



Byzantium, the Rus, and Medieval Typologies of the Other

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The aim of this article is to analyse the discourse about the people known as *Rus* and *Varangians* which was prevalent among the erudite minority of the medieval Roman Empire. The earliest image of the Rus in Eastern Roman sources, found in the sermons of Patriarch Photios from 860, is one of inhumanity in the most basic sense of the word: the Rus are likened to a hailstorm and a roaring sea, they are wild boars and merciless barbarians. In a later letter, however, Photios adopts a different view: the Rus are no longer inhuman insofar as they are on their way to becoming members of the community of Christian nations. The images of the Rus in works from the time of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (r. 945–959) are very different from their representations in the writings of Photios as the Rus had become subjects of diplomatic efforts by the imperial court. The Rus are still very different from the Romans, but they are identified as people with their own government, their own hierarchy, and their own interests. The texts *De ceremoniis* and *De Administrando Imperio* offer both peaceful and aggressive models of co-existence, each characterized with a different gender aspect. In the eleventh century, a group of Scandinavians known as Varangians became separated from the Rus. Although not mentioned in works earlier than from the 1070s, they are referred to in connection with events happening as early as in the 1030s. Unlike the Rus, the identity of the Varangians was tied to their service to the Romans, as members of the Roman army, or even an independent group of soldiers. Loyalty was regarded as an important characteristic of the Varangians. The picture of the Varangians as supremely loyal subjects, yet with a clearly demarcated identity of their own, is the one that entered posterity as the archetype of the Varangian.

Keywords: Eastern Roman Empire, Rus, Varangians, the Other, image, archetype.

A nation of no account, nation ranked among slaves, unknown, but which has won a name from the expedition against us, insignificant, but now become famous, humble and destitute, but now risen to a splendid height and immense wealth, a nation dwelling somewhere far from our country, barbarous, nomadic, armed with arrogance, unwatched, unchallenged, leaderless, has so suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, like a wave of the sea, poured over our frontiers, and as a wild boar has devoured the inhabitants of the land like grass, or straw, or a crop. (*Photii De Rossorum incursione* 167–68)

The “monoxyla” which come down from outer Russia to Constantinople are from Novgorod, where Sviatoslav, son of Igor, prince of Russia, had his seat, and others from the city of Smolensk and from Teliutza and Chernigov and from Vyshegrad. All these come down the river Dniepr, and are collected together at the city of Kiev, also called Sambatas.

(Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio* 56)

The emperor Basil was well aware of disloyalty among the Romans, but not long before this a picked band of Scythians had come to help him from the Taurus, and a fine body of men they were. He had these men trained in a separate corps, combined with them another mercenary force, divided by companies, and sent them out to fight the rebels. (Michel Psellos, *Chronographie* 1: 9)

The Varangians are a Celtic people serving the Romans as mercenaries.
(*Ioannis Scylitzae synopsis historiarum* 481)

The Varangians, too, who carried their axes on their shoulders, regarded their loyalty to the emperors and their protection of the imperial persons as a pledge and ancestral tradition, handed down from father to son, which they keep inviolate and will certainly not listen to even the slightest word about treachery. (Anne Comnène, *Alexiade* 1: 92)

Introduction: The Undefined

In the early medieval period (c. 800–1100), the Byzantine Empire was unique among the Christian states of medieval Europe, as it was not a creation of the turbulent early medieval period, but an ancient world power, the Roman Empire, which continued its existence in a reduced form throughout the Middle Ages. Although this is no longer seen as a period of continuous decline and fall, as famously suggested by Edward Gibbon, there is still a tendency among medieval scholars to view the Byzantine Empire as somehow qualitatively different from the Roman Empire as it was in the classical period of its history (see Kaldellis, *Romanland* 17–32). This has influenced discussion about Byzantine identities about which widely different views have been held. Those, who emphasize the differences between the ancient and medieval Roman Empires, have emphasized the Christian identity of the Byzantines, which makes them highly different from ancient Romans but in many ways the same as other peoples of medieval Europe (see Ducellier, *Le drame de Byzance* 139–234; Mango, *Byzantium* 26–31). On the other hand, those, who stress the continuity of Roman history, highlight the view, frequently found among Byzantine-era historians, that there was no break in the history of the Roman Empire from ancient time to their own periods, as the institution had adapted to the capital's move, the adoption of Christianity as an official religion, and the loss of various provinces to Islamic empires. A third view, focusing on the later medieval period, accentuates the Byzantines' identity as Greeks, a readjustment following the Latin conquest of a sizeable portion of the Empire during the Fourth Crusade (see Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* 317–88).

Identities are not developed in isolation; where there is Self, there is Other. Byzantine identities were shaped in conjunction with views of the Other: the unique status inherent in belonging to a world power was buttressed by the fact that there were other peoples who were outside of that society. Subjects of the Byzantine Empire had distinctive traditions and culture, and discourse within the empire was shaped by the fact that most of the writing was done in an elite language, Classical Greek, which was available only to those who had studied its use and function. Thus, the identity manifested in early medieval Byzantine writings was that of class as well as ethnicity. The others, within and without the Empire's borders, were those that shared no part of this culture.

In the ancient Roman Empire, ethnography formed a relatively coherent subgenre of discourse. The main paradigms for the definition of Self and Other were developed at that time. In the medieval period, however, the ancient ethnographic tradition was in decline, despite no shortage of ancient literary models, knowledgeable informants, or worthy subjects. Historiographic works based on classical models were remarkably introverted, as the historians were immersed in courtly culture, had little desire for travel, and had no need to use the barbarians as a mirror to reflect blame onto the rulers who were the subjects of these critical histories (see Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity* 51–55). This tendency was only exacerbated by the lack of interest in cultural differences in overtly religious works. Christianity had assimilated the ancient anti-barbarian rhetoric and combined it with scriptural exclusiveness. This led, for example, to a near-complete absence of texts discussing Islam and the culture and society of the Arabs in more than a perfunctory manner (Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity* 70–76).

Here, the people mentioned at the outset of this article constitute an interesting case. It is generally taken for granted that the nameless nation of no account mentioned by Photios, the Russians of Constantine Porphyrogenetos, the Scythians of Michael Psellos, the Celts of John Skylitzes, and the axe-bearing Varangians of Anna Komnene are one and the same people: Scandinavians who had come to the Byzantine Empire through the steppes of Russia and, eventually, became members of the celebrated Varangian Guard.¹ While there is reason to believe the validity of that assumption, the differences in terminology and general descriptions are noteworthy and give rise to some questions. The people in question, the eastern Vikings, had not been known in antiquity and thus a new system of reference was needed to make sense of them. There were new worlds and subjects to be created through the medium of discourse.

The aim of this article is to analyse the discourse about the people known as *Rus* and *Varangians*, which was prevalent among the erudite minority of the medieval Roman Empire, or Romanland, as it has been named by Anthony Kaldellis. It will be argued that the Rus were among the most important foreign peoples to enter the Romans' horizon in the early medieval period and that the "debate" on the Rus and the Varangians exemplifies in some manner how peoples outside the Roman Empire were dealt with in scholarly discourse between the ninth and twelfth centuries.

Indeed, it seems that a notable portion of the Roman ethnographic texts that discuss a foreign people in more than a rudimentary manner are devoted to the Rus (Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity* 39–42, 47–48, 65, 76, 78–79, 90–93, 102–105, 136). Even if they too suffered to some degree from the general lack of interest in ethnographic discussion, such references are more frequent and more detailed than was generally the case in Roman writings about foreign peoples in the early medieval period. However, there were also inherent peculiarities in the discourse about the Rus and the Varangians; they had a distinct cultural identity which separated them from other groups. Thus, the question is: How were the Rus and the Varangians different and how were they the same as any other peoples who were not Romans?

As a rule, treatment of the Rus in medieval Roman sources was based on the same general models of explanation that applied to all foreign peoples. The information gathered by imperial agents on them was fitted into a general paradigm which could be used to explain their alien features. In Roman ethnographic writing, an explicit contrast was generally made between Christians and pagans, and between Romans and barbarians. In addition, a clear analogue was drawn between foreign customs and false religions.² Any Roman writings on the Rus were shaped by these general concerns.

Being reminiscent of these concerns, what follows is an analysis of depictions of the Rus in Byzantine writings from the moment of their earliest appearance in the ninth century, at a moment when they were unknown and undefined. From this moment of inconspicuousness, the gradual emergence of the Rus in Byzantine discourse is followed until they metamorphosed into the Varangians in the eleventh century and a new identity took shape. Thus, we can witness a literary ethnogenesis, if not the creation of the actual Varangians, then the emergence of the imaginary Varangians as they appeared in the ethnographic discourse of Byzantine historians.

On this route there are three major junctions at which one can examine discourse on the Rus. The first is at the beginning, at the time when the Rus made their first appearance in the writings of the Romans, without much forewarning. The main witness at that stage is Patriarch Photios of Constantinople, who described both the attack of the Rus on Constantinople in 860 and the initial stages of the Christian mission to the Rus. The second is a more intermediate one, during the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (945–959), at which time the Rus were becoming more familiar, both as threatening adversaries and as potential Christian allies. This type of source, although produced in the highest echelons of society, is different from the rhetorical account of Photios as it is coloured by the immediate concerns of level-headed diplomats. The third junction is in the late eleventh century, at which time a new type of eastern Viking had appeared, the Varangian. As it turned out, the Rus and Varangians were to go down very

¹ For a general overview of the history of the Rus and the Varangians, see Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium*, and Sverrir Jakobsson, *The Varangians: In God's Holy Fire*.

² On classical Roman ethnography, see Greg Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians*.

separate paths from the late eleventh century onwards. Thus, an evolutionary aspect to the discourse can be traced, but also a cumulation of literary commonplaces that represented continuity in the debate on the eastern Vikings.

“Thunderbolt and Lightning – Very, Very Frightening”³

The earliest description of the Rus that occurs in Greek literature comes from a very erudite witness. Photios, who served twice as Patriarch of Constantinople (858–867, 877–886), was one of the most learned men of his age and he left for posterity an impressive account of his literary knowledge, in the *Bibliotheca*, or *Myriobiblos*, a collection of extracts and abridgements of 280 classical works, the originals of which are now, to a great extent, lost.⁴ It seems that Photios had a special interest in the past, as the work is especially rich in extracts from historical writers. As mentioned above, histories were the type of texts in which one might expect to find ethnographic descriptions.

Apart from his knowledge of the classical mode of describing alien peoples, as a senior cleric Photios also had extensive knowledge of the Christian ethnographic tradition. However, prior to his elevation to the patriarchate, Photios had followed a secular career path, becoming chief imperial secretary (Gr. πρωτασηκρητης) to the regent Theodora, widow of Emperor Theophilos. They belonged to the same family, as Photios’ brother Sergios was married to Irene, a sister of the Empress Theodora. Photios had been made patriarch in 858 by Caesar Bardas, the brother of Theodora, who had usurped the regency in a palace coup. Photios had held no clerical office before this time. Nevertheless, the *Bibliotheca* is a testament to his knowledge of theological texts and his own adherence to the orthodoxy of the church of the Roman Empire, as it was defined after the defeat of iconoclasm in 843.⁵

Thus, Photios was steeped in the teachings of the church and the classical tradition, indeed was one of the most learned men of his time. As an example of ninth-century thought, he is both an archetype and an aberration. The latter, because very few people at the time would have had the wide-ranging knowledge of the classical tradition that Photios epitomized. The former, in that it can be assumed that Photios was an embodiment of the education available to the people of his age. If there was a prevalent episteme that defined “the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice” in Photios’ time, he was undoubtedly its primary representative among the men of letters.⁶ This can be seen at work in his depictions of the Rus.

The Rus make an appearance in Photios’ homilies with a sudden rupture, as participants in an unprecedented deviation from the normal order of things. In mid-June 860 an unknown northern tribe attacked the most holy city of Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. The city had not been the victim of a barbarian attack since the forces of the Caliphate had been repulsed in 718. At that time the enemy was well-known and had been feared for a long time. This time, however, the inhabitants of the holiest of cities were dealing with an unknown enemy, or at least that is what was claimed.

In a sermon delivered soon after the attack, Patriarch Photios spoke of a “dreadful bolt fallen on us out of the farthest North,” and that a “thick, sudden hailstorm of barbarians burst forth” (*Photii De Rossorum incursione* 162).⁷ The weather metaphors signify both the unpredictability of such an attack on Constantinople, but also the lack of wonder with which the Patriarch described the perpetrators. They were nothing but a change in the weather. This constituted a denial of the humanity of the attackers who had appeared like a natural occurrence, without any motivation of their own. However, for a Christian author, weather phenomena always held a twofold meaning: they could be a simple force of nature, but also a signal of divine wrath (see Esptein 173-80). It was the duty of the senior cleric to unravel which meaning they conveyed.

³ Queen, “Bohemian Rhapsody,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ9rUzIMcZQ>.

⁴ See Diller, “Photius’ ‘Bibliotheca’ in Byzantine Literature.”

⁵ On the early career of Photios, see Treadgold, “Photius Before His Patriarchate.”

⁶ On this definition of episteme, see Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, p. 179.

⁷ For a further analysis on his statements about the Rus, see Kepreotes, “Faith as a Frontier,” and Jakobsson, *The Varangians*, pp. 23–28.

It soon becomes evident in Photios' homily that the enemy was indeed to be seen as a tool of God's disapproval. The emperor's subjects had become insolent after their delivery from internal and external threats, such as iconoclasm and Islam:

We were delivered from evils which often had held us; we should have been thankful, but we showed no gratitude. We were saved, and remained heedless; we were protected, and were contemptuous. For these things punishment was to be feared. (*Photii De Rossorum incursione* 163)

The attackers are thus an instrument of divine punishment. They have no agency of their own, no more than wild boars devouring everything about them, let loose by a wrathful God who no longer saw it fit to protect his own, as they had forfeited his protection.

The attackers were not just a force of nature or an instrument in divine punishment. They could also be portrayed after another model. A rhetorical archetype, through the aid of which Photios could paint his rhetorical picture, was the one provided by the Old Testament: "[A] people has crept down from the north, as if it were attacking another Jerusalem, and nations have been stirred up from the end of the earth, holding bow and spear; the people is fierce and has no mercy; its voice is as the roaring sea" (*Photii De Rossorum incursione* 163). The Patriarch's language indicates that he regarded the attackers as a force of nature, but his use of this Old Testament paradigm brings another dimension to their representation, as he classifies them as the ever-present Northerners, cruel savages threatening civilization.

He laments that "the unbelievable course of the barbarians did not give rumour time to announce it, so that some means of safety could be devised, but the sight accompanied the report, and that despite the distance, and the fact that the invaders were sundered off from us by so many lands and kingdoms, by navigable rivers and harbourless seas" (*Photii De Rossorum incursione* 165). Photios makes both these points repeatedly, that the attack was unexpected and that the attackers were from lands very far from the Empire, lands situated at the end of the earth. The terror associated with these attacks stemmed partly from these two reasons. It was the terror of the unknown, of mysterious enemies that had suddenly revealed themselves. The tenor of the language is remarkably like the descriptions of the Viking attack on Lindisfarne, almost seven decades earlier. This serves to classify the attackers as a marginal people.

In a second sermon delivered shortly after, also in the summer of 860, Photios discusses the identity of the barbarians in greater detail. He again returns to the theme that the invading nation "was obscure, insignificant, and not even known until the incursion against us" (*Photii De Rossorum incursione* 167). The Patriarch's wonder is less marked and that he now feels comfortable in making such a statement about these barbarians from a safe distance, as he depicts them as nomadic and leaderless. Yet they are no more than an unidentified "Scythian tribe" in his work. This reflects Photios' literary style, but does not necessarily indicate his lack of knowledge of their identity, as peoples inhabiting lands north of the Danube area and the Black Sea were often designated by this classical ethnonym by Roman authors. In the same manner, non-Romans were often designated as "barbarians," as non-Greek speaking people had been done in classical antiquity (see Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity* 51–55). In an encyclical letter composed some years later, Photios identifies these boar-like barbarians with a contemporary appellation, named the Rus (*PG* 102, coll. 736–37). This does not mean that he only learnt of their identity later, it only reflects how he chose to portray the Rus at different times. Indeed, it can be argued that the Rus should have been well-known to him at the time of the attack and were not an unknown and obscure people from the north.

Because he had worked in the imperial secretariat, it is likely that Photios was acquainted with a mission which had included the Rus who had been sent to the Carolingian court by Emperor Theophilus in 839, at which time the Rus were identified by the Franks as Swedes. From the Frankish royal annals, it can be gathered that the Byzantine emperor had taken these people under his protection and wanted to guarantee their safe conduct. This Rus mission can be connected to diplomatic efforts on the part of the emperor towards Scandinavia, as the seals of an imperial diplomat have been discovered in various locations in Denmark and among the eastern Vikings (see Duczko). Photios himself was probably in exile at the time, but it is unlikely that knowledge of these diplomatic efforts would have been forgotten

by the secretariat of the Roman Empire. Thus, we have at least one reason to suspect that Photios knew more about the Rus than he claimed in his sermons.

There are other reasons. The Persian official Ibn Khurradadhbih mentions extensive trade connections between the Rus and the Roman Empire at the middle of the ninth century (see Jakobsson, *The Varangians* 13–15). Such connections would have been well known to the leading administrators of the Roman Empire, a group which included Photios. Furthermore, it is very likely that there were people of Scandinavian descent in the top echelons of the Roman elite at the time, such as Eudocia Ingerina, the mistress of Emperor Michael (see Mango, “Eudocia Ingerina”). Inger (ON Ingvarr) is a Scandinavian name, and it is unlikely that a top official in the Roman Empire, especially one of the most learned people of the age, would have been unfamiliar with the origin of a woman intimately connected with the Roman emperor.

However, Photios never makes a connection between the Rus that had visited the Roman Empire in the 830s, Eudocia Ingerina, and the attackers who had struck Constantinople like a thunderbolt. It seems that there was a disconnection between the actual experiences of Photios and the stereotypes of unknown and obscure barbarians that he used to construct his rhetorical description of the attackers. Such a disjuncture was not particular to Photios, it is in fact very common among classical and late antiquity authors describing previously unknown peoples (see Meier 58).

Patriarch Photios’ message in his two sermons was stated clearly and unambiguously: the Rus were likened to a force of nature; they were not a part of the ecumene of civilized nations. This message is delivered so forcefully, that all possible knowledge the Patriarch might have had of the Rus before the attack was put aside, irrelevant to his rhetorical purpose. Later, however, Photios does not hesitate to name the Rus and discuss them as a known factor in Roman diplomacy. According to his encyclical letter from the year 867, the response to the attack was in line with the preferred goals of Roman diplomacy: missionaries were sent to the Rus to try to convert them to Christianity.⁸ The goal was to incorporate the Rus into the imperial ecclesiastical system and, in the process, make them political allies.

The encyclical letter contributed towards the development of a new identity for the Rus. They were no longer described through non-human metaphors, as a force of nature, a hailstorm, or a group of wild boars. Even their former transgressions against the Romans are now framed as human errors. They were “boundlessly proud and bold,” as humans sometimes are, and they believed in a “Hellenic and godless teaching” (Photios, *PG* 102, coll. 736–37). Even if the adjective “Hellenic” had primarily negative connotations in Photios’ time (see Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* 123–24), its use nevertheless connected the Rus to something human, specifically, the ancient cults of the Greeks that Christians like Photios rejected. This use is of course a rhetorical device, just like the natural and animal metaphors used by Photios in his earlier sermons. But it is not used randomly: Photios is welcoming the Rus into the company of humans and at the same time subtly signifying that they always were human, even if they were hubristic pagans.

It seems that Photios’ encyclical letter marks a new beginning, but in fact its composition marked the end of an era. Immediately afterwards, the Rus seemed to fade back into obscurity. Very little is known about the fate of the earliest Roman missionaries to the Rus, who were active in the 860s and perhaps longer (see Ivanov 102). In the following decades, the Roman sources are completely silent about the missionaries and their new congregation, the Rus. The Rus had been put into their place and needed no further definition.

The earliest image of the Rus in Eastern Roman sources is one of inhumanity in the most basic sense of the word. The Rus are likened to a hailstorm and a roaring sea, they are wild boars and merciless barbarians. In short, they are a force of nature, not a product of civilization. In the end, however, Photios offers hope. The Rus are no longer inhuman, they are on their way to becoming members of the community of Christian nations. But even before they had become Christianized and civilized, Photios no longer saw them as a force of nature. They are a people, a tribe, even if a proud and godless one. A

⁸ On the missionary policy of the Roman Empire in general, see Ivanov, pp. 101–102; Ericsson, “The Earliest Conversion of the Rus’ to Christianity”; Birnbaum, “Christianity before Christianization.”

natural phenomenon has no hope of humanity, but an evil and sinful people can be reformed. This is what Photios grants the Rus in the end: the ability for positive change.

A Glimpse of Hope and Unity

The career of Patriarch Photios came to an end when his pupil, Leo VI, became emperor in 886. The monarch's old mentor was dismissed and retired from an active role in the church and politics. Even if not appreciative of Photios, Leo demonstrated the influence of his learning — as emperor he was known as Leo the Wise. In later sources there are copies of a treaty that Emperor Leo made with the Rus on 2 September 911 which discusses the rights and obligations of the Rus in the Roman Empire. In this treaty there is no mention of any Christian mission among the Rus. On the contrary, it makes a clear distinction between Christians, that is to say, subjects of the Roman emperor, and the Rus (PVL 18). Apart from this treaty, which is generally regarded as being based on a Greek original, there is little mention of the Rus in Byzantine sources from the time of Leo VI and his most immediate successors. It is only during the reign of Constantine VII (r. 945–959), the only son of Leo, that the subject of a mission to the Rus was raised again.⁹

In the tenth-century *The Life of Basil the Emperor*, composed under the auspices of Constantine VII, there is a more detailed account of an earlier mission to the Rus, which in this source is credited to Emperor Basil I (r. 867–886) and the Patriarch Ignatios (r. 867–877). This seems to be the mission Photios referred to, but most probably the historian sponsored by Constantine VII, the grandson of Emperor Basil I, chose to claim the credit on behalf of that emperor.¹⁰ The Rus are described as being led by a leader (Gr. ἄρχων) and a group of elders (Gr. γέροντες) which met at an assembly (Gr. σύλλογος). This redefinition of the Rus as an ordered society probably owes as much to the agenda of the historian as to any written source this narrative might have been based on. As will be discussed later, by the 940s the Rus had become an organized state able to conduct diplomacy, and this description is coloured by an awareness of that fact.

This description is also very much in line with the description in Photios' encyclical letter which regards "godlessness" as the primary vice of the Rus. According to *The Life of Basil*, the Rus began to be baptized following a miracle, as the prelate placed the Holy Gospel in a furnace from whence it escaped unscathed. Before that he had "held out the Holy Book of the divine Gospel and recited to them some of the miracles performed by our Saviour and God; he also revealed to them some of the marvels wrought by God in the Old Testament" (*Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur* 314). This series of miracles running from the Old to the New Testament, and climaxing in the one performed on the spot by the prelate, is what was required to bring the Rus towards the Christian faith. The miracles from the Old Testament related by the prelate are not described in any more precise terms, although it has been argued that the cult of Elijah gained some weight among the Rus at an early date, and that this may in some ways have been due to the sponsorship of Roman diplomats (see Shepard, "The Coming of Christianity to Rus").

But why did the sponsor of *The Life of Basil*, his grandson, Constantine VII, invoke this missionary success with the Rus, an alleged fact which had been ignored in Roman sources for decades? It seems that the Rus had become the subject of an intense and renewed interest by the diplomats of the Roman Empire during the reign of Constantine VII. In 941 there had been a new Rus attack on Constantinople, described in five near-contemporary sources, which emphasize the failure of the attack and the heroism of the generals who repulsed it.¹¹ As a consequence, the Rus moved again to the top of the Roman diplomats' agenda.

⁹ On the scholarship of this emperor, see Schreiner, "Clothes Make the Man."

¹⁰ Ivanov, *Pearls Before Swine*, pp. 101–102. On the *Life of Basil* and the circumstances of its composition, see Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, pp. 165–80.

¹¹ On the Rus campaign of 941 and its influence on relations with the Roman Empire, see Shepard, "Some problems of Russo-Byzantine relations c. 860–1050"; Jakobsson, *The Varangians*, pp. 49–52. For problems regarding the sources, see Zuckerman, "On the Date of the Khazars' Conversion to Judaism."

An important event in the development of a new relationship between the Romans and the Rus was the first recorded visit of a Rus leader to Constantinople. This occurred in either 946 or 957, with the *arkhontissa* of the Rus, Helga (OS Olga) as the first visitor.¹² The use of the word *arkhontissa* is significant, as it echoes the vocabulary used to describe the leader of the Rus in *The Life of Basil*. Helga's Rus are evidently regarded as the same as the people that had been the subject of a mission during the reign of Basil I.

Helga's visit is thoroughly described in a contemporary source, *The Book of Ceremonies*, which was commissioned by Emperor Constantine VII and probably composed around the end of his reign, sometime between 956 and 959. Thus, we move from the realm of historical descriptions to a new context, that of a manual depicting the proper way to meet and greet great foreign dignitaries. Hence, the reception of Helga is depicted with attention to detail, but the context in which it took place is not explained (Constantinus Porphyrogenetos, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae Libri Duo* 594-98). *The Book of Ceremonies* records that she received two formal receptions in the palace, and its description of the ceremonial suggests that a broad cross-section of the Rus elite accompanied her. Numerous traders, envoys of "the archons of Rhosia," and envoys' retainers attended the receptions and feasts. The status of Helga as the leader of this expedition was readily acknowledged. Alone among the Rus, she saluted the empress merely by bowing her head, and she took dessert with the imperial family at a small golden table (Constantinus Porphyrogenetos, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae Libri Duo* 597).

In *The Book of Ceremonies*, the focus is on the ceremonial of the court, but what was the significance of the visit to Helga and her retinue? Clearly, this visit was the product of a conscious diplomatic effort, with the Rus showing interest in improving relations with the Roman Empire and testing what could be gained from a peaceful relationship. One benefit might have been increased trade, which would have been the subject of the emperor's discussion with Helga and the leaders of her retinue.

What the description does tell us is that the Rus are no longer the threat that they had been a few years before, in 941. The *arkhontissa* now had a special relationship with the imperial family and was acknowledged as an important ally. No reference is made to Helga being baptized, although the Old Slavonic translation of a treaty, supposedly made between the Rus and the Roman Empire in 944, mentions that some among the Rus elite were Christians at the time, while others remained pagans (PVL 23-26).¹³ In other sources, both late and early, there are references to the baptism of Helga which might have taken place on this occasion. However, in the description of Helga's reception there is no mention of religious identities, and such a reference would not necessarily have been appropriate in a text of this nature. The Roman emperor received diplomats from Christian and non-Christian states and would not have made a point of their religious identity during diplomatic negotiations.

There is also a clear gender aspect to Helga's reception as it is described in *The Book of Ceremonies*. She made her first entrance "with the princesses who were her own relatives and their principal servants," and although a cousin and other male kinsmen of the princess feature in the description, the "archons of Rhosia" would seem mostly to have stayed away, merely sending their envoys to accompany Helga and her entourage to Constantinople (Constantinus Porphyrogenetos, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae Libri Duo* 596). The emphasis on the relationship between Helga and Empress Helena also serves to accentuate the female aspect of this diplomatic encounter. Another source, *The Chronicle of Adalbert of Trier*, mentions Queen Helena of the Rus, who had been baptized in Constantinople (*Quellen zur Geschichte der sächsischen Kaiserzeit* 214). As Helena evidently seems to be Helga, it is tempting to regard this as a Christian baptismal name taken in honour of her patron, Empress Helena. Thus, the personal relationship between these two women was a factor in ensuring peaceful relations between the Rus and the Roman Empire.

In *The Book of Ceremonies*, the image of the Rus as a nameless and faceless natural phenomenon is all but erased. Their leaders are no longer anonymous, as in *The Life of Basil I*. On the contrary, the

¹² On the visit of Princess Helga to Byzantium, cf. Obolensky, "Olga's Conversion"; Featherstone, "Olga's Visit to Constantinople"; and Featherstone, "Olga's Visit to Constantinople in *De Cerimoniis*."

¹³ On the status of the treaties within the Primary Chronicle, see articles by Malingoudi, "Русско-византийские связи" and "Терминологическая лексика русско-византийских договоров." See also Tolochko, "Летописное обрамление русско-византийского договора 911."

Rus are led by a civilized woman who is analogous to the empress herself. Helga and the accompanying diplomats are not only making peace, but they are also making an entrance into the community of civilized nations that conducts diplomacy among themselves. Even if the attack of 941 can be regarded as a motivation for the Roman Empire to seek better relations with the Rus, Helga's reception is intended to offer a new way for the Rus to gain status, a feminine and conciliatory road which is the opposite of a brutal attack.

The other half of the Roman Empire's strategy towards the Rus is found in *De administrando imperio*, a diplomatic text composed under the auspices of Constantine VII, sometime between 948 and 952. It contains the best-known descriptions of the Rus found in any source earlier than the twelfth century. *De administrando imperio* mentions, for the first time, several Rus cities and is the first to provide the name of a contemporary ruler, Sviatoslav (Sphendoslavos), the son of Igor.¹⁴ Sviatoslav is also mentioned in the treaty of 944 and in the description of Helga's visit to Constantinople (PVL 23–26; Constantinus Porphyrogenetos, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae Libri Duo* 597). The description of the journey of the Rus southward towards Constantinople holds enormous interest for historians of travel and for philologists trying to decipher the language of the Rus through the names of waterfalls encountered on the way.¹⁵ However, it is also of interest as testimony to the imperial court's increased interest in the Rus.

The main thrust of the description of the Rus concerns their relationship with the Roman Empire. According to the treatise, the Empire's main strategy was to keep peace with a Turkic people, the Pechenegs, who controlled the steppe north of the Black Sea. The author claims that the Rus are unable to "come at this imperial city of the Romans, either for war or for trade, unless they are at peace with the Pechenegs" (Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando imperio* 50). This reflects how the concerns of the Empire had been changed by the attack on it in 941 and indicates the main strategy the Romans had adopted to avoid another attack of this kind. It is interesting to note that the Rus are regarded as the primary threat to the Roman Empire, as the alliance with the Pechenegs was mainly directed towards them. From the long description in *De administrando imperio* it is evident that Roman diplomats were now much better informed about the Rus than they had been in the ninth century. The text mentions several Rus towns which are not recorded in earlier sources, which reflects both diplomatic activity and conscientious recordkeeping. *De administrando imperio* also contains the earliest description of the relationship of the Rus with their Slavonic neighbours (Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando imperio* 56) and it is the earliest description of a Rus state structure which relied on income from Slavic tributaries, previously not referenced in Roman sources.

In the middle of the tenth century, the Rus had become subjects of diplomatic efforts by the imperial court. Thus, the images of the Rus in works from the time of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos are very different from their image in the writings of Photios. The Rus are still very different from the Romans, but they are identified as a people with their own government, their own hierarchy, and their own interests. A gendered reading of *The Book of Ceremonies* underscores a new identity of the Rus as a peaceful, gynocratic nation which was seeking a peaceful relationship with the Romans. Although Helga's adoption of Christianity was probably a part of the new, diplomatic relationship, it is not mentioned in *The Book of Ceremonies*, making religious conversion only a secondary factor in a new kind of relationship. Peaceful relations had become a goal of their own, with a religious motivation no longer needed. This is echoed in *De administrando imperio* which focuses on geopolitical factors at the expense of ideological ones. Although the conversion of the pagans was still of importance in the court literature of Constantine VII, as evidenced by *The Life of Basil I*, the diplomatic manuals produced at the behest of that emperor do not

¹⁴ On Sviatoslav, see Hanak, "The Infamous Svjatoslav" and Sakharov, Дипломатия Святослава. See also Jakobsson, *The Varangians*, pp. 58–61, on the portrayal of Sviatoslav by the Byzantine historian Leo the Deacon.

¹⁵ The description of the rapids of the Dniepr in *De administrando imperio* has been the subject of much academic debate. For a recent overview, see Melnikova, "Rhosia and the Rus in Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos' *De administrando imperio*." See also important articles by Obolensky, "Commentary on Chapter 9" and Howard-Johnston, "The *De Administrando Imperio*: A Re-Examination of the text and a Re-Evaluation of Its Evidence about the Rus."

display an interest in portraying the Rus in such theological and ideological terms. Whether Christians or pagans, the Rus were a geopolitical force to be reckoned with, with the Roman empress wielding the carrot and the Pechenegs the stick.

The Rise of the Varangians

In the eleventh century the eastern Vikings underwent a metamorphosis and a new group emerged: the Varangians. The Varangians are known from the writings of historians such as John Skylitzes, Michael Attaleiates, and Anna Komnene and they are primarily identified as a loyal bodyguard of the Roman emperor, based on the statement of Anna Komnene quoted above. The appearance of the Varangians in Roman sources requires some explanation, as they are not mentioned in any source earlier than the eleventh century. There also seems to be a relationship between the Varangians and the Rus, and both are a part of the history of the eastern Vikings. But what was the nature of this relationship? Why was there a need for a new definition for some of the Rus, resulting in the identification of a new group which was separate from the Rus? The emergence of the Varangians entailed not only the creation of new identities and new institutions, but also the revision of the discourse about the eastern Vikings. They evolved from being a dreaded enemy into gaining renown as the emperor's most loyal subjects. This was a radical transformation.

According to *The Book of Ceremonies*, the Rus supplied 700 men for the imperial fleet sent by Emperor Leo VI on an expedition to Crete in 911. The Rus continued to supply warriors to the Roman emperor, and they were also a part of another expedition to Crete in 949. At that time, they sent 584 warriors and 45 servants (Constantinus Porphyrogenetos, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae Libri Duo* 651, 664). It should be noted that the use of foreigners in the Roman Empire's army was not all that common in the early tenth century, in contrast to later custom (see Kaldellis, *Romanland* 227–29). In 989, Emperor Basil II was sent an army of mercenaries from the prince of the Rus, the “Tauroscythians,” mentioned by Michael Psellos. In *The Synopsis of Histories* by John Skylitzes, these Rus are connected to a matrimonial alliance made between Emperor Basil and Vladimir, the prince of the Rus.¹⁶ This alliance did not, however, entail any immediate re-classification of the Rus. They continued to be known as the Rus, or as “Scythians,” in histories written in the classical style, such as *The History of Leo the Deacon* and Psellos' *Fourteen Byzantine Emperors*.¹⁷

This changed in sources from the last quarter of the eleventh century, when the term “Varangians” became more frequent. The earliest use of the term can be found in Arabic sources from the first half of the eleventh century, but by the late eleventh century writers from the Roman Empire used it frequently. Like the term Rus, it seems to have originally been reserved for Scandinavians, but what was the difference between Varangians and Rus? Why was a new ethnic appellation needed for Scandinavians travelling to the east?

One of the earliest cases of a person being called a Varangian is also one of the best-known. In the so-called *Oration of Admonition for the Emperor* (Gr. *Λόγος Νουθετικός προς Βασιλέα*), which was composed between 1075 and 1078, there is an anecdote about a man called Araltes [ON Haraldr], who was the “son of the king of Varangia [Gr. *βασιλέως μὲν Βαραγγίας ἦν υἱός*]. Araltes went to the Roman Empire with “five hundred men of good family” in the time of “the most blessed Emperor Michael the Paphlagonian [r. 1034–1041], to pay his respects and to see for himself what Roman life was like.” Consequently, Araltes fought for the emperor but left the Empire in the time of the Emperor Constantine Monomachos [r. 1042–1055] under some cloud. Nevertheless, on becoming king of Varangia, “he showed good faith and brotherly love towards the Romans” (*Cecaumeni Strategicon* 97). In the narrative it is stated that the author had himself served alongside Haraldr, and that he is connected with well-known military expeditions of the Empire, in Sicily (1038–1041) and against the Bulgarians (1041). Haraldr seems to have served the emperor as an independent ally, with his company of five

¹⁶ On the sources for this event, see Poppe, “How the Conversion of Rus’ Was Understood in the Eleventh Century,” and Jakobsson, *Varangians*, pp. 66–72.

¹⁷ On the use of classical terms for alien peoples, see Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity*, pp. 115–116.

hundred. Nevertheless, he accepted imperial titles and rank and seems to have needed the permission of the emperor to leave the army.¹⁸

In this description, Varangia seems to be regarded as a country with its own king. The kings of Varangia mentioned in this text are known from other texts as kings of Norway, Ólafr (r. 1015-1030) and his brother, Haraldr (r. 1046–1066). The term “Varangian” is not used for a section of the Roman army or a palace guard.¹⁹ It would rather seem to be applied to a Scandinavian kingdom, or perhaps more than one, as the Romans hardly made a clear distinction between different Scandinavian kingdoms in the eleventh century. However, following Haraldr’s departure to Norway, references to Varangians in Roman sources become more frequent. The term seems to be used for Scandinavians that, for some reason, are not regarded as Rus. Haraldr would fit into that group, as he came from Norway and not the kingdom of the Rus. However, identities could be intersectional and difficult to navigate, and in fact Haraldr had a strong connection to Iaroslav, prince of the Rus, as he was engaged to his daughter Elizabeth. In fact, the Rus attack on Constantinople in 1043 was probably the event which made Haraldr suspect in the eyes of Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos, which caused him to try to ban Haraldr from leaving the Roman Empire around that time (see Jakobsson, *The Varangians* 82–83).

Haraldr’s portrayal exemplifies an evolution of the image of the eastern Vikings, quite distinct from the change in terminology. Haraldr is identified as a man of royal descent who was not the subject of diplomacy but a servant of the Roman Empire. Even following his departure from the Roman Empire, he showed brotherly love for the Empire and was not ungrateful towards the Roman emperor. As a Varangian, Haraldr appears in a different role from that which the Rus had formerly held. He has left the camp of the Other and become partly internalized, as a reliable ally of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, he remains distinct, as his status within the army was regulated by his origin as a foreigner. But Haraldr was not an alienated foreigner, still less a nameless natural force, but a foreigner who was partly assimilated to the Roman Empire and valued his relationship with it.²⁰

The historian Michael Attaleiates composed his history around 1080, a few years after the composition of *The Oration of Admonition*.²¹ In a near-contemporary narrative, Attaleiates relates how Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates (r. 1078–81) and his secretary were once attacked on a staircase by “the foreign men who guard the palace.” The emperor ably defended himself and was helped by some courtiers until men from another company came to his aid. Most of the soldiers were pardoned, although the most recalcitrant of the attackers were sent away to distant garrisons outside the city after they “were convicted by their own compatriots as well as by the judgment and the inquiry conducted by the emperor” (Attaleiates 536, 538, 540). This description has traditionally been regarded as pertaining to the Varangians, and if so, it certainly underlines the independence of the Scandinavians at the court of the Roman emperor, who seem to have held on to their own system of justice. However, Attaleiates does not use the term on this occasion, although he mentions Varangians as part of armies on different sides in the civil wars of the late 1070s. Thus, the testimony of Attaleiates is equivocal as to whether Varangians were primarily viewed as guards of the palace at that time. It is evident, however, that Varangians were regarded as a separate element within the army. In a description of the revolt of the siege of Athyra at the end of 1077, Attaleiates mentions Rus and Varangians fighting side by side in the imperial army.

The earliest incident in which Varangians are mentioned as group within the Roman army is to be found in *The Chronicle* of John Skylitzes and refers to events which occurred in 1034, shortly before Haraldr’s arrival in Constantinople. However, *The Chronicle* of John Skylitzes is composed later, around 1090, and could thus be influenced by later terminology (Scheel 171–79). John Skylitzes is generally

¹⁸ Several articles have been written on the exploits of King Haraldr of Norway in the service of the Roman emperor. See, for instance, Blöndal, “The Last Exploits of Harald Sigurdsson in Greek Service,” Ciggaar, “Harald Hardrada: His Expedition against the Pechenegs,” Bagge, “Harald Hardråde i Bysants,” and Filipchuk, “Харальд Сигурдссон и русско-византийская война 1043 г.”

¹⁹ On the status of Varangians within the Byzantine army, see Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz*, pp. 100–164.

²⁰ On the evolution of this figure in later historiography, see Jakobsson, “Araltes. The Evolution of a Varangian Stereotype.”

²¹ See Krallis, *Serving Byzantium’s Emperors*.

considered to be a rather unoriginal writer, and very much dependent on the source material at his disposal (see Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* 329–339). For this period, Skylitzes primarily uses one of two sources, Demetrios, bishop of Cyzicus, and the monk John the Lydian. Is it likely that one of these clerical writers from Asia Minor would have related a tale about a group known as the Varangians at such an early time? That can neither be proved or disproved, and, in any case, the tale of the Varangians is an isolated incident within Skylitzes' narrative.

There are two main points in the narrative which made it a worthy tale. One is the near-miraculous escape of a virtuous woman, a topos well-known in Roman historiography. Another is the custom of the Varangians to dispense their own justice:

There were some Varangians dispersed in the Thrakesion theme for the winter. One of them, coming across a woman of the region in the wilderness, put the quality of her virtue to the test. When persuasion failed, he resorted to violence, but she seized his Persian-type sword, struck him in the heart and promptly killed him. When the deed became known in the surrounding area, the Varangians held an assembly and crowned the woman, presenting her with all the possessions of her violator, whom they threw aside, unburied, according to the law concerning suicides. (*Ioannis Scylitzae synopsis historiarum* 394)

Very little is said about the identity of these Varangians at this point in Skylitzes' narrative. He clearly did not regard it as necessary to explain who these peoples were. Later, however, Skylitzes calls the Varangians “a Celtic people serving the Romans as mercenaries” (*Ioannis Scylitzae synopsis historiarum* 481), so that he does not seem to have associated them with Scandinavians or with Scythians, as had been typical for depictions of the Rus. Skylitzes may have connected them more with groups from western Europe that also were a part of the Roman army, such as the Normans or the Franks. According to Skylitzes, in 1052 a unit of Varangians and Normans was called upon to defend the imperial fortress in Armenia against Seljuk raids and, from then on, there are numerous references to Varangians fighting in the armies of the Roman Empire (*Ioannis Scylitzae synopsis historiarum* 474).

Although Skylitzes makes only a few references to the Varangians, his ideas about them seem to revolve around certain factors. First, despite the crimes of individuals, as a group the Varangians practise virtue, as evidenced in their emolument to the aggrieved woman. Second, their independence is highlighted, as they made their own decisions and dispensed justice without any external involvement. However, Skylitzes may not have regarded Varangians as a branch of the eastern Vikings, or perhaps that was circumscribed by whatever sources he was using for each period of his chronicle.

This leaves Anna Komnene, born in 1083, whose history, composed around 1150, is based on intimate knowledge of the court of her father, Alexios I (r. 1081–1118).²² As can be gathered from the epigraph above, the Varangians' service in the imperial bodyguard and “protection of the imperial person” (Comnène 1: 92) was regarded as a hallowed tradition in Anna's time. In fact, Anna makes frequent allusion to the axe-bearing barbarians protecting the Roman emperor. Any later idea of the Varangians as a loyal imperial bodyguard owes a lot to her portrayal of those military men (see Scheel 205–216).

Even during the time of Attaleiates, the Varangians seem to have fought as a separate unit within the Roman army. In Anna Komnene's narrative, early in the reign of Alexios I Komnenos, a certain Namphites is depicted as commander of the Varangians, and he led the Varangians against the Normans in the attack on Dyrrachion by Robert Guiscard in 1082 (Comnène 1: 155–61). The identity of Namphites is obscure, although the name is probably a Scandinavian appellation, such as Nábítr (“biter of corpses”). Apart from King Haraldr, this Nábítr is the best-known Scandinavian in the service of the Roman Empire in the eleventh century. Anna's dislike of westerners, clearly apparent in her description of the First Crusade (1096–1099), does not extend to the Varangians (see Harris 29–32; 37–38). In fact, they seem to be regarded as partly integrated into the Roman Empire, even though they also appear to have a clearly distinct and demarcated identity of their own, exemplified by the axes worn on their shoulders.

²² See Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian*.

In the eleventh century, a group of Scandinavians known as Varangians became separated from the Rus. Although not mentioned in works earlier than the 1070s, they are referred to in connection with events happening as early as the 1030s. This might relate to the formation of a separate military unit within the Roman army, although the existence of a Varangian Guard is not reported with any certainty before the time of Alexios I. However, from the example of King Haraldr it seems more probable that the word “Varangian” functioned as an ethnonym, perhaps to identify those Scandinavians that did not belong to the polity of the Rus. If so, there is no connection between the group of Rus sent to Emperor Basil II in 989 and the identification of Varangian units within the Roman army a few decades later. On the contrary, it only became necessary to speak of Varangians when the Romans began to identify military units coming from Scandinavia as separate from those of the Rus.

In later sources, both east Slavonic and Scandinavian, Varangians had become the primary identifier of Scandinavians fighting for the Roman Empire. In *The Primary Chronicle*, Varangians coming from Scandinavia are regarded as separate from the Rus already in the ninth century, with the legend of the “coming of the Varangians” who were regarded as the founders of the principalities of Novgorod and Kiev in *The Primary Chronicle*.²³ In Old Norse sources, soldiers fighting for the Roman Empire are an important motif in sources from the thirteenth century and later. They are always identified as Varangians, rather than as Rus (see Jakobsson, *The Varangians* 123–34). Thus, the term “Rus” achieved a new meaning, and the eastern Vikings became known to posterity as “Varangians.”

Conclusion

The eastern Vikings had not been known in antiquity and thus a new system of reference was needed to make sense of them. The Rus were among the most important foreign peoples to enter the horizon of the Romans in the early medieval period and the “debate” on the Rus and the Varangians exemplifies how peoples outside the Roman Empire were dealt with in scholarly discourse between the ninth and twelfth centuries.

In Roman ethnographic writing, an explicit contrast was generally made between Christians and pagans, and between Romans and barbarians. In addition, a clear analogue was drawn between foreign customs and false religions. The earliest image of the Rus in Eastern Roman sources, found in the sermons of Patriarch Photios from 860, is one of inhumanity in the most basic sense of the word. The Rus are likened to a hailstorm and a roaring sea, they are wild boars and merciless barbarians. In short, they are a force of nature, not a product of civilization. In a letter from a few years later, however, Photios offers hope. The Rus are no longer inhuman, they are on their way to becoming members of the community of Christian nations. At the very moment when the Rus began their road towards becoming Christianized and civilized, Photios refrained from depicting them as a force of nature. They are a people, a tribe, even if a proud and godless one. A natural phenomenon has no hope of humanity, but an evil and sinful people can be reformed. In his encyclical letter of 867, Photios grants the Rus the ability for positive change.

The image of the Rus in works from the time of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (r. 945–959) is very different from that which characterized the writings of Photios, as the Rus had become subjects of diplomatic efforts by the imperial court. The Rus are still very different from the Romans, but they are identified as a people with their own government, their own hierarchy, and their own interests. The texts *De ceremoniis* and *De administrando imperio* offer both peaceful and aggressive models of co-existence, and each of those is characterized by a different gender aspect. The feminine ceremonial described in the former text appears in a stark contrast to the masculine deviousness offered by the second, but ultimately the aim of Roman diplomacy was the same, irrespective of the methods that were used.

In the eleventh century a group of Scandinavians known as Varangians were separated from the Rus. Although not mentioned in works earlier than the 1070s, they are referred to in connection with events happening as early as the 1030s. From the example of King Haraldr, it seems more probable that the word “Varangian” was regarded as an ethnonym, perhaps to identify those Scandinavians that did not

²³ On *The Primary Chronicle* and the circumstances of its composition, cf. Gippius, “До и после начального свода,” Tolochko, *Очерки начальной Руси*, and Stefanovich, “К вопросу о понятии русь в древнейшем летописани.”

belong to the polity of the Rus. Unlike the Rus, the identity of the Varangians was tied to their service to the Romans, as members of the Roman army, or even as an independent group of soldiers. From the time of Haraldr onwards, loyalty was regarded as an important characteristic of the Varangians. For instance, Haraldr's loyalty was depicted as transcending his earlier fall-out with the emperor.

At the time of Anna Komnene, the Varangians had come to be regarded as ideal bodyguards to the Roman emperor, a hallowed tradition according to Anna, although there is little evidence, in earlier sources, of the Varangians serving primarily as bodyguards. The picture of the Varangians as supremely loyal subjects, yet with a clearly demarcated identity of their own, is the one that entered posterity as the archetype of the Varangian.

Where there is Self, there is also Other, and Roman identities were shaped in conjunction with views of the Other. The images of the Rus and the Varangians demonstrate the malleability of barbarian stereotypes, which the medieval Byzantines inherited from the ancient Romans. Hostile barbarians might be regarded as something less than human, a force of nature with no rational motivations worth mentioning. Alternatively, they could be regarded as subjects of diplomacy, which had to be engaged with or even regarded as allies. The final stage of the evolution of the barbarian was that of a loyal friend or subject, an ally in service of the Roman Empire and aspiring to be included in the world of *Romanitas*. At the point where that goal was achieved, the identity of the barbarian vanished into thin air, which was also to be the eventual fate of the Varangians.

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