

УДК 811.161, УДК 94(47).02

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PUBLICATIONS OF OLD RUSSIAN CHRONICLES TRANSLATED INTO MODERN RUSSIAN

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Abstract. The article by Vladimir Vorontsov is devoted to a critical analysis of the practice of publishing and translating Old Russian chronicles into modern Russian. The author questions established textual and translation approaches, including orthographic modernization, the compilation of variant readings from various manuscripts, and interpretive translation. Based on a comparison of photocopies of original chronicle manuscripts, facsimile sources, diplomatic transcriptions, and classical editions, the presence of systematic discrepancies between the manuscript text and its "prepared" versions is demonstrated.

Particular attention is given to the analysis of key lexemes and ethnonyms, as well as to the reconstruction of the genealogy of interpretative errors in historiography. The author argues that a number of translation decisions, enshrined in the academic tradition, lead to a distortion of the semantic structure of the source. This paper proposes a revision of the methodological foundations of the textual preparation of chronicles and calls for a maximally neutral, formalized approach to translation, based on direct work with manuscript sources.

This article is of significance for source studies, historical philology, and the historiography of Ancient Rus', stimulating discussion about the limits of acceptable editorial intervention and the status of translation as a scholarly tool.

Key words. Russian chronicles, Rus' chronicles, Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Codex of 1377, Hypatian Codex, Novgorod First Chronicle, Radziwiłł (Königsberg) Chronicle, V. N. Tatishchev, G. F. Miller, N. M. Karamzin, D.S. Likhachev, O. V. Tvorogov, A. A. Shakhmatov, V. Panov, A. S. Klevanov, M. D. Prisyolkov, Varangians, Rus', Rurik, Chuds, Slovens, Krivichs, Meryans, Ves (Weś), Khazars, taxation unit, plough, sokha, szeląg, vevertitsa; textual criticism; source studies; historical philology; translation of Old Russian texts; orthographic modernization; diplomatic transcription; facsimile; ethnonyms; semantic interpretation; editorial intervention; historiography of medieval Rus'.

conformity of the edited text with the original and the need to constantly check the facsimile or photograph of the original in this regard.

Medieval chronicle monuments reproducing the text of a previously created chronicle (protograph), made not by its author, are commonly referred to as apographers. The chronicles are far from identical in content. Historical information about the same event contained in different chronicles may differ significantly or completely contradict each other. These nuances are commonly referred to as "discrepancies." When publishing, scientists cleverly speculate on this, passing off texts with different readings for different chronicles, or for different lists of the same chronicle, depending on what is beneficial to them. The printed version, as a rule, includes the text that the author of the publication passes off as the only correct one, and discrepancies are marked with small footnotes, which are arranged in such numbers that the reader ceases to pay attention to them. In other words, none of the medieval Russian chronicles was published in the form in which it exists in the original. This is the second significant drawback of the publications of the Russian chronicles.

A pleasant exception is the publication of the Laurentian Codex and the Suzdal Chronicle, which was prepared before the revolution of 1917, but took place only in 1926-1928, with a continuation according to the Academic apographer¹, as well as the Hypatian Codex in 1923². They almost completely correspond to the manuscripts.

You can literally count the facsimile editions of the originals on your fingers. Only 4 chronicles were awarded this honor: Hypatian Codex³, Laurentian Codex⁴, Novgorod First Chronicle⁵, and Radziwiłł (Königsberg) Chronicle⁶. Moreover, the first two were not published in their entirety, but only the Primary Chronicle or 'Tale of Bygone Years' (Old Russian: **Повѣсть временныхъ лѣтъ**, commonly transcribed **Povest' Vremennykh Let (PVL)**). There are also rare colorful facsimile editions of the Illustrated Chronicle of Ivan the Terrible or Tsar-Kniga. But the Tsar-Kniga itself has artistic rather than scientific significance.

The Laurentian Chronicle is available online in the original on the website of the Russian National Library "The Laurentian Codex of 1377. Electronic

¹ ПСРЛ, т. I. 2-е изд. / Под ред. Е. Ф. Карского. Вып.1-3. — Л., 1926—1928.

² ПСРЛ, т. II. Вып. 1, изд. 3-е. — Петроград, 1923.

³ Повесть временных лет по Ипатскому списку. Санкт-Петербург: издание Археографической комиссии, 1871.

⁴ Повесть временных лет по Лаврентьевскому списку. Санкт-Петербург: издание Археографической комиссии, 1872.

Лаврентьевская летопись [Текст]: факсимильное издание / Институт русской литературы (Пушкинский Дом) РАН Российской академии наук, Российская национальная библиотека. — Санкт-Петербург: Росток, 2017.

⁵ Новгородская летопись по Синодальному харатейному списку. Санкт-Петербург: издание Археографической комиссии, 1875.

⁶ Радзивилловская, или Кенигсбергская, летопись. — СПб., 1902. I. Фотомеханическое воспроизведение рукописи. II. Статьи о тексте и миниатюрах рукописи.

Радзивилловская летопись: Текст. Исследование. Описание миниатюр / Отв. ред. М. В. Кукушкина. СПб.: Глагол; М.: Искусство, 1994. Кн. 1-2. (в Кн. 1 — полное факсимильное цветное воспроизведение памятника, в Кн. 2 — полная транскрипция текста, статьи Г. М. Прохорова и Б. А. Рыбакова, искусствоведческое описание всех миниатюр).

presentation of the handwritten monument."⁷ The Hypatian Codex has been digitized on the "Hypatian Codex | National Electronic Library - Book Monuments" website⁸. The placement of these monuments with a detailed description can be considered a great achievement of modern science.

But, most surprisingly, so far none of the chronicles has been fully translated into modern Russian. In general, even fewer translations of the chronicles have been published than facsimile copies of the originals. The overwhelming majority of the population of our country, who do not speak Old Russian and Church Slavonic, cannot get acquainted with the Old Russian chronicles, the main and most important written source on Russian history, only because neither the Academy of Sciences nor the official scientific community considered it necessary to translate the chronicles.

But even those translations that have been published are far from perfect. Only selected chronicles were translated, and only in parts. As I have already noted, neither the Archeographic Commission nor the Academy of Sciences were at all concerned with translations of medieval Russian chronicles. They were published at their own expense by the translators themselves. Until 1950, there were only two publications, one before the revolution and the other under Soviet rule. In 1871, A. S. Klevanov published at his own expense a translation of the initial code of the Laurentian Codex (before 1110) with a continuation of the Hypatian Codex (from 1111 to 1200) and an account of further events in southwestern Russia (Galician–Volhynian Chronicle) from 1201 to 1305.⁹ The next edition took place only 65 years later: in 1936, the non-governmental publishing house Academia published the collection "Ancient Russian Chronicles" translated by V. Panov¹⁰. He included the same monuments with abbreviations – the initial code before 1110 - the text edited by A. A. Shakhmatov in the book: "The Primary Chronicle", volume I, Petrograd 1916 (under the heading "Chronicle of Nestor"), the Kiev Chronicle from 1111 to 1200 and the Galician–Volhynian Chronicle from 1201 to 1291 according to the Hypatian apographer, published in the II volume of the PSRL, 2nd ed. St. Petersburg, 1908.

It was only in 1950 that the Academy of Sciences of the USSR finally published, under its banner, a translation of the Laurentian Codex, but not in its entirety, but only the initial set – the Primary Chronicle – up to 1110, with a continuation about the events of 1111-1117 according to the Hypatian apographer¹¹. The author of the text, translation, variant readings, articles and

⁷ Лаврентьевская летопись 1377 г. Электронное представление рукописного памятника – Electronic resource – access date 02/20/2026: <https://expositions.nlr.ru/LaurentianCodex/index.php>

⁸ Ипатьевская летопись | НЭБ Книжные памятники. Electronic resource – access date 02/20/2026: <https://kp.rusneb.ru/item/material/ipatevskaya-letopis>

⁹ Клеванов А. Летописный рассказ событий Киевской, Волынской и Галицкой Руси от её начала до половины XIV века. — М.: Тип. А. И. Мамонтова и К°, 1871.

¹⁰ Древнерусские летописи / Пер. и коммент. В. Панова; Статьи В. Лебедева и В. Панова. — М.—Л.: Academia, 1936.

¹¹ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть 1-2. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950.

commentary was D. S. Likhachev¹². 47 years later, in 1997, in volume 1 of the book series "Library of the Literature of Ancient Rus", a PVL on the Hypatian Codex, covering events up to 1117, was published with a parallel translation by O. V. Tvorogov¹³. In volume 5 of the same series, another excerpt from the Hypatian Chronicle was published - the Galician-Volhynian Chronicle from 1201 to 1292, translated by O. P. Likhacheva¹⁴. The so-called "Northern Russian Chronicle Compilation of 1472" and "Independent Church Chronicle Compilation of the 1480s" published in volume 7 of the same series. They are not original medieval monuments, but rather a compilation of several chronicle copies, combined with "reconstructions" of ancient texts. Finally, in 2017, the Laurentian Codex was published in G.M. Prokhorov's translation¹⁵. This is the most recent publication.

Not counting the translations of chronicle fragments describing individual historical events scattered across various collections (these are usually called "chronicle stories") and the PVL editions in retellings for children and for elementary readers, this is an exhaustive list of published translations of medieval chronicles into modern Russian. Of these, only one—namely, D.S. Likhachev's translation of the Primary Chronicle "according to the Laurentian Codex"—has been reprinted multiple times¹⁶. Therefore, it is considered almost a "classic" and is constantly cited in the works of historians. The abundance of citations from D.S. Likhachev's translation in our scholarly literature is not due to the fact that his translation is professional and fully faithful to the original, but rather to its widespread circulation. I will analyze the quality of his translation in as much detail as possible.

1. TEXT PREPARATION METHODS. STAGE ONE. CHANGING SPELLING

The translator's task is to convey the text of the literary work they are translating as accurately as possible, both in form and content, without making their own corrections, additions, or "improvements."

¹² With the exception of articles about the events of 1111–1117, which were translated by B. A. Romanov (author's note).

¹³ Творогов О. В. Повесть временных лет / Библиотека литературы Древней Руси. Т. 1. СПб, «Наука», 1997. С. 62-315.

¹⁴ Галицко-Волынская летопись (Подготовка текста, перевод и комментарии О. П. Лихачевой) / Библиотека литературы Древней Руси. Т. 5. СПб, «Наука», 1997. С. 184-357.

¹⁵ Лаврентьевская летопись. Текст. Перевод. Исследования / Институт русской литературы (Пушкинский Дом) РАН Российской академии наук, Российская национальная библиотека ; подготовка текста, перевод и исследования Г. М. Прохорова. - Санкт-Петербург : Росток, 2017.

¹⁶ Повесть временных лет. Подготовка текста, перевод и примечания Д. С. Лихачева / «Изборник» / Библиотека всемир. литературы. Серия первая. Т. 15. М., «Худож. лит.», 1969. С. 28-91.

Повесть временных лет. Подготовка текста О. В. Творогова, перевод Д. С. Лихачева / Памятники литературы Древней Руси. Начало русской литературы. XI — нач. XII в. М., «Худож. лит.», 1978. С. 23-278.

Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, и перевод Д. С. Лихачева. 2-е изд. СПб, «Наука», 1996.

Повесть временных лет. Перевод Д. С. Лихачева, О. В. Творогова. СПб, Вита Нова, 2012.

However, the chronicles were translated quite differently. The first stage was the so-called "text preparation." The "prepared" original text was published alongside the translation so that readers could compare their correspondence. The original text was broken into individual words and sentences, punctuation marks were added, and direct speech was highlighted, as in the medieval original, punctuation was arbitrary, and words were usually not even separated by spaces. Then the text was transliterated, that is, converted into a modern orthographic system. The letters **ѡ, Ѣ, Ѥ, Ѧ, ѧ, Ѩ, ѩ, Ѫ, ѫ, Ѭ, ѭ, Ѯ, ѯ, Ѱ**, which had existed before the introduction of the civil script in 1708/1710, were removed and replaced with the letters of the post-reform alphabet. For example, **ѡ, Ѣ, Ѥ** and **Ѧ** were replaced by the letter **я**; letters **ѧ** and **Ѩ** by the letter **"y"**, **ѩ** by the letter **"ю"**, etc. After the spelling reform of 1917/1918, the abolished letters **ѣ, ѥ, ѧ, Ѩ** and **ѩ** were also removed from medieval texts. The letter **"ѣ"** was replaced by **"и"**, **"ѥ"** by **"е"**, **"ѧ"** by **"ф"** or **"т"**, depending on the word (**Ѧеодоръ** – **Ѧеѡдор**, **ѧеатръ** – **театр**, etc.). The editor himself decided which letters to remove and which to leave in the text.

The general rule for transliterating medieval texts was formulated in an academic publication by O. V. Tvorogov only in 1978: "The text has been rendered with orthographic simplifications: words that were abbreviated in the manuscript have been fully reproduced, letters that are no longer used ("Small Yus," "Fita," "Izhitsa," etc.) have been replaced with the corresponding letters of the modern alphabet, the letters **"ѡ"**, **"Ѣ"** and **"Ѥ"** are preserved in all cases."¹⁷

Why it was decided to keep the letters **ѡ** and **"Ѣ"** is more or less clear. They have been preserved in the modern alphabet, although in ancient times **ѡ** meant an ultrashort sound [o], and **Ѣ** - an ultrashort [ε]. It is not entirely clear why they decided to keep the letter **"Ѥ"** ("Yat"), which was universally replaced by **"е"** by spelling reform. I have not found any explanation for why she was awarded such a great honor. This letter was removed from the Russian alphabet on the grounds that the pronunciation of **ѣ** and **Ѥ** at the time of the reform of 1917/1918 allegedly had almost no differences. However, judging by the surviving evidence, this was not the case. For example, Deputy of the State Duma V. V. Shulgin, in his memoirs of the first audience with Nicholas II in 1907, writes about the peculiarities of the Emperor's pronunciation as follows:

"Having bypassed everyone, the Emperor went to the middle of the semicircle and made a short speech. I don't remember the whole of his speech, but I clearly remember the end of it:

– Благодарю вас за то, что вы мужественно отстаиваете те устои, при которых Россия росла и крѣпла...

(– Thank you for courageously defending the foundations under which Russia grew and strengthened....)

The Emperor spoke softly, but very clearly and clearly. His voice was low, rather thick, and his accent was slightly tinged with foreign languages. He didn't

¹⁷ Повесть временных лет. Комментарий О. В. Творогова / Памятники литературы Древней Руси. Начало русской литературы. XI — нач. XII в. М., «Худож. лит.», 1978. С. 420.

pronounce "ѣ" much, why did the last word sound not like "крѣпла" (strengthened), but almost like "крепла".¹⁸

General Yu. N. Danilov noted the same features in the speech of Nicholas II: "in the speech of Emperor Nicholas, a barely perceptible foreign accent was heard, which became more noticeable when he pronounced words with the Russian letter "Yat"."¹⁹

Based on these testimonies, **е** and **ѣ** denoted different sounds after all, if they were distinguished by ear. However, the modern letter **е** itself can denote completely different sounds depending on the position in the word: [jɛ], [ɛ], [i], and even [i] after the hard consonants **ж, ц, ш** (жевать, целовать, шептать) (chew, kiss, whisper). At the same time, the "е" sound itself does not exist. From the point of view of transliteration, there is no point in leaving the letter **ѣ** in the text. Even to distinguish homoforms. There are too few of them. I can only recall one pair: "ѣсть" (to eat) and "есть" (form of the verb "to be" 3rd person singular present tense).

But when transliterating the letters "Izhitsa" and "Uk" ("Unik"), which are derived from the Greek "upsilon", the editors of the text were completely confused. The fact is that in the Middle Ages, Izhitsa was written in the same way as the Greek Upsilon - **ϣ**. It was used mainly in words borrowed from Greek. At the beginning of a word and between consonant letters, it denoted the sound [i]. For example, **Ѣгѣпетъ** – Египет (Egypt). And between the vowels - [v]. For example, **Ѣвангѣліе** – Евангелие (Gospel). According to the rules of medieval spelling, the Cyrillic letter "y" was designated by the digraph "оѣ" (Omicron-Upsilon, Church Slavonic **Оѣникъ** "Unik"). In the text, the letter **о** was often dropped from this digraph. In Skoropis (a type of Cyrillic handwriting script) and the Cyrillic semi-uncial script, the **ѣ** was placed on top of the **о**, resulting in the ligature **ѣ** (Church Slavonic **ѣкъ** "Uk"). Thus, the same sign, **ѣ**, came to represent two different letters. To distinguish them, the lower tail of the Izhitsa was cut off, giving it the appearance of the Latin **v**, while the upsilon remained in the **ѣ** form. It came to represent the [u] sound exclusively. However, in the medieval Russian chronicles of the 14th–16th centuries, which we are discussing, this transformation had not yet occurred. In the text of the PVL, where the chronicler quotes the Byzantine chronicle of George Hamartolos, when transliterating the words **Ѣрїя**, **Асїране**, **Вифѣнію**, **Ѣтарѣю Фрѣгію**, **Кѣпръ**, **Великаѣ Ѣкѣфъ**, etc., they should be written as "Сирия, Асиряне, Вифинию, Старую Фригию, Кипръ, Великая Скифъ." However, in absolutely all transliterations of the originals in the chronicle publications, we see an inappropriate letter **ѣ** in place of the modern **и** letter.

In turn, the digraph "оѣ", which was considered a single letter and denoted the sound [u], is somehow left unchanged during transliteration. Instead of words like "учитель", they write "оучитель", instead of "Синеусъ" they write

¹⁸ Шульгин В. Годы. Дни. 1920 год. М., Новости, 1990. С. 505.

¹⁹ Данилов Ю. Н. Мои воспоминания об Императоре Николае II-ом и Вел. Князе Михаиле Александровиче / Архив русской революции. Т. 19. — Берлин. 1928. С. 213.

"Синеоусъ" instead of "утвердѣти" they write "оутвердѣти" and so on. This creates the impression that this is precisely how people spoke in ancient times, which is not true. Such selective transliteration appears, to put it mildly, unprofessional, and from a textual perception perspective, it's a caricature.

2. TEXT PREPARATION METHODS. STAGE TWO. CONTENT EDITING

But the "preparation of the text" of the chronicle for translation did not end with transliteration. Instead of simply translating the text of the manuscript into modern Russian, editing of its contents began. No one wanted to be just a translator. It was necessary to declare himself as a major scientist, combining a philologist, historian, paleographer, literary critic, etc. In addition, everyone wanted to surpass the chronicler and correct his "mistakes." Words and whole fragments from other chronicle monuments, as well as "semantic corrections"²⁰, were necessarily inserted into the text of the chronicle. The comments provided quasi-scientific explanations as to why the chronicler wrote incorrectly and why the translator corrected it. And sometimes there were no comments at all. As a result, the reader received a distorted text that did not correspond to the original literary monument, and a translation of this distorted text.

In the article "An Archaeographic Review of the lists of the Primary Chronicle", D. S. Likhachev sharply criticized his predecessors, who considered the publication of the Primary Chronicle to be "flawed" based on only one of the well-known apographers, for example, Laurentian. In their opinion, the text of the Laurentian Chronicle is not, on the one hand, the original, author's text of the PVL (it dates back to 1377, i.e. according to their assumptions, it is more than two hundred and fifty years away from the time of compilation of the PVL), but, on the other hand, it cannot give an idea of the full richness of the contents of all its numerous apographers²¹. That is why they constantly compiled fragments from various chronicles, and supplemented some places with their own fantasies, calling them "scientific reconstruction" of the text. D. S. Likhachev dwells on two examples.

In 1876, L. I. Leibovich attempted to create a "combined text" of the Primary Chronicle "based on all published apographers of the chronicle"²². Striving for the greatest possible completeness, L. I. Leibovich combined into a single text all the information from all the apographers of the PVL published by 1876. This text mechanically combines mutually exclusive statements by chroniclers of different eras and different beliefs, reliable information with the fantastic, and connects the obviously incompatible, resulting in the occasional

²⁰ Повесть временных лет. Комментарий О. В. Творогова / Памятники литературы Древней Руси. Начало русской литературы. XI — нач. XII в. М., «Худож. лит.», 1978. С. 420.

²¹ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть 2. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950. С. 149.

²² Лейбович Л. И. Сводная летопись, вып. 1, „Повесть временных лет“. СПб., 1876.

disruption of the integrity and logic of the chronicle narrative. Despite this, L. I. Leibovich's work lacked a unifying principle, even a mechanical unification of the various texts, and was executed in a rather sloppy manner. It is completely impossible to use L. I. Leibovich's text today.

Another attempt to create a "stable" text of the Primary Chronicle was made by A. A. Shakhmatov. He pursued a different goal than L. I. Leibovich—to reconstruct the text of the PVL only in its original three editions. However, the text published by A. A. Shakhmatov²³ is largely hypothetical. What we have here is nothing more than an illustration of A. A. Shakhmatov's own research. A. A. Shakhmatov himself protested against the use of the reconstructions he published as historical sources²⁴.

In contrast to L. I. Leibovich and A. A. Shakhmatov, D. S. Likhachev presents his version of the PVL as the only correct one. He states: "We are publishing not a 'combined text' 'from all manuscripts' or a hypothetical reconstruction of the original text, but the actual text that has come down to us in the Laurentian Codex. All the most valuable elements contained in the other manuscripts of the PVL, which supplement, clarify, or contradict the main text we are publishing, are presented by us with explanations in the commentaries. The commentaries, therefore, serve in this edition not only to clarify the text but also to supplement it."²⁵

In fact, Dmitry Sergeevich is lying. His text "The Primary Chronicle according to the Laurentian Codex of 1377" is similarly edited and does not correspond to the text of the Laurentian Codex, as we will now see.

3. THE PRIMARY CHRONICLE (PVL) AND THE LAURENTIAN CODEX

The Primary Chronicle or the Chronicle of bygone years (PVL) is usually called the chronicle, which is appropriately titled (Old Russian "СѢ ПОВѢСТИ ВРЕМЯНЫХЪ ЛѢТЪ, ѿкуда єсть пошла Р҃҃скаѧ зємла" "This is a description of each year, how our state appeared and where the name of the Russian Land came from," or similarly); it embraces events up to the second decade of the 12th century and is contained at the beginning of most of the annals of the 14th - 17th centuries. In the oldest codices, one common text is kept fairly stable; in the later ones, it is either shortened and randomly inserted, or combined with another Kiev chronicle codex and the ancient Novgorod news²⁶.

²³ Шахматов А. А. Повесть временных лет. Том I. Вводная часть. Текст. Примечания. Изд. Имп. Археогр. комиссии. Петроград, 1916.

²⁴ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть 2. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950. С. 149-150.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 150.

²⁶ Шахматов А. А. Повесть временных лет. Том I. Вводная часть. Текст. Примечания. Изд. Имп. Археогр. комиссии. Петроград, 1916. С. I.

The Laurentian Codex is the oldest surviving chronicle manuscript. The time of its creation and one of the authors are precisely known to us from the colophon on the last pages (Fig. 1): "And I, an insignificant, unworthy, and sinful servant of God, monk Laurentius, began writing these books, called the Chronicle, on January 14, the day of remembrance of our holy fathers, killed in Sinai and Raithu. I present this to Grand Duke Dmitry Konstantinovich. I write with the blessing of the holy bishop Dionysius. And I finished writing on March 20, the day of remembrance of our holy fathers, who were killed by the Saracens in the monastery of Saint Sava. In the year 6885." The year 6885 from the Creation of the World is usually translated into the current chronology of the Birth of Christ, as 1377. The Codex got its name from the monk Laurentius.

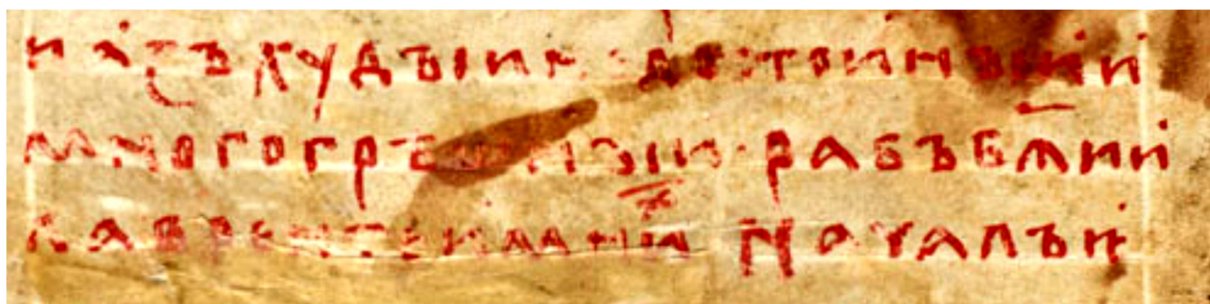


Fig. 1. Laurentian Codex, reverse of folio 172. Autograph of the monk Laurentius:

и азъ худъи недостойнъи и
 многогрѣшнъи рабъ бжїи
 лаврентеи мнї Началъ ю

"And I, an insignificant, unworthy and sinful servant of God, Laurentius the monk, began..."

The manuscript is a parchment book in large quadrangles, containing 173 folios. Several leaves of the manuscript are missing (gaps between folios 9 and 10, after folio 169, and after folio 170). The leaves are bound into 24 quire-books, the usual number of leaves per quire-book being 8 (there are deviations). However, at the end of the manuscript, the regular structure of the quire-books is disrupted: several leaves have been cut off and replaced with others, glued on the folds (insert folios 157, 161, 167). Up to folio 40, the writing is in a continuous line, and from folio 40 until the end of the manuscript, it is in two columns. The first 40 leaves are written in medium-sized uncial script. On the reverse of folio 40, starting from line 9, a different handwriting begins – semi-uncial, smaller, less meticulous, and in different ink. It is believed to be the handwriting of Laurentius himself (his colophon is written in it). This semi-uncial script, continuing to the end of the manuscript, is interspersed in three places (f. 157, on the verso of 161, the bottom 10 lines, and f. 167) with further small uncial script of varying sizes and different handwritings.

Monk Laurentius calls himself a copyist of other, older chronicle collections. Historians believe the chronicle was copied from three different sources. The first,

which we call the Primary Chronicle (folio1 rev. – 96), first recounts the legendary biblical events of how Noah's sons divided the Earth among themselves after the flood. It then moves on to a description of the origins and dispersal of Japheth's descendants, dwelling in detail on the Slavs. It then cites legends about the Khazar tribute and the founding of Kiev. The dated section begins with the year 6360 from the Creation of the World (852 AD) and ends after the article for the year 6618 (1110) with a colophon in which Abbot Sylvester, presumably the copyist and editor of the PVL, reports that this chronicler wrote (i.e., the PVL) during the reign of Prince Vladimir, who ruled in Kiev, in the year 6624 (1116). From the 78th to the 85th leaf is placed the so-called "Instruction of Vladimir Monomachos", which is not found in any of the other chronicles. The second part of the Laurentian Codex (pp. 96–118) describes events in Southern Rus' from 6619 (1111) to 6669 (1161), and the third (pp. 118–172 rev.) concerns mainly events in the North-East of Rus' from 6672 (1164). The narrative in the chronicle extends up to 6813 (1305).

Missing leaves: between folios 9 and 10 - 6 folios missing with text from 6406 (898) - 6429 (921); after folio 169 - 4-6 leaves missing with text from 6771 (1263) - 6791 (1283); after folio 170 - 1 sheet missing with text from 6796 (1288) - 6802 (1294).

D.S. Likhachev begins to make mistakes in the translation, beginning with the commentary on the colophon of the monk Laurentius. Announcing the completion of his work, Laurentius asks not to judge him harshly if he has made mistakes:

И нѣнѣ гсѣда ѿци и брѣа. ѡже са гдѣ бѣдѣ ѡписалѣ . или переписалѣ или недописалѣ . ѹтигѣ исправливаю бѣ дѣла . а не клените . занеже книги ветшаны . а оумѣ молодѣ . не дошелѣ.²⁷

The translation here is obvious: "And now, gentlemen, fathers and brothers, if I have written myself somewhere, or written too much, or did not finish, do me the honor of correcting, for God's sake, and do not scold, because the books are ancient, but the mind is young, has not reached." Laurentius, as a copyist, warns that the books are old, and he might not understand something in them due to his youth.

However, D. S. Likhachev translates the definition of "ветшаны" related to the word "books" not in the medieval meaning of "old, ancient", but in the modern meaning of "dilapidated", that is, they have lost their original qualities. He does this in order to confirm his rather strange thoughts about the state of the sources (Likhachev has one source), from which Laurentius copied his manuscript. Here is what Dmitry Sergeyevich writes: "The dilapidation of the chronicle, from which Laurentius made his parchment list, was considerable: there was no end to the events of 898 in it. and the following years, until 922, there was no account from 1263 - from the middle of the biography of Prince Alexander Nevsky - and until

²⁷ Лаврентьевская летопись, РНБ, F.п.IV.2, л. 173.

1283, there was no text from 1288 to the middle of the narrative of 1294. Lavrentius had to make passes in all these places."²⁸.

It's unclear why Dmitry Sergeevich's imagination ran wild like this. It's perfectly clear that Laurentius originally omitted no years from his narrative. Otherwise, the text would have broken off mid-page, not ended precisely at the end of the verso, all three times. And Laurentius undoubtedly would have made notes explaining why he omitted years. We don't know how many times Laurentius' chronicle was bound and rebound before it came into the possession of A. I. Musin-Pushkin in the 1790s, nor how many pages were lost. According to expert opinion, the binding of the manuscript is not original; its design and decoration date it to the 15th - early 16th centuries. On the 10th page, in the upper margin, in cursive handwriting from the late 17th - early 19th centuries, is the inscription "Here are not many folios" (Russian "Здѣ много листовъ нѣтъ" - Fig. 2). The manuscript has been edited several times, with pages removed and pasted in; some pages may be inserted. Experts from the National Library of Russia, as I noted above, attribute the missing years to the loss of 11 to 13 pages from the manuscript.

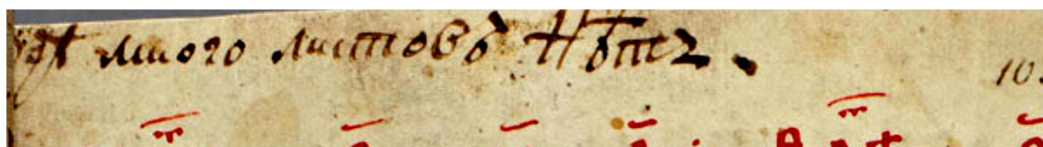


Fig. 2. Laurentian Chronicle, f. 10. Notes in handwriting from the late 17th - early 19th centuries about the shortage of sheets

Unfortunately, this is not the only case where D.S. Likhachev incorrectly translates a single word, which radically changes the meaning of a sentence, does not understand the context, has no idea about the history of the manuscript, which is attached in written form to the storage unit in the library, and gives free rein to his imagination.

4. DISTORTION OF THE TEXT OF THE LAURENTIAN CHRONICLE

Now let's turn directly to D.S. Likhachev's translation of the Chronicle's text.

For example, let's take the chronicle entry on one of the most significant events in our early history—the legend of the summoning of the Varangians and the "beginning of Rus'." In his 1950 edition of "The Primary Chronicle according to the Laurentian Codex," Dmitry Sergeevich first presents the chronicle's text, or rather, what he presents as its text, and then his own translation. We read the text and translation under the year 6370 from the Creation of the World (862 AD). I've highlighted in bold words that are not found in the actual original Laurentian Codex:

²⁸ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть 2. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950. С. 151.

«Въ лѣто 6370. Изъгнаша варяги за море, и не даша имъ дани, и почаша сами в собѣ володѣти, и не бѣ в нихъ правды, и вѣста родъ на родъ, и быша в нихъ усобицѣ, и воевати почаша сами на ся. И рѣша сами в себѣ: „Поищемъ собѣ князя, иже бы володѣлъ нами и судилъ по праву“. И идоша за море къ варягомъ, к руси. Сице бо ся зваху тѣи варязи русь, яко се друзии зовутся свие, друзии же урмане, анѣгляне, друзии гѣте, тако и си. Рѣша русь, чюдѣ, словѣни, и кривичи **и вси**; „Земля наша велика и обилна, а наряда в ней нѣтъ. Да поидѣте княжить и володѣти нами“. И избрашася 3 братья с роды своими, пояша по собѣ всю русь, и придоша; старѣйший, Рюрикъ, **сѣде Новѣгородѣ**, а другой, Синеусъ, на Бѣлѣ-озерѣ, а третий Изборѣстѣ, Труворѣ. И от тѣхъ варягъ прозвася Руская земля»²⁹.

D.S. Likhachev offers us this translation of this passage:

"In the year 6370. They drove the Varangians overseas and did not pay them tribute, and began to rule over themselves. **But there was no truth among them**, and clans rose against clans, and they waged strife and began to fight among themselves. And they said to themselves: 'Let us seek a prince who will rule over us and judge us by law.' And they went overseas to the Varangians, to the Rus'. Those Varangians were called Rus', just as others are called Swedes, and others Normans and Angles, and still others Gotlanders—those were their names. The Chud, Slavs, Krivichi, **and Ves'** said to the Rus': 'Our land is great and abundant, but **there is no order in it**. Come and reign over us.'" "And three brothers were elected with their clans and took with them all of Rus', and **came to the Slavs**, and the eldest, Rurik, **sat in Novgorod**, and the second, Sineus, in Beloozero, and the third, Truvor, in Izborsk. And from those Varangians the Russian land was named."³⁰

Please note that in D.S. Likhachev's translation, Rurik and his brothers **"came to the Slavs."** His own "original" version doesn't mention any Slavs. In D.S. Likhachev's second edition of 1996, the Slavs disappear from the translation.

Now let's turn to the actual original Laurentian Chronicle, according to the 1377 manuscript. I'll provide a color photograph of the 7th folio of this manuscript (Fig. 3). **It's immediately obvious that the date of the Varangians' invocation and the "beginning of Rus'" is not 6370, as D.S. Likhachev puts it, but 6369 from the Creation of the World, i.e., 861 CE:**

²⁹ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть первая. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950. С. 18.

³⁰ Там же, с. 214.

[illegible]

Text broken down into individual words and sentences with punctuation marks:

Изъгнаша вараги за море и не даша имъ дани. И поучаша сами в собѣ володѣти. И не бѣ в нихъ прѣвды, и вѣста родъ на родъ, быша в нѣ оусобицѣ, и воевати поучаша сами на са. Рѣша сами в себѣ: «Поищемъ собѣ князѣ, иже бѣи володѣлъ нами и сѣдилъ по праву. Идаша за море къ варагомъ к Рүси. Сице бо са зваху тын варази сѣтъ, яко се друзии зъвѣтса свое, друзии же оурмане, анъглане, друзии гъте, тако и си. Рѣша Рүсь чюдь, словѣни и кривичи: «Вса земла наша велика и обилна, а наряда в неѣ нѣтъ. Да пондѣте княжитъ и володѣти нѣми». И изъбравшасѣ · ѿ · братьѣ с роды своими, помаша по собѣ всю рүсь, и придоша. Старѣишии Рюрикъ. А другини, Синеусъ – на Бѣлѣ-озерѣ, а третии – Изборскѣ, Труворъ. Ѡ тѣхъ прозваса Рүскаѣ земла.

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reign over us and rule over us.” And three brothers with their clans were elected, taking with them all of Rus’, and they came. The eldest Rurik. Another, Sineus, was on Beloozero, and the third, Truvor, was in Izborsk. The Russian land got its name from them.”

In historical scholarship, the date of the "beginning of Rus'" is generally accepted to be 6370/862. This date appears in most Russian chronicles. But as a translator, Likhachev shouldn't be interested in other chronicles. He's translating the Laurentian Codex. And yet, we see that the Laurentian Codex gives a different year: 6369/861. This doesn't bother Dmitry Sergeyevich in the least, and he calmly substitutes 6370 for 6369 in both the translation and the original. Moreover, in his commentary, he doesn't even bother to explain why he did this. Such an approach to his work cannot be called professional.

It should be noted that the date 6369 (861) is not a mistake by the chronicler. In the "Chronicle of Polish, Lithuanian, Samogitian, and All Rus'" by the Polish chronicler M. Strykowski (1582), the date of the Varangian invocation is also 861, not 862. Strykowski, however, believes that 861 corresponds to the year 6370 from the creation of the world, "according to the Russian reckoning."³¹ The event that occurred 20 years later—the campaign of Rurik's successor, Prince Oleg, from Novgorod to the south and his capture of Kiev—is also dated by the Laurentian Chronicle not by 6390 (882), as other chronicles do, but by 6389 (881). This confusion of dates is, in fact, not surprising. The year in Ancient Rus' did not begin on January 1st, but began differently in different eras. It could begin on September 1st (as was the custom in Byzantium), or on March 1st. Moreover, the year in Rus' that began six months after the Byzantine September New Year was called the March year. However, the New Year could also begin six months earlier than the September New Year. At that time, it was considered a year according to the Ultra-March calendar. Which of these three calendars—September, March, or Ultra-March—the chronicler used is quite difficult to determine. Therefore, if the chronicler's year is different from the one considered correct by modern historians, this does not mean the chronicler made a mistake. The translator's task is to accurately translate both the text and the date, not to correct them, as D.S. Likhachev does. It is precisely because of such corrections that it becomes impossible to understand the calendar the chronicler used and to establish the exact date of the event described.

Now let's look at the text itself.

D.S. Likhachev's most common error is the mistranslation of interlingual homonyms. He always translates words that are identical in spelling or pronunciation in Old and Modern Russian but have completely different meanings with their modern meanings, leaving them untranslated. I've already mentioned that he incorrectly interprets the Old Russian word "ветхѣи", "ветшанъи", which is translated into modern terms as "old," "former," or "ancient" in the context of the colophon of the Laurentian Codex as "ветхий", meaning "having fallen into

³¹ Kronika polska, litewska, zmodzka i wszyskiej Rusi Macieja Strykowskiego. — Warszawa: Nakł. G. L. Glücksberga, 1846. — T. 1. — s. 113.

disrepair," and based on this, draws the false conclusion that the chronicler copied it from manuscripts so "dilapidated" that he was forced to omit several decades from the narrative.

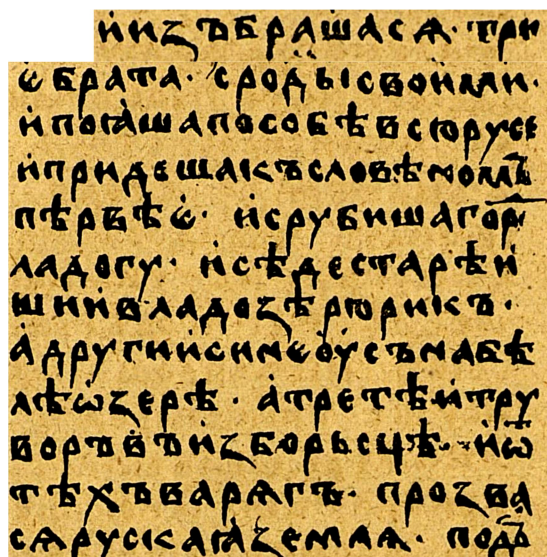
In the passage I cited above about the calling of the Varangians, Dmitry Sergeyevich translates the phrase "И не бѣ в нихъ правды" as "and there was no truth in them", although the word "правды" in this context means "justice", "order based on justice" ; and the sentence is translated as "and there was no justice among them."

In the sentence "Всѧ землѧ наша велика и обилна, а наряда в неѣ нѣтъ," in this context, the word "наряда" does not denote "order" in the broad sense of the word, as Dmitry Sergeyevich translates, but "state structure." Commentators on the 2012 edition of D.S. Likhachev's translation defend Dmitry Sergeyevich, explaining: "At the same time, the words 'there is no order in it' are a tribute to the traditional translation. In Laur. and Hypat. '[It reads] 'order,' that is, 'state structure.'" Here, I think, additional commentary is needed. And what is a "traditional translation"? Since when has making incorrect translations become a tradition in academic science? After all, we are talking about the translation of the main written source on the ancient history of our country! It wouldn't occur to anyone to translate the airplane control manual incorrectly!

We'll see later that D.S. Likhachev faces exactly the same problems with the translation of the word "языкъ" (Old Russian for "people"), which he translates literally as "language."

But we'll discuss this later. First, let's note how liberally Dmitry Sergeyevich treats the original text, inserting words that aren't there at his own discretion, and conversely, removing words from the text and replacing them with others.

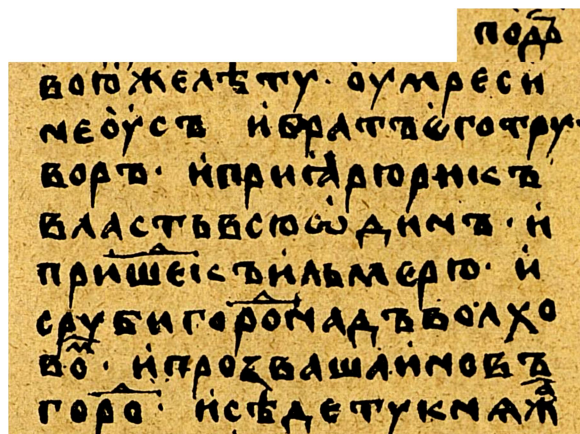
According to Likhachev's "translation," the original reads: "And three brothers were elected with their clans, and they took with them all of Rus', and came to the Slavs, and the eldest, Rurik, sat in Novgorod, and the second, Sineus, sat at Beloozero, and the third, Truvor, sat at Izborsk." In fact, there are no Slavs or Novgorod mentioned. The original text reads: "And three brothers were elected with their clans, taking with them all of Rus', and came. The eldest, Rurik. And the second, Sineus, sat at Beloozero, and the third, Truvor, sat at Izborsk." As I already mentioned, Dmitry Sergeyevich removed the Slavs in the second edition. It's not hard to guess where these Slavs came from. They "accidentally" migrated into D.S. Likhachev's Laurentian Codex, from another, later one—the Hypatian Codex, (c. 1425) and the Radziwill Chronicle. However, in those, the place of Rurik's initial reign is named not as Novgorod, but as an entirely different city—Ladoga (Fig. 4A). According to those same chronicles, Novgorod was founded by Rurik only two years after his calling (Fig. 4B).



Translation:

And three brothers were chosen, along with their clans, and they took with them all of Rus', and came first to the Slavs. And they built the city of Ladoga. And the eldest, Rurik, settled in Ladoga. And another, Sineus, on Beloozero. And the third, Truvor, in Izborsk. And from these Varangians the Russian land was named...

Fig. 4A



Translation:

Two years later, Sineus and his brother Truvor died. Rurik assumed complete power. He came to Ilmer and built a city on the Volkhov River, calling it Novgorod. He then took up his princely reign.

Fig. 4B

PVL of Hypatian Codex. Archaeographic Commission publication. St. Petersburg, 1871. P. 14

Where did D. S. Likhachev get the phrase "and the elder Rurik sat in Novgorod"? In a footnote about variant readings, he writes: "Added from T."³² By T, Dmitry Sergeyevich means the Trinity apographer or Trinity Chronicle, the original of which burned during the 1812 fire in Moscow, and is known only in the reconstruction by M. D. Prisyolkov.³³ However, even this reconstruction does not say that Rurik "sat in Novgorod." Here is a quote from it: «И избращася 3 братеники с роды своими и пояша по собѣ всю Русь. И придоша старѣишии Рюрикъ, а другии Синеоусъ на Бѣлѣ озерѣ, а третии во Изборстѣи Труворъ»³⁴ ("And three brothers with their families were chosen and took charge of all of Rus'. And the elder Rurik came, and the others Sineous at Beloozero, and the third Truvor at Izborsk"). N. M. Karamzin, who saw the Trinity Chronicle before it burned, writes the following (1816): "In the Pushkin parchment apographer by Nestor (this is how Karamzin calls the Laurentian Codex, after the name of its owner, A. I. Musin-Pushkin – V.V.): *the eldest Rurik came... and another Sineus to*

³² Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть первая. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950. С. 184.

³³ Присёлков М. Д. Троицкая летопись. Реконструкция текста. М., Л.: Изд-во Академии наук, 1950.

³⁴ Там же, с. 58.

Beloozero, and a third to Izborsk Truvor. The name of the place where Rurik reigned is omitted; in Trinity Chronicle (which is worthy of note) also"³⁵.

Despite this evidence, D.S. Likhachev continues to assert in his explanatory article that the Trinity Chronicle contains information about Rurik coming to rule in Novgorod, and as "proof" of the accuracy of his insertion, he asserts that "the Laurentian Codex leaves a blank space after the word 'Rurik'."³⁶ He claims that this blank space was specifically left for the words "sat in Novgorod." But if we look at the original Laurentian Codex (Figure 5), we see that there are no blank spaces after the word "Rurik" (I've highlighted the word "Rurik" with a light background).

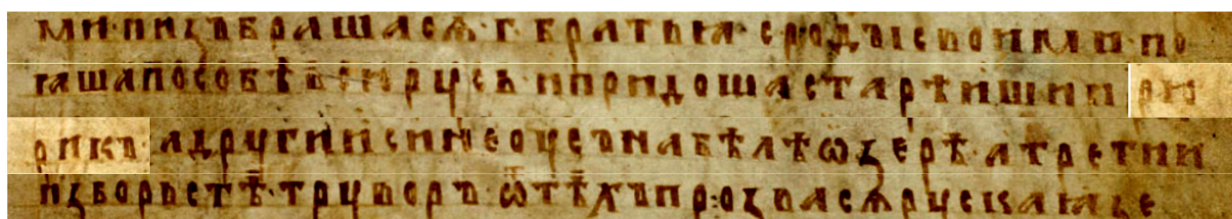


Fig. 5. Laurentian Codex of 1377 (RNL, F.n.IV.2), f. 7

Translation:

"...by us. And three brothers with their families were elected, took all of Rus' with them, and came. The eldest, Rurik, and the second, Sineus on Beloozero, and the third, Truvor, in Izborsk.

The Russian land was named after them."

The word "Rurik" is highlighted.

The Primary Chronicle devotes considerable attention to listing the peoples who settled in Europe and who "sits" where. At the very beginning of the manuscript, the chronicler recounts how Noah's three sons—Shem, Japheth, and Ham—divided the Earth among themselves. Japheth was given Europe and part of Asia by lot. The chronicler then lists the peoples who "sit" in Japheth's portion:

в Ѧфетовѣ же части сѣдять Рѹсь . Чюдѣ . и вси ѡзгыци . Мѣра . Мѹрома Весь Морѣдва . Заволочьская Чюдѣ . Пермь Печѣра Юмь . Оугра Литва . Зимѣгола Корсь . Сѣтъгола Любѣ Лахове же и Прѹси Чюдѣ прѣсѣдять к морѣ Варажьскому по семѹ же морю сѣдять Варази сѣмо ко вѣстоку до предѣла Симова . по т[о]мѹ же морю сѣдять кѣ западу до землѣ Ѧгнански и до Волошьски . Ѧфетово бо и то колѣно Варѣзи Овен . Оѹрмане [Готе] Рѹсь . Ѧгнане Галичане . Волѣхва Римлане Нѣмци . Корлази Венѣдици Фрагове и прочии...³⁷

D. S. Likhachev translates this passage as follows: "In the lands of Japheth live the Russians, the Chud, and all sorts of peoples: the Merya, the Muroma, the Ves', the Mordvins, the Zavolochye Chud, the Permians, the Pecherians, the

³⁵ Карамзин, Н. М. История Государства Российского. Т.I. : Печатано в Военной типографии Главного штаба Его императорского величества, СПб [1816]. — с. 370-371.

³⁶ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть вторая. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950, с. 241.

³⁷ Лаврентьевская летопись 1377 г. (РНБ, F.n.IV.2), л. 2.

Yemians, the Ugras, the Litva, the Zimigola, the Korsians, the Letgolas, and the Libyans. The Poles, Prussians, and the Chud live near the Varangian Sea. The Varangians live along this sea: from here to the east—to the borders of Shem, and they live along the same sea to the west—to the English and Wallachian lands. The descendants of Japheth also include the Varangians, Swedes, Normans, Goths, Rus', Angles, Gauls, Wallachians, Romans, Germans, Korlyazians, Venetians, Genoese, and others..."³⁸

The highlighted phrase (Old Russian: "Р҃҃сь . Чюдѣ . и вси ꙗзыци") is translated incorrectly by D.S. Likhachev. Dmitry Sergeyevich simply mechanically translates ethnonyms with whatever words come to mind, completely unaware of the meaning of the phrase being translated. Translating the ethnonym Р҃҃сь ("Rus") as "Russians" is completely inappropriate here, and the word "вси" certainly does not denote the adjective "all sorts." "Rus" here refers to an independent ethnopolitical group, community, or tribe, which had not yet formed the backbone of the Old Russian people, distinct from the Chud and listed secondarily in the group of Varangian peoples. And the word "вси" is translated not as "all sorts," but as "all in aggregate"—named tribes or peoples ("ꙗзыци"), an exhaustive list of which is provided by the chronicler.

The translation by A. S. Klevanov (1871) is much closer to the truth in meaning: "In the domain of Japheth live: Rus, Chud and all its tribes: Merya, Muroma, Ves, Mordva, Chud, which lives beyond Volok, Perm, Pechera, Yam, Ugra, Litva. Zimigola, Kors, Setgola, Lyub. And the Poles (Lyakhs) and Prussians of the Chud tribe live on the shores of the Varangian (Baltic) Sea. Around this same sea live the Varangians in an easterly direction to the borders of Shem's domain, and to the west, along the same sea. Their dwellings extend to the land of the Angles and to Italy. To the descendants of Japheth belong: the Varangians, the Swedes. Norwegians, Rus, Englishmen, Galicians (Gauls?), Wallachians (Italians), Romans, Nemtsi, Carlosi (Courlanders?), Wends, Fryags and others"³⁹.

According to S. N. Klevanov translation, despite some outdated words and expressions, in any case, it becomes clear why it is after the ethnonym "Chud" (Чюдѣ) that the chronicler begins to list Finno-Ugric and Baltic ethnonyms. He believes that chud is the collective name of the Finno-Ugric and Baltic tribes, and not the name of a separate tribe. Just like the Varangians (Вара҃҃зи) is the collective name of the North Germanic peoples, including the Angles, and the Volokhs (Волѣхѣ) of the Romance. The category of "Nemtsi" (Нѣмци), apparently, includes those European peoples whose chronicler cannot accurately determine the degree of mutual kinship. The fact that Chud is the collective name of the Finno-Ugric ethnic group is indirectly proved by the fact that the chronicler, telling on the pages of his work where each individual Finnish tribe "sits", does not mention a word where exactly the Chud settled (assuming that this is a separate tribe): «Ѡ

³⁸ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть первая. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950. С. 206.

³⁹ Клеванов А. Летописный рассказ событий Киевской, Волынской и Галицкой Руси от её начала до половины XIV века. — М.: Тип. А. И. Мамонтова и К°, 1871. С. 2.

Бѣлѣѡзерѣ сѣдять Вєсь а на Ростовьскомѣ ѡзерѣ Мєра а на Клещинѣ ѡзерѣ Мєра же . [а] А по Ѡцѣ рѣцѣ гдѣ потечє в Волгѣ же. Мѹрома ѡзѣкъ свои и Черемиси свои ѡзѣкъ. Морѣдва свои ѡзѣкъ»⁴⁰. ("The Ves live on Beloozero, and the Merya live on Lake Rostov, and the Merya live on Lake Kleshchino. And along the Oka River, where it flows into the Volga, the Muroma are a separate people, the Cheremis are a separate people, and the Mordvins are a separate people.") The location of the Chud is not specified because Chud is the name for all of these tribes collectively.

If "Chud" is a collective ethnonym, it becomes clear why Chud is listed first in the following passage: а се сѹть инни ѡзѣци . иже дань даютъ Рѹси . Чюдѣ : Мєра . Вєсь . Мѹрома . Черемисѣ . Морѣдва . Пермь . Печєра . Ямѣ . Литва . Зимигола . Корсѣ . Норова . Либѣ . си сѹть свои ѡзѣкъ . имѹше ѿ колєна Афєтова иже жоутѣ вѣ странахѣ полѹнощныхѣ⁴¹. A translation with the following punctuation suggests itself here: "And these are other peoples who pay tribute to the Rus'. Chud: Merya, Ves', Muroma, Cheremis, Mordvins, Perm, Pechera, Yam', Litva, Zemigola, Kors, Norova, Lib'. They are a separate people, descended from the tribe of Apheth, who live in the northern countries."

I would like to immediately note that D.S. Likhachev, following A.S. Klevanov, translates both of these passages incorrectly. I am not referring to the punctuation emphasizing the word "Chud," but to the very literalism I have already mentioned. Likhachev gives the following translation: "The Ves reside on Beloozero, and the Merya on Lake Rostov, and the Merya on Lake Kleshchino as well. And along the Oka River, where it flows into the Volga, are the Muroma, who speak their own language, and the Cheremis, who speak their own language, and the Mordvins, who speak their own language"; "And here are other peoples who pay tribute to Rus': the Chud, the Merya, the Ves, the Muroma, the Cheremis, the Mordvins, the Perm, the Pechera, the Yam, the Litva, the Zimigola, the Kors, the Narva, the Livonians—these speak their own languages; they are the descendants of Japheth, living in the northern countries."

For some reason, in different places, D. S. Likhachev translates the same word ѡзѣкъ (plural ѡзѣци) with words that differ completely in meaning. He translates the phrase "а се сѹть инни ѡзѣци" to "and these are other peoples." And the phrase "си сѹть свои ѡзѣкъ" translates as "these speak their own languages." However, the sentence structures and words they are composed of are completely identical. Се / си is the subject, expressed in the case of се by the demonstrative pronoun "these," and in the case of си by the demonstrative pronoun "these," which functions as the personal pronoun "they." Бѹтъ is a simple verbal predicate expressed by the verb bundle "to be" of the present tense, which is not translated or rarely translated into the verb "is" in modern Russian. ѡзѣци / ѡзѣкъ is the nominal part of a compound nominal predicate, expressed by a noun

⁴⁰ Лаврентьевская летопись 1377 г. (РНБ, F.n.IV.2), л. 4.

⁴¹ Ibid., л. 4 об.

in the nominative case. In both cases, it refers to the word "people"/"nation," an ethnic community speaking a common language, but not the language itself. In the phrase "свои языкъ," the word "свои" is not a possessive pronoun, but an adjective meaning "independent," "separate."

Unlike D.S. Likhachev and A.S. Klevanov, the third translator of the Laurentian Chronicle, V. Panov (1936), correctly translates these passages in meaning: "on Beloozero sits Ves', on Rostov Lake sits Merya, and on Kleshchino Lake sits Merya. And along the Oka River, where it flows into the Volga, there is a separate people - Muroma, a separate people - Cheremisa, and a separate people - Mordvins"; "And here are other peoples who pay tribute to Rus: Chud, Merya, Ves', Muroma, Cheremisa, Mordvins, Perm, Pechora, Yam, Litva, Zimgol, Kors, Noroma, Libya: these peoples are from the tribe of Apheth, living in the countries of the North."⁴²

Thus, D.S. Likhachev and A.S. Klevanov's translations of this passage are erroneous.

But let's return to the ethnonym "Chud." According to the Laurentian Chronicle, three peoples invited the Varangians to rule over them: the Chud, the Slovenes, and the Krivichi. If we accept A.S. Klevanov's assumption that "Chud" is the chronicler's collective name for the Finno-Ugric and Baltic tribes, then it becomes clear why, in the invitation to the Varangians, along with two Slavic tribes—the Slovenes and the Krivichi—only one Finnish people—the Chud—is mentioned. This general name also encompasses other Finnish tribes. The chronicler also describes in the same article about the invitation to the Varangians what other peoples were under the rule of Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor: «по двѣ же лѣтѣ . Синеусъ оумре . а братъ его Трѣворъ . и приа власть Рюрикъ . и раздая мужемъ своимъ градъ . швомѹ Полотескъ швомѹ Ростовъ другомѹ Бѣлоозеро . и по тѣмъ городомъ сѹтъ находѣнѣи Варази а перьвиѣи насельници в Новѣгородѣ Словѣне . [вѣ] Полотѣски Кривичи . в Ростовѣ Мѣра в Бѣлоозерѣ Весѣ . в Муромѣ Мурома . и тѣми всѣми шбладаше Рюрикъ.⁴³ —

"Two years later, Sineus and his brother Truvor died, and Rurik assumed power. He distributed cities among his men: Polotsk to one, Rostov to another, and Beloozero to another. And in those cities, the Varangians—newcomers—were the natives: Novgorod—Slovenes, Polotsk—Krivichi, Rostov—Merya, Beloozero—Ves', and Murom—Muroma—and Rurik ruled over them all."

I would like to note in passing that D. S. Likhachev, as always, does not bother to translate the word "находѣнѣи" (Old Rus. "newcomers", "aliens", modern Rus. "пришельцы", "чужаки"), but simply prints the transcription: "находники". This word is incomprehensible to a modern Russian person. Apparently, so that the reader who does not speak the Old Russian language can guess for himself what this means. Similarly, in his translation by V. Panov (1936), the characterization of

⁴² Древнерусские летописи / Пер. и коммент. В. Панова; Статьи В. Лебедева и В. Панова. — М.—Л.: Academia, 1936. С. 10.

⁴³ Лаврентьевская летопись 1377 г. (РНБ, F.n.IV.2), л. 7 — 7 об.

the " **первыи насельници** " (Old Rus. "those who founded and inhabit the city", in a nutshell: "the indigenous population", not "the first settlers", modern Russian "коренное население") literally translates to "первые населенцы", which looks illiterate in modern Russian.

5. THE ETHNONYM *VES'*.

AN EXAMPLE OF MULTIPLE DISTORTION OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT

According to most chronicles, Rurik died in 6387 (879). Before his death, he entrusted his power and his young son Igor to his relative Oleg. According to the Laurentian Codex, two years later, **in 6389 (881)**, Oleg launched a campaign from Novgorod to the south, captured Smolensk and Lyubech, and took Kiev, making it his capital—the "mother of Russian cities" (Fig. 6). **D.S. Likhachev again gives a different date, inconsistent with the Laurentian Codex: 6390 (882).**

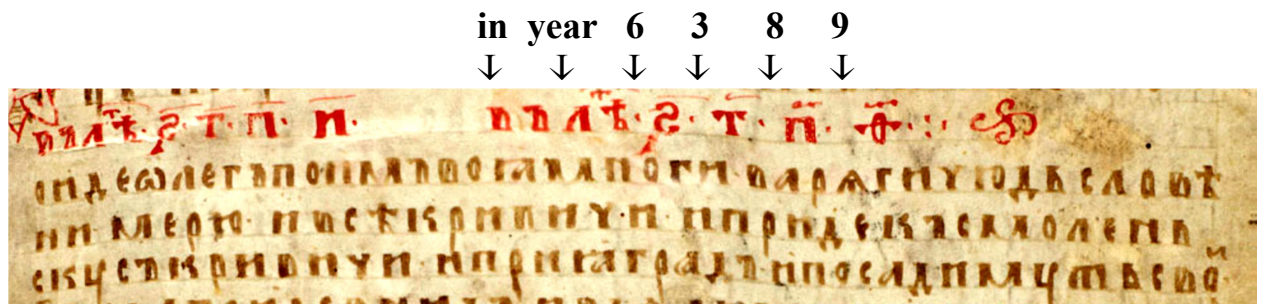


Fig. 6. Laurentian Codex of 1377 (RNL, F.n.IV.2), f. 8

въ лѣтѣ 2·7·8·9·
 ≠

оиде Олегъ по имѣ вою многи вараги уюдь словѣ
 ни мерю и всѣ кривичи и приде къ смоленъ
 ску съ кривичи и приа градъ и посади мужъ сво

Let's take a look at the tribes that comprise Oleg's army: "In the year 6389. Oleg set out, accompanied by numerous troops: the Varangians, the Chud, the Slovenes, the Merya, and all the Krivichi, and he came to Smolensk with the Krivichi, took the city, and installed his men," etc. The words "and all the Krivichi" I've highlighted are not the first time they appear in the chronicle. In the entry for the year 6367 (859), even before Rurik's summoning, there are lines (Fig. 7) that translate as follows: "In the year 6367. The Varangians received tribute from overseas from the Slovenes, the Merya, and all the Krivichi."

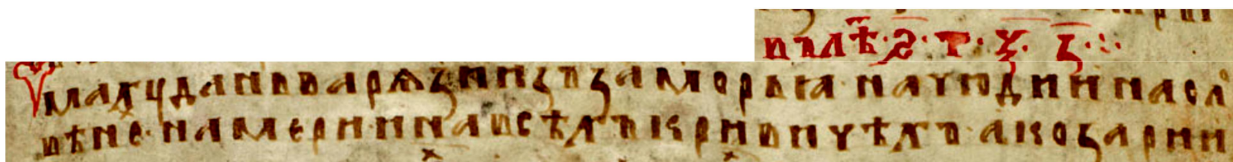


Fig. 7. Laurentian Codex of 1377 (RNL, F.n.IV.2), f. 7

ВЪ ЛѢ . 2 . 7 . 3 . 5 .

[и]маху дань **Варази** изъ **заморыа** . на **Үюди** и на **Ел**
овѣне . на **Мери** и на **всѣхъ Кривичѣхъ** . а **Козари** и...

What does the phrase "all the Krivichi" mean? The answer is given in the undated section of the Laurentian Codex, which describes the dispersal of the Slavs: «сѣли сѹть Словѣни по Дѹнаєви . гдѣ єсть нѹнє Оѹгорська зємла . и Болгарьска Ѡ тѣхъ Словѣнъ разидошася по зємлѣ . и прозвашася именѹи своими . гдѣ сѣдше на которомъ мѣстѣ»⁴⁴ ... «Словѣне пришедше и сѣдоша по Днѣпру и нарекошася Поланє . а друзии Дрєвланє занє сѣдоша в лѣсѣ^{*} . а друзии сѣдоша межю Припетью и Двиною . и нарекошася Дреговици [инии сѣдоша на Двинѣ и нарекоша^с Полочанє] рѣчки ради наже втечєть вѣ Двинѹ . иманємъ Полота . Ѡ сєя прозвашася Полочанє»⁴⁵ . «...Ѡ нихъ же Кривичи же сѣдѣть на верхѣ Волги . а на верхѣ^х Двинѹи и на верхѣ Днѣпра . нѹже градъ єсть Смоленскѣ⁴⁶ .

"...the Slavs settled along the Danube, where the Hungarian and Bulgarian lands are now. From those Slavs, they dispersed throughout the land and were called by their own names, depending on where they settled." "The Slavs who came and settled along the Dnieper were called Polyans, and others, Drevlyans, because they settled in the forests, and others settled between the Pripyat and Dvina and called themselves Dregovichs, others settled along the Dvina and called themselves Polotsk residents, after the river that flows into the Dvina, named Polot." "From them [came] the Krivichi, who live in the upper reaches of the Volga, and in the upper reaches of the Dvina, and in the upper reaches of the Dnieper, and their city is Smolensk."

Thus, we learn that the Krivichi were divided into three parts, which settled over a significant territory: the upper Volga, the upper Dvina, and the upper Dnieper. The chronicler refers to these three parts collectively as "all the Krivichi."

In the article for the year 6367 (859), D.S. Likhachev correctly translates the passage: "The Varangians from overseas exacted tribute from the Chud, the Slavs, the Merya, and all the Krivichi."⁴⁷ This is a rather rare case in Russian historiography, as, beginning in the second half of the 19th century, scholars began

⁴⁴ Лаврентьевская летопись 1377 г. (РНБ, F.n.IV.2), л. 1 об.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, л. 4.

⁴⁷ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В.П.Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть первая. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950, с. 214.

to outright falsify the original chronicle texts, replacing the word **все** ("all") in the phrase "all the Krivichi" and other places where tribes and peoples are listed with the name of the Finnish tribe **весь** (Ves') in the "original" publications.

Let me remind you that the chronicler attributes the entire tribe to the Chud, that is, the Finno-Ugric and Baltic tribes, and names Beloozero as their place of settlement. In the chronicles, Ves' is always written with the letter "ѣ" (**ѣсь**) and only in this singular nominative form. In the dated part of the PVL, this form appears only in the Hypatian Codex, in the article on Oleg's campaign against Kiev. Judging by the way it is written, it seems the chronicler initially intended to write **всѣ кривичи** (all the Krivichi), but for some reason changed his mind and, instead of placing a crossbar on the letter ѣ in the pronoun "**всѣ**," wrote the letter е above it, creating the ethnonym Ves' (**ѣсь**) (Fig. 8).

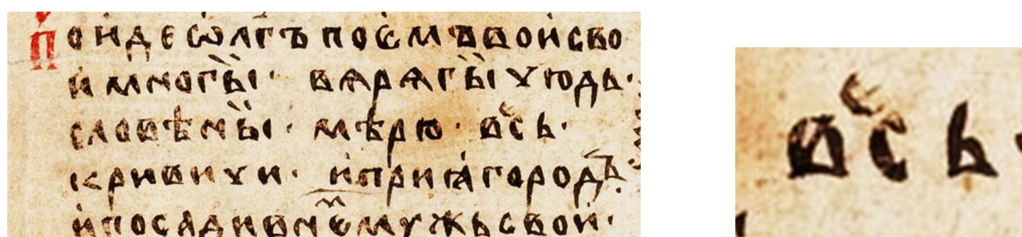


Fig. 8. The Hypatian Codex. Russian Academy of Sciences Library. Filing code НИОР 16.4.4., reverse of folio 9.

The word Ves' is written with a letter in bold: **ѣсь**

The Laurentian Codex and Radziwill Chronicle do not mention the ethnonym Ves' in the dated portions.

Nevertheless, when publishing the text of the Laurentian Chronicle in the 2nd and 3rd editions of Volume I of the PSRL (1872 and 1897), the editor-in-chief of the edition, A. F. Bychkov, in the article under year 6367 (859), attempts to transform the pronoun "**всѣхъ**" ("all") into the ethnonym "**ѣсь**" (Ves') in the non-existent prepositional case form "**ѣсьхъ**." First, he capitalizes the word, as was customary in the 18th and 19th centuries for proper names, including the names of tribes and peoples. Second, he inserts words (in this case, "[и на]") that are not in the original, as well as punctuation marks, to separate the pronoun "**всѣхъ**" from the noun "**кривичѣхъ**" (Fig. 8).

859 **(**)** Въ лѣто 6367. **Имаху(***)** дань Варязи изъ² заморья на³
 Чюди и⁴ на Словѣнехъ, на Мери⁵ и на **ѣсьхъ**, [и на] **Кривичѣхъ**;

Fig. 8a. Chronicle according to the Laurentian apographer. 3rd ed. St. Petersburg, 1897. p. 18.

A.F. Bychkov makes the same changes to the articles on the vocation of the Varangians (Fig. 9) and on Oleg's campaign against Kiev (Fig. 10), in addition, changing the dates of the vocation of the Varangians from 6369 (861) to 6370 (862), and Oleg's campaign from 6389 (881) for 6390 (882) years.

861 Въ лѣто 6369.

862 [Въ лѣто 6370](†). Изъгнаша¹⁰ Варяги за море¹¹, и не даша¹² имъ дани, и¹³ почаша сами в¹⁴ собѣ володѣти, и не бѣ в нихъ правды, и вѣста¹⁵ родъ на родъ, [и](††) быша в нихъ усобицѣ, и¹⁶ воевати почаша(†††) сами на ся. [и](*) рѣша сами в¹⁴ себѣ: «поищемъ собѣ князя, иже бы володѣлъ¹⁷ нами и судилъ¹⁸ по праву». [и](††) идоша⁽⁶⁾ за море къ Варягомъ, к Русі. сие бо тѣ звахуся(*) Варязи Русь(*), яко се¹ друзии зовутся Свие(**), друзии же² Урмане³, **862** Аньгяне⁴, друзии Гѣте⁵, тако и си. Рѣша Руси(***) Чюдъ, [и](†) Словѣни, и⁶ Кривичи [и](††) Всѣ(†††): «земля наша велика и обилна, .

Fig. 9. Chronicle according to the Laurentian apographe. 2nd ed. St. Petersburg, 1872. pp. 18-19.
 The year [Въ лѣто 6370] has been added in square brackets, the conjunction [и] has been added in the bottom line, the pronoun "all" has been replaced by the pseudo-ethnonym "Всѣ".

For comparison, the original is shown in Fig. 3

881 Въ лѣто 6389.

882 [Въ лѣто 6390](†). Поиде(††) Олегъ, поимъ⁷ воя многи, Варяги, Чюдъ, Словѣни, Мерю, Вѣсь(†††), Кривичи, и приде къ Смоленъ-

Fig. 10. Chronicle according to the Laurentian apographe. 2nd ed. St. Petersburg, 1872. p. 22.

The year [Въ лѣто 6390] has been added in square brackets.

The pronoun «всѣ» has been replaced by the ethnonym «Вѣсь».

For comparison, the original is shown in Fig. 6

Thus, the ethnonym Ves' (Вѣсь), used only in the singular, by A. F. Bychkov acquires the plural "Всѣ" and the plural prepositional form "Всѣхъ" in A.F. Bychkov. Moreover, the text is given out as a chronicle according to the Laurentian Codex.

The Laurentian Chronicle was published twice before A. F. Bychkov. It was first published in 1824 by R. F. Timkovsky. The article about the vocation of the Varangians there fully corresponds to the original:

«Идоша за море къ Варягомъ к Русі; сие бо ся зваху тѣ Варязи Русь, яко се друзии зовутся Свое, друзии же Оурмане, Аньгяне, друзии Гѣте; тако и си. Рѣша Руси Чюдъ, Словѣни, и Кривичи: **вся земля наша велика и обилна, а наряда в ней нѣтъ; да поидѣте княжить и володѣти нами**». — "They went across the sea to the Varangians to Russia; these Varangians were called Rus', as others are called Sveos, others Ourmans, Anglians, Goths; and that's what these are called. Chud, Slovens, and the Krivichi said to Rus': **our whole land is large and rich, but there is no government in it; come rule and rule over us**."

The first publication with direct speech in quotation marks took place in the first volume of the Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles in 1846 (Fig. 11).

Идоша за море къ Варягомъ къ Руси. сице бо ся зваху тѣи
 Варязи^ш Русь^ш, яко се друзіи зовутся Свое^ѣ, друзіи же Урмане^ѣ, Англыне^ѣ, друзіи Гъте^ѣ; тако
 и си. Рѣша Руси^ѣ Чюдъ^ю, Словѣни и Кривичи «вся^я земля наша велика и обилна, а наряда въ
 ней нѣтъ; да поидѣте княжити и владѣти нами^ѣ».

Fig. 11. PSRL, T. I. St. Petersburg, 1846, p. 8.

As we can see, there is no **Весь** (Ves') tribe in the dubious form of "**Вси**" in the text. There is a definitive adjective "whole" (**вся**), which refers to the noun "land" (**земля**) There is no union "**и**" between the words "**Кривичи**" and "**вся**".

Now let us turn to the second oldest chronicle manuscript, the Hypatian Codex (c. 1425 CE). The copyist of the Hypatian Codex was rather careless, there are many blots, corrections, outliers and unnecessary conjunctions "and". It differs from the Laurentian one in some dates and descriptions of individual events. But the participants in the vocation of the Varangians there are the same as in Lavrentian – Chud, Slovens and Krivichi. Ves' of them are missing (fig. 12).

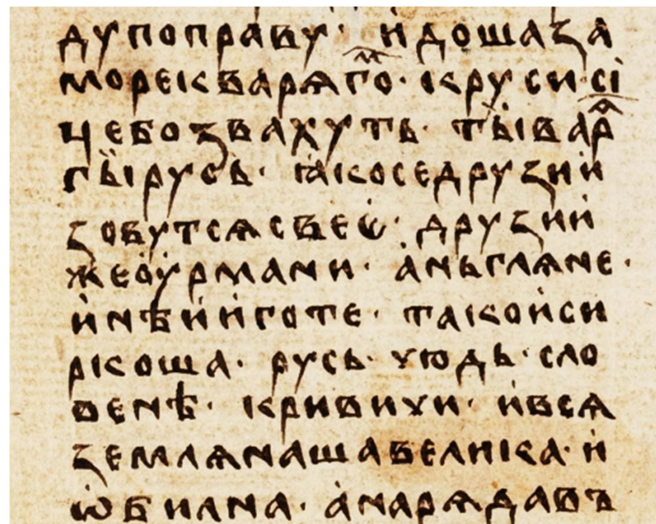


Fig. 12. The Hypatian Codex. Russian Academy of Sciences Library. Filing code НИОР 16.4.4., reverse of folio 8.

Translation:

"... they went across the sea to the Varangians, to Russia. For that is the name of those Varangians – Rus'. As others are called Svei, others are Urmans, Angles, others are Goths, so are these. Chud, Slovens, and Krivichi said to Rus': "And our whole land is large and abundant, but there is no state order..."

However, in the 1871 edition of the Chronicle of the Ipati List of the Archaeological Commission, edited by S. N. Palauzov, the tribe Ves' also appears here in the anecdotal form "**Всь**" (Fig. 13).

праву». Идоша за море к Варягомъ к Руси,—сїце бо звахуть ты Варягы Русь, яко се друзии зовутся Свее, друзии же Урмани³, Аньгляне, пнии^(**) Готе⁴,—тако и си. Ркоша Русь Чюдъ, Словенѣ, Кривичи и Всъ^(***): «земля наша велика и обпна, а наряда въ ней нѣтъ; да поидете княжить и во-

Fig. 13. The Chronicle according to the Hypatian apographer. Ed. Archeographic. Commissions, St. Petersburg, 1871. p. 11.

In the Radziwill (Konigsberg) Chronicle (the end of the 15th century), there is no Ves' tribe among the tribes that summoned the Varangians (Fig. 14).

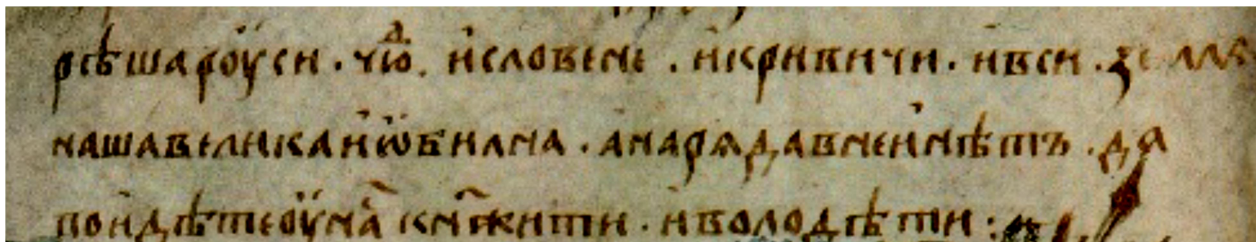


Fig. 14. The Konigsberg (Radziwill) Chronicle. Library of the Academy of Sciences, 34.5.30, f. ѳ (9)

Broken down into words, punctuation, and highlighting of direct speech, this passage looks like this: «Рѣша роуси чю^а, и словене, и кривичи, и вси: «Земля наша велика и обильна, а наряда в ней несть. Да поидѣте оу насъ княжити и владѣти...» This passage is translated as follows: "They said to Rus', and Slovens, and the Krivichi, and all of them collectively: "Our land is large and abundant, but there is no state structure in it. Come take power and govern our people."

Back in 1767, I. I. Taubert and I. S. Barkov published the Radziwill Chronicle in a civilian font, converting the original into a spelling system of the middle of the XVIII century, threw out archaic letters, divided the text into sentences and words, enclosed direct speech in quotation marks and punctuation marks.⁴⁸ (fig. 15):

„праву„. И идоша за море къ Варягомъ Руси; сїце бо шїи звахусь Варязи Русь, яко се друзїи зовутся Свїе, друзїи жѣ Урмяни, Ингляне, друзїи Готе. Тако же рѣша Руси, Чюдъ и Словене, и Кривичи и вси: „Земля наша велика и обильна, а наряда въ ней нѣтъ; да пойдѣте у насъ княжити и владѣти„.

Fig. 15. The Chronicle of Nestor with his successors according to the Konigsberg apographer, p. 16

⁴⁸ Летопись Несторова с продолжателями по Кенигсбергскому списку, до 1206 года // Библиотека российская историческая, содержащая древние летописи и всякие записки, способствующие к объяснению истории и географии российской древних и средних времён. СПб, 1767.

But it did not occur to them to translate the definitive pronoun **"вси"** as the name of the Ves' tribe (**весь**). As can be seen in Figure 15, the names of the peoples (Slovens, Krivichi, etc.) Taubert and Barkov are written with a capital letter, and the word **"весь"** is written in lowercase.

We have already encountered the pronoun **"вси"** in D. S. Likhachev's translation when we considered the translation of the phrase «**Рѹсь . Чюдѣ . и вси ꙗзыци**». Then, as we remember, he translated it with the word **всякие** ("all sorts"). In his edition of The Primary Chronicle according to the Laurentian Codex of 1377, in an article about the vocation of the Varangians, Dmitry Sergeevich, although he convinces us in the Preface that he does not have "a consolidated text" "for all the apographers" and not a hypothetical reconstruction of the original text, but a text that actually reached us in the Laurentian Codex," in fact, replaces the original text with a fragment from the Radziwill Chronicle: "The Russians, the Chuds, the Slovens, and the Krivichs **and all sorts**: «Рѣша русь, чюдѣ, словѣни, и кривичи **и вси**; „Земля наша велика и обилна, а наряда в ней нѣтъ. Да поидѣте княжить и володѣти нами”». But even more puzzling is the translation of these two sentences: "The Chud, Slavs, Krivichi, **and Ves'** said to the Rus': 'Our land is great and abundant, but there is no order in it. Come and reign over us.'" The pronoun **"вси"**, which he himself translated as **всякие** ("all sorts") miraculously becomes the **tribe Ves'**.

The most puzzling aspect of all these distortions and reworkings of ancient texts is the motive. Why would academic scholars, especially those of such high standing, engage in petty manipulations? For example, what's the point of persistently inserting the ethnonym Ves' into chronicles, which doesn't exist there, and insisting that this is precisely what the chronicler intended? This is done so obsessively that it's impossible to justify these deliberate actions as "honest errors."

The answer may lie in the mistake made by the researchers of the annals, which stretches back to the XVIII century, when historical science was still in its infancy in our country. Here is how M. D. Prisyolkov commented on this "conscientious misconception" (posthumous ed., 1950). While reconstructing the burnt-out Trinity Chronicle, he collected bit by bit quotations from it, left by researchers who studied it before the fire of 1812. Commenting on the excerpt he restored from the Trinity apographer about the vocation of the Varangians ("Рѣша Русь, Чюдѣ, Словѣнѣ, Кривичи **и вся**") regarding the phrase **"и вся"**, he writes the following:

"For some reason, Miller corrected **"вси"** to **"весь"** in the printed Konigsberg apographer. Karamzin (vol. I, note 230) also interpreted everything (Radziwill's apographer) and **вся** (Lavrentian and Trinity apographers), writing: the ancient chronicler names only the Krivichi, Slavs or Novgorodians, Some **and Ves'**, who wanted princes".⁴⁹

It can be assumed that it was precisely due to the lack of competence of the "dinosaurs of Russian history" by G. F. Miller and N. M. Karamzin that this "conscientious misconception" was introduced into Russian historiography.

⁴⁹ Присёлков М. Д. Троицкая летопись. Реконструкция текста. М., Л.: Изд-во Академии наук, 1950. С. 58.

However, doubts still arise about the "good faith" of this misconception. Before the publication of the Ipatiev Chronicle by S. N. Palauzov in 1871 and the 2nd edition of the Laurentian Chronicle by A. S. Barkov in 1872, no one repeated this "mistake". In addition, there is a direct "proposal" by academician A. A. Shakhmatov (1916) in certain chronicle articles, instead of the pronouns "вси", "всѣхъ", etc., to put the ethnonym **Весь** ("Ves") in a strange and generally unused form of the nominative case "**Вьсь**"⁵⁰.

The revolution that broke out in 1917 and a complete change of priorities in historical science interrupted these philological experiments devoid of common sense, and the odious **Вьсь** did not manage to become widespread. However, in 1950, D. S. Likhachev began to redraw the original chronicles again.

6. EXAMPLES OF INSUFFICIENT COGNITIVE EXPERIENCE OF TRANSLATORS

Correctly translating chronicle texts requires more than just a good command of the language. It requires a whole range of knowledge. And not just knowledge of history, hagiography, and related disciplines, but also knowledge of economic, religious, international, political, and other relations in the Middle Ages, as well as an understanding of medieval psychology. A thorough understanding of the legal system of medieval society and the meaning of legal terms are essential. In other words, a chronicle translator must possess a comprehensive knowledge of the context described in the source text. Unfortunately, nothing of the sort is evident in published translations.

6.1. A White Veveritsa from Smoke

This chapter describes a situation based on a play on words in Old Russian. Chronicles speak of the Varangians collecting tribute from tribes in Eastern Europe in the amount of a "**бѣлѣи вѣверицѣ**" (transcribed **belei veveritse**). In Old Russian, this phrase can be read in two ways.

If you read the word "**belei**" with the letter "i" together in the prepositional case, you get the adjective "**belei**" ("**white**"). If you read the word "**bele**" with the letter "i" separately, you get two words: the noun **bele** (nominative "**bela**") and the conjunction **i** ("**and**").

Either "the Varangians took tribute according to a **white veveritsa** from the smoke," in which case there would be **one unit of taxation: the white veveritsa**.

Or "the Varangians took tribute according to a **bela and a veveritsa** from the smoke." In which case there would be **two units of taxation: the bela and the veveritsa**.

The correct reading of this phrase has been debated among scholars since the 18th century.

⁵⁰ Шахматов А. А. Повесть временных лет. Том I. Вводная часть. Текст. Примечания. Изд. Имп. Археогр. комиссии. Петроград, 1916. С. 395.

Let's take, for example, the familiar PVL article under the year 6367 (859). Let's turn to the original text in D.S. Likhachev's transcription (1950):

«859 Въ лѣто 6367. Имаху дань варязи изъ заморья на чюди и на словѣнхъ, на мери и на всѣхъ кривичѣхъ. А козари имаху на полянѣхъ, и на сѣверѣхъ, и на вятичѣхъ, имаху **по бѣлѣ и вѣверицѣ от дыма**»⁵¹ (**bela and veveritsa from smoke**).

Dmitry Sergeevich translates this article as follows:

"859 In the year 6367. The Varangians from overseas collected tribute from the Chud, the Slavs, the Merya, and all the Krivichi, and the Khazars collected **a silver coin and a squirrel skin from smoke** from the Polyana, the Severians, and the Vyatichi."⁵²

V. Panov (1936) has difficulty translating the "white veveritsa": "In the year 6367. The Varangians, coming from overseas, collected tribute from the Chud, the Slovenes, the Merya, the Ves, and the Krivichi; and the Khazars collected tribute from the Polyans, the Severians, and the Vyatichi: they collected a **"white veveritsa" from smoke.**" In his commentary, he nevertheless explains that a veveritsa is a squirrel skin.

A. S. Klevanov (1871) also has a vague translation: "The Varangians, who came from overseas, took tribute from the Chud, Slovenes, Merya, and all the Krivichi; and the Khazars took tribute from the Polyans, Severians, and Vyatichi - **a squirrel and a veveritsa skin from each house.**"⁵³

First, let's figure out **what "from smoke" means**. D.S. Likhachev believes that "'from smoke' means 'from each family.'"⁵⁴ This is perhaps the most unfounded interpretation. It doesn't clarify what is meant by the concept of "family." A.S. Klevanov's translation of "from each house" is closer to the truth. In fact, "smoke" here refers to a separate household capable of generating income (yard). Eight hundred years later, in 1678-1679, a similar system of taxation of the rural population was introduced throughout Russia, becoming known as "podvornoye oblozheniye" or the tax from the yard (from the word "**dvor**" (**yard**) instead of "**smoke**").

It is much more difficult to understand what "belei veveritsi" means (nominative **belaya veveritsa**). Researchers have encountered difficulties interpreting and translating these words since the very beginning of their study of chronicle texts. In the 18th century, when this study began, the word "veveritsa" (вѣверица) was, in all likelihood, unfamiliar to researchers. For example, in the posthumous first edition of V. N. Tatishchev's "History of Russia" (Book 2, 1773), edited by G. F. Miller, the word "veveritsa" is printed as северица "severitsa," and

⁵¹ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть первая. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950, с. 18.

⁵² Там же, с. 214.

⁵³ Клеванов А. Летописный рассказ событий Киевской, Волынской и Галицкой Руси от её начала до половины XIV века. — М.: Тип. А. И. Мамонтова и К°, 1871. С. 9.

⁵⁴ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть вторая. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950, с. 233 – 234.

"belaya" ("white" in Russian) or "bela" is transformed into "belka" ("squirrel" in Russian). (Fig. 16).

**Въ лѣто 6368. 860. Варяги брали дань ошѣ русси,
 Чуди, Славянѣ, Мери, Веси и Кривичѣ, а Козары, яко рехѣ,
 брали ошѣ Полянѣ, Сѣверы, Вятичѣ и прочихѣ по бѣлкѣ
 ошѣ дыма и по северицѣ [ласка или горностай].**

Fig. 16. Tatishchev V. N. Russian History. Book 2. Publ. Imperial Moscow University. 1773. P. 10.

G. F. Miller himself interpreted this phrase as "tribute was paid according to the vedaga and the veveritsa," but he placed an asterisk above "vedaga" and added a marginal note: "This word is unclear." Karamzin (vol. I, commentary 89) noted: "In the Pushkin and printed Nikon apographers: "they paid tribute according to the white veveritsa," in the Trinity apographer: "they paid tribute according to the bela and the veveritsa." In note 300 of the same volume I, Karamzin returned to this in the following phrase: "At first the chronicler said that the Khazars imposed tribute on them only in veveritsas."⁵⁵ Because of these contradictions, M. D. Prisyolkov was unable to restore this passage in the Trinity Chronicle.

In short, G. F. Miller and N. M. Karamzin, with their corrections to the text and subjective interpretations of the content in keeping with the traditions of the 18th century, have only added to the confusion, without coming any closer to answering the question of what exactly are the economic units (unit) in which the size of the tribute was measured? Their research has led to a situation that has raised several additional questions. 1) Which is the correct reading: "по бѣлѣи вѣверицѣ" or "по бѣлѣ и вѣверицѣ"? Considering that in chronicles, as a rule, words were written without spaces, the breve ˘ was not placed above the letter "й", and the adjective "бѣлая" in the prepositional case ("бѣлой") was written "бѣлѣи", either of these options could theoretically be correct. 2) If the correct reading is the noun "bela", what does it mean? 3) What is a veveritsa?

Let's read what D.S. Likhachev wrote on this subject: "по бѣлѣ и вѣверицѣ от дыма. The question of how to read this passage correctly is quite important. It can be read as "by the white squirrel," and then its meaning will be "by the white (i.e., gray, winter) squirrel." Squirrel fur is valued only in winter, as it is the most durable. In modern Russian, the adjective "white" eventually supplanted the noun "veveritsa" and itself adopted the noun suffix "belka." In support of this understanding of the text of the Primary Chronicle, we can cite the following passage from the Laurentian Codex under the year 1068: "by martens and belyu", while in the Hypatian Codex this passage is understood as "by kuna and skora" (i.e. furs), which indicates that in ancient Rus' the word "bel" was sometimes understood as "squirrel fur". However, this passage can also be read as "po bele i veveritse", which could mean: "by bela (by a white, silver coin) and squirrel". This

⁵⁵ Присёлков М. Д. Троицкая летопись. Реконструкция текста. М., Л.: Изд-во Академии наук, 1950. С. 57, прим. 4.

interpretation was first proposed in the first half of the 19th century and developed by Academician B.D. Grekov. (...) In our translation, we accept the point of view of B.D. Grekov."

In the comments to the 2012 reprint of D.S. Likhachev's translation of the PVL, a group of authors expresses a different point of view: "A more convincing view is that the text should be read as one word (по бѣлѣи вѣверицѣ), since the term "bela" as a monetary unit appears no earlier than the last third of the 13th century. If we consider that "bela" in the chronicle refers not to a coin, but to a squirrel pelt, then an unjustified semantic repetition arises (veveritsa is the same squirrel)."⁵⁶

The correct reading, of course, is "a white veveritsa from smoke." But for entirely different reasons. **The construction of a complex structure incorporating two units of taxation—"bela" and "veveritsa"—is entirely artificial.**

6.2. The meaning of the word "veveritsa"

Here we encounter not so much a translation error as literalism, when the primary or most familiar meaning of a word is used in translation instead of the appropriate one, but outright speculation. It's completely unclear how the context of "they took tribute from the white veveritsa from the smoke" implies that veveritsa is squirrel skin. Moreover, this translation has become so ingrained in our scholarly literature that it is considered an axiom requiring no proof. Let's examine the meaning of the word "veveritsa" in medieval literature, and whether there is even the slightest allusion to squirrel.

1) Unknown animal

Hypatian Codex, 6622 (1114 AD):

«Сѣму же ми са дивляцію, рекоша ми: „Се не дивно; и суть и еще мужи старии ходили за Югру и за Самоядь, яко видивше сами на полунощныхъ странахъ, спадѣ туца, и в тои туци спадѣ вѣверица млада, акы топерво рожена, и възрастъши, и расходитса по земли, и пакы бываѣтъ другая туца, и спадають оленци мали в нѣи, и възрастають и расходатса по земли”»⁵⁷.

"When I was amazed at this, they said to me: 'This is not surprising; there are still old men alive who have traveled beyond Yugra and beyond Samoyed and have seen for themselves in the northern lands: a cloud descends, and from that cloud a young veveritsa falls, as if just born, and, having grown up, disperses across the land. And another time there is another cloud, and from it little fawns fall and grow up, and disperse across the land.'"

⁵⁶ Повесть временных лет. Перевод Д. С. Лихачева, О. В. Творогова. СПб, Вита Нова, 2012. С. 241.

⁵⁷ Ипатьевская летопись. Библиотека РАН. Шифр хранения НИОР 16.4.4, л. 104.

The first edition of Dahl's explanatory dictionary (1863) provides precisely this interpretation of "veveritsa": "**Веверица** (with two "e"s - V.V.) Veveritsa, feminine. obsolete, unknown animal (Viverra?). Probably a weasel or ermine; but some scientists inappropriately gave the name "veveritsa" to marmots as a generic one."⁵⁸

From this article, it becomes clear (based on the words "weasel or ermine" and the spelling of "veveritsa" with two "e"s") that V. I. Dahl found this obsolete word in the passage from Tatishchev's "History," which I placed in Fig. 16. He was clearly unfamiliar with it before this. He confuses marmots with animals called civets or civet cats (Latin: Viverrae), whose family has a Latin name that sounds almost identical to "veveritsa"—Viverridae—but has no relation to "veveritsa."

The noun "**veverichina**", meaning "meat of a veveritsa," comes from "veveritsa." In the medieval book "Questioning of Kirik", with the answers of the Novgorod bishop Nifont (1130-1156), this word is used when the bishop answers the question of what spiritual punishments should be imposed for eating forbidden meat (No. 89)⁵⁹:

«А смердъ дѣла помолвиѡ, иже по селам живут, а покаются оу нас, оже-то друзѡи ѡдаѡт вѣвериѡиѡу и ино. — Злѣ, рече, въ злѣ ѡсти давлѣнина; аще бѣша и вѣвериѡиѡу ѡли, или ино недавлено, нѣѡу бѣды, вѣлыми лѣжаѡ»⁶⁰.

"And what punishment should be imposed on the smerds," asked Kirik, "who live in the villages and repent to us that some eat **veverichina** and the like?" "It is unjust," (the bishop) replies, "it is impious to eat **davlenina** (the meat of strangled animals – V.V.). But if they ate strangled meat or similar meat, but not strangled animals, there is no sin on them; they do not deserve condemnation at all."

2) The fur of some animal, or a skin with fur

Nypatian Codex, 6579 (1071 AD). Text transcribed by O. V. Tvorogov:

«Бывши бо единою скудости въ Ростовѣстѣй области, и вѣстаѡ два вольхва от Ярославѣя, глаголюѡа, ѡко «Вѣ свѣмы, кто обильѣ держитѣ». И поидоста по Волзѣ, и кдѣ придучи в погостѣ, ту же нарекаѡа лучѣшиѡ жены, глаголюѡа, ѡко «Си жито держатѣ, а сии — медѣ, а сии рыбы, а сии скору. И привожаху к нима сестры своя, и матери и жены своя. Она же въ мѣчѣѣ

⁵⁸ Даль В. И. Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка. Часть 1. Изд. Об-ва любителей русск. словесности при Моск. университете. М., тип. А. Семена, 1863. С. 154.

⁵⁹ Вопросы Кирика, Саввы и Илии, с ответами Нифонта, епископа новгородского, и других иерархических лиц // Памятники древнерусского канонического права / [Ред. А.С. Павлов]. - 2-е изд. - Санкт-Петербург : Тип. М.А. Александрова, 1908. / Ч. 1. (Памятники XI-XV в.). - 1908. - 1466 с. и стб. разд. паг. (Русская историческая библиотека, изданная Императорской Археографической комиссией Т. 6). - С. 48.

⁶⁰ Новгородская (Климентовская) Кормчая книга. 1282 г. ГИМ 80370/750. Инв. № Син. 132. Л. 5316.

Также: Въпрашание Кюриково // Калайдович, К. Памятники российской словесности XII века / изданные с объяснением, вариантами и образцами почерков. — Москва : в типографии Семена Селивановскаго, 1821. — с. 191.

прорѣзавше за плечемъ, вынимаѣста любо жито, любо рыбы, или вѣверицю, и убиваша <...> многы жены, имѣния ихъ имаша собѣ» .

Translation: "There was an unusual famine in the Rostov region, and two sorcerers from Yaroslavl appeared, saying, 'We both know who's hiding the supplies.' So they set off along the Volga, and wherever they arrived at a village, they immediately named noblewomen, saying that one was hiding bread, and another honey, and another fish, and another furs. And they brought their sisters, mothers, and wives to the two of them. The sorcerers, deceiving the people, cut open their backs and took out either bread, or fish, or a pelt, and killed many of the women, taking their property for themselves."

Here, O. V. Tvorogov translates "veveritsa" as a skin with fur, since earlier, in the list of foodstuffs and goods that, according to the sorcerers, the women were hiding, they were called furs ("skora"). This is perhaps the only place in medieval chronicle literature where the word "veveritsa" can be indirectly identified as a furry pelt. However, this context doesn't necessarily indicate that it's a squirrel pelt, and why O. V. Tvorogov translates "veveritsa" as "squirrel" is unclear.

3) Money in general

The most common meaning of the word "veveritsy" in the plural (вѣверицьѣ, вѣверицѣ, вѣверицьѣ) was "money."

In birch bark manuscripts from the early 11th to mid-15th centuries, this word appears **only in this meaning** (words such as "veksha," "rezana," "kuna," "nogata," "grivna," and others are used as names of specific monetary units). birch bark manuscripts are the most authentic written source on the history of medieval Rus' society and everyday life, as they represent personal and business correspondence, promissory notes, purchase orders, court summonses, etc. "Veveritsy" as a general term for money is a lexical feature of the earliest period of the early Old Russian language⁶¹.

I will cite several examples.

Birch bark manuscript No 246 (stratigraphically until the mid-50s of the 11th century, origin – Smolensk, Polotsk or Vitebsk).

«Ѡ жиrowитѣ къ стоѣнови како ту оу мене и ѡбѣтъное дрѣво вѣзѣмѣ и вѣверицьѣ ми не присѣлѣци то деѣѣтое лето а не присѣлѣцими полоу патѣи гривны а хоцоу ти вѣроути вѣ та лоуцѣшаго новѣгородѣанина посѣли же добѣрѣмѣ».

Translation: "From Zhirovit to Stoyan. It's been nine years since you swore to me on the cross (or: took the cross) and haven't sent me money (вѣверицьѣ). If you don't send me four and a half grivnas, then I intend to confiscate the goods of a noble Novgorodian for your guilt. So send voluntarily."⁶²

⁶¹ Зализняк А.А. Древненовгородский диалект. Изд. 2-е. М., Языки славянской культуры, 2004. С. 219.

⁶² Ibid., p. 280 – 281.

Birch bark manuscript No 1002. Novgorod, 1120s–1150s. Transcription by A. A. Zaliznyak, broken down into words:

«...на чьлѣди **въвъричь не платиле** 5 на дьсѣте гривно. А нынѣково али по коунѣ на нѣдѣлоу. А ныны ...»

Translation: "He didn't give money (**въвъричь**) for the slaves—fifteen grivnas. And now they've taken a kuna a week. And now..."⁶³

Birch bark manuscript No 1004. Second quarter – mid-12th century.

The text, transcribed by A. A. Zaliznyak, is divided into words as follows:

«Ѡ Лоукы къ Ѡтьцеви. То ти не въдало наѣмѣть, ѣже то ма везель, **на кожахъ вевѣрице**, а продалъ ти есемо емоу на 6-сти ногать сковородъ — то ти пѣльнѣ 2е. А идеть ти во лодие съ товаромо. Воземи же ѡ него 2е гривене. Али ти сѧ ѣзмотаетъ, а молувиво емоу, поустѣ же ѣ во три».

Translation: "From Luka to my father. The hired hand who was carrying me owes me money (**вевѣрице**). He didn't pay for the hides, and I sold him six nogat's worth of frying pans—a full two grivnas in total. And he's sailing on a ship with the goods. Take the two grivnas from him. And if he denies it, confront him with it and make him owe three grivnas."⁶⁴

In addition to birch bark letters, the word "veveritsas" as a general designation of money can be found in a variety of sources.

For example, in the inscription from St. George's Cathedral of the Novgorod Yuriev Monastery (1119-1120). The inscription is on the wall of the cathedral's staircase tower; discovered by T. V. Rozhdestvenskaya in 1992, the inscription was covered with ancient plaster dating back to the time of the cathedral's construction (1119-1120); hence its dating.

4-line text: «**въвъриць три | на дѣсѣте | гривнѣ | и рѣзана**».

Translation: "The money (**въвъриць**) is thirteen grivnas and rezana." (...)

The word "veveritsy" (**въвъриць**) appears in the same meaning that is known from birch bark manuscripts: "money"⁶⁵.

In the same sense, this word appears in the "Questioning of Kirik" with the answers of the Novgorod bishop Nifont (1130-1156): «А за оуѣпокои сице велаше слоужити сорокоустѣ... А испраши, рече, или самъ разоумѣи, коли ти дѣти **въвъриць**»⁶⁶.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 101.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.102-104.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.279.

⁶⁶ Новгородская (Климентовская) Кормчая книга. 1282 г. ГИМ 80370/750. Инв. № Син. 132. Л. 519а.

Также: Вопросы Кирика, Саввы и Илии, с ответами Нифонта, епископа новгородского, и других иерархических лиц // Памятники древнерусского канонического права / [Ред. А.С. Павлов]. - 2-е изд. - Санкт-Петербург : Тип. М.А. Александрова, 1908. / Ч. 1. (Памятники XI-XV в.). - 1908. - 1466 с. и стб. разд. паг. (Русская историческая библиотека, изданная Императорской Археографической комиссией Т. 6). - С. 24.

Translation: "And for the repose, they tell you to serve Sorokoust (Funeral Acolouthia)... but ask," he says, "or think for yourself, since they gave you the money (вѣверицѣ)".

4). The name of the monetary unit

In addition to the general designation of money, the word "veveritsa" was used to designate a specific monetary unit.

It is mentioned, for example, in Article 42 of the Short Edition of the Russkaya Pravda, which describes the "Pokon Virny" (11th century) — an institution that determined the amount of the in-kind or monetary fee in favor of collectors of court fees and fines (viras): «а вирнику · ̑ · гривень и · ̑ · рѣзанъ и · ̑ · вѣверици, а передѣ гривна», i.e. "to the collector, 60 grivnas, 10 rezans, and 12 vevertitsas, and upon entry, a grivna." The insignificant value of this unit is evident from the "Questioning of Kirik," according to which a church candle cost a vevertitsa: «а юже бы елико субботѣ взимати за того и до сорочинѣ, обауе много бѣваѣтъ свечѣ и вѣверицѣ · ̑ · »⁶⁷, i.e. on the candles on the fortieth Day after death, putting a vevertitsa for each one, they need 40 vevertitsas.

The use of the word "veveritsas" as a general term for money is a sign of antiquity: it is found only in the pre-Mongol period. Business correspondence between medieval Rus' residents, contained in birch bark manuscripts, as well as the discovery of numerous hoards of silver coins and ingots, indicate that Ancient Rus' had developed commodity-money relations and a common, stable monetary system, which N. P. Bauer tentatively calls "kuna's system" after the denomination of the basic monetary unit, the kuna. The monetary units mentioned in the documents (veveritsas, vekshas, rezanas, kunas, nogatas, grivnas) were not hypothetical animal skins, but actual metal coins and ingots. Arabic dirhams were in circulation, imitations of which were also minted in the Khazar Khaganate and Volga Bulgaria. According to the Historical Literature, the Khazars' subjects in the second half of the 9th century included the Vyatichs, Drevlyans, Polyans, Severians, Radimichs, and other East Slavic ethnic groups, who later united under Rus' rule. N. P. Bauer equates the kuna specifically with the Arab silver dirham. Coins of lower denominations are considered fractions of the dirham. The vevertitsa was the smallest unit in this system. In the 12th century, it changed its name to veksha, but not in all monuments. There are cases where both the old and new names were used simultaneously.⁶⁸ According to N. P. Bauer, during the period we are describing (late 9th – early 10th centuries), the relationship between monetary units was as follows:

⁶⁷ Вопросы Кирика, Саввы и Илии, с ответами Нифонта, епископа новгородского, и других иерархических лиц // Памятники древнерусского канонического права / [Ред. А.С. Павлов]. - 2-е изд. - Санкт-Петербург : Тип. М.А. Александрова, 1908. / Ч. 1. (Памятники XI-XV в.). - 1908. - 1466 с. и стб. разд. паг. (Русская историческая библиотека, изданная Императорской Археографической комиссией Т. 6). - С. 24.

⁶⁸ Бауер Н. П. История Древнерусских денежных систем IX в. — 1535 г. / Под ред. П. Г. Гайдукова. Ин-т истории материальной культуры РАН М., «Русское слово», 2014. С. 222.

9th century

Kuna (dirham, weight standard 2.86 g silver) = 2 rezanas (1.48 g silver) = 4 vevertsas.

The weight standard of a vevertsa was 0.72 g silver.

10th century

Nogata (full-fine dirham, 2.46 g silver) = 1.5 kunas (base dirham, 1.97 g) = 2.5 rezanas (0.98 g) = 5 vevertsas (0.49 g).

Grivna of kunas (49.25 g silver) = 20 nogatas = 25 kunas = 50 rezanas = 100 vevertsas.

The weight standard of a vevertsy was 0.49 g silver.⁶⁹

5) Small coin

In the Pandects of Nikon of the Black Mountain, a vast compilation of conciliar and patristic canons, disciplinary and penitential regulations, and the like, translated from Greek into Old Russian in the 12th century, the word "veveritsa" is used to denote copper Byzantine coins of completely different denominations from different eras: Nummios (Νούμιος), Follis (= 40 Nummios, Φόλλις)⁷⁰ and Lepta (according to Epiphanius of Cyprus (367–403), ½ Follis, Λεπτόν)⁷¹. In this context, the lexeme "veveritsa" can be interpreted as simply "small coin."

From all of the above, the following conclusion can be drawn. The word "veveritsa" acquired the meaning of "squirrel" or "squirrel skin" no earlier than the late 19th century (even the first edition of V. I. Dahl's dictionary from 1863 does not include this meaning). This translation of the word "veveritsa" into modern language is completely artificial. **The word "veveritsa" is not found in authentic written sources from the Middle Ages in the specific meaning of "squirrel".**

6.3. Technical characteristics and relative cost of squirrel pelts

From a purely economic perspective, could a squirrel pelt, for which we are so eagerly being sold as a veveritsa, have served as a taxable unit? To answer this question, a basic understanding of economics and at least a basic understanding of commodity science are sufficient. Judging by numerous studies, most of them proceed from the unfounded assumption that all squirrel pelts are identical and have the same value. However, D.S. Likhachev does qualify this by stating that he is referring to "white (i.e., rather than gray, winter) squirrel fur. Only winter squirrel fur is valued, as it is the most durable."⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 480.

⁷⁰ Словарь древнерусского языка (XI–XIV вв.) / РАН. Ин-трус. яз.; Гл. ред. Р. И. Аванесов. Том II. М. «Русский язык», 1989, с. 287.

⁷¹ Бауер Н. П. Указ. Соч. с. 223.

⁷² Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть вторая. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950, с. 233.

In fact, the most valuable squirrel pelts are considered to be Grade I pelts, which have a dark, rather than white, gray-blue hair coat, without brown guard hairs. Grade I pelts are those harvested in winter, meaning they are full-haired, with a mature, lush winter coat, tall, dense, shiny guard hairs, and dense, matted down. Pelts harvested in late autumn or early winter are classified as Grade II pelts, as their winter coat has not yet fully developed, and the guard hairs and down have not yet reached their full height. Pelts from most fur-bearing animal species harvested in the second half of autumn, when they are completely cleared of summer hair or when a limited amount remains on the sides, head, or limbs, are classified as Grade III pelts. At this time, the winter coat has reached no more than two-thirds of its full height. The guard hairs are dense but short, and the down is still poorly developed. If the price of a Grade I pelt is taken as 100%, then the price of Grade II pelts is 80%, and that of Grade III pelts is 50%. Furthermore, pelts can vary greatly in price depending on their size. For large pelts, the price is set at 100%, for medium pelts at 75%, and for small pelts at 50%. Pelts from the same species can vary greatly in hair color and have significant price differences. Squirrel pelts are also priced according to their ridge. A ridge is a set of commercial properties characteristic of pelts from a particular species of animal, harvested in a given region, and differing from pelts of the same species from other regions. Furthermore, all pelts are classified as normal or defective. Standard pelts are those free of any defects in the hair or flesh, or those with minor defects that do not reduce the pelt's quality after processing, i.e., in the semi-finished product. Such defects are not considered defects and are considered acceptable. Pelts with minor defects are valued at 90% of the corresponding grade (i.e., with a 10% discount), pelts with moderate defects at 75% (a 25% discount), and pelts with major defects at 50%. Many additional criteria contribute to the price of a semi-finished product. An important factor in the evaluation is whether the pelt is dressed or undressed, meaning a pelt removed from the animal's carcass that has not been processed.

Unlike Soviet scientists, Sigismund von Herberstein, a German diplomat of the 1st half of the 16th century, who twice visited the embassy in the Russian state and lived in Moscow for 9 months in 1526, studied the market conditions well. His book "Notes on Moscow Affairs" (1549)⁷³ is one of the most reliable and competent foreign Renaissance sources on the history of our country. Here is what he writes about squirrel furs: "Squirrel skins are also delivered from different places, the widest from the Siberian region, and those that are nobler than all others – from Shuwaii, not far from Kazan, and in addition, from Perm, Vyatka, Ustyug and Vologda, from where they are brought (in large numbers, also turned out) always tied in bundles of ten pieces. In each bundle, two of the best are called personal (**litzschna**), three, a few worse, are called red (**crasna**), four are tinted (**pocrasna**), one, the last, is called dairy (**moloischna**), it is the cheapest of all.

⁷³ Herberstein, Sigmund von: *Rerum Moscovitarum commentarii* ([Wien] [1549]).

Each of them can be bought for one or two **dengas**."⁷⁴ The **denga** in 1526 was a silver coin weighing 0.37 – 0.38 g. In addition to the difference in the grades of semi-finished fur products, Herberstein reports on the traditional methods of their forgery: "They (skins - V. V.) have some signs near the head and tail, by which it is possible to recognize whether the animals were caught at the right time. Because as soon as they are caught, they are skinned, and the fur is turned out so that the hair does not get worn out and does not get worse. If an animal is caught at the wrong time and its fur lacks the proper natural color, they pull out the hairs from its head and tail, which serve as a sign, so that it cannot be known that the animal was caught at the wrong time, and thus deceive customers"⁷⁵.

In recent history, there has been an example of in-kind taxation, the amount of which was calculated in squirrel skins. In 1921, when the Bolsheviks completely destroyed the economy of post-revolutionary Russia, and as a result of hyperinflation, monetary circulation in the country almost stopped, they tried to impose an in-kind tax on the rural population. Natural taxes on dairy products, horticultural and melon products, wool, tobacco, honey and wax, meat taxes, poultry taxes from poultry farmers, etc. were established. We are interested in the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR of August 25, 1921 on the in-kind tax on furs. It concerned only hunters and trappers⁷⁶. It concerned only hunters and trappers. The tax was levied on citizens who owned hunting rifles and other hunting implements and lived in both commercial and non-commercial and semi-commercial areas. The Decree immediately specified the requirements for semi-finished fur products: furs were accepted for tax payment only fresh, full-fledged, full-haired, not fine, corresponding to the usual sorting of original raw materials containing, including the head, 50% of the first, 35% of the second and 15% of the third grade. The tax collection system was complex and led to high costs. Each hunter located in a non-commercial area was required to deliver 7 skins, in a semi-commercial area - 14 and in a commercial area - 21 skins of squirrels or other animals according to replacement standards according to the table of equivalents.⁷⁷

This table is of particular interest because it gives an idea of the value of the skins of different commercial animals in relation to each other. I'll give it in full:

"The amount of tax is calculated in squirrel skins. Suppliers of furs are given the right to replace squirrels with skins of other animals based on the following proportion: **instead of 1000 squirrels** — 15 leopards, 175 badgers, 7000 chipmunks, 25 wolves, 17 otters, 100 ermines, 1250 white hares, 900 rusak hares, 1750 cuffs of hares (southern), 200 columns, 175 korsaks, 40 steppe cats, 20 soft martens, 35 mountain martens, 875 weasels, 15 foxes (light), 9 medium-sized

⁷⁴ Герберштейн С. Записки о Московии. Под ред. А.Л. Хорошкевич. Т. I: латинский и немецкий тексты, русские переводы с латинского А. И. Малеина и А.В. Назаренко, с раннего верхненемецкого А.В. Назаренко. М., "Памятники исторической мысли", 2008. С. 283-284.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Декрет СНК РСФСР о натуральном налоге на пушнину. 25 августа 1921 г. // «Известия» № 202, 11 сентября 1921 г.; «Собрание Узаконений» № 61, ст. 431.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

foxes, 4 dark foxes, 20 red foxes, 35 light steppe foxes, 140 gray foxes (karaganok), 12 brown bears, 8 black bears, 4 white bears, 58 minks, 5 blue foxes, 21 white foxes, 1000 carriers (transportation), 25 wolverines, 15 lynx, 9 kidas sables, 5 light fur sables, 3 medium-colored sables (natural), 1 dark sable, 350 large marmots, 160 large tarbagans, 18,000 ground squirrels, 3,500 sandstone ground squirrels (large), 355 seals, 88 black (large) polecats, 300 white (large) polecats."⁷⁸

In the 18th century, when medieval Russian chronicles began to appear in print and a widespread fascination with ancient Russian history began, the so-called "fur theory of money" emerged among amateur historians, which also became widely accepted by official historians. According to this theory, all monetary units of Ancient Rus' were made from the pelts of fur-bearing animals. In addition to the vevertsa, which V. N. Tatishchev considered to be the skin of a weasel or ermine, supporters of the "fur theory" considered the kuna to be the skin of a marten, the nogata to be a "sable skin with four legs" (!), the grivna to be a "skin with a mane", the mortka (mordka) to be the head (muzzle) from the skin of an animal (!), the rezana to be a "cut skin" (!), etc. Despite the obvious artificiality of these etymologies, they were remembered in Soviet times, and they began to enjoy popularity again, as in the 18th century.

But let's return to the table of equivalents for semi-finished fur products. From it, we can estimate the value of other furs that proponents of the "fur theory of money" present as equivalents for monetary units, using squirrel pelts as the unit of measurement:

- 1 weasel = 1.14 squirrels;
- 1 mountain marten = 28.5 squirrels;
- 1 soft marten = 50 squirrels;
- 1 sable kidas = 111 squirrels;
- 1 light-colored sable = 200 squirrels;
- 1 medium-colored sable (natural) = 333 squirrels;
- 1 dark sable = 1000 squirrels.

As you can see, these proportions do not correspond to the ratio of the ancient Russian monetary units of the 9th – 10th century, expressed in silver, where the kuna was equal to 4 veveritsas:

- 1 veveritsa = $\frac{1}{2}$ rezana = $\frac{1}{4}$ kuna = $\frac{1}{5}$ nogata = $\frac{1}{100}$ grivna;
- 1 rezana = 2 veveritsas;
- 1 kuna = 4 veveritsas;
- 1 nogata = 5 veveritsas;
- 1 grivna = 100 veveritsas.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

To understand the value of fur in today's terms, let's look at the 2025 procurement prices for animal pelts in Krasnoyarsk region (Table 1). Current fur-bearing animal populations in Siberia roughly correspond to those in Eastern Europe 1,100 years ago.

Table 1. Prices for fur reception in Krasnoyarsk in 2025-2026⁷⁹

Assortment of fur raw materials	Head	Maximum estimated value, rubles	Additional requirements for raw material procurement
Sable skins (all ridges except Amur)	7 color; 1st grade; normal.	20 250	Unacceptable: defective, autumn, damaged by moth and carpet beetle larvae, rotten, with a greasy sooty smell; less voluminous hair - 30% discount, low-haired - 50% discount.
Skins of forest and mountain martens	1st grade; normal male female	2 500 1 650	Adoptive: 1st-2nd grade
Squirrel skins (all ridges)	1st grade; normal.	180	Unacceptable: damaged by moth and carpet beetle larvae, rotten, tailless;
Ermine skins	1st grade; normal; large	100	Adoptive: I; large, medium

I would like to point out that the price of a marten's skin is significantly influenced, in addition to other characteristics, by the sex of the animal.

I've provided all this information for general information purposes, since, judging by the majority of scholarly articles on the Varangian tribute, their authors have no idea what the squirrel skins with which their articles are so abundant are. For example, G. M. Prokhorov, the author of the most recent translation of the Laurentian Codex (2017), asserts that the tribute to the Varangians "по бѣлѣи вѣверицѣ от дыма" is nothing more than "by the white skin of a squirrel from smoke," and even "concludes" that "it seems to me that we should finally return to this traditional understanding of the text!"⁸⁰

Let's ask ourselves: could the annual tribute "from smoke," that is, from a full-fledged farm, have amounted to the equivalent of a squirrel pelt, valued at the paltry sum of 180 rubles? Considering the cheapness of squirrel pelts, one might follow K. Zuckerman in asking another question. If the Varangians had indeed

⁷⁹ Цены на прием пушнины в Красноярске - Прайс лист Сибирь Пушкина. Электронный ресурс, дата обращения 20.02.2026 г.: <https://www.sibpush.ru/zagot/price.html>

⁸⁰ Лаврентьевская летопись. Текст. Перевод. Исследования / Институт русской литературы (Пушкинский Дом) РАН Российской академии наук, Российская национальная библиотека ; подготовка текста, перевод и исследования Г. М. Прохорова. - Санкт-Петербург : Росток, 2017. С. 28 – 29.

begun to receive a squirrel pelt "from smoke" or "from a man", what would these professional warriors, unconnected to commerce, have done with mountains of fur garments? At what price would they have been able to sell them? Was there any economic rationale for exporting them? What foreign market would have been able to absorb them?⁸¹

In historical literature, one can find quotes from the "Notes" of the secretary of the Arab embassy to the ruler of Volga Bulgaria in 921-923, Ahmed ibn Fadlan, where he also speaks of the tribute the Slavs allegedly paid to the Khazars. In A.P. Kovalevsky's translation (1956), this passage reads: "The king of the Slavs bears the tribute he pays to the king of the Khazars, from each house in his state—a sable skin." However, the word "as-sakaliba," which A.P. Kovalevsky translates as "Slavs," in this context refers to the Volga Bulgars, not the Slavs, as he himself states in his commentary. The tribute paid to the Khazars by the "king" of the Volga Bulgars, according to Ahmed ibn Fadlan—a sable pelt "from every house in the state"—seems exorbitant, especially if one considers a sable to be equivalent to 1,000 squirrels. It should be noted that the reliability of medieval Arabic writers' accounts is highly questionable. Furthermore, accurately translating medieval Arabic texts is even more difficult than translating Old Russian ones.

It must not be forgotten that the works of medieval authors, whether Arabic or Russian, are not precise financial and political reports based on official documents and personal participation in diplomatic work and economic transactions, such as, for example, the "Notes" of S. Herberstein, but descriptive works based on oral tradition or written sources, the reliability of which can be quite conditional.

I'd like to briefly summarize.

- 1) White squirrel pelts do not exist. The rarest exception is the albino squirrel.
- 2) The darkest winter squirrel pelt is considered the most valuable, contrary to D.S. Likhachev's contrary assertion.
- 3) Squirrel pelts vary significantly in price depending on the criteria listed above, and are unknown as a measure of value in medieval sources.

6.4. A szeląg from a ralo

In addition to the veveritsa, the PVL mentions another payment unit in which the Slavic tribute to the Khazars was calculated: the szeląg (Old Russian: **ЩЛАГЪ**, **ЩЛАГЪ**, or **ЩЛАГЪ**), which was collected "from the ralo". Let's take the Hypatian Codex (Figs. 17, 18).

⁸¹ Цукерман К. Английский след в ранней летописи, или летописец шутит // У истоков и источников: на международных и междисциплинарных путях. Юбилейный сборник в честь Александра Васильевича Назаренко. — М.: Институт российской истории РАН, 2019. С. 473.

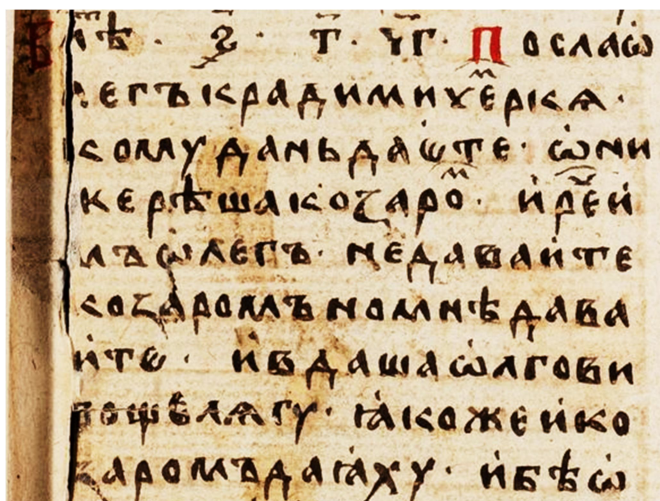


Fig. 17. The Hypatian Codex. Russian Academy of Sciences Library. Filing code НИОР 16.4.4., p. 10.
 Article 6393 (885)

Translation: "In the year 6393 (885). Oleg sent to the Radimichs, asking: "To whom do you give tribute?" They answered: "To the Khazars." And Oleg said to them: "Do not give tribute to the Khazars, but give it to me." And they gave Oleg a **szelag**, as they had given to the Khazars."

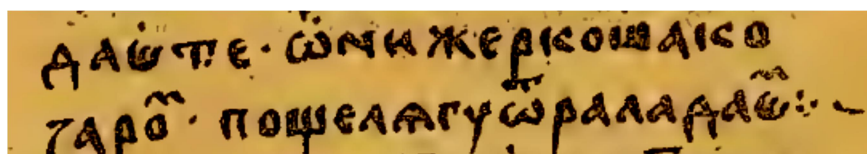


Fig. 18. The Primary Chronicle according to the Hypatian Codex. Photolithograph.
 Published by the Archaeological Com. St. Petersburg, 1871. P. 48.
 Article for the year 6472 (964).

In 6472 (964), Rurik's grandson, Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich, undertook his first campaign: «И иде на Оку рѣку и на Волгу, и налѣзе вятичи и рече имъ: «Кому дань даете?» Они же ркоша: “Козаром **по щелягу от рала** даем”» (transcription by O. V. Tvorogov)⁸². Translation: “And he went to the Oka River and to the Volga, and rode upon the Vyatichs, and asked them: “To whom do you give tribute?” They answered: “We give a **szelag from a ralo** to the Khazars.”

Both D. S. Likhachev and O. V. Tvorogov translate the word "from the ralo" not as "from the ralo", but as "from the sokha." Naturally, they're not referring to plowing implements. They're referring to a late medieval unit of payment called a "sokha." But here they're clearly anachronistic. The first mention of "sokha" as a legal term is in the Chronicle of Avraamka (1495), in the entry for the year 6916 (1408). There, the Golden Horde's beklarbek, Edigu, reproaches the Moscow prince Vasily Dmitrievich for evading paying tribute to the Horde in every possible way: «а что твои приказы и грамоты твои к намъ, то еси намъ все лгалъ; а что еси ималъ въ твоей деръжавѣ съ всякого улуса съ **дву сохъ рубль**, и паки тое

⁸² Повесть временных лет. Комментарий О. В. Творогова / Памятники литературы Древней Руси. Начало русской литературы. XI — нач. XII в. М., «Худож. лит.», 1978. С. 112-114.

серебро гдѣ ся дѣваетъ?»⁸³ Translation: "And what about your admonitions and your letters to us? You always lied to us; and what did you take from each ulus in your realm, **a ruble for every two sokha**, and where did that money go?"

In legal documents, the sokha appears in the Charter of Veliky Novgorod granting a year's worth of "Black Forest" tax from the Novotorzhsky volosts to Grand Prince Vasily Vasilyevich, dated 1437/1448 or 1456–1461:

«А брати князя великого черноборцемъ на новоторжскихъ волостехъ на всѣхъ, куды пошло по старинѣ, съ сохи по гривнѣ по новои, а писцу княжу мортка съ сохи. А в соху два коня, а третье припряжь; да тшанъ кожевничскои за соху; неводъ за соху; лавка за соху; плугъ за двѣ сохи; кузнецъ за соху; четыре пѣшци за соху; лодья за двѣ сохи; црѣнь за двѣ сохи. А хто сидитъ на исполовьѣ, на томъ взяти за полсохи.»⁸⁴

Translation: "And the Grand Duke's tax collectors in all the Novotorzhsky volosts are to take, as was the custom in the old days, a new grivna per sokha, and the prince's scribe a mortka (a small unit of account and currency – V.V.) per sokha. And per sokha, two horses and a third trace horse; and a tanner's vat per sokha; a seine per sokha; a store per sokha; a plow per two sokhas; a blacksmith per sokha; four horseless (farms?) per sokha; a boat per two sokhas; a tsren (cauldron for boiling salt) per two sokhas. And whoever sits on the half-plough (a tenant who gives half of his income to the owner) is to take from him a half-sokha."

The grivna was a high-purity silver ingot used to settle large transactions. Beginning in the last quarter of the 13th century, such ingots were referred to as rubles in birch bark documents, and half-ruble ingots as poltins. Both these terms—grivna and ruble—meant the same thing⁸⁵. Until the end of the 14th century, the weight of the Novgorod silver grivna-ruble was equal to 197 grams, but around 1389 it was reduced to 184 grams, a weight norm that remained until 1446/47⁸⁶. In 1420, Novgorod began minting its own coin, the "denga," which weighed 0.80 grams of high-purity silver. Along with the 184-gram ruble ingot, a counting monetary ruble was introduced, equal to 216 Novgorod dengas. It was called the "new ruble" or "new grivna" and weighed 172.80 grams⁸⁷. In 1446/47, the production of payment bullion coins ceased. The "old" (Old Russian: **ветхѣ**) grivna ingots, weighing 184 grams, were withdrawn from circulation and melted down into coins. The "new grivna," weighing 172.80 grams, now remained the only unit of account.

⁸³ ПСРЛ, т. XVI. СПб, тип. Ф. Елеонского, 1889. Стлб. 158.

⁸⁴ Грамоты Великого Новгорода и Пскова. Под ред. С. Н. Валка. М.-Л., изд. АН СССР, 1949. С. 39.

⁸⁵ Спасский И. Г. Русская монетная система. Историко-нумизматический очерк; 2-е изд. М., 1960. С. 40; 3-е изд. Л., 1962. С. 66.

⁸⁶ Бауер Н. П. 2014. История древнерусских денежных систем IX в. - 1535 г. Москва, «Русское Слово», 2014. С. 344-345.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 433 и 484.

Thus, in 1408, the estimated tax was 184 grams of silver per two sokhas, while in the mid-15th century, the actual tax, "black pine forest," was 172.80 grams of silver per sokhas.

The "mortka," which the prince's scribe received per sokha, weighed 0.50 grams of silver, according to data from 1404. The Novgorod grivna ("old," 184 grams) was equal to 364 mortkas.⁸⁸ By 1494, the weight of the mortka had dropped to 0.40 grams⁸⁹.

Now let's try to figure out what the "szeląg" (щеляг) was, which the Khazars were paid "from the ralo."

According to D.S. Likhachev, "The szeląg is a coin whose exact meaning and origin are unclear. This coin is mentioned again in 964. Apparently, this is a Polish coin (cf. Lithuanian szillings, Anglo-Saxon scilling, Gothic skilliggs, Polish szelag). Collecting tribute from the Radimichs and Vyatichs with the Polish coin "szeląg" is obviously a conjecture of the chronicler (since Radim and Vyatko, the ancestors of the princes of the Radimichs and Vyatichs, were "from the Lyakh clan!"). In fact, archaeologists have not found any szelągs in the territories of these tribes"⁹⁰.

I immediately want to object to D.S. Likhachev. The coin with the colloquial name "szeląg" began to be issued in Poland only in 1578, 200 years after the writing of the Laurentian Codex, and the chronicler could not have used its name for "speculation" in 1377.

It's not entirely clear why D. S. Likhachev considers the word szeląg (ЩЕЛАГЪ) to be Polish. This name is entirely consistent with common Slavic word-formation norms. In the 9th and 10th centuries, this word was even pronounced in Old Russian exactly the same as the Polish szeląg. The Polish letter ą before g sounds like a nasal [ɔɲ] or [ɔ̃]. The Old Russian letter Ѧ (yus small) also conveyed a nasalized back vowel [ɔ̃] (like the French "on" in "bombon" or the Polish ą in "kąt"). The word ЩЕЛАГЪ/szeląg is, by sound, an almost exact transcription of the Old High German Scilling and German Schilling (schilling) – the name of a monetary unit of the Carolingian coinage. The schilling, in turn, was a Germanized version of the Roman coin "solidus". From 743 AD, it was equal to 1/20 of a pound and was divided into 12 denarii (pfennigs). Since Charlemagne's monetary reform of 796, the schilling has become widespread not only in Charlemagne's empire, but also in Italy, France, England (from the 11th century), the German states, and other Western European countries, including the Baltic crusaders.

Whether the chronicle's word "szeląg" denoted a monetary shilling or something else is a matter of debate. A. P. Novoseltsev (1990) puts forward an alternative theory. In the Khazar Khaganate, the king and his entourage converted to Judaism, and trade was entirely in the hands of Jewish merchants living in all

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 483.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 484.

⁹⁰ Повесть временных лет. Под ред. В. П. Адриановой-Перетц. Подг. текста, перевод, статьи и коммент. Д. С. Лихачева. Часть вторая. Изд. АН СССР. М-Л, 1950, с. 254.

the country's cities. The main currency of Khazaria—"the Arab dirham and its variations, minted in independent or semi-independent states of North Africa, Central Asia, and Iran... was called (by Jewish merchants) 'sheleg' ('white', 'silver'), and this currency is mentioned in the Historical Literature for Khazar possessions in the lands of the Eastern Slavs."⁹¹

K. Zuckerman (2018) objects to this. He draws a curious parallel between the tribute levied by the Radimichs and Vyatichs on the Khazars and the tax levied by the Saxons on the Polabian Slavs, as found in the Slavic Chronicle of Helmold of Bosau (1160s). Zuckerman cites three passages from the Chronicle, as revised by him from L. V. Razumovskaya's Latin translation. The first two passages (I. a. and I. b.) date from the 10th century; the third (II.), essentially identical, concerns the levies for the benefit of a bishop, imposed by Helmold's contemporary, Duke Henry the Lion of Saxony and Bavaria (d. 1180):

«I. a. Dabatur autem pontifici annuum de omni Wagirorum sive Obotritorum terra tributum, quod scilicet pro decima imputabatur, **de quolibet aratro** mensura grani et XL resticuli lini, et **XII nummi puri argenti**. Ad hoc unus nummus, pretium colligentis. Slavicum vero aratrum par boum aut unus conficit equus (I, 12, p. 25).

Every year, a tithe, considered a tribute, was paid to the bishop from all the lands of the Vagrians and Bodrichs: **from each plough**, according to the grain yield, 40 bundles of flax, and **12 coins of pure silver**; in addition, one coin as a reward for the harvesters. A Slavic plow was equivalent to a pair of oxen or one horse (cf. Helmold, 1963: 55).

I. b. Est apud Obotritos pontificale tributum, quod pro decimo imputatur, **de quolibet scilicet aratro**, quod duobus bobus aut uno constat equo, mensura grani et XL restes lini et **XII nummi probatae monetae**; praeterea unus nummus, qui debetur colligenti (I, 14, p. 28).

The Bodrichs have a tithe tax paid to the bishop, namely, **from each plough**, which consists of two oxen or one horse, one measure of grain, 40 bundles of flax and **12 coins of official minting** are paid; in addition, one coin is due to the collector (cf. Helmold, 1963: 58).

II. Et precepit dux Slavis, qui remanserant in terra Wagirorum, Polaborum, Obotritorum, Kicinorum, ut solverent redditus episcopales, qui solvuntur apud Polanos atque Pomeranos, hoc est **de aratro** tres modios siliginis et **duodecim nummos monetae publicae**. Modius autem Slavorum vocatur lingua eorum 'curitce'. Porro Slavicum aratrum perficitur duobus bobus et totidem equis (I, 88, p. 174).

The Duke ordered the Slavs who remained in the lands of the Vagrians, Polabians, Bodrichs, and Khizhans to pay the bishop's dues, as the Polonians and Pomeranians did: 3 modii of rye and **12 state-issued coins per plough**. A modii is

⁹¹ Новосельцев А. П. Хазарское государство и его роль в истории Восточной Европы и Кавказа. М., «Наука», 1990. С. 117.

called a korets in the Slavic language. A Slavic plow consists of two oxen and the same number of horses (cf. Helmold, 1963: 200)».⁹²

By the **12 "state-minted silver coins"** I've highlighted in the text, K. Zuckerman means **12 denarii (pfennigs)**, which make up **the shilling**, a monetary unit. K. Zuckerman then cites the hypothesis of A. V. Komar (2011), according to which "The origin of the taxation system with a unit of 1 shilling of silver per plough should be associated with the ancient Saxon society, from where this tradition spread to England and the Baltic Slavs, after which it was borrowed by Rus' in the tenth century". According to this hypothesis, the emergence of the shilling as a unit of silver is not associated with Charlemagne's reform, but with a certain "Salic solidus," and it **weighed only 16.38 g**, fitting perfectly into the system of ancient Russian weights (two 8.19 g weights). From this follows the conclusion: "Archaeology leaves no doubt that the system of counting in the weighted shilling was widespread in Rus' in the 10th – early 11th centuries, before the appearance of its own kuno-rezana's monetary system."⁹³

I won't discuss the veracity of all these hypotheses, as this is not the topic of my paper. I'll simply summarize the opinions to understand the value of the "szeląg" collected "from the ralo," expressed in grams of silver. If the "szeląg" is a dirham, its weight ranges from 2.86 grams of silver in the 9th century to 2.46 grams in the 10th. If it is a shilling, then, according to A. V. Komar, its weight was 16.38 grams of silver. Neither the first nor the second figure compares with the actual payment of 172.80 grams of silver per sokha, according to the Charter of Veliky Novgorod, for the "Black Forest" tax "according to the new grivna." This means that D. S. Likhachev and O. V. Tvorogov's translation of the chronicle tax unit "ralo" as "sokha" is completely incorrect. Firstly, the "sokha" was a very large unit, recognized in the 15th century as the main measure for assessing taxes and duties. And secondly, as is clearly evident from the Novgorod Charter, it was not constant and was not tied to the area of a specific plot of cultivated land, but was extended to enterprises, industries, property, etc. In the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries, all lands in northeastern Rus', urban and non-urban, reported, i.e., described and measured when describing them for tax collection and assessing duties, were divided: 1) into chets and sokhas, 2) into vyts and obzhas, and 3) into kosts⁹⁴.

At the end of the 15th century, after the conquest of Novgorod by Grand Prince Ivan Vasilyevich, we see repeated changes in the measurement of Novgorod sokhas; thus, in one Novgorod census book, a sokha is allocated 3 obzhas, and an obzha is allocated four korobs or eight chets, therefore, a sokha is allocated 24 chets, while in another Novgorod census book, a sokha is allocated 126 chets or

⁹² Цукерман К. Английский след в ранней летописи, или летописец шутит // У истоков и источников: на международных и междисциплинарных путях. Юбилейный сборник в честь Александра Васильевича Назаренко. — М.: Институт российской истории РАН, 2019 - с. 468.

⁹³ Комар А.В. Древнерусская денежно-весовая система X в. на перекрестке путей: хазарский тупик // Хазарский альманах 9. Киев-Харьков 2010—2011. С. 158.

⁹⁴ Беляев И. Д. Лекции по истории русского законодательства. М., 1879. С. 320.

quarters; then we encounter 30 chets in a Novgorod sokha; we encounter the same inconsistency in the measurement of ploughs in other Russian possessions⁹⁵.

"Ralo" is an archaic tax unit from the pre-Mongol era, and one can only speculate what it represented. A hypothetical analogy could be found in the tax collections with the Latin name "aratrum" from Helmold's Chronicle (which L. V. Razumovskaya tentatively translates as "plough"). In any case, the translation of the tax unit "ralo" by the medieval legal term "sokha," as D. S. Likhachev and O. V. Tvorogov do, is incorrect.

CONCLUSIONS

I've touched on the translations of only a few articles in the dated section of the Primary Chronicle. A full study of the translations would result in a multi-volume work, far exceeding the two-volume set published by D.S. Likhachev in 1950. However, the material I've presented in this article is sufficient to draw a preliminary conclusion.

The task of a text translator is to convey the content of a text in one language using the means of another. However, as we can see, none of the scholars wanted to be a simple translator. Each strove to be, at a minimum, a co-author of the chronicler and even to improve on his work. But even in those parts of the chronicles that researchers have not managed to distort beyond recognition, their translation into modern languages is not distinguished by accuracy. In translations of Old Russian chronicles, we can see a whole host of translation errors: 1) insufficient proficiency in the original language; 2) insufficient cognitive experience, i.e., a lack of knowledge of the surrounding reality described in the source text; 3) inattention to the system of meanings contained in the text, i.e., a misunderstanding of what the author is saying about the subject; 4) an inability to discern the individual style of the author of the original speech work.

I would also like to say a few words about the "classical" translation of the Primary Chronicle by D.S. Likhachev. The text he published under the title "The Primary Chronicle according to the Laurentian Codex of 1377" bears no relation to the original chronicle. It is a completely different chronicle, inconsistent with the Laurentian Codex, which D. S. Likhachev haphazardly assembled from fragments he found attractive in various chronicles, without any criteria. The Old Russian text itself is translated unprofessionally, with gross translation errors, distorted dates, and the addition of toponyms and ethnonyms not found in the original. I would not recommend using this translation for scholarly purposes.

Translating chronicles into modern Russian requires a fundamentally different approach. First and foremost, the translator must have a completely neutral attitude toward the text. They should not add names that aren't there, change words or dates, or revise phrases at their own discretion. The translator's task is to translate the text verbatim, not to attempt to co-author it. Secondly, the translation must be literate. If a toponym or ethnonym is unknown, don't translate

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 321.

it with the first similar name from a modern language that comes along. If a lexical unit from a language that's obscure is encountered, don't search for equivalents in modern agnonyms. In general, one should not undertake the translation of a historical text unless they have the necessary professional knowledge.

The conclusion I can draw is not comforting. To date, there is not a single professional scientific translation into modern Russian of any of the ancient Russian chronicles. And this is a great tragedy for the Russian historical and philological science.

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