forces manning. The main reasons were always some changes in political and social structure of those countries, depriving part of local population, especially youth, of their centuries-old connections with land and clan. Close correlation between the situation inside the donor countries and intensity of recruiting system is often obvious. So the question of complex investigation of processes in social, economical, political, cultural structures that could affect the popularity of the idea of entering Byzantine service among the population of donor countries has to be examined.

During 10-12th centuries Scandinavian countries passed through the processes of state unification, centralization of power and land estates: Harald Bluetooth Christianisation and Svend Tveskaeg state centralization in Denmark, Uppland conquest of neighbouring countries under Olof Skottkonung, Saint Olav and Harald Hardrade reforms in Norway. Tribe kingdoms were disappearing from the political map, free odal owners class was hardly stricken. Mass, mostly young active men, were unleashed, and they needed application of their abilities. Part of the defeated tribal nobility was ejected out of Scandinavian borders together with their squads and turned into Vikings or Vaerings depending on the circumstances.

At the same time every travel was considered by Scandinavians not only by pragmatically, but also as the best way to demonstrate qualities, boldness and 'good fortune' – special category of ancient Scandinavian mentality, partly natural, partly inherent. But partly it could be derived from the lucky konung or jarl, while being in his service.

Considerable amount of northern mercenaries came to Byzantine service to stay forever. Sample of eleven heroes of Icelandic family sagas, details of whose service in Grekland are more or less clear, indicate that four of them were travellers-adventurers aiming to return from Byzantium making a fortune (three of them were there in 10th century); other four were either murderers, hiding themselves among the Varangians, either refugees because of feud in Iceland; correspondingly two men were being avengers (Thorstein at *Heiðarviga-saga* and Thorstein Dromund at *Grettis-saga*). Revenge for murder, performed at foreign land became folklore cliché and notorious that, according to it, murderer had to escape exactly in Miklagard/Constantinople. At least five of eleven Icelandic Vaerings (45%) hadn't any intentions to return home. But Icelanders were never the Varangians majority, as it could be seen from the sources.

12th century is characterized by new social-economical reasons for Vaerings movement. In this new situation powerful persons at Northern Europe feudal monarchies were not interested in mercenaries outflow without their participation and this position caused reduction of Scandinavian mercenarism at Byzantium during the century.

The main peculiar reasons for Swedish mercenarism were traditions dated back to 9th cent. Swedish Vaerings in Grekland are the best documented by runic stones: 11 at Uppland, 3 at Södermanland, 2 at Östergötland. These cenotaphs are concentrated in those regions, where process of state centralization was the most active. The runic stone of Berezan Island (12th cent.) is also

considered to be Swedish. The most probable is the version about mercenaries, who had left it, not merchants.

Participation of Norwegians in Byzantine events is attested by some sagas and they sometimes regarded as first Vaerings to come to Miklagard in 10th cent. Danes on this way are exposed by Italian and German sources from the beginning of 11th cent. Specifically *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseburg mentions them in Kiev at the time of struggle for power between Yaroslav and Sviatopolk, sons of Volodimer. Thietmar used ethnonym *Danes* as usual not to indicate all Scandinavians but exactly descendants from Jutland peninsula. So this reveals the possibility of peaceful relations between knyaz Yaroslav and Canute the Great, king of Denmark. Allusion by Leo of the Marsi for the Danes in the Byzantine army in Italy at the second half of the 10th century proves the positive conjuncture for transfer of Danish warriors towards Byzantium by the Austerwegr already at that time. *Yomsvikinga-saga* points out the possibility of Danish detachment ingress at the Rus' after the death of Svend Tveskaeg even without his son Canute will.

Scandinavian laws show that Byzantine service was reputed as long-termed and dangerous. Norwegian *Gulatingsslog* (II, 47) transmits the property of traveller to Grekland to the inheritor from the beginning of voyage. Swedes were more accustomed to the trade and mercenary routs into Grekland, so their laws required of his relatives to keep his property reserved until his return without time limits.

Rus' stood unusually in the international system, created by Byzantine diplomacy. During 10th and the first half of 11th century it secured and provided the solders transit from the Scandinavian countries to Byzantium and also played a role of the filter for this stream. Russian princes received large benefits from that, using liquid Scandinavian force for their political aims, increasing their power and indirectly controlling Byzantine army efficiency. Wars, led by Kievan princes against Slavonic, but also Finnish and Lithuanian, tribes, and intertribal conflicts as well raised the mobility and marginalized local population, thus creating new proposition of manpower for hireling.

Byzantine Empire gained from this role of Rus' as well, because its army was not able to accept every willing recruit from all over the Northern Europe. Constantinople authorities refused to man their ethnikai detachments from countries, with which rulers they had no agreements providing legal ground for hireling. Also they haven't hired a man, if every single case of recruitment wasn't confirmed by the ruler of donor country. That's why Rus' played such a big role, being since the treaties of 911 and 944 till the end of 11th century actually the only official donor country for whole Northern Europe region.

Last year the Rhos were mentioned in acts of war was 1077, in document clauses – 1088, anyway in one or two decades after the Manzikert defeat of 1071 Russian contingent had disappeared from the Byzantine army. The only convincing explanation for this is internal processes in Russian lands. Territorial principalities, created after the death of great prince Yaroslav and had being at permanent war with each other, had lost the integrated diplomatic system, connecting Rus' with Byzantium. In consequence the stream of Scandinavian mercenaries stopped, its infrastructure was ruined and Russians themselves lost possibility to use it. What is more, every new prince needed his own squad and feudalized society couldn't provide enough free efficient men for military service abroad.

Other European countries were also involved in the Byzantine recruiting, that is England, German lands and Italy. Every of these directions have to be carefully investigated. Anglo-Saxon role in Byzantine army is well (though not without puzzles) illuminated by written sources, while later reinforcement from Norman England much less detailed. It is certain, that English knights of that time kept connection with their motherland and were not only descendants of the Anglo-Saxon refugees. The main still moot points concern sources (especially *Chronicon Anonymi Laudunensis*), moment of British appearance in Byzantium, ethnical prevailing element in arranging corpus since the end of 11th cent., continuity of manpower arrival from England to Byzantium in 12-14th cent.

German presence in Byzantine army mostly reflects periods of friendly relations between two Empires, but not always. The issue of military collaboration between Byzantine and Saint Roman Empires is insufficiently known. We reviewed all the cases of the armed force involving from German lands fixed by sources, since the first reliable mention under 1069 up to some episodes of the collaboration between the Epirotan despotat and Hohenstaufens. As in the case of Rus', Scandinavian countries or England, it also had its own diplomatic prehistory in negotiations that prepared Second Crusade in 1143-1145. But not all the facts can be explained with the help of this diplomatic correspondence.

Some factors providing stability for the preservation of the contingent are examined, among them: the functions of the units, the system of subordination, the legal position of the units, their quartering, payments to the troops and other material inducements, spiritual influences exerted by the Byzantine church, and the perception of the mercenaries among the inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire.

From the very first mentioning in the Byzantine army in 10th century Rhos were subordinated to the common military administration structures. They entered two armies – the field tagmas and the palace guard. Already Constantine the Porphyrogenetos mentioned some *baptised Rhos* guarding the emperor palace. Rhos corpus established in 989 composed of 6 thousand solders acted as one detachment subordinated to emperor.

The same was Varangian position in the next century. Ioannes Scylitzes distinguished two structural units of Varangians – *Palace Varangians* and *External Varangians*. Varangians together with tagmas and emperor cavalry were the main body of every acting force in Empire till the beginning of the 13th century. Theory about *akolouphos* as a whole Varangian corps commander isn't found to be reasonable enough. There are some signs of legal proceedings in Varangian detachments, independent from Imperial judicial system.

Among the functions of Palace Rhos and Varangians were arrests and guard of the political prisoners, suppression of revolts. In acting army External Varangians were used in the centre of formation or were unleashed in the last critical moment. Byzantine and Italian authors more then once expressed admiration of their fighting value.

It is necessary to underline that mercenary armies of any descent were important substitution for the theme armies becoming more and more feudalized at the time. Its position was strengthened after the Manzikert defeat and loss of Asia Minor with all of its people resources to Seljuqs. Numerous Seljuq Turks themselves also entered Byzantine army as *Turcoples* and *Vardariotes* detachments, created by the emperor Alexios Comnen.

The private case of young Harald Hardrade being Vaering in Byzantium is very demonstrative concerning the sources of treasures, one could earn there. Solution to this case is found in the meaning of the Scandinavian term *pólútasvarf*, considered to be a kind of halflegal tax gathering in the territories under military actions.

The most successful ethnikai representatives received possibility of making serviceman career, even of officer rank in Emperor Guard that needed paying a huge entrance fee in the ordinary case. Such a prospect along with guaranteed property rights for mercenaries created favourable conditions for gathering wealth by means of military service in Roman Empire providing in turn constant motivation for volunteers and requiring mentioned above limitations.

According to the general Empire policy mercenaries, as every other group in Byzantine army, had to be baptized in orthodox way and even had their own churches. Mercenary groups were first to bring Christianity to Rus' and Sweden massively. Instead Scandinavian and English Varangians of the 12th century worshiped their national Latin saints. They acquired in Constantinople the right to build temples, consecrated in the names of St. Olav and St. Augustine of Canterbury, for instance.

The special problem is the geographical localization of the mercenary groups in

Constantinople and in the provinces. Among other questions here one can notice a close connection between Varangians and settlement in North-Western Crimea, called Uarangolimen, Varango Lime, Uarangica, Uarangido, etc. in the portolane charts from 1311 till 17th century. It is supposed to be a camp of Varangian force, established by Byzantines in the region during the short time expansion at the end of the 12th century.

It is proved, that the Byzantine emperors especially cared about the fighting capacity of this foreign contingent in particular, which was used both as a field army and as the border garrisons from which were recruited guard units.

The stages of the Rhos' and Varangians' contingent activity are delineated according to changes in its ethnical and structural composition.

The result of investigation was the forming ways reconstruction and a structure role of the Rhos and Varangian contingent, and also some other ethnikai detachments in Byzantine army from 910 to 1204. Evolution of all structural features and status of contingent gives material for periodization of the Byzantine mercenarism history.

During the period of 910-988 the mercenary Rhos detachments usually, though not constantly, took part in the Byzantine military campaigns. There are evidences of engaging them into regular military formations, such as fortresses garrisons and emperor guard. Kievan Rus' was at that time the only country-donor of the military force in Europe. This was legally based on the series of international treaties. Such a cooperation became one of the foreign policy priorities for Byzantium and an important mean of the statehood maintenance for Rus'. Therefore Rhos was the only name, under which were known all the northern mercenaries in Byzantium, no matter what was the country of their real origin.

The second period began with the creation of the first numerous constant Rhos contingent in 989. Later it was known under the name *Rhosike moira*. Crew multiplicity caused ethnical partitioning of the contingent in few structural units: Rhos, Varangians and possibly Koulpings. Kievan Rus' still played the main role in the soldiers delivery, but Scandinavians now obviously more independently active. By the end of the period we can see also German knights for the first time in Byzantine service.

At the beginning of the third stage (1071-1204) Rhos presence in Byzantium decreased. But new ethnos came into service – soldiers of Anglo-Saxon descent. Later on the same stage Byzantine forces had to invite Scandinavian parties from the Crusading armies' staff. Effective results were shown by ambassadors being simultaneously recruiting agents. When Empire had lost such partner as Rus', it had to choose much more flexible way of foreigners recruiting. Ethnical composition of Byzantine tagmas became more heterogeneous. German and Normandian (from Southern Italy) knights replaced vacant places in imperial army. Varangian contingent proper consisted now of Scandinavian and English soldiers together. It had lost juridical autonomy, but received more religious liberty. Danish volunteers and crusaders in 1190-s were last considerable aid to the contingent before Constantinople became the capital of Latin empire. In the sequel Scandinavians disappeared absolutely, Varangians were only associated with Englishmen. But they very rarely took part in actual acts of war.