



**Háskóli Íslands**

**Hugvísindasvið**

**Vikinga og miðaldafræðum**

# **The West on The North in The East**

*Western images of the Norse and the Rus', 800-1250 AD*



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**  
**HUGVÍSINDASVIÐ**

**Ritgerð til M.A.-prófs í Vikinga og miðaldafræðum**

**Ryan Dean Fenster**

**Kt.: 071193-4039**

**Leiðbeinandi: Sverrir Jakobsson**

**Júni 2020**

## Acknowledgements

Nobody creates anything alone, and I am deeply indebted to many individuals and institutions for their support and assistance, great and small, in researching and writing this thesis. On the institutional level, I would like to thank the National and University Library of Iceland, the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, and Bóksala Stúdenta. On the individual level, I would like to thank my advisor, Sverrir Jakobsson, for providing me the opportunity to take part in his project through the Icelandic Center for Research; Anita Sauckel, for her endless assistance and support; Haraldur Bernharðsson, who even in sabbatical was here to support us during quarantine; Orilee Ireland-Delfs, for her editing expertise; and last but certainly not least, to my family and friends, scattered across the world, and my dearest Luna. I wouldn't have anything if I didn't have you guys.

S.D.G.

- Ryan Fenster

Reykjavik, 2020

## Útdráttur

Athafnir norrænna manna í löndunum sem síðar urðu að Rússlandi og sjálfsmyndir þeirra sem kölluðust Rus' hafa verið rannsóknarefni fræðimanna í rúma öld. Töluvert hefur verið fjallað um vitnisburð heimilda á arabísku og grísku um þessa norrænu menn og einnig hafa lýsingar norrænna fornrita verið mikilvægt rannsóknarefni. Á hinn bóginn hafa samtímaheimildir á latínu vakið minni fræðilegan áhuga. Í þessari ritgerð er fjallað um sjö frásagnarheimildir á latínu, ritaðar frá miðri níundu öld og fram á þrettánda öld. Ritin sem eru til athugunar eru Annales Bertiniani, Annales Fuldenses, Chronicon eftir Regino frá Prüm og Adalbert frá Magdeburg, Chronicon eftir Thietmar frá Merseburg, Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum eftir Adam frá Brimum, Chronica Slavorum eftir Helmold frá Bosau og Gesta Danorum eftir Saxo Grammaticus. Þessar heimildir eru greindar með meginþingum og eigindlegum hætti með tilliti til orðræðunnar um norræna menn og Rus'. Niðurstaðan er að þessum tveimur hópum var lýst með svipuðum hætti og viðhorf vestrænna þjóða til þeirra milduðust með tímanum, samtímis því að kristni breiddist út á Norðurlöndum og í Austurvegi.

## Abstract

The historical debate surrounding the nature of Norse interactions in the region now known as Russia, and the identity of the people known as the Rus', has been the focus of ongoing academic interest for well over a century. However, while Arabic and Byzantine sources on the subject and saga literature on the subject have been widely examined, the views of contemporary Latin sources from Western Europe have received comparatively lesser attention. This thesis, therefore, examines seven Latin sources, dating from the mid-ninth to early thirteenth centuries AD, the *Annales Bertiniani*, the *Annales Fuldenses*, the *Chronicon* of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg, the *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseburg, the *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, the *Chronica Slavorum* of Helmold of Bosau, and the *Gesta Danorum*. These sources are subjected to Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis, looking at the language used to describe the Norse and the Rus'. The end result finds that the two groups were described in relatively similar terms, and that western attitudes softened towards both over time, as Christianity spread in both North and East.

## Formáli – Prologue

Few topics in the field of Nordic Studies have been as divisive and politically charged, historically speaking, as the question of the Norse presence in and influence on the eastern portion of Europe, in the region that would become the modern nations of Russia, Belarus, and the Ukraine. I promise that this thesis is not another entry into the long, tedious, and ultimately futile Normanist debate. As I will briefly relate, that debate is largely obsolete. Instead, this thesis is an attempt to understand what contemporary peoples thought about the Norse, the Rus', and their interactions. The Norse, as is well known, did not write down their own history; the few scattered runic inscriptions they left behind are mostly gravestones. Likewise, the major source for the Rus', the Russian Primary Chronicle, is of dubious provenience.<sup>1</sup> So the historian, then, is left with no choice but to look to other cultures in search of documentary evidence.

This thesis owes its inception to the “Legends of the Eastern Vikings” project funded by the Icelandic Center for Research, RANNÍS. This larger project is an attempt to collect and re-examine the medieval sources that touch on Norse and Rus' activities in the middle ages. While other, wiser scholars tackle the sources stemming from the Byzantine Empire and the Abbasid Caliphate, as well as later medieval Scandinavian sources, my task was to examine the Latin sources, to try and see what the Latin Christians of Western Europe had to say about the Norse, the Rus', and what they may have said about their interactions. While other scholars on the project are specifically looking at what the Norse and Rus' said about themselves, or what later Russians said about their forebearers, my own project is concerned with what others at the time thought of them. This is all part of a quest to understand how the identities of these people were formed, and how the concept of a “varangian” an Eastern Viking, as distinct from their western brethren, could arise.

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<sup>1</sup> Lunt, “On interpreting the Russian primary chronicle: the year 1037”, 252.

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## Introduction

A single scholar at the Russian Academy of Sciences, G.F. Müller, likely had no idea in 1749 of the magnitude of the academic furor he would ignite when he gave a dissertation in which he advanced his theory that the first royal dynasty of Russia, the Rurikids, had come from Scandinavia.<sup>2</sup> This analysis, based on historical sources such as the Primary Chronicle,<sup>3</sup> and later supported by linguistic<sup>4</sup> and archaeological<sup>5</sup> evidence, provoked a strong reaction from Russian nationalists, who defended their argument on linguistic grounds,<sup>6</sup> although it would later receive its strongest support not from academic agreement, but from being declared the official historical position of Soviet scholarship.<sup>7</sup> Those on the side of Norse influence on Russian history came to be known as Normanists, while their opponents were the Anti-Normanists. The official clampdown on inquiry, while it did meet with academic resistance within the Soviet Union,<sup>8</sup> was strong enough that, coupled with Cold War tensions and distrust, the topic was mostly ignored outside of the Warsaw Pact nations.<sup>9</sup>

After the end of the Cold War and the resumption of academic interaction between Russian and international universities, the common consensus has settled on a modified Normanist position, that the people known as the Rus' were actually a confederation of various peoples: Nordic, Slavic, Baltic, and Finnish,<sup>10</sup> combined into a hybrid identity. Therefore, the Norse and Rus' can be thought of as cousins of a sort, cultures linked by common descent and a syncretic culture.<sup>11</sup> This makes for an interesting concept of cultural synthesis, and opens up greater avenues of research, since then knowledge from

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<sup>2</sup> Klejn, "The Russian Controversy over the Varangians", 28.

<sup>3</sup> Tolochko, "The Primary Chronicle's 'Ethnography' Revisited: Slavs and Varangians in the Middle Dnieper Region and the Origin of the Rus' State", 183.

<sup>4</sup> Zakharii, "The Historiography of Normanist and Anti-Normanist theories on the origin of Rus': A review of modern historiography and major sources on Varangian controversy and other Scandinavian concepts of the origins of Rus'", 18-20.

<sup>5</sup> Lebedev, "A Reassessment of the Normanist Question", 371.

<sup>6</sup> Klejn, "The Russian Controversy over the Varangians", 32. While their opposition was cloaked in academic language, it mostly grew from a position of Slavic supremacy, and accusations that their opponents were denigrating the Slavic peoples by denying them the ability to form a nation.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>8</sup> The account of Leo Klejn in *From Goths To Varangians: Communication And Cultural Exchange Between The Baltic And The Black Sea* is an inspiring account of principled academic independence in the face of official propaganda and, while not within the scope of this thesis, is well worth reading.

<sup>9</sup> The debate in the west itself fell out of vogue in favor of other avenues of research.

<sup>10</sup> Lebedev, "A Reassessment of the Normanist Question", 373.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

studies of either people group can be used to examine the other. With all of this in the back of my mind, I set out to gather sources and settle on a methodology by which to analyze them, all in an effort to better understand what the West thought of the North in the East.

### **What are West, North, and East?**

Before we begin, it would be remiss of me to not explain what I mean by the West, the North, and the East. These general directional terms are used here in reference to medieval Europe and, while they will carry some historical and social baggage, I hope to use them more-or-less in their geographical sense for the most part. In a more specific sense, the West is that portion of mainland Europe which, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, was primarily Roman Catholic in religion and primarily used Latin as their administrative language. This definition is essentially the definition of Latin Europe given by Robert Bartlett.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Bartlett's definitions greatly influenced my own. The North, in this thesis, refers to the Norse-speaking, originally pagan regions of northern Europe. The East, however, which Bartlett considered to include Byzantium, I have here limited in definition to encompass only those regions of Europe east of what is now modern Germany, and north of the Byzantine empire, who were originally pagan, and primarily spoke Slavic or Baltic languages. This places both regions outside of the borders wherein the various sources were written, Saxo Grammaticus being the only exception. However, Saxo's Denmark had been Christianized for so long that I feel it safe to consider his attitudes to be those of the West.

### **Sources and Methodology**

When looking at a concept as broad as the attitudes and worldview of a people long dead, it is necessary to take a somewhat broad approach, including adopting and modifying the methodologies of other fields. For the purposes of this project I selected seven Latin sources from the so-called Viking era and immediately after. The goal was somewhat shaped by circumstance, as I needed to select accessible sources that were at least in some form of standardized orthography, and both in the original Latin as well as in translation. In addition, I prioritized sources known to contain some mention of the

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<sup>12</sup> Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950-1350*, 1.

Rus'. However, even given these limitations I was able to find, without undue difficulty, seven different works covering three different genera of literature: Annals, Chronicles, and Histories. Specifically, I chose the *Annales Bertiniani* (The Annals of St-Bertin), the *Annales Fuldenses* (The Annals of Fulda), the *Chronicon* of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg, the *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseburg, the *Chronica Slavorum* (The Chronicle of the Slavs) by Helmold, the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum* (The Deeds of the Bishops of Hamburg) by Adam of Bremen, and the *Gesta Danorum* (The Deeds of the Danes) by Saxo Grammaticus.

Having collected these works, I proceeded to lay them out chronologically, as presented, and then to further subdivide them into two groupings: Early and Late. The division between early and late works was somewhat arbitrary, and has been defined as early works being those written down, solely or primarily, by those who lived between the dawn of the Viking age in the late 700's AD to the first common event present in the newer texts but not the older ones, in 1018 AD, when Bohemia and Poland, with the involvement of the Holy Roman Empire, installed Sventipolk as king of Kievan Rus'.<sup>13</sup> This creates two groups, with both the *Annales Bertiniani* and *Annales Fuldenses*, as well as Regino's *Chronicon* being classified as early works and Thietmar's *Chronicon*, Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, the *Chronica Slavorum*, and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* falling in the late group.

Stylistically, these texts were easier to group, falling under the three broad groups of Annals, Chronicles, and Histories. Annals, in this case the *Annales Bertiniani* and the *Annales Fuldenses*, are year by year records of events which occurred within a kingdom and its immediate environs. Chronicles, in this case the works of Regino of Prüm, Thietmar of Merseburg, and Helmold, fall between annals and histories in that they are organized chronologically, but are not divided into years, and, while they may include didactic anecdotes, they are not structured in the same way as a history, and are more narrowly focused. Histories, in this case the works by Adam of Bremen and Saxo Grammaticus, provide a broader narrative, less of a strictly linear year-by year focus, and contain multiple asides. The fourth book of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, for example, does not directly relate to the previous three, and is instead a geography

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<sup>13</sup> *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, 383.

describing the northern world, and Saxo's work includes a very long aside that would eventually become the basis of Hamlet.<sup>14</sup>

These texts span across almost four hundred years of European history, starting in the Low Middle Ages and continuing into the High Middle Ages, and five different dynasties: the Carolingians, the Ottonians, the Salians, the Hohenstaufens and, in the case of Saxo, the Danish Estridsens. While all the sources were written in Christian realms, and all the authors were thoroughly Christianized, getting to their attitudes, ideas, and memories of Norse involvement in the lands of the Rus' still entails entering several different minds who were all shaped by different national, historical, and regional worldviews and concerns. To better collect and analyze such a diverse dataset, I turned to the field of communications. First created to analyze mass media such as newspapers and radio broadcasts, content analysis counts keywords to quantitatively analyze a piece of media, while further analyzing the deeper contextual nature of the language used to quantitatively analyze the source.<sup>15</sup> This is the great strength of content analysis, as proclaimed by its proponents, that it can combine both quantitative and qualitative processes to offer a very complete picture.<sup>16</sup>

For my particular venture into content analysis, I took a triple pronged approach. Both the Norse and the Rus' were peripheral people to the chroniclers, analysts, and historians I had collected.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, I hypothesized that they would approach the two peoples and their interactions in similar ways. My triple pronged approach, given this hypothesis, was to catalogue every mention in each work of the various Norse groups, every mention of the Rus', and then between those two datasets count every instance in which the two overlapped. I began by selecting the keywords I would search for. The specific keywords searched for in all these works were: Danes, Danish, Denmark, Iceland, Icelandic, Kiev, Northman, Northmen, Nortmannia, Norway, Norwegian, Norwegians, Novgorod, Russia, Russian, Rus', Sweden, Swedes, and Swedish. Although some authors do use the name Goth,<sup>18</sup> it is not used by all and is used so

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<sup>14</sup> *The History of the Danes*, Vol. 1, 83-90, 94-101.

<sup>15</sup> Mayring, "Qualitative content analysis", 267.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 269.

<sup>17</sup> And even for the Danish Saxo Grammaticus, he was culturally removed from the Viking age by a good two centuries, at least.

<sup>18</sup> Adam of Bremen apparently classified them as a subdivision of the Swedes. *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 204.

rarely and sparingly as to be comfortably excluded; likewise, specific territories within the larger region<sup>19</sup> have not been counted.

Having counted these keyword appearances, I then read the texts again to understand the context and understanding of both groups within each source. Once I had analyzed each source individually, I was able to better understand them in relation to the others, and, therefore, map out a four hundred year trend of changing views and opinions. In constructing this thesis, I chose to focus on one specific issue within each source which, when compared to the others, best reflects the shifting Western opinion on the Norse, the Rus', and their interactions.

Furthermore, I had to choose how to define the terms I would use in my own writing. Since not all the people groups living the region of Scandinavia were Nordic in culture or heritage, not all Norsemen lived in Scandinavia, and various smaller designations such as Norwegian, Dane, and Swede are difficult to verify within the sources, the term "Scandinavian" was rejected in favor of the use of "Norse" or "Nordic" to describe the larger ethno-cultural group in question, although the geographical region will still be referred to as Scandinavia. Regions and kingdoms within Scandinavia will be referred to according to their notional borders during the era. Likewise, in an attempt to avoid the confusion of modern borders, the eastern region in question is referred to generically as Russia and its inhabitants as Rus' throughout; despite the fact that the center of the kingdom lay in what is today Ukraine, it is the name the sources gave to the region. In cases where it becomes important to know the precise location of events, the modern borders as given in the CIA World Factbook will be used, and this usage will be indicated in the footnotes.

With the methodology laid out, let us move on to the sources. These seven sources, taken together, form the basis of the analysis in the final section of this thesis. We will begin with the earliest source, which contains the very first interaction between all three peoples, the Norse, the Rus', and the Christian peoples of Western Europe.

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<sup>19</sup> Scania, Jutland, Viken, et cetera.

## The Sources

### **Annales Bertiniani**

The oldest source examined; the *Annales Bertiniani* was compiled during the early to mid-ninth century at the royal court of the Carolingian emperors based in Aachen. These Annals cover events primarily taking place in and around the western portion of the Carolingian empire from 830-882 AD. Multiple authors had a hand in the compilation of this text, although the only two to whom names can be attributed are Prudentius of Troyes<sup>20</sup> and Hincmar of Reims<sup>21</sup>, bishop of Troyes and Archbishop of Reims, respectively. Prudentius likely began his writing at the royal court itself,<sup>22</sup> although his writing can only be definitely known from 843 AD onwards.<sup>23</sup> Hincmar, on the other hand, despite not starting at the palace had a greater focus on politics in his section of the *Annales*.<sup>24</sup> Between the two authors, however, the text features a relatively homogenous usage of language to describe the peoples on the borderlands of the Carolingian Empire

### **Mentions of Norsemen, Rus', and their Interaction**

Since these Annals were compiled during the height of the Viking raids against mainland Europe, the *Annales Bertiniani* contain many references to these invaders, and refer to what may be some of the earliest of those encounters with these people groups. The word *Denmark* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 56 times; the word *Northman* and its variants appears 114 times; the word *Sweden* and its variants and ethnonyms<sup>25</sup> appears once. In total, the various Norse peoples are mentioned directly 171 times.

The *Annales Bertiniani* also include the first written mention of Russia in the Latin sources. The word *Russia* and its variants and ethnonyms appears once. In total, *Russia* and its associated cities and peoples are mentioned directly once. Interactions between the two peoples occur on one occasion.

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<sup>20</sup> Nelson, "Introduction", 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 9-10.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 8. According to Nelson and others, Prudentius lived at the palace until shortly after the death of Louis the Pious in 840.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> In this case, the word used was *Swedes*.

## First Contact: Rus' or Swedes?

In the year 839 AD, according to the *Annales Bertiniani*, an embassy arrived at the court of Louis the Pious from the Byzantine emperor. In their entourage were representatives of an unknown people, who called themselves the Rus'.<sup>26</sup> They came as emissaries of their king, the Khagan,<sup>27</sup> to establish contact, if not full diplomatic relations, with the Carolingian empire. However, their request for assistance in returning home made Louis suspicious, and, on further investigation, it was determined that these ambassadors were Swedes and, on suspicion of espionage, they were imprisoned until their true intentions could be determined. This single paragraph, thirty sentences long in the original Latin, is the first written reference to the Rus' in the west. It is also tantalizingly vague, while at the same time being one of the longest digressions on the Rus' in the early sources and, out of all seven covered in this project, the only one to actually depict the interaction of the Norse, the Rus', and western Christians all together.

So what, if anything, can actually be drawn from this source? This single paragraph has been picked over by numerous scholars over the years. However, most of these authors approached this from a direction of Slavic studies,<sup>28</sup> their interests tied up with the exact date of the emergence of the Rus' as a group, or of the ethnic character of the Rus' themselves. It hasn't really been approached from the point of view of the western authors who made note of their visit, and sources related to this angle are rather thin on the ground. To examine this properly, there are a few questions that much be addressed; Why did these ambassadors travel so far to communicate with a nation they wouldn't contact again for over another century,<sup>29</sup> what did they do to raise the suspicions of Louis the Pious, and why does their story end without resolution?

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<sup>26</sup> Some modern translations, such as Janet L. Nelson's, use the generic "Russians". However, as previously noted in the section on Methodology, Rus' is the ethnonym this paper will use, with Russia being used to refer to the kingdom centered in Kiev, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>27</sup> The debate over the usage of this name, while interesting, is not important to us, as the western sources never again use this term in relation to the ruler of Russia. Ildar Garipzanov argues that this is a mistranslation of the given name Hákon, which other scholars dispute. Garipzanov, "The Annals of St. Bertin (839) and Chacanus of the Rhos".

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, older works from the Normanist/Anti-Normanist days were obsessed with this source. See Cross, "The Scandinavian infiltration into early Russia", Pritsak, "The Origin of Rus'", Riasanovsky, "The Embassy of 838 revisited: Some comments in connection with a "Normanist" source on Early Russian history".

<sup>29</sup> In 959 AD, with Queen Helen's request for missionaries, which will be discussed later. *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe: The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*, 260.

These questions need to be addressed out of order, because the second question is key understanding the first and third. All we are told is that the emperor's reaction against the emissaries is by further examination of the strangers: "*Quorum adventus causam imperator diligentius investigans, comperit, eos gentes esse Sueonum.*"<sup>30</sup> (When the Emperor investigated more closely the reason for their coming here, he discovered that they belonged to the people of the Swedes.)<sup>31</sup> Why the suspicions were triggered is never revealed, nor is the way in which this identity became discovered. This leaves a lot up to interpretation, but if reference is made to the wider usage of language in the text, a case can be made for an ethnic prejudice against Nordic people.

In the text as a whole, as previously mentioned, words used to indicate the Norse are used 171 times, 67% of which are some variant of Northman. The term Northman<sup>32</sup> is overwhelmingly negative throughout the sources, and here, in its earliest applications, this is very much true. In the earliest appearance of Northmen, in 835 AD, they are described as not merely pillaging the city of Dorestad, but "*vastaverunt atque hostilitur depraedati sunt.*"<sup>33</sup> (laid it waste and looted it savagely.)<sup>34</sup> Attacks from the Northmen occur every year thereafter, before the arrival of the Rus' envoys.<sup>35</sup> Only once in that time are the "pirates"<sup>36</sup> identified as specifically belonging to a distinct group, the Danes in that case, but are otherwise just Northmen, making their "*inruptione solita... inruentes,*"<sup>37</sup> ([their] usual surprise attack).<sup>38</sup>

Now, there had been a previous incursion the year before,<sup>39</sup> which had likewise struck the *emporium* at Dorestad, but there the attackers were clearly identified as Danes, and there is an earlier reference to Danish diplomats in 831 AD.<sup>40</sup> However, very quickly the name Northman and its' variants replace these specific terms. By referring to these Rus' as being *gentes Sueonum*, the authors of the chronicle show that they know full well that these Northmen are not a monolithic group; by preferring the term Northmen

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<sup>30</sup> Prudentius of Troyes and Hincmar of Reims, *Annales Bertiniani*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 44.

<sup>32</sup> As will be amply illustrated and reflected throughout.

<sup>33</sup> Prudentius of Troyes and Hincmar of Reims. *Annales Bertiniani*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 35, 37, and 39. However, the raid of 383 AD was thwarted by a storm. *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> Prudentius of Troyes and Hincmar of Reims. *Annales Bertiniani*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 37.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 23.



they reveal a total disinterest in attempting to differentiate these groups. These are just the pagan barbarians attacking and devastating their coast, and they do not deserve differentiation. “Northman” in this case becomes a generic term that, coupled with the negative words associated with it, amounts to a slur.

So, when the Rus’ arrived four years later, Louis had been fighting various Norse groups all along. Having some familiarity, we can safely assume, with what a “Northman” looked like, and having spent the last few years fending off Norse raids, he likely knew that those men were of Swedish origin without much further investigation. Whether or not they really were spying, as he accused them of doing, the presence of distrust, fear, and distaste for these outsiders in particular, and the Norse in general, is manifest. The lack of further record indicates, to me, that they were not released from prison, although this cannot be confirmed.<sup>41</sup> This could also indicate, in part, why the Rus’ did not attempt further contact until the late 950’s AD. After all, why go all that distance to meet with a people who have no desire to have anything to do with you at best, and treat you as an enemy at worst?

At this early stage in interaction between these people groups, at least according to the *Annales Bertiniani*, hostility and violence dominated the discourse. In the Christian West, these outsiders were violent, untrustworthy, and dangerous, an image that would for a very long time dominate their relations with the North and the East. Written, as it was, at the tail end of Carolingian unity, the *Annales Bertiniani* capture this view perfectly, and reflect a region about to undergo massive and bloody change as the empire fragmented and reconstituted to the east, and as connections to the wider world became ever more intrusive. Its’ East Frankish companion, the *Annales Fuldenses*, supports this, as we will see in the next subsection.

### **Annales Fuldenses**

Whereas the *Annales Bertiniani* are primarily concerned with events in the western half of the Carolingian world, the *Annales Fuldenses*, or “The Annals of Fulda”, cover events occurring in the eastern half of the empire across roughly the same timeframe, from 838 to 901 AD. They were primarily compiled at the abbey of Fulda, in what is

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<sup>41</sup> Wladyslaw Duczko hypothesized that they may have been sent on with the Byzantines as part of a Byzantine embassy to the Danes. Duczko, *Viking Rus: studies on the presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*, 14.

now the state of Hessen in Germany, by several different chroniclers three of whom are known: Einhard, Rudolf of Fulda, and Meginhardus of Fulda.<sup>42</sup>

### **Mentions of Norsemen, Rus', and their Interaction**

Since they were written down around the same time and within the same Carolingian tradition, the terms used in the *Annales Fuldenses* reflect the usage of the *Annales Bertiniani*. The word *Denmark* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 10 times and the word *Northman* and its variants appears 71 times. In total, the various Norse peoples are mentioned directly 81 times. None of the other keywords appear in this text. There is no mention of Russia, or of Norse interactions there.

### **Outsiders and Collapsing Empires**

Notably, alone out of all the seven sources examined, the Rus' do not receive any mention in the *Annales Fuldenses*. This does leave us without interactions to analyze. Under the same year when the Rus' ambassadors arrived at the court of Louis the Pious, as we just examined from the *Annales Bertiniani*, the *Annales Fuldenses* make no mention of any embassy. However, what they do mention helps to better illustrate a reality of medieval life that explains much of the seeming absence of various peoples and events from the chronicles.

Under the heading of 839, the Annals record a conflict between the Emperor Louis and his son, Louis the German, which ends with the younger man's humiliation and the division of the empire,<sup>43</sup> as if in premonition of the elder's death the next year.<sup>44</sup>

Whereas the same year in the *Annales Bertiniani* takes up almost seven pages,<sup>45</sup> here it is barely two paragraphs. The list of territories divided up is less developed in this chronicle, and the overall writing is much simpler and less inflated, with fewer didactic asides. Now, this could be a case of different scribes and compilers with different tastes and styles of writing. However, this difference can also be examined as a reflection of the political reality of the eastern Frankish kingdom.

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<sup>42</sup> Reuter, "Introduction", 5. Reuter does, however, raise some suspicion about the traditional attribution to these authors, although he does not suggest any alternative origins.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 41-8.

Following the death of Louis the Pious, the realm of his father Charlemagne essentially fell apart. The western kingdom would eventually evolve into the Kingdom of France, while the east would become the various German kingdoms,<sup>46</sup> principalities, and assorted feudal and ecclesiastical states. At the same time as the kingdoms grew apart, they were beset by attacks from the surrounding peoples. While the west certainly had their own problems with the Norse, the eastern kingdom also had to deal with the Slavs to their east and the Hungarians to their southeast, as well as the Norse. These conflicts fill the *Annales Fuldenses*. Northmen “ravaged” Paris and sacked Hamburg in 845,<sup>47</sup> Tours in 853,<sup>48</sup> and slew a great number of notable men in 880,<sup>49</sup> to give only a very few examples. Indeed, the 880’s appear to have been a time of unending conflict with the Norse. Conflicts with the Slavs occur almost every year as well. Slavic conflicts are usually portrayed as rebellions being crushed, as in 844,<sup>50</sup> 846,<sup>51</sup> 849,<sup>52</sup> and, lest it be thought these examples are isolated, 877,<sup>53</sup> 880,<sup>54</sup> and 884,<sup>55</sup> can also be named, in addition to others.

This era, especially as far the *Annales Fuldenses* seek to depict it, was one of conflict with all neighbors, and many putative allies. Indeed, these conflicts are almost anticipated; the Bohemian rebellion of 849 AD is introduced with “Boemani more solito,”<sup>56</sup> (The Bohemians in their usual fashion).<sup>57</sup> Dissention amongst the Franks was so common that apparently the Norse would try and keep abreast of it, taking advantage of the upheaval to strike at the unprotected empire.<sup>58</sup> Surrounded as they were on all sides by enemies, and living in an era of endemic civil war, it is hardly surprising that the authors of the *Annales Fuldenses* had little time for strange foreigners. If the Rus’ were not attacking the west, then why waste good ink discussing them? There were any number of greater occurrences to consider, and so that is what they did. It would not be

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<sup>46</sup> With the central portion of the realm becoming the short-lived Kingdom of Lothringia

<sup>47</sup> *The Annals of Fulda*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 88-9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>56</sup> Einhard et al., *Annales Fuldenses: sive, Annales Regni Francorum Orientalis*, 38.

<sup>57</sup> *The Annals of Fulda*, 28.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

until 959 AD, fifty-eight years after the *Annales Fuldenses* cease to record events, that the Rus' would appear again, as a degree of stability returned to the eastern half of the old Carolingian world.

### **The *Chronicon* of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg**

As the Carolingian empire crumbled in the late ninth century AD, with the death of the childless Charles III on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 888, the region was left exposed to attacks from all sides. In this uncertain time and reflecting back on the entirety of the history of the Carolingian empire was Regino, Abbot of the monastery of Prüm. Like the annals, this book is arranged as an account of year-by-year events. However, by extending its scope beyond events the author had lived to recount, it marked a change in style that would continue into the future. Beginning with the birth of Christ, Regino copied extensively from other authors to create a record of major events stretching up to 906 AD, when it was further continued by Adalbert, archbishop of Magdeburg, who continued it until 967.

This text deserves special consideration, in that Regino was the first author of our sources to try and create a chronology that spanned all of history, or, at least, all the history from the birth of Christ onwards.<sup>59</sup> To do this, Regino outright copied multiple different sources, which he then tried to fit into a timeline.<sup>60</sup> This chronology, while ambitious, proved to be inaccurate up until the portions of his chronicle which parallel the *Annales Regni Francorum* (Royal Frankish Annals).<sup>61</sup> However, it marked a sea change in writing styles within Europe: Annals were out and Chronicles were now in.

### **Mentions of Norsemen, Rus', and their Interaction**

Between the two authors, there is a remarkable consistency in the language used to identify and describe the Norse and the Rus'. The word *Denmark* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 17 times; the word *Northman* and its variants appears 71 times; the word *Sweden* and its variants and ethnonyms appears once. In total, the various Norse peoples are mentioned directly 89 times, the majority of these mentions occurring in Regino's section of the *Chronicon*.

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<sup>59</sup> MacLean, "Introduction", 11.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

The Rus', left out of the *Annales Fuldenses*, return to the story in the *Chronicon*. The word Russia and its associated cities and peoples appear on 3 occasions. In total, Russia and its associated cities and peoples are mentioned directly 3 times. These all occur in Adalbert's section of the *Chronicon*, in relation to his appointment as missionary to the court of Helen,<sup>62</sup> Queen of the Rus' which means that, while the Norse and Rus' are not mentioned as interacting in this text, the *Chronicon* of Regino and Adalbert contains one of the few accounts of interaction between the Rus' and the west.

### **Adalbert of Magdeburg, Reluctant Missionary**

The three references by Adalbert of Magdeburg to his missionary journey are a rare mention from one of the western Frankish Annals of missionary activity amongst the pagans of the north and east.<sup>63</sup> The particular manner in which Adalbert writes these few short entries tells us a story which the sparse words only hint at. In his entry for the year 959 AD, Adalbert wrote the following: "*Legati Helenae reginae Rugorum, quae sub Romano imperatore Constantinopolitano Constantinopoli baptizata est, fite, ut post claruit, ad regem venientes episcopum et presbiteros eidem genti ordinary petebant.*"<sup>64</sup> (Legates of Helen, queen of the Rus', who had been baptized in Constantinople under the Constantinopolitan emperor Romanus, came to the king and asked (falsely, as became clear later) that a bishop and priests be appointed to that people.)<sup>65</sup>

By mentioning the little aside of their falsehood, Adalbert reveals that he wrote this section after having completed his mission to the Rus'. What was meant by this accusation is not clear, although the lack of success he would enjoy seems a likely explanation. Why exactly it did not meet with success, at least at the official level, seems to have been down to a combination of Adalbert's inexperience, as seen in the next excerpt, and Helen's removal from power, as we will examine after the third excerpt. "*Libutius priori anno quibusdam dilationibus ab itinere suspensus XV. Kal. Marti. anni presentis obit; cui Adalbertus ex coenobitis sancti Maximini machinatione*

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<sup>62</sup> Also known as Olga, or Helga, of Kiev.

<sup>63</sup> Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*, written in 875, can be considered an exception, although it was written on the northern edge of the empire and is a biography rather than an annal. Eventually, through its usage by Adam of Bremen, it would become part of the northern, Saxon historical corpus.

<sup>64</sup> Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg, *Reginonis Abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum Continuatione Treverensi*, 170.

<sup>65</sup> *History and Politics*, 260.

*et consilio fuerit Wilihelmi archiepiscopi, licet Meliora in eum confisus fuerit et nihil unquam in eum deliquerit, peregre mittendus in ordinatione successit. Quem piissimus rex solita sibi misericordia omnibus, quibus indigebat, copiis instructum genti Rugorum honorifice destinavit.*”<sup>66</sup> (Libutius, whom certain delays had prevented from traveling in the previous year, died in the present year on 15 February. By the contrivance and counsel of Archbishop William [of Mainz], Adalbert from the monks of St-Maximin [in Trier] was appointed to be sent abroad in his place, even though he expected better from William and had never done anything to offend him. With his accustomed mercy, the most pious king equipped him with all the supplies he needed and sent him with honor to the people of the Rus’.)<sup>67</sup>

*Even though he expected better from William and had never done anything to offend him.* With this sentence Adalbert offers a window directly into his own thinking. Adalbert did not want to go to the Rus’, and he was not the first choice to lead the expedition. Delay in departure cost him valuable time and momentum, and he was likely woefully unprepared for the journey. No mention is made of him being equipped with knowledge of the region, of the language, or the culture, only supplies. Why would the church and emperor have settled on a missionary bishop who had expressed no desire to go, and why would Adalbert be so seemingly hostile to the idea of going? A look at the historical context will bring this to light.

The mission to the Rus’ was carried out during the reign of Otto I, and in his own text Adalbert mentions the emperor’s constant conflicts with neighboring pagan peoples such as the Hungarians<sup>68</sup> and Slavs.<sup>69</sup> The pagan peoples at the periphery of the Christian world had been raiding and attacking since the earliest entries in the various annals, and it was only now that stability was returning to the Empire.<sup>70</sup> However, this stability was by no means secured yet, and Adalbert likely still held what we may call the “Bertinian” or “Fuldentian” views of pagan outsiders as dangerous and untrustworthy barbarians, probably from firsthand experience, or from encounters with victims of raids. While the account of the mission was written after the fact, it is not unreasonable that Adalbert held those views before being sent. Unfortunately for

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<sup>66</sup> Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg, *Reginonis Abbatis Prumiensis*, 170.

<sup>67</sup> *History and Politics*, 261.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 232-34.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

<sup>70</sup> From here on out “Empire” and “Imperial” refer to the Holy Roman, rather than Carolingian, Empire.

Adalbert and his mission, it appears that his prejudices were confirmed, as shown in his entry for 962 AD: “*Eodem anno Adalbertus Rugis ordinatus episcopus nihil in his, propter quae missus fuerat, proficere valens et inaniter se fatigatum videns revertitur et quibusdam ex suis in redeundo occisis ipse cum magno labore vix evasit.*”<sup>71</sup> (In the same year Adalbert, who had been ordained as bishop of the Rus’, returned, realizing that he could not accomplish any of the things that he had been sent to do and that he was tiring himself out in vain; some of his men were killed on the way home, and he himself only just escaped with great effort.)<sup>72</sup>

Adalbert’s mission, it would seem, was doomed from the start. Not only was he not the first choice, but the authority of Queen Helen does not seem to have extended to mass conversions. The Queen was only queen regent, and her son Svjatoslav supposedly took power from her about the same time that Adalbert’s mission ended,<sup>73</sup> with the missionary bishop barely escaping with his life. The political situation in Russia at the time was such that, even if there was a Christian presence,<sup>74</sup> the ruling elite could not so easily abandon paganism.<sup>75</sup> The timing for Adalbert was simply wrong, with a more aggressive government coming into power, possibly in response to the Byzantine sympathies and Christianizing efforts of Helen.<sup>76</sup> However, the missionary may not have been aware of the political situation in Rus’, and to a western audience with marginal knowledge of or interest in the kingdom, the simple answer that the Russian people lied about wanting a bishop was more easily digested than a complex balance of power struggle in a far-off, pagan land.

### **The *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseburg**

Another chronicle, the *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseburg was compiled between 1013 and 1018 AD, when the author Thietmar, Prince-Bishop of Merseburg, died.<sup>77</sup> The

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<sup>71</sup> Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg, *Reginonis Abbatis Prumiensis*, 172.

<sup>72</sup> *History and Politics*, 263.

<sup>73</sup> Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom: An Introduction to the Medieval History of the Slavs*, 251. Although, it must be noted, this is dependent on the testimony of the Primary Chronicle which is, as noted before, of shaky provenance.

<sup>74</sup> The actual proportion of which is unknown: see Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs*, 247. However, given the proximity of Christian Byzantium and Bulgaria, as well as rapidly Christianizing Poland and the presence of Christians within Scandinavia as well, it is almost certain that there was at least some native Christian presence, albeit of marginal influence.

<sup>75</sup> Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs*, 249-50.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 251.

<sup>77</sup> Warner, “Introduction”, 3.

text is mainly dedicated to the lives and deeds of the Ottonian Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire, and covers a period from 908 to 1018 AD. It consists of eight books of varying length, and, of all seven sources, is the most narrowly focused, although Thietmar does indulge in the common trend of including didactic accounts of miracles, wonders, and other such asides which, while they may be less than germane to our research, nevertheless help to advance the narrative and reflect his thoughts.

Thietmar was of noble birth, and his family are referred to on multiple different occasions as having some degree of power and property.<sup>78</sup> He himself interacted with King Henry II many times and was a devoted servant of the Ottonian emperors. His mixture of highborn standing, ecclesiastical power, and political handiwork made his *Chronicon* a very complex work that reflects a much more “elite” view than the other sources.

### **Mentions of Norsemen, Rus’, and their Interaction**

Although primarily concerned with local, ecclesiastical, and Imperial affairs, Thietmar touches upon both the Norse and the Rus’ in several places. The word *Denmark* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 8 times; the word *Northman* and its variants appears 3 times. In total the various Norse peoples are mentioned directly 11 times. The word *Russia* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 6 times, and their administrative center of Kiev is mentioned twice. In total, Russia and its associated cities and peoples are mentioned directly 8 times.

Interactions between the two regions only occur on one occasion, in regard to Kiev, which, according to Thietmar, is filled with refugees running from the Danes.<sup>79</sup> In terms of the language used alongside these words, Thietmar gives overwhelmingly negative connotations to the Northmen, calling them heathens<sup>80</sup> and pirates.<sup>81</sup> Danes appear as enemies of the empire, ferocious<sup>82</sup> and rebellious.<sup>83</sup> Finally, Russia has a mostly

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<sup>78</sup> *Ottonian Germany*, 267-70. Thietmar even admitted to showing favoritism to his own family members in using his influence, as when he assists his cousin with legal troubles by appealing to the emperor.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 384. These “fugitive serfs” on the run from “the fast moving Danes” are not referenced at any other point in the text, nor is there any similar account in the other sources. What precisely Thietmar meant by this reference is unclear.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 336.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 131.



negative connotation in this chronicle, and why Thietmar seems to think so poorly of them is a matter that requires further analysis.

### **The Bishop and the King: Politics and Religion in Thietmar's *Chronicon***

Somewhat unique when compared to all the other authors, Thietmar takes an actively hostile stance to the Rus', and especially to their king, Vladimir. Despite the fact that Vladimir of Kiev had been the first Christian ruler of the Rus', and was eventually canonized by the Western Church,<sup>84</sup> Thietmar's description of the king is hardly flattering. "*Amplius progrediar disputando regisque Ruscorum Wlodemiri accionem iniquam perstringendo*",<sup>85</sup> Thietmar begins the seventy second chapter of his seventh book, "Now I shall continue my criticism and condemnation of the wicked deeds of the king of the Russians, Vladimir."<sup>86</sup> Leaving aside the fact that he hadn't said anything specifically about Vladimir before, this passage, and the negative chapters following it, seem to rather pointedly tell us something about Thietmar's views on the Rus' and Norse, and perhaps the views of the West on those peoples as well.

So, what are the crimes which Thietmar accuses Vladimir of? Thietmar's chief concern is with Vladimir's sexual and marital relationships. According to Thietmar, Vladimir had wed the daughter of a Byzantine Emperor, who had previously been betrothed to the Emperor Otto III.<sup>87</sup> He then converted to Christianity, but "*quam iustis operibus non ornavit*"<sup>88</sup> ("did not adorn [his new faith] with righteous deeds.")<sup>89</sup> and persisted in fornication and warmongering.<sup>90</sup> In the seventy-fourth chapter he comments on a loincloth that Vladimir wore, supposedly to increase his sexual prowess.<sup>91</sup> Thietmar ends his brief biography of Vladimir with the declaration that, in the division of his lands between his sons, God had doomed the Kievan state to destruction, and that "*quam ut mutari in hiis partibus velit Deus sentenciam, omnis Christianitas oret*"<sup>92</sup> (All

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<sup>84</sup> Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 734-5.

<sup>85</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg*, 487.

<sup>86</sup> *Ottonian Germany*, 357.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 357-58.

<sup>88</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, *Die Chronik*, 487.

<sup>89</sup> *Ottonian Germany*, 358.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 359.

<sup>92</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, *Die Chronik*, 490.

Christendom should pray that, in regard to these lands, God may change his judgement.)<sup>93</sup>

While Vladimir may not have had the most spotless of personal lives, he did strive to Christianize his lands, building churches and schools and deploying missionaries to convert the populace.<sup>94</sup> The particular strain of Christianity adopted was almost certainly of a Byzantine, or possibly Bulgarian, variety.<sup>95</sup> While this may have partially inspired Thietmar's distaste for the king, it is likely not as great an issue as it may at first appear. The Great Schism, as it is known, had not yet occurred, and many scholars, such as Sverrir Jakobsson, have thrown doubt on the very concept of an abrupt doctrinal split between the Latin church of Rome and the Greek church of Constantinople.<sup>96</sup> However, as a bishop who's see could well have been involved with missionary work to the east, it is easy to imagine that Vladimir's choice of a Greek rather than Latin church culture came as something of a personal snub to the Prince Bishop of Merseburg. Even more likely is that Vladimir's marriage to the daughter of the Byzantine emperor had thrown a wrench into the political maneuverings of the Holy Roman Empire. While it is not clear exactly what stake Thietmar would have had in such a political arrangement, his devotion to the Ottonians was such that he would view any insult to the dynasty with grave seriousness.

It does not merely seem to be Christian piety that drove Thietmar to denounce Vladimir, either. One of Vladimir's sons, Sventopolk, was married to a daughter of Duke Boleslav of Bohemia, a man who Thietmar spoke out against harshly throughout his text, calling him "*nostrique persecutoris*"<sup>97</sup> (our persecutor).<sup>98</sup> Boleslav was sometimes the foe and sometimes the friend of the Ottonian emperors<sup>99</sup> to whom Thietmar was so loyal, and this untrustworthy friendship seems to have tainted Vladimir in the eyes of the Prince-Bishop. This may well be it, but I believe there is a third reason, which would be reflective of a wider trend in the view of Norsemen and Rus' in Western eyes at the end of the Ottonian era. Although, even by Thietmar's own reluctant admission, Vladimir seems to have done his part to enforce Christianity within his realm, the tenth and early

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<sup>93</sup> *Ottonian Germany*, 359.

<sup>94</sup> Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs*, 258-59.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 257.

<sup>96</sup> Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Schism That Never Was".

<sup>97</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, *Die Chronik*, 487.

<sup>98</sup> *Ottonian Germany*, 358.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 362.

eleventh centuries were times when Christianity was still far from its later political power, and Christian Europe was still bordered by pagans of various stripes. Conversions of rulers for political expediency was an acknowledged risk,<sup>100</sup> and Vladimir's piety, to the clergyman, appeared to be less than genuine.

Falling chronologically, as it does, between the seven texts examined, Thietmar serves as a bridge in reporting, and his language use corresponds with this, with the neighboring Danes being the only Norse peoples mentioned with a specific ethnonym, all others being called Northmen, and the Northmen are assumed to be pagan. This reminder of lingering paganism occurs both implicitly with Vladimir and explicitly with various Norse characters. For example, shortly before his account of Vladimir, Thietmar writes of the capture of the Archbishop of Canterbury by a band of Northmen.<sup>101</sup> The word used to describe them, "Perfida"<sup>102</sup> can be reasonably interpreted in this context as "heathen",<sup>103</sup> a reminder that conversion in the North was still an ongoing process. The more literal translation of *perfida*, however, is more accurately rendered as "traitor", which suggests that these particular Northmen may have converted pro forma, only to turn around when it was convenient. Treachery, faithlessness, and profligacy were not looked upon kindly by Thietmar of Merseburg in the pages of his *Chronicon*, and this attitude seems to reflect the general attitude towards both the Nordic peoples and the Rus' at this time, as we see in other sources.

### **Gesta Hammaburgensis**

*Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum*, in English "The Deeds of the Bishops of Hamburg" is a history of northern Europe, from Charlemagne's conquest of the Saxons up until the mid 1070's. The *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, as the name would suggest, includes a lot of material focusing on the history and dealings of the Archbishopric. Written primarily by the scholar known as Adam of Bremen, director of the cathedral school in Hamburg, it consists of four books and an epilogue, which consists of a poem dedicated to Liemar, Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. Not much is known about Adam, he is said by the annotator of Book IV of the *Gesta* as coming from Upper

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<sup>100</sup> Melnikova, "How Christian Were Viking Christians?", 91.

<sup>101</sup> *Ottonian Germany*, 336.

<sup>102</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, *Die Chronik*, 449.

<sup>103</sup> *Ottonian Germany*, 336.

Germany, a very broad region encompassing most of modern Germany.<sup>104</sup> While he was clearly an accomplished academic, he had joined the office of the Prince-Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen as a layman, not a member of the clergy.<sup>105</sup> However, while not much is known about his life, his views come across clearly in the pages of his work.

### **Mentions of Norsemen, Rus', and their Interaction**

Since the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen was instrumental in the conversion of Scandinavia, it is no surprise that Adam of Bremen makes incredibly frequent mention of the region and its people. Indeed, Adam makes more references than all prior sources combined, more than all prior sources and Helmold's *Chronica Slavorum* combined, and is second only to Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* in total references<sup>106</sup>. The word *Denmark* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 231 times; the word *Iceland* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 12 times; the word *Northman* and its variants and toponym appears 22 times; the word *Norway* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 100 times; the word *Sweden* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 114 times. In total, the various Norse peoples are mentioned directly 479 times.

Russia is also mentioned by Adam. The word *Russia* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 13 times; the city of Novgorod<sup>107</sup> appears 2 times, and the city of Kiev appears once. In total, Russia and its associated cities and peoples are mentioned directly 16 times.

Interactions between the two regions occur on 7 separate occasions, 3 in regard to royal marriages, once in reference to a royal exile, once in reference to travel distance between Novgorod and Denmark, once in a footnote from a later editor, and once indirectly, as will be explained below.

### **The Varangian Way: Nordic Trade in Rus' and Byzantium in Adam's *Gesta***

Adam's account reveals a deep familiarity with Denmark and the other Scandinavian kingdoms, as to be expected from his position in Hamburg-Bremen, as well as from

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<sup>104</sup> Tschan and Reuter, "Introduction", xiii.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, xiv.

<sup>106</sup> Saxo makes slightly less than twice as many references as Adam, over the course of a text four times as long.

<sup>107</sup> As Ostrogard.

time spent with King Svein Estridsson of Denmark.<sup>108</sup> It also offers a view on Rus' and its Norse interactions. Of specific interest is one indirect passage from the Fourth Book.<sup>109</sup> “*Asserunt etiam periti locorum, a Sueonia terrestri via permiasse quosdam usque in Graeciam. Sed barbarae gentes, quae in medio sunt, hoc inter impediunt, propterea navibus temptatur periculum.*” (Those who have a knowledge of geography also assert that some men have passed by an overland route from Sweden into Greece. But the barbarous peoples who live between make this way difficult; consequently, the risk is taken by ship.)<sup>110</sup> This is one of the few indications of the trade route between Scandinavia and the Byzantine Empire to appear in Latin sources. It is followed not long after by a second reference, to the island of Holm,<sup>111</sup> which “*et fida stacio navium, quae ad barbaros et in Graeciam dirigi solent.*”<sup>112</sup> ([it is] a safe anchorage for the ships that are usually dispatched to the barbarians and to Greece.)<sup>113</sup>

The existence of that trade route is well-attested by the archaeological record. There are multiple instances of runestones describing travel between Scandinavia and Russia, Byzantium, and ‘Serkland’ (the middle east), usually taking the form of memorial stones raised for merchants who had died along the route.<sup>114</sup> There is also much evidence of gold and especially silver coins from the Byzantine Empire and the Caliphate turning up in Sweden.<sup>115</sup> The late Elisabeth Piltz, in her extensive studies on the subject, pinpointed the heyday of this Norse-Rus'-Byzantine trade, based on coin hoards, as occurring from about 975 to around 1070.<sup>116</sup> Adam of Bremen, who likely died not long after that end date,<sup>117</sup> would have been alive and writing during that period, and could conceivably have spoken to men who had direct knowledge of that trade. Indeed, we know that Adam spoke to various people, named and unnamed, to support his claims,<sup>118</sup> a practice that appears to have been followed in this case, since he

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<sup>108</sup> Tschan and Reuter, “Introduction” xxxi.

<sup>109</sup> Adam of Bremen. *Adami Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum Ex Recensione Lappenbergii*, 163.

<sup>110</sup> *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 196.

<sup>111</sup> Likely Gotland, according to Tschan and Reuter, *History*, 197.

<sup>112</sup> Adam of Bremen, 164.

<sup>113</sup> *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 197.

<sup>114</sup> Piltz, *Varangian Companies for Long Distance Trade: Aspects of Interchange between Scandinavia, Rus' and Byzantium in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries*, 87-8.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 95-6.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>117</sup> Adam is believed to have died sometime between 1081 and 1085 AD.

<sup>118</sup> Tschan and Reuter, “Introduction”, xxxii.

refers to men “who have a knowledge of geography”<sup>119</sup> as confirming the existence of the overland trade route made by water; that is, via riverine travel along the internal waterways. While Adam does not appear to have spoken to anyone who made the journey themselves, writing as he did from the port city of Hamburg it is not unreasonable to imagine that his geographic sources were sailors who may well have met those who had made the journey in the past.

It should come as no surprise that these references appear in Adam of Bremen’s work. Adam, unlike the previous authors, seemed interested in actually recording the history of the surrounding nations, and cataloging their cultures in the manner of old Greek and Roman authors. When reading Adam of Bremen, the parallels and influence of Solinus, Horace, and Vergil are clear.<sup>120</sup> This is a new trend in the sources, which seems to presage the later humanist revival of the Renaissance, over half a century later. By referring to this trade route, he reveals an interest in something no other author before had explored: the connection between the Norse and the Rus’.

### **Views of the Norse and Rus’**

As regards Adam’s view of the Norse and Rus’, he is the first to offer a view that was nuanced for his time. Adam of Bremen referred to many rulers of the Danes,<sup>121</sup> Norwegians,<sup>122</sup> Swedes,<sup>123</sup> and Rus’<sup>124</sup> as “Saintly” or “Blessed” and affords them a major role in the continued Christianization of their respective lands. However, Adam also wrote at a time when the Christianization of the Norse was still ongoing, and his text also contains numerous accounts of heathenry, piracy, and barbarianism.<sup>125</sup> He portrays the conversion differently from other authors, as a multi-stage process of conversion, rejection, and reclamation; no group ever completely rejects the faith in Adam’s analysis, and the missionary activity is a continual collaboration between the peoples of the north and the see of Hamburg-Bremen.

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<sup>119</sup> *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 196.

<sup>120</sup> Tschan and Reuter, “Introduction”, xxxi.

<sup>121</sup> *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 69-70. Harold Bluetooth.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 94. Saint Olaf Haraldsson.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 81. Olaf Lapp-King.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*. Yaroslav.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 37-8, in that chapter alone all three are used to describe the Norse.

Much has been written about Adam's motive for writing this text,<sup>126</sup> how his end goal was to reassert the primacy of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen over the northern churches and the missionary activity in the northern and eastern periphery of Christendom.<sup>127</sup> And well this is hard to argue against, I would suggest that Adam did not portray the pagan peoples of the north and east<sup>128</sup> in the manner he did merely to score points in the struggle for ecclesiastical supremacy. Indeed, there is no reason to doubt that Adam wrote his work because he sincerely believed in the rights of his See. What this means for this analysis is that, while Adam may cast paganism as the enemy of Christendom, and the mysterious northern and eastern regions as its home,<sup>129</sup> it can be assumed that the views of the Norse and Rus' presented in his work accurately reflected his own personal views.

As has already been shown, Adam has a mixed view of these peoples, bordering on an optimism that, once Christianized, they will make for lovely neighbors. He refers to the positive moral attitudes of several different groups, lamenting only that they lack the Christian religion.<sup>130</sup> Why he had such a different view is hard, if not impossible, to say almost a thousand years after the fact. However, if we assume that Adam's view of these peoples as potential fellow members of the faith was shared by at least some of his contemporaries, this would indicate a new view of the Norse and Rus' in the longer historical pattern, which will be examined in context in chapter three.

### **The *Chronica Slavorum* of Helmold**

The *Chronica Slavorum*, or Chronicle of the Slavs, written by the Saxon cleric Helmold of Bosau around the year 1170 AD, details the history and conversion of the various Slavic tribes who lived on the northern and eastern periphery of the Holy Roman

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<sup>126</sup> Indeed, there is much debate regarding this. Henrik Janson argued in 2000 that there was no temple at Uppsala, and Adam's descriptions are an attack on opponents within the church hierarchy. Olof Sundqvist questioned that conclusion in 2011. Meanwhile, recent archaeology has reinforced the existence of a sacred space at Gamla Uppsala. See Janson, "Adam of Bremen and the Conversion of Scandinavia.", Sundqvist, "An Arena For Higher Powers. Cult Buildings And Rulers In The Late Iron Age And The Early Medieval Period In The Mälars Region.", and Ljungkvist and Frölund, "Gamla Uppsala—The Emergence of a Centre and a Magnate Complex."

<sup>127</sup> See also Ildar Garipzanov's 2011 chapter "Christianity and Paganism in Adam of Bremen's Narrative." In *Historical Narratives and Christian Identity on a European Periphery: Early History Writing in Northern, East-Central, and Eastern Europe (c. 1070–1200)*, for a critique of scholarship on the subject.

<sup>128</sup> Which would include those Norse yet to convert, as well as the still freshly converted Rus'.

<sup>129</sup> *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 31.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 67. In reference here to the inhabitants of the city of Jumne.

Empire, as well as Imperial, Polish, and Danish politics. It consists of two books, the much longer first book, and a much shorter second book, which continues the first.

### **Mentions of Norsemen, Rus', and their Interaction**

Helmold reflects the general trend of the later texts by using a wide variety of words to describe the various peoples he deals with. The word *Denmark* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 50 times; the word *Northman* and its variants appears 9 times; the word *Norway* and its variants and ethnonym appears 2 times; the word Sweden and its variants and ethnonyms appears 10 times. In total, the various Norse peoples are mentioned directly 71 times.

Helmold also makes mention of the Rus'. The word Russia and its variants and ethnonyms appears 7 times; the city of Kiev is mentioned once. In total, Russia and its associated cities and peoples are mentioned directly 8 times.

Interaction between the two occurs on one occasion, in a passage regarding the Danish name for Russia. Helmold's references to Russia are entirely geographical in nature and, while he says nothing about the people there except to note that they are Christians of the Greek variety,<sup>131</sup> his comments on the Danes invite further investigation.

### **Denmark: From Heathen Raiders to Christian Crusaders**

Although ostensibly the history of the western Slavs, the *Chronica Slavorum* includes quite a bit of material covering the surrounding peoples. While this outside information includes very little about Russia or the Rus', it does include much about the Norse, and especially the Danes. In fact, by reading Helmold's *Chronica Slavorum*, it is possible to trace the development of Denmark from a homeland of heathen enemies of the civilized world to a Christian power who carry the cross to the heathen Slavs. While this example is specific to the Danes, it is not unreasonable to assume that it holds true as a microcosm for the general view of the Nordic peoples at this time.

Proving that Helmold thought negatively of the heathen Norse is not difficult; the first mention of those peoples in relation to the Empire describes them as rebels, pirates, and barbarians.<sup>132</sup> The cases being reported here appear in other sources, both the *Annales*

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<sup>131</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 46.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 57.



*Bertiniani*<sup>133</sup> and the *Annales Fuldenses*.<sup>134</sup> While these themes may have reappeared in his work Helmold of Bosau was, however, the first chronicler to see the Nordic peoples use their powers of raiding and pillaging for what, to Christian eyes, at least, seemed a good use.

Under the rule of King Valdemar<sup>135</sup> Denmark became a prosperous Christian nation, with piracy a thing of the past and “*eo quod pirata defecisset et confracte sint naves predonum*”<sup>136</sup> (the ships of the plunderers were broken up).<sup>137</sup> However, the end of piracy was not an end to conquest. At some point around the year 1168 AD,<sup>138</sup> the Danes conquered the pagan holdouts on the island of Rügen, desecrating the idol of Svantovit, burning its temple and converting the populace.<sup>139</sup> This conversion narrative, and the war between the Danes and Slavs which followed after, seems to reflect a midway point in the broader story of Christianity in the peripheral north and east. Yes, Valdemar defeated the pagans, destroyed their idol and temples, and brought them to the faith. However, he did not set out primarily to convert the Rugiani; instead, Valdemar set out “*ut iret in terram Rugianorum ad subiugandum eam sibi*”<sup>140</sup> (to invade the land of the Rugiani in order to subjugate it to himself).<sup>141</sup> Ultimately, while the faith did take hold on Rügen, the expedition proved to have a costly aftermath. Bound by a previous treaty to split all the gains of war with Duke Privislav,<sup>142</sup> Valdemar found himself at war again after trying to cut the Duke out of his share in the Rugian expedition.<sup>143</sup>

This idea, that warfare for the wrong reason could ultimately resolve to the detriment of its instigators, reflects a new and growing trend in Christian thinking at the time Helmold was writing. Although the term itself would not enter common usage until

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<sup>133</sup> *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 60.

<sup>134</sup> *The Annals of Fulda*, 23.

<sup>135</sup> Tschan renders the name as “Waldemar”, a practice most older editors used, as it is closer to the Latin *Waldemar*. Modern histories prefer “Valdemar”.

<sup>136</sup> Helmold of Bolsau, *Helmoldi presbyteri Bozoviensis Cronica Slavorum*, 201.

<sup>137</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 264.

<sup>138</sup> The exact date is somewhat disputed, Helmold says in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Book II that the destruction of the idol of Svantovit occurred in the year 1168 AD, (*The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 277), whereas Saxo gives a date closer to 1169 AD.

<sup>139</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 275.

<sup>140</sup> Helmold of Bolsau, *Helmoldi presbyteri Bozoviensis Cronica Slavorum*, 211.

<sup>141</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 274.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 264.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 277-78.

much later,<sup>144</sup> the concept of holy wars to protect Christian lands and expand Christian borders, of Crusades, had begun to take shape at that time. Helmold, writing in the later part of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was well acquainted with crusading. His own book devotes several chapters to the Second Crusade<sup>145</sup> and Helmold, in the way he writes about the Imperial and Danish crusaders, reveals an understanding of the Crusades that is paradoxically both idealistic and cynical.

Helmold speaks idealistically of crusaders setting out “*qui propter ampliandos fines pacis*,”<sup>146</sup> (to extend the bounds of peace)<sup>147</sup> of an egalitarian Christian army, “*milicia nobilium et ignobilium vulgariumque*”<sup>148</sup> (an army of the noble and the common and the vulgar).<sup>149</sup> However, when it came time to fight the Slavic tribes to the east, Helmold’s crusaders grew dissolute and ineffectual, the Danes specifically proving “*segnius agere*”<sup>150</sup> (dilatatory or slow to act).<sup>151</sup> Although they eventually proved successful in converting a number of the Slavs, this appears to have been short-lived.<sup>152</sup> Ultimately, Helmold lays the blame for this failure with Christian princes being more concerned with making money than spreading the Word.<sup>153</sup>

Helmold’s own conflict seems to be a reflection of an expanding definition of what a crusade meant at the time.<sup>154</sup> This campaign against the Slavs was not an attempt to reclaim a sacred site for Christians, like the expeditions to Jerusalem, nor was it an attempt to reclaim formerly Christian territory that had been encroached upon, such as the expeditions to Iberia that formed part of the Second Crusade alongside the Wendish Crusade.<sup>155</sup> Rather, it was a combination of missionary activity, through the conversion of outsiders, and of secular expansion on behalf of the Saxon nobility.<sup>156</sup> Scholars have examined this as a part of the German people’s eastward expansion,<sup>157</sup> alongside the later Danish conquest of Rügen, which leads to questions of frontier and cultural

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<sup>144</sup> Banach, “Saxons, Slavs, and Conversion”, 27.

<sup>145</sup> Chapters 59-65 of Book I.

<sup>146</sup> Helmold of Bolsau, *Helmoldi presbyteri Bozoviensis Cronica Slavorum*, 115.

<sup>147</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 173.

<sup>148</sup> Helmold of Bolsau, *Helmoldi presbyteri Bozoviensis Cronica Slavorum*, 115

<sup>149</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 172.

<sup>150</sup> Helmold of Bolsau, *Helmoldi presbyteri Bozoviensis Cronica Slavorum*, 122.

<sup>151</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 180.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 188.

<sup>154</sup> Banach, “Saxons, Slavs, and Conversion”, 31.

<sup>155</sup> Which Helmold mentions in Chapter 61, Book I.

<sup>156</sup> Banach, “Saxons, Slavs, and Conversion”, 33.

<sup>157</sup> Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 144.

exchange. Scandinavia may have been Christianized, but that process had taken place not so terribly long ago, and old prejudices and suspicions likely remained. Although Helmold acknowledged the mixed motives of his own people in crusading, he seems even less willing to attribute positive motives to the Danes.

### **What of the Rus'?**

How does all of this reflect back on the Rus', and Helmold's view of them?

Unfortunately, he said very little about the Rus', apart from their aforementioned Orthodoxy, and that he classified them as one of the Slavic nations.<sup>158</sup> This does tell us something, however, as he spoke at great length about the western and northern Slavs in his book which is, after all, a chronicle of their achievements. In his own work, he shows the Slavs to be rebels<sup>159</sup> and pirates,<sup>160</sup> just as he did with the Danes. They are pagans, whose conversions often prove false. It does not at all seem outrageous to suggest that Helmold thought little different of the Slavs than he did the Norse, and therefore thought little different of the Rus'. As fairly recent Christian converts, and following a different fashion within the Christian community, Helmold most likely thought of the Rus', when he thought about them at all, in the same manner as the Danes: Christians? Yes, but only just. Civilized? Even less so.

### **Gesta Danorum**

*Gesta Danorum*, The Deeds of the Danes, is a genre-defying epic, combining history, myth, chronicle, and the author's own deliberate invention into a sixteen-book long doorstopper. Written by Saxo Grammaticus, probably at the court of the Archbishop of Lund, it is an ambitious work that seems to offer an early bridge away from the older Carolingian and Ottonian chronicle styles and towards the epic histories of the later medieval and renaissance authors. Written in Denmark, it also offers a slightly different perspective, as it is Christian but neither Frankish nor German, like the others in this survey.

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<sup>158</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 45.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 194

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 279.

## **Mentions of Norsemen, Rus', and their Interaction**

Since the *Gesta Danorum* text is focused entirely on Denmark, it is no surprise that Denmark is mentioned more times by Saxo than in all the other sources combined. The word Denmark and its variants and ethnonyms appears 510 times; the word *Iceland* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 5 times; the word *Northman* and its variants and toponym appears 9 times; the word *Norway* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 144 times; the word *Sweden* and its variants and ethnonyms appears 180 times. In total, the various Norse peoples are mentioned directly 848 times.

Saxo also extensively refers to Russia in his multipart epic. The word Russia and its variants and ethnonyms appears 38 times; the city of Novgorod appears once, and the city of Kiev appears once. In total, Russia and its associated cities and peoples are mentioned directly 40 times.

Direct interactions occur between the two groups on 21 occasions, mostly in relation to wars, raids, and piracy.

## **Legendary Memories**

The high number of interactions between the Norse and the Rus' in the *Gesta Danorum*, the highest number of keyword instances of any source, all come with a major caveat to them. Almost all occur in the first nine books, widely acknowledged to be highly mythologized. These sections also feature giants, dragons, and the Norse gods,<sup>161</sup> and are intended to be a legendary history, on par with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, written about the same time.<sup>162</sup> And just as that national epic served as a way to create legendary memories to bring glory to its particular kingdom and dynasty, the *Gesta Danorum* is first and foremost a patriotic work of Danish propaganda, inventing a mythological past that portrayed Denmark as a grand empire that spanned the north and the east.

As to whether or not this propaganda was ordered by the king or not, scholarship on this matter has moved back and forth over the years. Initially, scholars considered the chief message of the *Gesta Danorum* to be one of royal primacy.<sup>163</sup> However, this view has

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<sup>161</sup> Albeit as human sorcerers using their magic to pass themselves off as gods.

<sup>162</sup> Sawyer, "Valdemar, Absalon and Saxo: Historiography and politics in medieval Denmark", 686.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 685.

been challenged since the 1980's, suggesting either a more literary motive<sup>164</sup> or a nuanced idea of relationships between the monarchy and aristocracy.<sup>165</sup> I would suggest instead that, for purposes of our study, this question is irrelevant, with the Russian holdings of the Danish kings merely acting as an example of a far-flung place that was accessible to the audience of the time. Examining the accounts of Danish conquests in Russia throughout the mythical books makes this clear.

In book five, King Frothi of Denmark makes war on the Huns and their Russian allies for control of the east. Whereas in earlier sources battles and wars are cursory affairs with most events glossed over, in the *Gesta Danorum* they are described poetically, with great rhetorical flourishes. These poetic asides, however, would seem to indicate that this is meant to not be taken literally. On at least two occasions the same imagery of water filled with corpses appears. Following a naval battle between the Danes and the Rus' fleet, during an epic war against the Huns and their allied peoples, the seas are described as:

*“quippe crebra interfectorum corpora nec minus scutorum hastarumque fragmenta iactante aestu universum maris constraverunt sinum. Itaque portus non angusti minus quam olidi errant; igitur mediis obstrictae cadaveribus haesere puppes. Nec putria quidem ac circumflua corpora remis abigere aut contis propellere poterant...”*<sup>166</sup> (That whole bight of the sea was strewn with myriads of dead bodies and as many shattered shields and spears tossing on the waves. The harbors were choked and stank, the boats, surrounded by corpses, were blocked in and could not move. Nor were they able to push off the rotten floating carcasses with oars or poles...)<sup>167</sup>

Later on in this same war against the Huns and their allies, this imagery of water filled with bodies appears again, *“Cuius prima dies tanta interfectorum strage recrudit, ut praecipui tres Rusciae fluvii cadaveribus velut ponte constrati pervii ac meabiles fierent.”*<sup>168</sup> (The first day saw a crescendo of such savage bloodshed that three principal Russian rivers were paved with corpses, as though they had been bridged to make them

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 687. Sawyer argues that the construction of the text appears to reflect multiple literary influences, including the bible in its division into a Pagan and a Christian section.

<sup>165</sup> Hermanson, “Friendship and politics in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*”, 261.

<sup>166</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, 130.

<sup>167</sup> *The History of the Danes*, Vol. 1, 146.

<sup>168</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, 132.

solid and passable.)<sup>169</sup> by the end of this war the Danish king rules over a network of client kings and chiefs which “*Rusciam ab ortu complectens, ad occasum Rheno flumine limitatum erat.*”<sup>170</sup> (embraced Russia to the east and were bounded by the River Rhine in the west.)<sup>171</sup>

So what is the reader meant to make of this great conquest and these horrendously bloody battles? The first question must be what Saxo meant by including them and constructing them as he did. Scholars of Saxo’s work have concluded that he included his mythical portions not as factual accounts, or allegories, but as examples of proper behavior.<sup>172</sup> This was a common medieval technique used especially in sermons<sup>173</sup> which was used in this case to reflect what Saxo believed a good Dane, in this case a good Danish King, although it could easily apply to a nobleman as well, should strive for. Before the first naval engagement above, King Frothi did not want to attack the enemy, believing them to be too few, and thus unsporting targets.<sup>174</sup> However, when pressed to go onwards, he found more enemies than he expected. When he encountered enemies in battle he left so many corpses, supposedly, as to be able to pave the water on two separate occasions, and eventually commands kings as far apart as the Rhine and Russia. What should a Dane at war be like? According to Saxo here, he should be sporting, brave, and unrelenting, ready to go far and wide in pursuit of victory.

And the wideness of his reach, here, is the important detail. To the Danes of Saxo’s day, the Rus’ were some of the farthest people with whom they routinely entered into diplomatic relations.<sup>175</sup> Throughout the High Medieval period, when Saxo was writing, travelogues of exotic locations were immensely popular, such as *The Book of John Mandeville*<sup>176</sup> and *The Travels of Marco Polo*. The east was also seen in Europe since early in the middle ages as exotic.<sup>177</sup> Exoticism tends to be less associated with overtly negative attitudes, as it implies curiosity and eccentric difference.<sup>178</sup> The language used

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<sup>169</sup> *The History of the Danes*, Vol. 1, 147.

<sup>170</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, 133.

<sup>171</sup> *The History of the Danes*, Vol. 1, 148.

<sup>172</sup> Fischer and Davidson, *The History of the Danes*, Vol. 2, 5-6. Citing K. Johansson, *Saxo Grammaticus, Komposition och världsbild i Gesta Danorum*. 1978.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>174</sup> *The History of the Danes*, Vol. 1, 145.

<sup>175</sup> Royal marriages between the two and royal fostering seem to have been common enough to be somewhat unremarkable. Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World*, 102-3.

<sup>176</sup> Cohen, *Pilgrimages, travel writing, and the medieval exotic*, 611.

<sup>177</sup> Petrinis, *Sailing to Byzantium: The Byzantine exotic in medieval French literature*, 1.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

by Saxo, of great epic battles, is filled with violence, but not with any negative judgement of the Rus'. They are merely an exotic enemy to be vanquished and are easily welcomed into the expanse of the Kingdom.

This, then, seems to be Saxo's running theme. Saxo is quite willing to denounce poor moral behavior,<sup>179</sup> but he does not seem to think poorly of pagans or foreigners, except to say that some have "unmasculine" habits.<sup>180</sup> His language, flowery and poetic, could easily have been used to demonize the enemy, but was not. This flowery language along with the exotic locale shows a great break from the earlier sources, with his history, and its Russian setting, reflecting an attitude of exoticism and poetic invention. The Rus', finally known well enough, could be integrated at last into the legends and myths of old.

### **Western Views of the Norse and Rus' Across The Sources**

As we have seen, these sources cover a broad swath of time, around four hundred years, and encompass five different dynasties, at least four distinct political entities<sup>181</sup>, and eleven separate authors and compilers. Each offers a different opinion about the world they found themselves in. Prudentius of Troyes and Hincmar of Reims, Einhard, Rudolf of Fulda, and Meginhardus of Fulda all watched as the empire they lived in collapsed around them, wracked by divisions within and beset by Norse, Slavic, Magyar, and Islamic raiders from without. Regino of Prüm likely experienced a Viking raid himself,<sup>182</sup> and his continuer, Adalbert, proved a reluctant and unsuccessful Apostle to the Rus', the first and only in our sources to actually go there himself. Thietmar, writing from a more secure position, found the time and freedom to record the deeds of strong emperors and condemn the licentious weakness, as he saw it, of the Russian king. Adam of Bremen took an antiquary's interest in the north and east, both for the glory of his bishopric and out of a genuine desire to record the history of a people he could see were on their way out, and, while Helmold found much wanting in the sincerity of these peoples to embrace a Christian European ethos, by the time of Saxo Grammaticus these

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<sup>179</sup> *The History of the Danes*, Vol. 1, 185.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> The Carolingian Empire, East Francia (Germany), the Holy Roman Empire, and the Kingdom of Denmark.

<sup>182</sup> *History and Politics*, 185. "In the year of the Lord's incarnation 882, the Northmen advanced through the Ardennes and entered the monastery of Prüm on the very day of the Lord's epiphany." Maclean speculates in the footnote that Regino could very well have been present, making this the only firsthand account of such an attack among the seven sources.

lands of the North and East were capable of being the setting for mythical high adventure; exotic and fantastical lands whose people, being part of the heroic past, could be forgiven of a multitude of sins.

What this means is that, to analyze all these sources in aggregate, they need to be broken down both stylistically as well as chronologically. In both analyses, keyword data is hugely important, especially for the chronological analysis. By looking at which words are used and how many are used, as we have done in a more cursory manner with each individual source, an interesting picture begins to emerge. An examination of Figure 1, given below, shows us all the data laid out in a chart.

	Norm.	DEN	SWE	NOR	ICE	RUS	NOV <sup>183</sup>	KIV <sup>184</sup>	Inter.	Total
Bertin	114	56	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	172
Fulda	71	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	81
Regino	71	17	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	92
Thietmar	3	8	0	0	0	6	0	2	1	19
Adam	22	231	114	100	12	13	2	1	7	495
Helmold	9	50	10	2	0	7	0	1	1	71
Saxo	9	510	180	144	5	38	1	1	21	888
Total	299	822	306	246	17	68	3	5	31	1797

Figure 1: Table of Keywords by Source

As previously mentioned, the words which I looked for in each of the seven sources were: Danes, Danish, Denmark, Iceland, Icelandic, Kiev, Northman, Northmen, Nortmannia, Norway, Norwegian, Norwegians, Novgorod, Russia, Russian, Rus', Sweden, Swedes, and Swedish. Before we can examine the data, however, there are a few issues of terminology which must be cleared up first that will prove vital to understanding the stew of numbers above.

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<sup>183</sup> Novgorod

<sup>184</sup> Kiev



## The Difficulty of Identifying Groups: What Makes a Northman?

In the twentieth century, with its nation-states and centralized systems of culture and linguistics, this question has clear cut answers: the ethnic group can be clearly defined by set lists of criteria.<sup>185</sup> However, the “globalist” world of the twenty-first century, with its large expatriate communities and hybrid cultures, may actually offer a better picture of what various groups thought of each other during the four hundred-odd year spread of these sources. A confusing example is the terminology for various subdivisions of larger groups. For example, while Thietmar makes use of only two terms (Northmen and Danes), Helmold makes multiple references to the various peoples of Scandinavia using different names, and the precise usage or value on each is hard to make sense of.

Whereas Thietmar seems to use Northman as a generic term, with Dane being a demonym for Northmen hailing from Denmark, Helmold can be taken two ways. At the beginning of the first book of his Chronicle, he says “*Dani siquidem ac Sueones, quos Northmannos vocamus...*”<sup>186</sup> (the Danes and Swedes, whom we call Northmen...) <sup>187</sup>which seem to indicate a view like Thietmar’s. However, in at least one case he uses the two words with distinction: “*Tunc etiam Saxonia vastata est a Northmannis sive Danis.*”<sup>188</sup> (Then, also, was Saxony laid waste by the Northmen OR Danes)<sup>189</sup> Now, the conjunction here could either indicate that it was Danes, who are Northmen, who laid waste to Saxony, or it could indicate confusion as to who exactly did the raiding, either identifiable Danes or unspecified Northmen, or, it could indicate an actual group called Northmen, distinct unto themselves.

So, as the heading above asks, what makes a Northman a Northman? The name itself suggests one defining trait: they come from the north, that is, from Scandinavia to the north of the Latin Christian world. However, this term does not seem to include the Finns, Sami, or Laplanders, who, on the rare occasions they are mentioned,<sup>190</sup> are not called Northman, or numbered amongst them. Indeed, the references to the Northmen that do give them some sort of subdivision refer to, in descending order of reference,

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<sup>185</sup> Braswell, “The Problem of Ethnicity and the Construction of K’iche’an Identity”, 173.

<sup>186</sup> Helmold of Bolsau, *Helmoldi presbyteri Bozoviensis Cronica Slavorum*, 13.

<sup>187</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 45.

<sup>188</sup> Helmold of Bolsau, *Helmoldi presbyteri Bozoviensis Cronica Slavorum*, 25.

<sup>189</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 62. Emphasis mine.

<sup>190</sup> Book IV of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis*.

Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians. Therefore, a Northman, to the authors of our sources, was Norse, either a Dane, Swede, or Norwegian.

This may seem to be an exercise in reinventing the wheel, but our modern understanding of a Northman is colored by the fact that over a thousand years have passed from the last Viking raid, and archaeology, saga studies, and historiography have shaped our ideas. To the medieval Chroniclers, especially in the earlier sources, there was no history to parse over, and therefore no shifting in historical views on the Norse peoples.<sup>191</sup> However, there were still multiple shifts in view over the entirety of the time period in question, as both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the language bears out. Specifically, with the use of this term “Northman”.

As we touched on in the *Annales Bertiniani*, Northman appears to be a generalized ethnic term, bordering on a slur. While it is technically correct, as they came from north of the people referring to them, the fact that the authors will refer to the Danes by name on some occasions, but not on others, tells us that in at least some of the cases, and I would argue most of them, the authors simply don’t care to correctly identify the people burning their countryside and pillaging their churches. Much like the use of terms like “Charlie” by American forces in Vietnam to refer to their enemies, Northman, I would argue, especially in the early sources, is an inherently negative term identifying an enemy Norseman.

The term Northman is actually applied to distinct, named individuals on three occasions in the *Annales Fuldenses*, which further illustrates this point. Roric the Northman is mentioned in 850 as holding Dorestad on behalf of Emperor Louis, until he is denounced as a traitor, turns to piracy, and reclaims his holdings by strong-arming the King.<sup>192</sup> Two years later, in 852, one Heriald<sup>193</sup> the Northman, who had converted to Christianity and served King Louis the German, was killed by the other nobility on suspicion of treachery.<sup>194</sup> In 885, one Godafrið<sup>195</sup> the Northman broke his faith and

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<sup>191</sup> As explored, for instance, by Gwyn Jones in his “A History of the Vikings”.

<sup>192</sup> *The Annals of Fulda*, 30.

<sup>193</sup> Herjald, or Hárald.

<sup>194</sup> *The Annals of Fulda*, 32.

<sup>195</sup> Guðfriðr.

prepared to attack the Rhine with a Norse army, only to be summoned to the royal court and executed.<sup>196</sup>

All of these people called Northmen are either suspected of, or are actually guilty of, treason and treachery. The linking of the name Northman to treachery is strengthened especially by Heriald, who is called Northman even though he is said to hail originally from the court of the King of Denmark.<sup>197</sup> Even when he could have been identified as a Dane, he was instead called by the generic term Northman. Now, it could be that Heriald was actually a Norwegian, or Swede, or some other Norse ethnicity. However, the combination of treacherous traits being associated with the name leads me to believe that, by referring to them as Northmen, the authors are being both descriptive and judgmental at the same time.

### **Northmen By The Numbers**

So if we consider Northman an inherently negative term, how does its usage play out across the sources? Referring back to Figure 1, there are three very clear patterns which emerge. As regards the usage of the word Northman, the number of usages of Northman decreases as sources move from earliest to latest. This is linked to the second clear pattern; as the number of references to Northmen decrease, the usage of other terms for the Norse, that is, references to Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland, increase, both in total percentage as well as in diversity. Some usages can be explained as reflecting the shift in wider political realities. For example, variants of Norway only appear with Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, where the references of Norway go, quite literally, from zero to one hundred. This can be perhaps explained as the conversion of Norway being more or less made stable, and therefore the Norwegians being brought into the Christian sphere. Thirdly, apart from two outliers, the total number of references to the Norse tends to increase as the sources move from earliest to latest.

The notion of Christianization is very important to understanding the shift in language used in the sources. There seems to be a strong causal correlation between the increased spread of Christianity to the north and the east of Europe and the inverse correlation of Northman to other names for the Norse. In the earliest sources, when the spread of

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<sup>196</sup> *The Annals of Fulda*, 97.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

Christianity had begun, following the missionary activities of St. Ansgar and others,<sup>198</sup> but not yet gained a sizeable following, the texts make use of very few terms for the Norse other than Northmen. The early sources (*Annales Bertiniani*, *Annales Fuldenses*, and the *Chronicon* of Regino and Adalbert) account for 256 of the 299 usages of the term Northman in the sources, over 85% of the total usages. The other terms they use are relatively limited; Denmark receives 93 mentions out of 822, 11% of the total, and Sweden is mentioned two times out of 306, a miniscule 0.6% of the total. These numbers reflect the pattern to which I referred earlier. As sources move from earliest to latest, the pejorative Northman decreases in usage, while the more neutral demonyms increase in both usage and diversity. While the word Northman does receive mention in later sources as well, it is then only used in historical contexts, and never to refer to contemporary Norse peoples.<sup>199</sup>

### **Across the Years, Why the Change?**

As I have stated above, this change seems to be tied to the spread of Christianity, and I have also been alluding to this idea throughout our exploration of the sources. The changing of the views of the west on the Norse is tied to their acceptance of the Christian religion, the consolidation of their various chiefdoms into centralized kingdoms, and the subsequent reduction in, and eventual cessation of, raiding. In the earliest source, the *Annales Bertiniani*, the Frankish court had knowledge of Sweden<sup>200</sup> as far back as at least 893, and Denmark even earlier. However, Sweden is barely mentioned in these sources; Denmark receives more mentions, but even still these are fewer than in later sources. Denmark made moves toward becoming a centralized state far earlier than the rest of Scandinavia,<sup>201</sup> and Danish rulers are mentioned throughout the sources as having diplomatic relations with the Carolingian<sup>202</sup> emperors. Denmark also was the first nation to formally convert to Christianity<sup>203</sup> and, since this would have required at least some acceptance from all levels of society, it must have begun earlier

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<sup>198</sup> *History of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 20. Comment is made in the footnotes that Adam tends to overexaggerate the success of missionary efforts in the North. However, regardless of outcome, these missionary activities brought the west and North into contact.

<sup>199</sup> In the case of Saxo, the use of Northmen tends to be either for semi-historical figures such as Ragnar Loðbrók, or as a poetic term for a pagan Norseman.

<sup>200</sup> *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 44.

<sup>201</sup> Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 9.

<sup>202</sup> *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 23. *The Annals of Fulda*, 24.

<sup>203</sup> Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 9.

still. Denmark, and to a much lesser extent, Sweden, must have been in contact with their southern neighbors in a non-military capacity for some time.

This is key because, when they are not engaging in hostile activities or trying to deceive the Franks or the Germans, people who may otherwise have been called Northmen are not called Northmen at all. In the *Annales Bertiniani* there are mentions of Danish envoys, but not of Northman envoys.<sup>204</sup> Charlemagne's war on the Saxons in Regino's *Chronicon* mentions both Danes and Northmen.<sup>205</sup> In more positive interactions, these people are called by their name, in negative interactions, they are Northmen.<sup>206</sup>

Unfortunately for the authors living in the ninth and tenth centuries, the majority of their experiences with the Norse were on the negative end of the spectrum. This was, after all, the height of the "Viking age", when Norse raiders plundered across Europe and the Mediterranean. They were helped along by the political instability within Europe, and to the Chroniclers they were a compounding factor, striking at the holiest of sites on the holiest of days.<sup>207</sup> Therefore, this early age is marked by severe distrust and distaste towards the Norse. They are vilified as despoilers and ravagers, lumped together under one name, and considered nothing more than treacherous, dangerous foes.

As the sources move towards the later end of the spectrum, this picture begins to change. Thietmar of Merseburg and Adam of Bremen both wrote from a place of greater security, during the reigns of the Ottonian and Salian emperors. These rulers, much stronger in their hold over the empire,<sup>208</sup> were better equipped to hold back outside aggressors, and it was during this time that raiding ceased to be a common Norse practice. Again, there are many factors which contributed to the decline in raiding,<sup>209</sup> both the increased spread of Christianity and the increased centralization of power within Europe played a strong part in this transition. This shift in behavior on the part of the Norse also brought about a shifting in western views of the Norse, which

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<sup>204</sup> *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 23.

<sup>205</sup> Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg, *Reginonis Abbatis Prumiensis*, 65.

<sup>206</sup> With the noted exception that Danes will also be referred to as pirates, See *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 50. Some of this confusion may be that certain groups were more easily distinguished as being Danes. The earliest example of a Norse raid in the *Annales Bertiniani* refers to Danish pirates. *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 39.

<sup>207</sup> 133. Regino's account of the Norse raids of 853 makes special mention of the fact that they murdered the Bishop of Nantes in church performing baptism on Easter Sunday.

<sup>208</sup> Warner, "Introduction", 7.

<sup>209</sup> See Barrett, "What caused the Viking age?"

seems to have taken two shapes. The first, more pessimistic view, is best exemplified by Thietmar and his *Chronicon*. Thietmar referred to the Norse in a mostly negative manner, especially concerned that they were false converts and traitors. Adam, on the other hand, took a more optimistic outlook. Adam saw the Norse as a people well on their way into the Christian fold and tended to be kinder to them overall in the *Gesta Hammaburgensis*.

This dichotomy has multiple causes. Thietmar was writing slightly earlier than Adam of Bremen, and therefore experienced a slightly different geopolitical climate. Thietmar, as bishop of Merseburg, had political concerns which Adam, a mere cleric at the court of the Prince-Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, did not. Thietmar's *Chronicon* is, first and foremost, a celebration of the Ottonian emperors, and therefore they are the focus, their virtues magnified, and their foes villainy likewise increased for the purpose of contrast. In this case it is easy to throw the Nordic foreigners under the bus, as it were, for the sake of the narrative.

Adam of Bremen, however, was writing to celebrate another cause, the deeds of the Archbishopric he served. The church in Hamburg had, from its very inception, been tasked with missionary work in the Scandinavian region, and, as other bishoprics popped up in Scandinavia and missionaries from other parts of Europe were invited in,<sup>210</sup> he needed to reassert the leading role that Hamburg-Bremen played in that mission. If the Norse were still unreliably Christian, this could have been used to show the Archbishopric as being unsuccessful in the task assigned them. Therefore, a view of the Norse as converted and friendly would make a much more convincing account.

However, I find it hard to believe that these men could write about the Norse (and, as we will see, the Rus' as well) solely based on an ideological bent without their own views coloring their descriptions. There is another explanation which I find much more persuasive. Merseburg is located in central Germany, almost four hundred kilometers southeast of Hamburg, which is much closer to what was then Danish territory. Adam of Bremen, in writing his book, even spent time at the Danish court befriending the Danish king. Exposure to these outsiders over time seems to have ameliorated the opinions of the west. Thietmar, while still holding more negative views, held an attitude

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<sup>210</sup> Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 9.

more of suspicion than of outright hostility. Thietmar's Danes are rebellious<sup>211</sup> and ferocious,<sup>212</sup> yes, but are also submissive<sup>213</sup> to the emperor. Adam, with even more time separating him from the height of Norse aggression and with even further exposure to their culture, held an even more positive view, with the ending of Book IV praising the conversion of a people given to barbarity and piracy<sup>214</sup> to a new life of Christian devotion.<sup>215</sup>

By the time Helmold of Bolsau and Saxo Grammaticus are writing, even more time has passed, and the Viking age is completely over. Denmark is even partaking in crusades and destroying pagan shrines in the Baltic region. The authors still have critiques and critical views of the Nordic peoples, by now referred to almost exclusively by their actual demonyms as Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, or Icelander. However, these “negative” views are no longer related to barbarism but are moral judgements that are also leveled against other Christian rulers. Helmold is quick to accuse the Danes of being lackluster in their zeal during the Wendish Crusade, or their betrayal of the Slavs after the sack of Rügen, but he is likewise willing to accuse his own overlord, Henry the Lion, of putting profit ahead of Christian piety.<sup>216</sup> Saxo likewise is more apt to judge pagan characters more for their failings in terms of manners and personal moral behavior than for their paganism *per se*. Once again, historical distance from events and the continued acceleration of Christianizing activity made the Norse appear less threatening and moved the views of the west such that the Nordic peoples were now part of the wider European family.

### **Rus' By the Numbers**

So, having accounted for the Norse, and continuing with our hypothesis that the views of the west regarding the Norse would be roughly equivalent with the views of the west on the Rus', what do the numbers say on the matter? Referring yet again to Figure 1, the overall number of references to the Rus' and to Russia are absolutely dwarfed by the number of mentions of the Norse in all sources. Speaking solely of numbers, the patterns seem to follow, generally, the same as for the Norse. As sources move from

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<sup>211</sup> *Ottonian Germany*, 131.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>214</sup> *History of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 223.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>216</sup> *The Chronicle of the Slavs*, 188.

earliest to latest, the diversity of words used to indicate the Rus', in this case mention of their chief cities of Novgorod and Kiev, increases. Likewise, as sources move from earliest to latest, the number of references to the Rus' increase in quantity. However, this is not a perfectly smooth process, and there are some quantitative statistical questions that must be examined before we can progress to a qualitative analysis of what is said about Russia and the Rus'.

One problem that must be assessed is the varying percentage of total keywords taken up by the mentions of the Rus' in each source. For example, the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* contains sixteen separate mentions of Russia and the Rus', second only to the *Gesta Danorum* in terms of total numbers. However, Adam of Bremen also logged 495 total keyword usages, which means that his references to the Rus' account for only 3.2% of his total usages. For comparison, the Chronicon of Regino and Adalbert only mentions the Rus' three times, but, with 92 total keywords, their Russian account also takes up 3.2% of the keywords. In the same manner Thietmar, with only eight mentions of the Rus', used up a whopping 42% of his keywords on them, mostly in talking about king Vladimir of Kiev.

So what use are all these percentages? Well, for the scholar trying to find which source to examine in search of pertinent information, they force a pause and consideration. It is the quality, not merely the quantity, which needs to be examined. Saxo Grammaticus mentions the Rus' or Russia 40 times, more times than all of the other sources combined, and yet those keywords only account for 4.5% of his total. And, whereas Adalbert only uses the word Rus' three times, his account is vitally important as the only account from someone who had actually been to Russia himself, however briefly. It also forces the scholar to ask why the Rus are indeed mentioned so rarely.<sup>217</sup>

### **The Rus' Across The Years**

This, then, is the hardest part of the analysis. How does one go about identifying medieval western views of a people they never seemed to talk about? As mentioned at the very beginning of this thesis, we know from archaeological evidence, linguistic analysis, and historiography that the Rus' were greatly, or at least partly, influenced by the Norse, with much ethnic and cultural mixing. If so, do the attitudes of the west seem

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<sup>217</sup> Indeed, only Icelandic keywords receive less mention across the sources.



to match? The qualitative analysis certainly seems to suggest this is the case. In the earliest source the Rus' were greeted by Louis the Pious with suspicion. His suspicions revealed that the envoys were ethnically Swedish, and therefore they were imprisoned as spies. When Adalbert spoke of the Rus' it was of their false promises and unwillingness to adopt the Christian faith. Thietmar continued that criticism with his three-chapter denunciation of King Vladimir, decrying his lack of piety. After these authors mentions of Russia increase, but the quality of information decreases. After Thietmar, all the references are primarily either geographical, annalistic,<sup>218</sup> or, in the case of Saxo Grammaticus, mythical.

This shift seems to move in a pattern similar to that of the Norse patterns previously discussed. Initially, these people, the Rus', were pagan outsiders, not to be trusted. The brevity of their appearance in the *Annales Bertiniani*, coupled with their absence from the *Annales Fuldenses* and their absence from Regino's portion of the *Chronicon*, strongly suggests that they did not try and resume contact with the Latin West until the embassy of Queen Helen, at least with the more westerly regions of the former Carolingian empire. This is not exactly a bold statement; Kiev is a long way from France and Germany. However, it does indicate something of the western attitude that they say nothing. By not making mention they are, in a sense, writing them off as a non-issue. With Norse raids, Breton uprisings,<sup>219</sup> and Slavic rebellions going on all around them, with the occasional Muslim or Hungarian incursion for flavor, it makes sense that the Rus' were ignored in these early sources, since the Western political class they were written for simply didn't need to interact with them.

This interaction picked up, and quickly. The geographic distance from the West was less great for the easternmost and northernmost Christian realms; Poland saw many royal marriages between their ruling houses and that of Kiev,<sup>220</sup> and all three of the Scandinavian kingdoms saw royal marriages or royal fosterlings with the Rus'.<sup>221</sup> Very quickly the sources move from a hostile to a suspicious view. Adalbert of Magdeburg was unsuccessful at bringing the Rus' into the Latin Christian fold, through a combination of royal politics and his own lack of preparation and training. The adoption

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<sup>218</sup> Brief entries mentioning marriages, exiles, and wars.

<sup>219</sup> Much of both the *Annales Bertiniani* and Regino's portion of the *Chronicon* is occupied with wars against the Bretons.

<sup>220</sup> Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 73.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

of a Greek influenced Christianity by the Rus', and Vladimir's "poaching" of a Byzantine bride likely led to Thietmar's denunciation of Vladimir of Kiev as a false convert, and moreover seems to have driven the later chroniclers to pay less attention to the region as a whole. Adam of Bremen was mostly concerned with Russia as a geographer, and Saxo with Russia as an exotic locale.

So, qualitatively, what can be said about the views of the West on the Rus'? The pattern here seems to follow that of the views of the West on the Norse. The Rus' were a marginal people to the world of the Latin West, just like the Norse, and were treated in the same manner. In the earliest sources the scant references to the Rus' paint them as spies and liars. As the sources move towards the latest example their view seems to be that the Rus' are of dubious status as Christians. As time goes by this view does not die out entirely; although he never passes direct judgement on them, Helmold held a somewhat sour opinion on the piety of most of the powerful men in the more contemporary chapters of his *Chronica Slavorum*. However, the trend of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* and the *Gesta Danorum* seems to indicate that a second view existed, of Russia as simply another faraway land within the wider Christian world.

## Conclusions

Having looked at each source individually, and then at the sources collectively, we can make a few reasonable assumptions about the opinions of western Europe towards the Norse and Rus' in the middle ages. The trends in both indicate a similar association in ideas and attitudes toward both groups, and the shifting historical views seem to mirror each other as well. Therefore, the two can be used, albeit with caution, to stand in for each other. In the earliest sources, the Western view was one of fear and dislike. Outsiders were to be considered dangerous and untrustworthy. Towards the middle of the period, as both the Rus' and Norse adopted Christianity, this shifted to a view of these outsiders as untrustworthy and unstable. The newly converted pagans were always close to reverting to their previous behavior. By the end of the period in question, when these people have become Christianized, their behavior is viewed in the same light as other nations of the West. This not always flattering light is not extended to their past, which is instead mythologized and made into exotic tales.

These changes and trends are reflective of the historical, cultural, and political environments under which they emerged. They reflect a world in which anyone coming from outside of a community was a potential threat, where information did not necessarily travel in the same direct and instantaneous manner it does today, and where religious affiliation was more important than national or ethnic background. To a modern scholar in search of opinions about the activities of Norse merchants along the Volga and Dnieper rivers, or confirmation of the Rurikids, this may seem frustrating or fruitless, which is why this particular avenue and these particular sources have for so long been ignored. Indeed, they seem to reveal more about the West than the North and the East.

Nevertheless, there is much to learn here. It explains much of their silence on direct interactions. The raw data shows surprisingly few interactions between the two groups, despite only one source lacking a mention of both peoples. The account from the *Annales Bertiniani* tells us that the west certainly knew about these interactions, but the treatment of those Swedish Rus' tells us that both groups were treated the same. When searching the sources for accounts of Norsemen operating amongst other peoples, or Rus' operating amongst others, for that matter, a scholar must examine whether or not the absence of proof is really proof of absence. After all, the two appear to have been treated amorously by the West in terms of attitude, and unless identified by name or

clearly demarcated by area of activity, it is unlikely that a wandering Norseman in the east would have earned any mention. The views of the West on the North in the East, then, while not expressed often in writing, were almost certainly the same as the West's views of the North alone, and likewise for their Eastern brethren. First fear, then suspicion, and, finally, acceptance as part of the wider Christian world.

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