

# **The Viking Rus and the Khazars**

Points of contact in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries

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Thesis for a Master's degree in Medieval Viking and Norse Studies

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## Preface

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of notable individuals. I would first and foremost like to thank my advisor Thorir Jonsson Hraundal who immediately began to provide assistance and guidance when I first sought him out to ask vaguely about Arabs and Vikings. He has been a constant presence throughout my studies at Háskóli Íslands, assisting me in my study of the Arabic language, and providing direction and guidance.

Secondly, I would like to thank those who read through my drafts and helped me to write coherently and consistently.

Last, I would like to thank my wife, Hildur Jones, for her invaluable contributions and for her sharp eye in editing this work.

This thesis was written solely by me, the undersigned. I have read and understand the University of Iceland Code of Ethics ([https://english.hi.is/university/university\\_of\\_iceland\\_code\\_of\\_ethics](https://english.hi.is/university/university_of_iceland_code_of_ethics)) and have followed them to the best of my knowledge. I have correctly cited to all other works or previous work of my own, including, but not limited to, written works, figures, data or tables. I thank all who have worked with me and take full responsibility for any mistakes contained in this work. Signed:

Reykjavík, 17/05/2020

*Elliot Anning Jones*

## **A Note on Transliteration**

In this thesis, some words and place names from the Arabic language are used and transliterated from Arabic into Latin letters. The lines over some of the vowels represent the long vowels in the Arabic language. This is done to ensure the accuracy of the transliteration.

In addition, definitions of the transliterated words has been provided where applicable.

## Abstract

Eastern Vikings, or Rus as they were usually named by contemporary writers, engaged in diverse activities to sustain themselves; they raided and plundered their neighbors, but they also engaged in trade and acted as merchants and middlemen for various goods. In addition, they also functioned as bodyguards (e.g. the Varangian guards at Constantinople). Of particular note is the unique relationship between the Rus and the khaganate of Khazaria that is attested to in various sources. For example, the Khazars permitted the Rus access to the Caspian Sea for the purpose of pursuing trade, the Rus functioned as bodyguards for the Khazarian ruler, and the sources (primarily written in Arabic) present the ruler of the Rus as the “Rus Khagan”. The use of this title is quite odd since it was not a title that could simply be borrowed by non-Turkic peoples. The most convincing hypothesis put forth by one of the primary experts in the field, argues that the presence of a “Rus Qağanate” suggests a vassal-lord relationship between the Rus and the Khazars. That is, the Rus would have to have been subordinate to the Khazars for such a title to have been legitimate. As of yet though, this unique relationship between the Rus and the Khazars has not yet been fully explored and modern scholarship has not yet pursued this question in great detail. Therefore, this thesis will seek to provide an overview of the Rus-Khazar contacts as well as provide some further insight to the rapport that clearly exists between these two peoples. This approach is essential to further clarifying the broader question of Viking involvement in the East. This topic and the geographical region involved receive far less attention than Viking and Scandinavian activities in Western Europe (this is in part due to the majority of sources being in Arabic). A more in-depth consideration of Eastern Scandinavian activities would create a fuller and clearer picture of the Viking impact on the early Medieval World. The desired outcome of such research is to determine with greater accuracy the relationship between the Scandinavian Rus peoples and the Turkic tribes (specifically the Khazars) around them, and to provide a launch pad for further research.

# Ágrip

Austrænir víkingar og Khazarar: samband þeirra á níundu og tíundu öld

Austrænir víkingar, eða Rus eins og þeir voru jafnan kallaðir af samtímaheimildamönnum, stunduðu bæði strandhögg og ránsferðir en líka kaupmennsku, og voru jafnvel í sérstökum lífvarðasveitum eins og hjá keisaranum í Konstantínópel. Samband Rus og Khazara er um margt sérstakt og vitnisburður um það hefur varðveist í mörgum heimildum. Khazarar leyfðu Rus t.d. að komast um Volgu inn á Kaspíahaf til að versla, Rus voru lífverðir fyrir leiðtoga Khazara, og sumar arabískar heimildir tala um Rus Khagan, eða khan. Þessi titill er óvenjulegur þar sem hann var einungis notaður meðal túrkískra þjóða. Ein sterkasta kenning sem hefur komið fram er líklega hafi verið til einskonar Rus Kaghanat, í tengslum við veldi Khazara. Rus urðu þannig að hafa verið undir stjórn Khazara til að geta notað þennann titil. Hið einstaka samband Rus og Khazara hefur hins vegar ekki verið skoðað til hlítar í fræðunum, og þessari ritgerð er ætlað að vera framlag í þá umræðu. Þetta efni getur enn fremur varpað frekara ljósi á sögu víkinga í Austurvegi, sem gjarnan hefur notið mun minni athygli en saga þeirra í vestri (ekki síst vegna þess að flestar heimildirnar eru á arabísku). Nánari skoðun á umsvifum austrænna víkinga gefur okkur skýrari mynd af áhrifum víkinga á heim miðalda. Dýpri skilningur á sambandi hinna skandínavísku Rus og túrkískra ættbálka (sérstaklega Khazara) er lykilatriði, og getur reynst stökkpallur fyrir frekari rannsóknir.

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## Introduction

Between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea runs the Caucasus mountain range. This strategic landmark marked the Southern boundary of the kingdom of Khazaria between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Khazars spoke a Turkic language and carved out a kingdom that stretched from the Caucasus mountains in the south to encompass the southern parts of the Dnieper and Volga rivers in the north. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Viking Age began in Scandinavia. Scandinavian raiders and traders quickly traveled far and wide and began to settle throughout the regions they visited. In the east, the fur-rich Baltic region attracted many Scandinavians, and those who migrated there came to be known as *Rus*. They settled in the Baltic region and various groups of Rus engaged in a variety of mercantile activities in the south, though primarily remained based out of the North Baltic region. A small group of Rus eventually reached the city of Kiev along the Dnieper river in the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century, and this would become the center of the Kievan domain a century later. Much of the economic capital of Kiev came about through trade, up and down the Dnieper river, as well as taking advantage of the numerous overland routes through which, they also gained access to the Volga river. One such trading partner of the Rus, was the Jewish Kingdom of Khazaria. The Rus had many trading partners and various treaties with the kingdoms and peoples around them. However, their relationship with the Khazars was especially unique. Various points of contact existed, one of which was trade access to the Caspian Sea. Before this thesis turns to examine these various points of contact, we will introduce both the Khazars and the Rus people in their historical contexts in order to better understand the significance of their relationship. These depictions of both peoples will make use primarily of the major Arab and Persian sources, although specifically in the case of the Rus, the Latin *Annales Bertiniani* and the Slavonic *Primary Chronicle* will also be considered. The latter, however, we must approach with a great deal of caution. The primary Arab and Persian sources that will be surveyed to provide historical context are the works of Al-Ṭabarī, al-Mas'ūdī, Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Rustah, and the anonymous Persian account titled *Hudūd al-'Ālam*. The Arab and Persian sources have largely been ignored until quite recently in modern

scholarship's investigation into both the Khazars and the Rus. Thus, this thesis will largely base its findings on the Arab and Persian sources.

Once the historical setting has been established for both people groups, we will turn to specific points of contact that existed between the Khazars and the Rus. Namely, both the Khazar and the Rus states relied heavily on trade and mercantile activities, and thus the sources clearly indicate a strong trading relationship between them. Secondly, there is the issue of the so-called Rus Khāqānate. This Turkic title is attributed to the Rus ruler in both the Arab-Persian sources as well as western Latin sources and the use of such a title raises many questions since the Rus were not a Turkic people. To what extent did the institution extend geographically or politically? If indeed a Khāqānate existed among the Rus, did its authority spread to all the various groups of Rus? Was the Khāqān a member of the Rus and was it independent of the Khazars, or did the Rus Khāqān function as a vassal of the Khazarian Khāqān? Do the references to the Khāqān Rus in fact refer to the Khazarian Khāqān, and were certain groups of Rus under the dominion of the Khazars, or at least subordinates in their tribal union? This thesis will attempt to provide answers and will address the leading theories concerning the supposed Rus Khāqānate. Third, the Rus quickly adopted many different customs from the various peoples around them; this is perhaps most evident both in Ibn Fadlan's account of the death and burial of a Rus chieftain and his description of the Rus ruler. Thus, cultural exchange will be addressed. In addition, the Rus served as bodyguards for the Khazarian Khāqān which most likely helped promote the cultural exchange that seems to have taken place. Finally, the Khazar state ultimately declined and fell during the tenth century. While many factors contributed to the downfall of Khazaria, the Rus nonetheless played an important role in their fall and ultimately went from subordinates of the Khazars, to their conquerors. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to survey and outline Arab source material as it relates to both Rus and Khazar history. The study of the Viking Age in the west has received a disproportionate amount of attention and research compared to Viking involvement in the east, and thus this thesis will endeavor to contribute to the study of Viking impact and association in Eastern Europe by providing a survey of primarily Arab and Persian materials in order to narrow in on the Khazar-Rus relationship. Modern scholars such as Peter B. Golden, Thomas S. Noonan, Wladyslaw Duczko, and Thorir Jonsson Hraundal have explored the contacts between the Rus and Khazars. Golden's work is the most extensive covering the question of a Rus Khāqānate; economy of the Khazars, Khazarian origins and language, etc. Noonan focuses his efforts on analyzing the

economy of the Khazars, while Duczko narrows his studies to the archeological findings of Rus culture in the Baltic region and touches on the Rus in Latin sources, as well as the question of the Rus Khāqānate. Finally, Jonsson Hraundal concentrates on the Rus in Arabic sources, though he addresses the Rus-Khazar relationship in his dissertation. These works and the conclusions drawn by the authors will be addressed in more detail later on, throughout this thesis, as they become relevant. On the whole though, the Rus-Khazar relationship requires more study and research.

# I: The Khazars

## Concerning Turks

The Khazar state came about as a result of the breakdown of a Turkic tribal union at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The origins of the Turkic peoples lie shrouded in mystery and folkloric legend, nonetheless it is possible to come to some factual knowledge of their origins. The terms “Turk” & “Turkic” refer to a linguistic group of people comprised of many tribes and ethnicities. The spread of the term “Turk” (*Turk, pl. Atrāk*) can be largely attributed to Islamic geographers and historians who used the term rather indiscriminately to describe the many tribes they encountered on the steppe<sup>1</sup>. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC, to the north of China, a group of nomads termed the Hsiung-nu, under the leadership of Mao Dun, brought into submission many of the other tribes around them with the intent of raiding the Qin (and subsequently Han) dynasty to the south in order to secure the steady flow of goods and products into their hands. The nomad’s mastery of mounted warfare allowed them to make quick raids which the sedentary culture of the Chinese initially could not repel<sup>2</sup>. This polity of tribes lasted until the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and has been credited with laying the groundwork for future nomadic empires and proto forms of statehood<sup>3</sup>. In addition, their activities pushed many Turkic elements out of the Altay zone westward, and these intermixed with other people groups they encountered during their move west.

Despite the demise of the Hsiung-nu polity in the first century, they nonetheless played a major role in affecting later nomadic empires and provided the catalyst for migrations that affected, not only Europe but also, the movements of the Iranian and Altaic peoples<sup>4</sup>. In the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century AD, according to the Chinese sources, the Northern Wei ruler expanded into the territories north of China, including those of the Hsiung-nu<sup>5</sup>. This caused some tribes to break off and migrate westwards to the region of southern Altay and adopt the name “Turk”.

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<sup>1</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1992. *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2 and 115.

<sup>2</sup> Chang, Chun-shu. 2007. *The Rise of the Chinese Empire: Nation, State, and Imperialism in early China, ca. 1600 B.C- A.D 8*. Vol. 1. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 135-137.

<sup>3</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1992. *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, 67.

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

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

Unfortunately, due to lacunae in the available evidence, it is not possible to determine the original homeland of the so-called Turks or Turkic elements<sup>6</sup>. However regarding the Turkic elements, evidence seems to suggest a Mongoloid people, who migrated westward, and absorbed many Indo-European elements throughout their movement. In both western and eastern Central Asia, Turkic elements established powerful tribal unions and Khāqānates<sup>7</sup>. In the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century AD the Sabirs, who were most likely affiliated with the Western Turkic Tribal Union, began to raid Transcaucasia, modern day Georgia and Azerbaijan. It would be from the subsequent breakup of this tribal union that the Khazars would emerge dominant in the Caucasus region<sup>8</sup>. Many of the sources, particularly the Arab ones, introduce the Khazars as a much older people and presence, however these references cannot be verified or backed up<sup>9</sup>. A variety of hypotheses have been offered concerning the origins of the Khazars, but so far, a definite conclusion does not exist. In any case, positive suggestions concerning the existence of the Khazars as an independent or even major force prior to the 6<sup>th</sup> century remain elusive. The most likely scenario, according to Peter Golden, is that the Khazars were an Oğuric tribe belonging to the Turkic Sabir union which took over the Caucasus region and emerged as the subsequent head of that union sometime in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>10</sup>. In his work, the Arab historian and geographer al-Mas'ūdī presents the Khazars as “Sabir” in Turkic, which further reinforces the idea of the Khazars as an important element of the Turkic Sabir union<sup>11</sup>. Peter Golden concludes that it is within a Turkic context that the Khazar Khāqānate appears as a regional force<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Peter B. Golden in his work *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples—Ethnogenesis and State formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* deals quite thoroughly with ethnogenesis of the Turkic peoples and the problems associated with trying to piece together a coherent and concise history. He puts forth many hypotheses concerning the origin of the Turks as a people.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 127-141.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 235-236.

<sup>9</sup> For further discussion concerning notices in Arab and other sources, see D.M. Dunlop *A History of the Jewish Khazars*, chap. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1992. *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, 236.

<sup>11</sup> Muqaddasi, al-. 1870. *The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions (Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm)*.

Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum. Edited by M. J. de Goeje Lugduni Batavorum: E. J. Brill, 83.

<sup>12</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1992. *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*.

## The Emergence of the Khazars

While the emergence of the Khazar state remains murky, they clearly established themselves by the 7<sup>th</sup> century in the Caucasus region<sup>13</sup>. It was here that they carved out a territory for themselves between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. They subsequently brought many other tribes and peoples under their dominion and into their union. For example, a Hebrew source termed *the reply of Joseph* which is part of a correspondence between the Khazarian ruler and Ḥasday ibn-Shaprut who resided in al-Andalus, has the Khazars in the 7<sup>th</sup> century displacing and subduing the Bulgar tribe, who were former allies of the Khazars<sup>14</sup>. While this does not explicitly appear in the sources, that the Khazars had already displaced tribes and peoples such as the Barsilians prior to their takeover of Bulgar territory, seems a likely scenario<sup>15</sup>. It is worth noting that this possession of Bulgar territory most likely took place during the lull in Khazar-Arab war of the late 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, though the fighting between the Khazars and the Bulgars took place for most of the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>16</sup>. Thus, the Khazars found themselves at the eastern edge of the Black Sea which brought them into contact with the Byzantine Empire. The acquisition of new lands and contact with the Byzantines afforded the Khazars new opportunities, trading partners, and eventually even military help against the ever-expanding Islamic Empire.

To the south lay the Umayyad Caliphate (succeeded by the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century) with whom the Khazars fought frequently for the next hundred years for control of the Caucasus region<sup>17</sup>. The Khazars sought to launch raids for the acquisition of valuable goods and other resources which not only brought revenue to the union but also helped to maintain unity amongst the tribal constituents. On the other side of the Caucasus mountains, the Islamic Caliphate, which was expanding in North Africa and pressuring the Byzantine territories, sought to increase its holdings and control the strategic pass through the Caucasian mountains. This Arabo-Khazar struggle lasted approximately a hundred years with the Arabs making extensive progress all the way to the Volga river. However, despite winning a significant battle in 737 and forcing the Khazar

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<sup>13</sup> The word state is used here rather loosely, see Peter Golden on terming nomadic polities as states, the modern word has connotations that are not appropriate in this context, rather the extent of Khazar influence and control is referred to here.

<sup>14</sup> Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 43 and 126-133.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Di Cosmo, Nicola, Allen J Frank, and Peter B Golden. 2009. *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 265.

<sup>17</sup> Wasserstein, David J. 2007. "The Khazars and the World of Islam." In *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium Hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute*, by Peter B Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai and András Róna-Tas, 373-386. Leiden: Brill, 375.

Khāqān to convert to Islam, the Islamic Caliphate proved unable to maintain its holdings and supply lines beyond the Caucasus mountains<sup>18</sup>. So, in the east, like in 732 at the Battle of Tours in the west, the Arab expansion northwards found its limit against the Khazars.

Despite continued sparks of conflict, on the whole Arabo-Khazar relations turned more commercial in the 8<sup>th</sup> century as the Khazars established themselves as middlemen controlling trade routes and access to the Caspian Sea. With their kingdom wedged between the Black Sea to the west, the Caspian Sea to the east, the Caliphate to the south and various other kingdoms to the north, they managed to control busy trade routes which proved quite advantageous to them<sup>19</sup>. The 'Abbāsīd Caliphate's rapidly expanding trade found access to the markets of Eastern Europe and beyond through Khazaria by way of the Volga-Caspian trading network.

This expansion by the Islamic Caliphate helped to bring Byzantium and Khazaria into alliance. While this alliance did not prevent both parties from fighting over the Crimea, they nonetheless often united against their common foe to the south<sup>20</sup>. Both Constantinople and Khazaria found themselves under pressure from the Caliphate and thus they formed an alliance and trade relationship. Prior to these events of the 8<sup>th</sup> century though, in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Khazars fought alongside the Greeks against Persia in approximately 627<sup>21</sup>. According to Greek, Armenian, and Georgian sources, the Khazars met the Greeks at Tiflis south of Caucasus as the latter marched against the Persians. There, they formed an alliance and the Khazar Khāqān left a contingent of soldiers with the Greeks to aid in their war against Persia. After this incident, sources remain quiet concerning Greek-Khazars relations until the very end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The Khazars were engaged in protracted conflict with the Arabs during this time, and only after a lull in the fighting, consolidated their hold on the Caucasus region at the expense of their neighbors.

This strengthening of their position brought the Khazars into renewed contact with the Byzantines, though this time at the eastern edge of the Black Sea. The Khazars reappear at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in approximately 695, in Byzantine sources<sup>22</sup>. According to Greek writers, the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 375-376.

<sup>19</sup> Golden, B. Peter. 1980. *Khazar Studies; A Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*. Vol. I. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 107.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>21</sup> Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Howard-Johnston, James. 2007. "Byzantine sources for Khazar History." In *New Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium Hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute*, by Peter B Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai and András Róna-Tas, 163-194. Leiden: Brill, 168.

ex-Emperor Justinian II appeared before the Khazar Khāqān and apparently married the Khāqān's sister. The current Byzantine Emperor, Tiberius III, having heard of Justinian's presence in Khazaria, sent word to the Khāqān and requested he turn Justinian over to him and offered the Khāqān a large reward. The Khāqān agreed and made preparations to turn over the ex-Emperor<sup>23</sup>. However, Justinian II eluded capture and eventually managed to regain his former throne in Constantinople.

In retaliation for his treatment at the hands of the Khazars, Justinian II made arrangements for an invasion of the Crimea. According to the sources, the Greek army consisted of 100,000 soldiers with the aim to punish the inhabitants of the Crimea (which it seems was at least partially under Khazarian control) and to set up a governor in the city of Cherson<sup>24</sup>. The initial aims of the invasion were fulfilled, though Justinian II ordered his men to return back to Constantinople despite the lateness of the season and reportedly lost a three quarters of his army.

Justinian II, unperturbed by this disaster, again made ready to sail, but was dissuaded when the inhabitants of Crimea made preparations to defend themselves and requested Khazarian support. Justinian II attempted to repair the damaged relations between himself and the Khazars, but his overtures proved in vain<sup>25</sup>. Justinian II then invaded a second time. The Khazars backed Phillipicus who had been elected Emperor by the envoys sent by Justinian II to placate the Khazars in the first place. Having extracted promises and financial security from the Greeks, the Khazar Khāqān turned Phillipicus over to the Byzantines. This story demonstrates the prominence of the Khazars, at the very least as a regional power, wielding influence over the politics of the Byzantine empire. Some intermarriage between the Greeks and the Khazars took place between their rulers, though this is often only briefly noted in the Byzantine sources<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 172.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 173-174.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 175-176.

<sup>26</sup> Howard-Johnston, James. 2007. *The World of the Khazars*, 168.

## The Arab/Persian Sources

Thus, the Khazars emerged as a regional power in the Caucasus. In order to provide a fuller picture of the Khazar people and state, this thesis will now consider some of the major Arab and Persian sources on the Khazars. These sources provide historians with a great deal of information on the Khazars and Arab relations with them. The study of such sources is imperative for a deeper and clearer understanding of the Khazar people and culture, as well as how they were perceived by those around them. This thesis will consider some primary Arab and Persian authors, their works, and how the Khazars feature in them. However, an extensive evaluation of the following sources will not be provided since this falls outside the scope of research and such evaluation has already been done by other scholars. In addition, the following sources do not represent an exhaustive list of Arab and Persian sources that deal with the Khazars; rather this is simply an overview of the main ones. Finally, not every mention of the Khazars provided by each of the following sources will be examined, but rather the notices which serve to further the depiction of Khazar society will be highlighted.

### Al-Ṭabarī

The first author under consideration is al-Ṭabarī who composed and arranged *akhbār*<sup>27</sup>. His work stands as one of the largest and most complete of the early Medieval era. Al-Ṭabarī was born in the year 839 and was a scholar of the religious sciences<sup>28</sup>. He studied the *hadith*<sup>29</sup>, and from this, he studied the Islamic community and its actions, finally he also studied law and jurisprudence. The work of al-Ṭabarī, *Mukhtasar*, stands as one of the largest and most complete writings in comparison to other authors of the early Medieval era, such as Ibn Qūṭīya, who confined his work to the history of al-Andalus, or Ibn Abd al-Hakam, who dealt primarily with the Islamic history of Egypt and secondarily to the western African lands and al-Andalus. Al-Tabari, in contrast to these other writers, narrows in on the 'Abbāsīd dynasty and relates *akhbār* dealing with the various caliphs and officials of the 'Abbāsīd dynasty. He frames his telling of the 'Abbāsīd dynasty by opening his work with the history of world from Adam (the first prophet in Islamic tradition<sup>30</sup>) to

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<sup>27</sup> Arabic word meaning “anecdotes”, that is tales and stories of actors and events.

<sup>28</sup> Bearman, P J, TH Bianquis, C E Bosworth, E van Donzel, and W P Heinrichs. 2005. *Encyclopædia of Islam*. 2. 12 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill. Consulted online on 18 February 2020 [http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_1133](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1133)

<sup>29</sup> The hadith refers to the words and deeds and the prophet Muhammad as recalled by his associates. The hadith carries great weight in Islam.

<sup>30</sup> Ṭabarī, al-. 2010. *Al-Ṭabarī: The Early 'Abbāsī Empire*. Translated by John Alden Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

his own present era. He arranges his work annalistically with the focus ultimately falling on the 'Abbāsīd caliphs. He aimed to present Islamic history between the lands of Egypt and the Iranian territories, and to that end, he arranged all the *akhbār* of reputable *Isnād*<sup>31</sup>, and the reader was left to evaluate the authenticity of each anecdote, and to make their own judgment of each actor and event<sup>32</sup>. Like most works of *akhbār*, al-Ṭabarī does not intervene as an author in the work, he simply arranges anecdotes, even contradictory ones, and leaves the final assessment up to the consumers of his work.

Al-Ṭabarī's work does not exclusively focus on the Khazars, rather it aims to provide a history of the entire universe. The notices and references to the Khazars in al-Ṭabarī's work primarily deal with the Arabo-Khazar wars of the 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries and he does not seem interested in Khazarian society or culture. He often provides repetitive anecdotes from different sources that vary only slightly. Nonetheless these notices provide important and helpful pieces in constructing an overall view of the Khazars as a people group as well as their relations with their neighbors. The first serious notices concerning the Khazar people comes in al-Ṭabarī's work in the year 22/642 with the peaceful takeover of al-Bāb, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, the commander in charge of al-Bāb is ordered to press further and attack the Turks (The Khazars)<sup>33</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī claims that no child was orphaned, or woman widowed during this campaign<sup>34</sup>. Due to this clear divine favor and the perceived invincibility of the Muslim forces, the Khazars barricade themselves in their towns and fortresses<sup>35</sup>. A Khazar soldier then accidentally kills a Muslim soldier and breaks the aura of invincibility<sup>36</sup>. The Khazars ambush and kill 'Abd al-Raḥmān, which gives them great courage to push back against the invading forces. In the year 32/652 al-Ṭabarī records a similar incident as the one outlined above. The details vary slightly but the outcomes remain the same. This anecdote is followed by more similar tales and the same assertion that the Islamic forces suffered no casualties. Though each tale ends with the defeat of 'Abd al-Raḥmān.

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<sup>31</sup> Isnād is the "chain of authorities" from which one would receive anecdotes.

<sup>32</sup> Bearman, P J, TH Bianquis, C E Bosworth, E van Donzel, and W P Heinrichs. 2005. *Encyclopædia of Islam*. 2. 12 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill. Consulted online on 18 February 2020 [http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_1133](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1133)

<sup>33</sup> Fortress of Darband in the Caucasus Mountains.

<sup>34</sup> Ṭabarī, al-. 1994. *The History of al-Tabari (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)*. Translated by G Rex Smith. Vol. XIV. Albany: State University New York Press, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Al-Ṭabarī records further minor reports throughout his history of victories and defeats between the Arabs and the Khazars. Some expeditions against Turks are mentioned, but as previously mentioned the term “Turk” seems to be used rather loosely to describe a plethora of peoples. The Muslim armies are eventually victorious and the Khazar Khāqān submits to Islam (albeit quite briefly), but al-Ṭabarī, apart from a brief notice that Marwān b. Muḥammad held the governorship of the region, does not comment on the situation. Al-Ṭabarī makes only brief comments regarding the Khazars and only in relation to the bellicose relations with the Muslim forces. Given the length of the war and the fact that the Muslim armies never truly advanced beyond al-Bāb, it seems a reasonable conclusion they proved a difficult enemy to dislodge and commercial relations proved more effective in the long run. However, some scholars, like David Wasserstein, argue that the Arabs simply did not care to keep advancing. The terrain was difficult, and, in the end, commercial enterprise proved easier and more profitable to the Islamic Empire. Wasserstein argues that beyond simple knowledge of the Khazars as dwellers on the fringe of the Islamic empire, most geographers and historians simply did not care about what lay beyond their borders<sup>37</sup>. While this view may be true of al-Ṭabarī and his work, this does not seem to be the case in some other works from the early Medieval Islamic world as is clearly demonstrated in the text/information divulged below.

### **Ibn Fadlan**

One example of this is the work of Ibn Fadlan who wrote a unique account of his travels and impressions during an embassy to the Volga Bulgar ruler who had recently converted to Islam. This account stands out as it does not fall under any of the normal literary traditions of Medieval Islamic writings, rather it is more of a travelogue<sup>38</sup>. Ibn Fadlan writes an eyewitness account of all the peoples and customs he observes during his travels. He served as a representative of the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Muqtadir (c. 908-932) on the embassy sent to the Turkic King (also referred to by Ibn Fadlan sometimes as the *Malik as-Ṣaqāliba*, that is, the King of the Pagans) of the Volga Bulgars<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Wasserstein, David J. 2007. "The Khazars and the World of Islam." In *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium Hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute*, by Peter B Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai and András Róna-Tas, 373-386. Leiden: Brill., 381-386.

<sup>38</sup> Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources: Cultural Contacts and Identity*. Bergen: University of Bergen.

<sup>39</sup> Zadeh, Travis, “Ibn Faḍlān”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 19 February 2020 [http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_30766](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30766)

The Bulgarian king asked the caliph for instruction in the Islamic faith seeing as they had recently converted, as well as aid in building a mosque, a *minbar*, and a fort to protect them against their neighbors. The Bulgars at this time were under Khazar rule so the fact that they go around Khazaria to get in touch with the 'Abbāsīd Caliph opens some interesting questions which will not be explored here. Nonetheless, Ibn Fadlan's account provides some glimpses into the Khazar state and institutions, as well as their position in the Steppe society.

Having finished his errand with the Bulgar King, Ibn Fadlan provides a summary of the Khazar people<sup>40</sup>. Ibn Fadlan notes that the capital of the Khazars is called Itil on the Volga river which flows from al-Rūs and Bulghār towards Khazaria<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, Ibn Fadlan clarifies that Khazaria is the country and Itil is the capital, which is divided into two parts, east and west<sup>42</sup>. The king is called *bāk* in the Khazar tongue, and only the king lives in brick buildings, the rest live in tents<sup>43</sup> as the ruler does not permit the use of bricks by anyone else. Concerning the religious makeup of Khazaria, Ibn Fadlan remarks more than 10,000 Muslims live in the city of Itil. He comments that the Jews are a minority in Khazaria but that the king and his retinue practice the Jewish faith. Muslims and Christians make up the majority, along with a sizable pagan (idolater) population<sup>44</sup>. The king has 9 judges from among these various religions. Slavery is practiced but only by the idolaters. The army is made up of 12,000 men, and income comes in the form of tariffs, taxes, and tributes from the surrounding people and from merchants passing through<sup>45</sup>. Ibn Fadlan continues that while some harvesting takes place, the bulk of revenue comes from the sources mentioned above. He also notes that the Khazars only import, they do not export goods<sup>46</sup>. Ibn Fadlan remarks that the Khazar people are not like the Turks, rather they have two kinds of complexions: some are dark almost like Indians, the others are fair skinned and comely.

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<sup>40</sup> Quotations of Ibn Fadlan will be used from both the Penguin edition of his account as well as Yāqūt al-Hawamī's quotations of Ibn Fadlan found in James Montgomery's *Mission to the Volga*. Yāqūt al-Hawamī was a Turkish geographer who wrote about the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate and who quotes Ibn Fadlan's work in its entirety in his own work.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone. 57.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> This most likely points to the continued nomadic lifestyle of the majority of the Khazarian population. This is further confirmed in Ibn Rustah's account of the Khazars.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Hawamī, Yāqūt al-, and Ahmad Ibn Fadlan. 2017. *Mission to the Volga*. Translated by James E Montgomery, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Concerning their ruler, he only appears in public once every four months; he is known as the Great Khāqān and his deputy is called Khāqān bih<sup>47</sup>. The deputy commands the armies and manages the affairs of the kingdom, and it is to him that the neighboring kings pay homage. This Khāqān bih enters the presence of the Great Khāqān every day and Ibn Fadlan outlines the procedures and protocols that must be observed for the deputy to enter the presence of the Great Khāqān. The deputy, having followed all the protocols, then sits at the right hand of the Great Khāqān, and then two more functionaries enter in similar fashion. It is only these select few men who enter into the presence of the Great Khāqān; the common people do not come before him. Ibn Fadlan later notes that when the Great Khāqān goes out riding, the entire army accompanies him. A distance of one mile separates the army from the ruler and his subjects prostrate themselves face down when he arrives so as to never see him. Only once he has passed do they stand up. When the ruler dies, his subjects build a large dwelling in which twenty tents are erected and twenty graves are dug. A river flows under the dwelling so that the body may rest undisturbed. Those who bury the Khāqān are beheaded upon completion of their task so that no one knows the exact location of the corpse. Finally, they refer to the grave as “The Garden”.

The Great Khāqān customarily has twenty-five wives, and sixty concubines. The wives come from neighboring kingdoms who have sworn fealty to the Khazar ruler, and the concubines are slaves “beautiful beyond compare”<sup>48</sup> according to Ibn Fadlan. The Khāqān’s sexual mores are outlined, then Ibn Fadlan summarizes the procedure the Khazar people follow upon the death of their ruler. The Great Khāqān’s rule lasts for forty years, if his rule lasts beyond forty years to the day, his subjects kill him saying “His mind is defective, and his judgement is impaired”<sup>49</sup>. Ibn Fadlan highlights that any squadron sent out by the ruler never retreat or turn back, for if they do so, they are executed for disobeying orders<sup>50</sup>. Any general who returns defeated has his wife and children, along with all his possessions, given to another man before his eyes, and then the ruler executes the defeated general; though if the ruler decides to show mercy, the defeated general is made a stable boy. Ibn Fadlan ends his description of the Khazars with the observation that some

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<sup>47</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 55.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Hawamī, Yāqūt al-, and Ahmad Ibn Fadlan. 2017. *Mission to the Volga*. Edited by Shawkat M. Toorawa. Translated by James E. Montgomery, 52.

<sup>50</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 57.

refer to the Khazars as Gog and Magog<sup>51</sup>. While he refrains from denying or confirming this impression, his previous description of the Khazars seems to render the final observation false.

Ibn Fadlan's account of his travels provides a rare glimpse into the inner workings of Khazar society, customs, and political life. In addition, Ibn Fadlan's account and treatment of the Khazars goes beyond the average scope of other authors, which makes his discussion and presentation of them and their society central to a fuller view of the Khazar civilization. While of course, not everything Ibn Fadlan relates can be taken at face value (e.g. 25 wives from neighboring countries), many aspects of his account are nonetheless considered relatively reliable.

### **Ibn Rustah**

The third work under consideration is that of the Persian geographer Ibn Rustah. He wrote in the beginning of the 10th century, possibly as early as 903<sup>52</sup>. While not as extensive or long as Ibn Fadlan's account, Ibn Rustah nevertheless provides some valuable information concerning the Khazars. In addition, Ibn Fadlan made use of Ibn Rustah's account in his later work.

Ibn Rustah's work reads like an encyclopedia as he provides accounts of the various peoples of the world. When he presents the Khazars, he begins by presenting their location in relation to the other peoples around them. He opens with<sup>53</sup> "Between the Pechenegs and the Khazars is a ten day march through deserts and forests"<sup>54</sup>. Ibn Rustah further informs the reader that the ruler, Khāqān, holds authority in name only and that the deputy, which Ibn Rustah calls *Ishā* actually runs the affairs of the state<sup>55</sup>. Furthermore, Ibn Rustah relates that the Khazar rulers adhere to the Jewish faith but also that a strong Muslim presence exists in their cities. Ibn Rustah presents two cities in which the Khazars winter before heading out on the spring raids, *Sār'shin* and *Khamlij*. In addition, the Khazars, according to Ibn Rustah, raid the Pachenegs every year for spoil and plunder; the deputy leads the raids which usually consist of ten thousand men, some paid and some levied from among the rich<sup>56</sup>. When the raid has been successfully completed, the *Ishā* takes what he wants from the spoil and then the rest is divided up amongst the men.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> Translations are my own.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 116.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 117.

Ibn Rustah's account of the Khazars, while relatively short compared to other accounts, nonetheless contributes useful and interesting information to the overall picture of the Khazar State. For example, the term *Ishā* as opposed to Khāqān bih or Bek stands out, also his statement that the capital of Khazaria is the city of *Sār'shin* instead of Itil as other authors have stated<sup>57</sup>. Finally, Ibn Rustah's presentation of the yearly raids and the division of spoil is new thus far.

### **Al-Mas'ūdī**

The final work under consideration is the work of al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūdj al-dhahab* (Meadows of Gold), which he wrote and subsequently revised in the mid tenth century. The work is massive since al-Mas'ūdī sought to compile a chronology of the universe<sup>58</sup>. Al-Mas'ūdī stands out as a writer and historian from the early Medieval era; he travelled extensively in search of accurate information from reliable sources, and he subsequently edited and corrected his work when mistakes were found. The city of Baghdad at the time stood as a center of learning and had access to many literary resources, thus al-Mas'ūdī enjoyed relatively easy access to many works and genres<sup>59</sup>. He believed that any man who waited at home for information to come to him could not trust such information, and thus he sought to visit and explore the places he wrote about<sup>60</sup>. In addition, his interest and dealing with non-Arab peoples and civilizations (especially to the extent which he did) stands out from the works of other Arab writers. In contrast to some of the authors mentioned above, al-Mas'ūdī intervenes in his text as he is not simply content to arrange tales.

At the point in his narrative when al-Mas'ūdī introduces<sup>61</sup> the Caucasus mountain range (al-Qabkh), he also introduces the city of al-Bāb which lies at an intermediary point between the Caucasus mountains and the Khazar Sea, presumably the Caspian Sea<sup>62</sup>. It is worth noting that the Caspian Sea is referred to as the Khazar Sea at this point in the mid tenth century which leads to the conclusion that the Khazars controlled access to the sea and most likely had a formidable presence along its coastline. Al-Mas'ūdī notes that a kingdom named *Jīdān* lies next to al-Bāb and

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<sup>57</sup> For further discussion and analysis of both these irregularities and the author, see D.M. Dunlop, 1954, *A History of the Jewish Khazars*, 105-107.

<sup>58</sup> Bearman, P J, TH Bianquis, C E Bosworth, E van Donzel, and W P Heinrichs, "al-Mas'ūdī", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Consulted online on 18 February 2020 [http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0704](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0704)

<sup>59</sup> Mas'ūdī 'Alī Ibn-al-Ḥusain al-. 1863. *Les Prairies D'or*. Translated by Casimir Barbier De Meynard and Charles Pellat. Vol. 2. Paris: Société Asiatique, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Translations are my own.

<sup>62</sup> Mas'ūdī 'Alī Ibn-al-Ḥusain al-. 1863. *Les Prairies D'or*. Translated by Casimir Barbier De Meynard and Charles Pellat, 2.

that this kingdom is subservient to the king of the Khazars; furthermore, he states that the Khazar capital sits an eight day journey from al-Bāb and is called *Samindar*<sup>63</sup> (Probably the city of Salmandar). Al-Mas'ūdī then says that since the Arabo-Khazars wars, the real seat of power is located in *Amōl*. He then goes on to say that *Amōl* is situated between two rivers and that on an island in the middle sits the throne of the Khazar government. The population consists of Muslims (who are the dominant population), Christians, Jews, and Pagans; al-Mas'ūdī states that the king, his court, and all those who are of Khazar ethnicity practice Judaism which is the dominant faith in this state<sup>64</sup>. Al-Mas'ūdī's statement differs from other accounts like Ibn Fadlan who states that only the elites among the Khazars practice the Jewish faith. Al-Mas'ūdī further notes that many Jews have fled persecution in the Byzantine Empire and have sought refuge in Khazaria. Of further note, which will be addressed later in this thesis, al-Mas'ūdī claims that the Rus live among the Khazars and he outlines Khazarian funeral rites<sup>65</sup>. Next, al-Mas'ūdī indicates that seven judges preside over the judicial affairs of the Khazars: two Muslim judges, two Christian judges, two Jewish judges, and a pagan judge<sup>66</sup>. However, should the judges be unable to resolve a case, they submit to Islamic law. Despite the prominence of Judaism though, al-Mas'ūdī observes that the Muslims present in Khazaria have worked out advantageous conditions such as their right to construct mosques and other buildings, that their call to prayer which takes place five times a day happens publicly, and that the vizier is chosen from amongst the Muslim population<sup>67</sup>. In addition, al-Mas'ūdī documents that the Khāqān places supreme trust in the Islamic warriors and that they enjoy prominence within his army.

Al-Mas'ūdī then turns to the person of the Khāqān and notes, as the other sources do, that the Khāqān himself does not participate in the affairs of the state, but simply stays in the middle of his harem while his deputy runs the actual affairs of the kingdom. However, al-Mas'ūdī provides an interesting nuance: that the deputy has no power except inasmuch as the Khāqān resides in the capital and is close to him physically. In addition, if the country is ravaged by disaster and war, the people have the option to go to the deputy and demand that the Khāqān be put to death, either by the people themselves or sometimes the deputy takes charge and presides over the execution. Al-Mas'ūdī ends this segment with the caveat that he does not know whether this is an ancient

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 10.

Khazarian custom or not<sup>68</sup>. Finally, al-Mas'ūdī ends his treatment of the Khazars with comments on their numerous ships with which they sail up and down the great rivers, and that many Turkic tribes reside in fixed places under Khazarian dominion and that this dominion extends all the way to the Bulgar border<sup>69</sup>.

As outlined above, al-Mas'ūdī offers information that affirms other author's statements, but much of his work also differs from previously mentioned scholars. The religious makeup of Khazaria presented seems on par with other sources, though the Islamic component receives more attention by al-Mas'ūdī than other authors (such as Islamic law being used for final arbitration in tough cases). In addition, the presentation of the Khāqān and his deputy are similar to other accounts presented above. His designation of *Amōl* though as the capital of Khazaria stands out as different from other informants.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 14.

## II: The Rus

Having considered the rise of the Khazars and their place in the Eastern European historical context, we will now consider the Rus historical context, origins, culture, and society. The Khazars were well established by the early-mid 600s as an economic and military power prior to the arrival of the Rus on the scene. The Khazars controlled the Caucasus region and the Volga Bulgars sat to the north-east of them and it was into this region that the Rus appeared. The sources make note of the Rus people in many different contexts and locations throughout the Khazar era; thus we should not assume a unified culture or agenda when considering the Rus<sup>70</sup>. Scholarship throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century took the *Primary Chronicle* more or less at face value and the rapid formation of a “Kievan state” seemed inevitable from the social picture painted by the Chronicle<sup>71</sup>. However, Oleksiy Tolochko argues convincingly that such a narrative does not match the evidence, particularly archeological, available to us, and that furthermore, the *Primary Chronicle* has not been subjected to suitable scrutiny<sup>72</sup>. Tolochko’s concerns will be addressed later when we turn to consider the Primary Chronicle. Suffice it to say that the narrative of Rus history remains unclear, and the extent to which we can speak of a unified political institution is doubtful as well.

### Who were the Rus?

Much ink has been spilt to outline both the etymology of the word *Rus*, as well as their origins: Slavic or Scandinavian. While the etymology of the word *Rus* has not yet been established beyond all doubt, the evidence is nonetheless convincing that this term should be taken to refer to Northmen from Scandinavia. The sources, both contemporary and later (e.g. Arab sources, the *Primary Chronicle*, the *Annales Bertiniani*, and many others), connect these Rus with Scandinavia. For a long while, there existed a debate between Normanists and Anti-Normanists. This debate stemmed from nationalistic sentiments between Soviet and Western-European historians; on the one hand Soviet sentiment dictated that the Rus had to be of Slavic origin for the sake of

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<sup>70</sup> Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, 164-165.

<sup>71</sup> Tolochky, Oleksiy P. 2008. "The Primary Chronicle's "Ethnography" Revisited: Slavs and Varangians in the Middle Dneiper Region and the Origin of the Rus' State." In *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, by Ildar H Garipzanov, Patrick J Geary and Urbanczyk Przemyslaw, 169-188. Turnhout: Brepols.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

nationalistic pride. On the other hand, the German historians made the case for the Scandinavian origin of the Rus people. This debate long marred and muddied the waters<sup>73</sup>, but this thesis will not devote much time or energy to frame the debate. Based on the available evidence, namely, that the primary sources of the era as well as the archeological evidence point to these people as Scandinavian, it can quite convincingly be argued that the Rus hailed from Scandinavia, and gradually intermixed with the local Slavic populations and swiftly adopted Slavic and Turkic customs which they melded with their own original customs to form a sort of Scandinavian cultural hybrid.

During the Viking Age, raiders, traders, and settlers roamed far and wide from their native Scandinavia. Many accounts of the Rus have come down to us, but these accounts are sometimes vague and contradictory. Given the fundamentally mobile nature of this group of people, it is not unreasonable to assume a high degree of influence on the original Scandinavian culture by local populations across a wide variety of geographic locations. Thorir Jonsson Hraundal, in his doctoral dissertation *The Rus in Arabic Sources* which focuses primarily on Ibn Fadlan's account of the Rus, having argued for a broader view of cultural identity from anthropologic theories, states that:

“...when such a culturally hybrid and in-flux situation is considered; elements which seem contradictory and non-reconcilable when compared to one particular culture, that is a Scandinavian home-land culture as the case has usually been, become a more acceptable feature of his [Ibn Fadlan's] description when our horizon is expanded with a more flexible, less primordialist, concept of identity.”<sup>74</sup>

Thus the lines delineating Rus culture remain hazy at points. Nonetheless, we are able with a reasonable degree of certainty to form an overall picture of Rus culture and society. With that in mind, let us turn to the Rus portrayal in the Arab and Persian Sources. As with our treatment of the Khazars, this thesis will not provide an exhaustive list of all appearances and handlings of the Rus in all Arab sources as such a project falls well outside the scope of this work. Rather, we will focus on the works of al-Mas'ūdī, Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Rustah, and the *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, as well as the *Annales Bertiniani* and the *Primary Chronicle*.

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<sup>73</sup> For further discussion and outline of the debate and the evidence available, see Thorir's *The Rus in Arabic Sources*. 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, 32.

## Al-Mas'ūdī

In his work *Murūdj al-dhahab* during his treatment of the Khazars, al-Mas'ūdī writes that living amongst the Khazars are many pagans, primarily *Rūs* and *Ṣaqālibā*<sup>75</sup>, and they live next to each other in the city<sup>76</sup>. When one of the Rus dies, they burn him along with his possessions. They also burn his wife alongside him and al-Mas'ūdī remarks that the women desire to be burned alongside their husbands due to their desire to follow him to paradise; however, should the wife die before her husband, he does not follow her in death. Al-Mas'ūdī further notes that this practice of burning the dead and wives following their husbands in death comes from India and that the women in India only follow their husbands inasmuch as they aspire to do so<sup>77</sup>. The author then turns to the Khazar Khāqān's bodyguard and says it is primarily made up of Muslims, but that Rus and Slavs may also join the guard. Al-Mas'ūdī spends some time depicting other tribes like the Bulgars before returning to the Rus. He says that under the denomination *Rūs* there is a multitude of peoples, the most common and largest denomination being *al-Lūdh 'ānah*. This specific group of Rus engages in trade with Spain, Rome, Constantinople, and the Khazars. Al-Mas'ūdī then describes an interesting scene between the Rus and the Khazar people<sup>78</sup>.

A great body of Rus men have arrived, specifically five hundred ships each carrying one hundred men<sup>79</sup>. They ask the Khazar king for passage through the Khazar Sea to reach other populations alongside the coast for the purpose of raiding them<sup>80</sup>. In return, the Rus promise to give to the Khazar king half of all plunder they accumulate during the course of their raids. The Khazar king agrees and the Rus are permitted to pass. Al-Mas'ūdī continues to describe the great slaughters wrought by the Rus on people who were unaccustomed to attack by sea<sup>81</sup>. Most of the peoples attacked by the Rus were Muslim, and though some mounted resistance, the Rus had their way during this season of raiding. However, upon their return to the Khazar king, the Islamic people living under Khazar rule demand the right to attack the returning Rus in retaliation for their treatment of their religious brethren during the preceding raiding season<sup>82</sup>. The Khazar king grants

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<sup>75</sup> Elsewhere this term denotes pagans as a whole and is even sometimes used in Arab sources in reference to the Rus themselves. The use of term varies somewhat and is not always entirely clear what the writers always have in mind when using this term.

<sup>76</sup> Mas'ūdī al-, *Les Prairies D'or*, 1863, 9.

<sup>77</sup> Mas'ūdī al-, *Les Prairies D'or*, 1863, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 20-24.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> The Caspian Sea.

<sup>81</sup> Mas'ūdī al-, *Les Prairies D'or*, 1863, 20-24.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 22.

them permission but also warns the Rus of this development. The two sides draw up in battle formation and according to al-Mas'ūdī the fighting rages on for three days<sup>83</sup>.

Ultimately the Muslims claim victory and about five thousand Rus flee to the other side of the river where they are met by Bulgar soldiers and subsequently slaughtered. Al-Mas'ūdī concludes this episode with the assertion that the Rus never again engaged in such a perilous enterprise within the Khazar Sea. He dates this episode to after the year 300/912, but he claims ignorance concerning the exact date<sup>84</sup>. The final notice al-Mas'ūdī gives concerning the Rus comes during his description of the Greek lands, in which a littoral city named *Mosnat* is said to keep watch against Rus incursions.

### **Ibn Fadlan**

Similar to al-Mas'ūdī's report on Rus burial customs, Ibn Fadlan's travelogue addresses Rus burial rites in great detail. Ibn Fadlan's report of the Rus has received a great deal of attention due to the uniqueness of the details outlined; the primary interest directed towards this account has been in light of the religious elements that Ibn Fadlan charts in his account, specifically the cult of Odin. Such consideration falls outside the scope of this thesis and will therefore not be addressed.

Ibn Fadlan begins with a physical description of the *Rūsiyyah*<sup>85</sup>. He claims to have never seen bodies so physically perfect and beautiful as theirs; they are tall as palm trees, fair and reddish. They wear cloaks which cover half their body and leave one arm open and free to wield their weapon<sup>86</sup>. Their weapons consist primary of swords, daggers, and axes; their swords are Frankish with broad, ridged blades. Ibn Fadlan's next remark is not entirely clear, he says the Rus are dark from head to toe with pictures, trees, and the like<sup>87</sup>. Presumably, he is describing tattoos, but this is not clear-cut. Concerning Rus women, each one wears a box around her neck, the material of which (gold, silver, brass, or iron) indicates the financial worth and social standing of her husband<sup>88</sup>. In addition, she wears a small knife around her neck. The women also wear gold rings around their neck, one for every ten thousand dirhams her husband has acquired as a further symbol

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 45.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

of financial worth. However, the most prized pieces of jewelry are the dark ceramic beads which they acquire and string together to make necklaces.

Ibn Fadlan then expresses his astonishment at their personal hygiene. He writes that “They are the filthiest of all God’s creatures.”<sup>89</sup> He relates that they possess no shame in carrying out bodily functions in public, and do not even wash after sexual intercourse. He even designates them as wandering donkeys, after noting that they do not even wash their hands after eating<sup>90</sup>.

When they arrive to Itil (the capital of Khazaria), they construct wooden houses in which they remain while they conduct business. They always have female slaves with them, and the Rus freely have intercourse with their female slaves whenever they desire in full view of their companions. Ibn Fadlan even notes in surprise that it is not uncommon for a merchant to happen upon a Rus man having intercourse with the female slave that he, the merchant, wishes to purchase<sup>91</sup>. Ibn Fadlan’s section on Rus hygiene ends with his description of their washing; a female slave brings in a basin of water to her master who then washes his face, hair, and hands, combs his hair, and then spits and blows his nose in the water. That same basin and water then passes along to the next man in line and so on and so forth till every man has done this. Ibn Fadlan emphasizes their willingness to perform any impure or unclean act into this basin of water<sup>92</sup>.

Ibn Fadlan then describes their rituals before going to the market<sup>93</sup>. Each man disembarks with his goods and presents himself before a block of wood which has the face of a man carved into it and a set of smaller figurines around it. The man prostrates himself before the large figure and entreats favor to sell his goods (which he enumerates before the idol) for favorable prices without difficulty. If he encounters difficulties in selling his wares, he returns to entreat further favor with greater offerings. He even implores each figurine in turn for favor. When his wares are finally all sold, the man will return with an offering of thanks.

Having sketched the procedures of Rus merchants, Ibn Fadlan then turns to the Rus practices concerning their sick<sup>94</sup>. The sick person is left in a tent outside the group with bread and water until he either recovers or dies. Slaves are left as food for dogs and other wild animals. But the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 48.

Rus burn their companions<sup>95</sup>. Thieves or bandits who are caught are tied to a sturdy tree and left to die of exposure. Ibn Fadlan segues into a description of the death of their chieftain which he says he desired earnestly to verify<sup>96</sup>. They place the man in a grave in his house for ten days while they prepare his garments. Once this has been finished, they place him in a boat and divide his possessions into three parts: one third to the man's household, one third towards funeral preparations, and finally, one third towards the alcohol they will consume on the day of his funeral<sup>97</sup>. Ibn Fadlan mentions in passing that the Rus are addicted to alcohol. Once the chieftain has been prepared, they ask his slaves which one of them is willing to die with him<sup>98</sup>. Once a slave, usually female, volunteers, the agreement is binding, and they cannot back out of this commitment. They place two other female slaves in charge of the one who volunteered, and they follow her everywhere and attend her every need. The slave consigned to death drinks alcohol every day while they prepare her master and she sings merrily<sup>99</sup>. Before exhuming the chief, a boat is prepared. A woman called the Angel of Death prepares a couch spread with Byzantine silk. It is she who bears responsibility for killing the female slave and arranging the chieftain suitably for his journey to the after-life<sup>100</sup>. Ibn Fadlan describes her as neither old nor young, but gloomy and corpulent<sup>101</sup>. Once the boat is ready, they bring the body, and place alcohol, fruit, and basil around him. They cut a dog in two and place it in the boat, they place all his weaponry with him, and they make two horses gallop into a sweat, cut them into pieces and throw the meat onto the boat. Bread, onions, and meat are also placed in front of the chieftain. In addition, two cows are cut up and placed on the boat as well as a cock and hen<sup>102</sup>. Meanwhile, the female slave who will accompany her master enters an unspecified number of yurts and each owner has intercourse with her saying that he has done this out of love for her master<sup>103</sup>. Then the female slave is lifted up three times above a door frame-like structure and each time she tells what she sees, culminating with a vision of her master sitting in the Garden with his men and entourage<sup>104</sup>. The slave then removes her bracelets and gives them to the Angel of Death. She is given more alcohol to drink so that she is

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>97</sup> Hawamī, Yāqūt al-, and Ahmad Ibn Fadlan. 2017. *Mission to the Volga*. Translated by James E Montgomery, 58.

<sup>98</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 50.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 50-51.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

intoxicated and is compelled to enter a yurt. Six men enter to have intercourse with her while men outside bang their shields with sticks to drown out the noise so that other female slaves will not fear to die with their master<sup>105</sup>. After all this has been accomplished, they lay her next to her master and two men tie a rope around her neck to strangle her, while two more men hold her feet and the Angel of Death stabs her between the ribs, and thus she dies.

Finally, a relative of the dead chieftain walks backwards, completely naked, with a flaming piece of wood with which he lights the structure under the boat<sup>106</sup>. The people then come forward with torches and lit pieces of firewood and set fire to the structure. Ibn Fadlan also relates how one of the Rus standing near him told him, through an interpreter, that the Arabs were foolish for burying their dead in the ground where worms and vermin can reach them. The Rus, on the other hand, burn their dead quickly to fine ash<sup>107</sup>. Thus concludes Ibn Fadlan's observations concerning the Rus. As stated above, this text has often been used and applied as evidence for Odinic cult worship and has been taken out of context in order to be applied to the whole Scandinavian culture. However, this approach fails to take into account the context in which this is written and by whom these observations are made<sup>108</sup>. Rus culture absorbed many Turkic and Slavic elements and the extent to which Ibn Fadlan's depiction of Rus burial rites can be attributed to Scandinavia as a whole remains murky.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>108</sup> Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, 187.

## **Ibn Rustah**

We will now turn to Ibn Rustah's account of the Rus<sup>109</sup>. The Persian Chronicler opens his section on the Rus with the claim that they live on an island in the middle of a lake, though this claim is dubious. Geographically, Ibn Rustah gives little by way of hints beyond his opening statements concerning the location of the Rus<sup>110</sup>. He does mention the journey to their location is surrounded by thick forests and is overshadowed by potential for illness. Ibn Rustah then states that the king of the Rus is called "Khāqān Rus", and that the Rus raid the *Ṣaqāliba* in their ships and take plunder and prisoners which they subsequently sell to the Bulgars and the Khazars<sup>111</sup>. They engage in such trade because they do not farm but live off the resources which they take from the *Ṣaqāliba*. Ibn Rustah provides a glimpse into Rus mentality with the brief snapshot that Rus children are given swords and told that they will only come into their inheritance by the sword<sup>112</sup>. Since they do not farm, they have built their economy on sable, fur, and slave trade, in which they engage eagerly.

Ibn Rustah continues that the Rus have many cities which are favorable towards foreigners. Concerning their justice system, the king and his advisors are the ones who decide matters, however, if the verdict does not please both parties, they can pick up swords and settle the dispute while their clans watch.

Ibn Rustah makes an interesting observation, namely, that the doctors<sup>113</sup> hold more sway and influence than even the Rus king. Their orders are given almost as much consideration as those of the gods<sup>114</sup>. Should someone not follow their orders to the letter, they hang the offender from a wooden structure as an offering to the gods. Ibn Rustah then highlights the courage of the Rus people and their unwillingness to back down from a fight. Some remarks on their clothing are given and Ibn Rustah also provides a snippet saying that the Rus do not attend their personal needs alone, but rather that they form groups of three to protect and watch over each other. However, they all have their swords due to their distrust of each other. Finally, he highlights some of their burial customs; when one of the great among them dies, the Rus dig a grave the size of a house and they lay him with his clothes, food, drink, and money, and after all that, they lay his wife

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<sup>109</sup> Translations are my own.

<sup>110</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 126.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Probably a reference to Witch Doctors.

<sup>114</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 127.

whom he loved in life at his side. They ultimately bury her alive though, which contrasts with Ibn Fadlan's account of how the Rus bury their chieftains.

### **Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam**

Similar to Ibn Rustah's encyclopedic account of the Rus, the anonymous Persian account titled *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*<sup>115</sup> contains a brief paragraph concerning the Rus. The author composed the *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam* in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century in modern day Afghanistan for the local Farīghūnid dynasty in the Gūzḡānān area<sup>116</sup>. The account is short, but nonetheless provides some unique perspectives concerning the Rus. The author of *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam* locates the Rus west of the Pecheneg mountains, north of the Rūtā<sup>117</sup> river, east of the *Ṣaqāliba*, and to the north of Rus lie the uninhabited Northern regions. Next, the author speaks to the temperament and character of the Rus describing them as “evil tempered, intractable, arrogant-looking, quarrelsome, and warlike.<sup>118</sup>”. The Rus, according to this author, make war with all the peoples around them and emerge victorious. Their king is called Rus Khāqān, and the country is extremely favorable to the Rus with regard to resources<sup>119</sup>. A group of them practice chivalry, and they hold their doctors in high regard. They pay tithes from their plunder and commercial profits to their government every year<sup>120</sup>. A group of Slavs live among them as slaves. The author makes some remarks concerning their clothes and gives a similar burial description to Ibn Rustah though the details about the wife of the chieftain do not feature in this account. The town closest to Islamic lands according to this author is Kūyāba, presumably Kiev<sup>121</sup>, a couple other towns are mentioned, their specific commercial and temperamental details briefly outlined, and the account ends. Thus concludes our treatment of the Arab and Persian sources.

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<sup>115</sup> “The Regions of the World”.

<sup>116</sup> Minorsky, Vladimir, V. V. Bartold, and Clifford Edmund Bosworth. 2015. *Hudūd Al-‘Ālam = The Regions of the World: a Persian Geography, 372 A.H. (982 A.D.)*. Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 159.

<sup>117</sup> Unclear what specifically the author is referring to.

<sup>118</sup> *Hudūd Al-‘Ālam*. 2015, 159.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, 85.

## The Western Sources

### **Annales Bertiniani**

Having considered some of the major Arab and Persian sources on the Rus, this thesis will now briefly consider some notices from other sources in order to round out this picture of the Rus and provide a clearer picture of the Rus historical context. The first source we will consider is the *Annales Bertiniani* from the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century. In the year 839, a Byzantine embassy arrived at the court of Louis the Pious in Ingelheim. Part of this contingent contained representatives of a people known as *Rhos*. The entry in the annals soon notes the Swedish origin of these *Rhos*, and also that their ruler bears the title *chacanus*. The majority of scholarship assumes this title refers to what the Arab sources have mentioned, namely that the ruler of the Rus bears the title “Khāqān Rus”. However, this interpretation is not without dissent and this shall be addressed later on during the discussion of the question of the Rus Khāqān.

The entry opens with the arrival of the delegation from Byzantium representing the emperor Theophilos<sup>122</sup>. The Greek emperor congratulates Louis the Pious on recent victories and seeks to affirm friendship and love between the two empires. On that note, Theophilos then introduces the *Rhos* among his delegation, and requests that they be granted safe passage and assistance through Frankish territory in order to safely reach their homelands<sup>123</sup>. The entry notes that the *Rhos* king, termed *chacanus*, had sent these particular envoys to Constantinople for the sake of friendship. The entry then relates that the Frankish emperor, Louis, desiring to learn more about these people, discovered that they belonged to the genus of the Swedes, and he [Louis] suspected that in fact these men were spies<sup>124</sup>. Louis thus decided to hold the men until the truth could be ascertained and quickly wrote to Theophilos of his suspicions, and that if the envoys proved genuine, he would indeed help them, but should they not prove true, he would return them to Constantinople for Theophilos to deal with as he saw fit<sup>125</sup>. Further information is not recorded, and the outcome of such inquiries does not come down to us.

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<sup>122</sup> Duczko, Wladyslaw. 2004. *Viking Rus: Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 17. Duczko provides the entry translated from Latin in his work.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

This entry in the annals raises many questions which fall outside the scope of the present research; nonetheless, the pertinent questions to this discussion relate to the possibility of a Rus Khāqān, and provides broader evidence that peoples beyond the Arab sources recognized that the ruler of the Rus bore the title “Khāqān”.

### **The Primary Chronicle**

The final source which must be considered in the establishment of the Rus historical context, despite its unreliability relative to the other sources considered in this thesis, is the *Primary Chronicle*. The 12<sup>th</sup> century chronicle takes the form of a literary expression of civilization primarily based out of Kiev. The author commonly attributed to this work is the monk Nestor, but recent scholarship no longer finds this hypothesis particularly convincing, so modern scholarship is left with an anonymous chronicler<sup>126</sup>. The chronicles of Kiev and other cities and provinces who also maintained chronicles take up a relatively uniform position on early Russian history up to the 12th century. After which the centralized power of Kiev lessened somewhat, promoting a greater degree of flexibility and independence within other cities’ annals and chronicles<sup>127</sup>. The conventional dawn of Russian history is given as the year 852, according to the Primary Chronicle, and until the 12th century the narrative across cities and regions remains more or less even. However, from the 12th century onwards, the narratives become less homogeneous. This source is not contemporary like the Arab sources nor the notice in the *Annales Bertiniani*, it was composed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, well after the time period under consideration. Furthermore, it must be stressed that this source is a literary expression of early Russian history. While the contents of this work will be considered to help provide us with some of details concerning Rus and Khazar relations, this source cannot be accepted without great caution. Where possible, this thesis will corroborate information from the *Primary Chronicle* with the Arab accounts.

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<sup>126</sup> Cross, Samuel Hazzard, and Olgerd P Sherbowitz-Wetzor. 1953. *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*. Cambridge: MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

The first recorded entry concerning Scandinavians in the *Primary Chronicle* comes in the year 859<sup>128</sup>, the entry states: “The Varangians from beyond the sea imposed tribute upon the Chuds, the Slavs, the Merians, the Ves’, and the Krivichians.”<sup>129</sup> The entry for the next few years (860-862) though records that the tributaries refused to pay tribute to the Varangians and that they repulsed them out of their lands and set out to govern themselves<sup>130</sup>. However, chaos ensued, and the former tributaries warred with each other. They decided they needed someone to come and rule them. So, they turned to the Varangians called the Rus, just as some are called Swedes, Normans, Gotlanders, or English, and requested that these Rus come rule over them<sup>131</sup>. Thus the Rus sent three brothers who took their kinsfolk and migrated with a great number of their people and established themselves. The oldest brother, Rurik, settled in Novgorod, the second brother, Sineus, established himself in Beloozero, and the third brother, Truvor, set up in Izborsk. A couple years later, the two younger brothers died, and Rurik assumed control of their cities<sup>132</sup>. The chronicle notes that the region of Novgorod became known as the land of Rus, and that the ancestors of the inhabitants are of Varangian stock, but that they quickly mingled with the Slavic population<sup>133</sup>. The chronicle continues to outline the history of the Rus people. Of note, raids against the Greeks by Rurik, and subsequently by his son Oleg are mentioned and summarized along with the treaties that followed each raid. The narrative primarily follows the descendants of Rurik, the rise of the Rus, and their adoption of Christianity. The Khazars do not feature prominently in this narrative except at the start of the chronicle when they take over Kiev and demand tribute<sup>134</sup>, when they propose to the Rus to accept Judaism<sup>135</sup> and when the great grandson of Rurik, Svyatoslav, conquers the Khazar city of Bela Vezha<sup>136</sup> in the year 965. The chronicle is written as a literary history of Russian civilization and follows the methods of other chronicles by inserting itself into the Christian narrative of world history. The chronicle does not provide a clear picture concerning Rus and Slavic synthesis, rather it seems to follow the Rurikid clan and paints a clean picture that would

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<sup>128</sup> 6367 in the Primary Chronicle.

<sup>129</sup> Cross, Samuel Hazzard, and Olgerd P Sherbowitz-Wetzor. 1953. *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*. Cambridge: MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 59.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 84.

suggest a sort of proto-state formation<sup>137</sup>. However, the evidence does not support this and the unity of the Rus themselves remains undetermined. Nonetheless, from the chronicle we can glean information such as key actors in Rus history as well as the distinctiveness of Kiev. Furthermore, some of the information on the Rus given in the chronicle is corroborated by the Arab writers we have already surveyed. For example, the chronicle records the Rus as dealing furs, amber, wax, and slaves. The Arab sources validate this information saying that the Khazars obtain such goods from the Rus in the north.

We have now surveyed some of the primary Arab sources as well as two non-Arab sources to build a picture and historical timeline of the Rus. They originated from Scandinavia and gradually integrated into the Slavic peoples around them while maintaining a distinctness about them. They probably adopted and borrowed customs from some of the native populations around them, both Slavic and Turkic, and created a sort of hybrid of culture and customs. A small group of Rus eventually reached Kiev probably sometime in the late ninth century. However, the activities of this Kievan faction remain distinct from other groups of Rus. Various other companies of Rus appear in various different places (Volga Bulghār, Byzantium, Baghdad, etc) and the activities of these groups differ from each other. Based on archeological evidence, Rus settlements remain primarily in the Northern Baltic region and do not appear further south until the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>138</sup>. The Kievan “golden age” took place sometime during the eleventh and twelfth centuries after the fall of the Khazars with the Rus takeover of other tribal territories. It is worth noting that the references and notices of the Rus document a people spread across many contexts and locations. Thus, we should not assume that these Rus all acted uniformly or even had similar agendas. Having considered the historical timelines and sources for both the Khazars and the Rus, we will now turn to consider the points of contact between the two peoples.

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<sup>137</sup> Tolochky, Oleksiy P. 2008. "The Primary Chronicle's "Ethnography" Revisited: Slavs and Varangians in the Middle Dneiper Region and the Origin of the Rus' State." In *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, by Ildar H Garipzanov, Patrick J Geary and Urbanczyk Przemyslaw, 169-188. Turnhout: Brepols.

<sup>138</sup> Franklin, Simon, and Jonathan Shepard. 2013. *The Emergence of Rus, 750-1200*. Vol. 2. London: Longman, 71.

### III: The Points of Contact

Having now established the historical context and timelines of both the Khazars and the Rus in sections I and II, we will now turn our focus towards the relationship that existed between these two peoples. The first and perhaps most obvious point of contact between the two groups is that of trade. Both states' economy, especially that of the Khazars, relied heavily on trade and the benefits that could be reaped from such endeavors. Tariffs and taxes formed the solid base on which the Khazarian economy was built. The Khazar zone of influence sat in an extremely favorable position from which they could benefit from trade and commerce. The Volga river saw extensive use from many different merchants, not least of all the Rus, and the Khazars were in a great position to take advantage of this. The Volga river united a vast network of trade which included on one end the advanced Mediterranean world, and on another the equally established Iranian and Turkic urban sphere of Central Asia<sup>139</sup>. In the west, the Volga linked Kiev, by way of its portages with the Don-Donets complex and overland routes, to western Europe and Byzantium<sup>140</sup>. In the north, the Baltic amber zones, as well as furs and wax, were brought into the commercial sphere which made amber available to the Islamic and Greek ports to the south. Finally, to the east, the raw materials of the Urals and Siberia made their way to Baghdad<sup>141</sup>.

Geographically, Khazaria lay at the center of a vast commercial network. An extremely well placed emporium of sorts. According to the Arab sources, such as Ibn Fadlan, the Khazars do not seem to have had access to many natural resources, but rather they took advantage of the numerous goods and merchants that had to pass through their territory<sup>142</sup>. The *Hudūd al-‘Ālam* does claim in juxtaposition to our other sources that the land of the Khazars possessed great wealth particularly with regard to livestock and slaves, but then a few lines later acknowledge that most of the wealth of Khazaria and its elite come from maritime trade and tariffs<sup>143</sup>. According to Ibn al-Faqīh in his work *Kitāb al-Buldān*, both the Khazars and the Bulgars exacted one tenth of the

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<sup>139</sup> Golden, B. Peter. 1980. *Khazar Studies; A Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*, 107.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibn Fadlan, specifically Yāqūt al-Hawamī quoting him (see above).

<sup>143</sup> Minorsky, Vladimir, V. V. Bartold, and Clifford Edmund Bosworth. 2015. *Hudūd Al-‘Ālam; The Regions of the World: a Persian Geography, 372 A.H. (982 A.D.)*. Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 161-162.

value of goods that passed through their lands<sup>144</sup>. Of course, in order for such a system to turn a profit, the Khazars guaranteed to the best of their abilities, protection for both domestic and foreign merchants<sup>145</sup>. However, such a system would prove to be untenable and directly contributed to the downfall of the Khazar state, though this will be addressed more thoroughly later in this text<sup>146</sup>.

## **Trade and the Khazarian Economy**

Geographically, the Rus also found themselves located in a strategic position to take advantage of the trade routes that extended to the rich empires of the south. The first Scandinavians to arrive established a trading outpost at Staraja Ladoga in the Baltic region, which served as hub for hunters and traders bringing in furs from the forest steppe zone<sup>147</sup>. It was from here that operations expanded throughout the Baltic region, in part driven on by an increasing interest from western Europe in Scandinavia and her goods<sup>148</sup>. To the south, the Khazars had emerged from the disintegration of the Sabir Union and had carved out its piece of land in the Caucasus at the expense of the Bulgars and other tribes. The Arabo-Khazar wars had reached a stalemate. The Umayyad Caliphate fell in the mid eighth century, and the 'Abbāsīd Caliph assumed power. Despite some continued fighting between the Khazars and the Arabs, relations between the two at this stage were driven more by commercial interests than by war. The Islamic empire under the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate saw its economy expand rapidly. This contributed to the need for further trade, and this necessity helped the Khazars establish themselves as effective middle-men in the great Volga network. These developments to the south in turn created a high demand for Scandinavian goods, primarily fur, amber, wax, and slaves<sup>149</sup>. A premium was placed on high quality fur and was paid for by Arab silver dirhams<sup>150</sup>. The high quality of silver seems to have immediately attracted the attention of the traders who began to engage in a greater volume of trade. Such was the degree of profit that could be gained that many Scandinavians began to move east in search of wealth<sup>151</sup>.

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<sup>144</sup> Ibn al-Faqīh. 1870. *Kitāb al-Buldān*. Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum. Edited by M. J. de Goeje. Lugduni Batavorum: E.J. Brill, 270-271.

<sup>145</sup> Golden, B. Peter. 1980. *Khazar Studies*; 110-111.

<sup>146</sup> Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *A History of the Jewish Khazars*, 234.

<sup>147</sup> Duczko, Wladyslaw. 2004. *Viking Rus: Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 62.

<sup>148</sup> Callmer, Johan. 1994. "Urbanization in Scandinavia and the Baltic region c. AD 700-1100: trading places, centres and early urban sites." In *The Twelfth Viking Congress. Developments around the Baltic and the North Sea in the Viking Age*, by Bjorn Ambrosiani and Helen Clarke, 50-90. Stockholm: Birka Project.

<sup>149</sup> Duczko, Wladyslaw. 2004. *Viking Rus*, 63.

<sup>150</sup> Melnikova, Elena A. 1996. *The Eastern World of the Vikings: Eight Essays about Scandinavia and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*. Göteborg: Litteraturvetenskapliga Institutionen, Göteborgs Universitet, 53.

<sup>151</sup> Duczko, Wladyslaw. 2004. *Viking Rus*, 63.

The number of immigrants to the east from Scandinavia grew to such an extent that competition became fierce and forced the Rus to organize more effectively. Wladyslaw Duczko contends that the Rus drew inspiration from their Khazar neighbors and partners to the south, and this influenced the creation of the Rus polity at Kiev and the formation of the Rus Khaganate<sup>152</sup>. The Rus themselves seem to have also practiced the custom of the Khazars of exacting one tenth of the profits of the goods that traveled through their lands<sup>153</sup>. By the end of the ninth century, it seems some Scandinavian rulers had established themselves in and around Kiev, however this remained a minority of the Rus, and did not represent the seeming “state” that the *Primary Chronicle* appears to suggest. The *Primary Chronicle* records that sometime prior to the first year entry of 852, Kiev paid tribute to the Khazars when the latter came upon the city and forced them to submit<sup>154</sup>. According to the chronicle, the Varangians arrived about ten years later in 860 and imposed tributes on the local Slavic peoples<sup>155</sup>. As has been outlined above, the local populations drove out the Varangians but quickly invited them to return and rule over them, and Rurik emerged from the three brothers as head of the Rus. Two of his boyars sailed down the river, seemingly with the goal to invade Byzantium. They happened upon the city of Kiev which provided a convenient launching point for their invasion<sup>156</sup>. In short, they presumably did not act on Rurik’s orders and their subsequent invasion of Byzantium proved disastrous. Rurik entrusted the kingdom to his kinsman Oleg to steward until Rurik’s son Igor could assume the throne. Oleg then attacked Kiev and subsequently subjugated the surrounding peoples, forbidding them from paying tribute to the Khazars since they were his enemies<sup>157</sup>. This consolidation marked the beginning of the Old Russian State<sup>158</sup>.

The *Primary Chronicle* provides little documentation concerning Rus-Khazar relations; the next entry of substance concerning such relations is the takeover of Bela Vezha by Svyatoslav in 965. Prior to this, the Rus still engaged in trade with Khazaria. al-Mas'ūdī relates an episode in which the Rus must ask for permission to cross Khazaria to attack other tribes along the Caspian Sea. al-Mas'ūdī writes that the Rus are known to engage in trade with a wide variety of people,

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>153</sup> Melnikova, Elena A. 1994. *The Eastern World of the Vikings*, 53.

<sup>154</sup> Cross, Samuel Hazzard, and Olgerd P. Showbowitz-Wetzor. 1953. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 58.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>158</sup> Melnikova, Elena A. 1994. *The Eastern World of the Vikings*, 60.

with Spain, Constantinople, Rome, and the Khazars<sup>159</sup>. The Rus must ask for permission to cross and in return promise to give to the Khazars half of all the plunder they acquire during this raiding season, which is a significant jump up from the usual tenth required. In addition to al-Mas'ūdī, we know from Ibn Fadlan that the Rus engaged widely in trade and came to Khazaria to sell and trade their goods<sup>160</sup>. Finally, both Ibn Kurdādhbih<sup>161</sup> and Ibn Faqīh<sup>162</sup> relate that the Volga helped serve to bring Rus goods to the southern Islamic markets. The Khazars of course, being dependent on the flow of goods through their land, did their best to ensure that such goods and persons enjoyed protection, which leads us to the second point of contact between the Rus and the Khazars: the Varangian bodyguard.

Given the precariousness of the Khazarian economy and system, an army was not only required to maintain the delicate balance, but was also necessary to allow the Khaganate to remain in a position to exact such tariffs and taxes<sup>163</sup>. D.M. Dunlop has also called the Khazarian economy “highly artificial”<sup>164</sup>. Thus it was necessary for the Khazars to maintain a fighting force. Ibn Fadlan tells us the Khāqān maintained an army of twelve thousand men<sup>165</sup>. According to al-Mas'ūdī, the Khāqān's bodyguard is made up of Rus and Muslim soldiers<sup>166</sup>. Muslim soldiers and mercenaries seem to be the group relied on most heavily by the Khāqān, but nonetheless the Rus are also permitted to guard the Khāqān<sup>167</sup>. Scandinavians are to be found all over in various courts serving as bodyguards or as soldiers for royal retinues, and the Khāqān of Khazaria was no exception to the employment of the Scandinavian Rus<sup>168</sup>. Well into the ninth century, the sources report the Rus as bodyguards and soldiers of the Khāqān.

The Rus-Khazar relationship consisted heavily of trade, as did the Khazarian relationship with many other peoples. The Khazar state geographically sat on an extremely profitable crossroads of various goods, and the Rus dealt in some of the most profitable goods sought after in other markets. Such a market required protection and an army to maintain the balance. Over the course of the

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<sup>159</sup> Mas'ūdī al-. 1863. *Les Prairies D'or*, 18.

<sup>160</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 48.

<sup>161</sup> Ibn Kurdādhbih. 1870. *Kitāb al-Masālik w'al Mamālik*, 53-155.

<sup>162</sup> Ibn al-Faqīh. 1870. *Kitāb al-Buldān*. Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum, 270-271.

<sup>163</sup> Golden, B. Peter. 1980. *Khazar Studies*. 111.

<sup>164</sup> Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 232-234.

<sup>165</sup> Hawamī, Yāqūt al-, and Ahmad Ibn Fadlan. 2017. *Mission to the Volga*, 50.

<sup>166</sup> Mas'ūdī al-. 1863. *Les Prairies D'or*, 11-12.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 10-12.

<sup>168</sup> For further discussion and presentation on the Varangian bodyguard, see Sverrir Jakobsson's *The Varangian Legend: Testimonies from Old Norse Sources*. 2016.

ninth century the Khazars and the Rus developed a trading relationship, and this relationship evolved as some of the Rus emigrated to Khazaria and were permitted to join the bodyguard.

## **A Rus Khan?**

Perhaps the most perplexing and confusing element of Rus-Khazar relations is the issue of the so-called Rus Khāqānate. This term appears in a variety of sources; the Arab and Persian sources call the ruler of the Rus the “Khāqān Rus”, the *Annales Bertiniani* also name the ruler of the Rus who arrive as part of the Byzantine delegation to Louis the Pious as “*Chacanus Rhos*”. Many different scholars have put forth different theories concerning the nature of such a Khāqānate, and we will explore some of them below. However, before we address some of the various theories, let us first establish the notion and concept of the “Khāqānate” within Turkic and nomadic thinking. The Khazar people emerged out of a nomadic tribal union (see Section I) and as such, the notion of statehood would have been vastly different from what a modern person thinks when they think of a political state.

Steppe nomads lived primary off of livestock production, and to small extent vestigial agriculture<sup>169</sup>. This form of sustenance was based on moving from one pastor to another depending on the season and time. This lifestyle did not consist of aimless wandering, but rather pre-planned movement. Distinct political and social systems developed in large part due to the nature of nomadic dealings with sedentary society<sup>170</sup>. Turkic society during this time was highly tribal and these systems can be characterized as informal responses to pressures from more organized groups<sup>171</sup>. The economic system of nomadism could only sustain a limited group of people, whereas sedentary economies could provide for a much larger number of people. Given the fragility of the nomadic way of life, raiding sedentary peoples proved an effective way of maintaining the necessary resources for nomadic life<sup>172</sup>. Steppe nomadic peoples had developed an equestrian way of life that lent itself particularly well to military skills which could often be hard to counter, namely high mobility, advanced martial skill, and quick strikes<sup>173</sup>. Conflict with sedentary societies often came about due to access to goods and resources. Sometimes, such

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<sup>169</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1992. *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, 3.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> For further discussion on tribes and their nature, see Peter B. Golden’s *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, as well as Morton Fried’s *Notion of a Tribe*, 1975.

<sup>172</sup> Lewis, Mark Edward. 2010. *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 130.

<sup>173</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1992. *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, 8.

fighting led to a takeover of sedentary dwellings by the nomadic people, but this could have unintended consequences<sup>174</sup>. The actual occupation of a sedentary society required a certain number of logistical underpinnings. This in turn often led to the elite amongst the nomads to sedentarize, while the majority remained itinerant and unable to reap the benefits of conquest. This did not lead to egalitarianism. Rather it deepened the divide between regular tribesmen and their chieftains who became heavenly-mandated Khāqāns<sup>175</sup>. This often led to discord between classes and between members of the ruling clan, any of whom could assume leadership. Thus, the victor of often bloody wars of succession came to be viewed as rightly claiming the mandate of heaven<sup>176</sup>. It is from these realities that many nomadic unions rose and fell throughout the Steppe and Central Asia.

The title of “Khāqān” appears after the fall of the earliest nomadic empire the Hsiung-nu (see section I). The title was used in China and Tibet as well, and it also was used in other Turkic tribes and confederations<sup>177</sup>. The term “*Baz Qağan*” also appears meaning “vassal Qağan”. However, the supreme Khāqānate was reserved for the *Ašina* clan<sup>178</sup>. The person of the Khāqān was considered sacred and holy and was the fount of law and creator of the polity.

According to Peter B. Golden the office of Khāqān bore certain religious-shamanic aspects<sup>179</sup>. For example, as we later see in the accounts of Khazars, the Khāqān would be strangled if he exceeded his term by even a single day. In addition, the view of the Khāqān as a good luck charm for the welfare of the society also makes its way into Khazarian thinking<sup>180</sup>. And as we have seen in al-Mas'ūdī's account of the Khazars, natural disasters and calamities could lead to calls for the Khāqān's removal and death. If he was seen as having lost the favor of heaven, his remaining time in office would only bring about further misfortune upon the people. These same principles applied in China as well where the ruler also governed from a heavenly mandate. The death of the leader was accomplished without the shedding of blood, hence death by strangulation.

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>177</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1982. ‘*The Question of the Rus Qaganate*’, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, no. 2 (Wiesbaden). 76–97.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> See Ibn Fadlan's account of the Khazars in Section I.

Finally, the Khāqān came from one clan, even in later Turkic polities, probably from the *Ašina* clan<sup>181</sup>. Al-Mas'ūdī's work further reinforces the notion that the Khāqān usually came from the same clan<sup>182</sup>. Clearly then, concludes Golden, the notions of legitimacy and *translatio imperii* resided at the front of Turkic, nomadic consciousness<sup>183</sup>. A claim to the title of the Khāqānate had to then rest not only on the appropriate lineage to the *Ašina* clan, but also the mandate from heaven which had to be manifest in control of sacred forests, mountains, and rivers, and also victories over enemies. Without meeting such criteria, the title of Khāqān could not be rightly assumed and would not be taken seriously. So why does the title appear in connection to a non-Turkic people, the Rus? With these parameters and notions in place, let us consider some of the scholarly theories concerning the question of the Rus Khāqān. Wladyslaw Duczko writes concerning the notice in the *Annales Bertiniani* that the Rus leader bears the title “Khāqān”<sup>184</sup>. Duczko claims that because of the reference in the annals, the Rus must have considered themselves a Khāqānate, although he provides a caveat that they must have been well aware they were not the “real” Khāqānate, heir of the Western Turk Empire. Duczko states that only the Khazarian Empire remained of such a polity. He then outlines Golden's hypothesis, which we will deal with in greater detail later, that the Rus Khāqān held vassal status under the Khazarian Khāqān at Itil. However, Duczko finds this hypothesis not altogether convincing since, if the Rus held such power, it then seems odd the Khazars would include them in their federation. Duczko concludes, primarily based on the *Annales Bertiniani* and Ibn Rustah's account, that the Rus Khāqānate is based in the North in the Ladoga-Ilmen region. Based on the annal's comment that the Rus mentioned in the account were unable to return to their leader and home in the north, coupled with Ibn Rustah's description of the Rus land being on an Island in the middle of thick forests and swamps with trees, Duczko concludes the Rus Khāqānate was in fact an indigenous Rus Khāqānate<sup>185</sup>. Furthermore, the archeological evidence, according to Duczko, points strongly in the direction of Norse settlements in the Ladoga-Ilmen area at this period.

Thorir Jonsson Hraundal stands in stark contrast to Wladyslaw Duczko; Jonsson Hraundal argues that the Rus did not possess a native Khāqānate, and furthermore, the Arab sources do not

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<sup>181</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1982. *The Rus Qaghanate*.

<sup>182</sup> al-Mas'ūdī. 1863. *Les Prairies D'or*, 13-14.

<sup>183</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1982. *The Rus Qaghanate*.

<sup>184</sup> Duczko, Wladyslaw. 2004. *Viking Rus*, 29-33.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

place such a Khāqānate in the Ladoga-Ilmen region. He agrees in the end with Golden and provides numerous hypotheses about the notices that make mention of a Rus Khāqān and those that do not. For Jonsson Hraundal, the fact that the majority of extant sources do not make any mention whatsoever of a so-called Rus Khāqānate casts doubts on the notion as a whole<sup>186</sup>. Moreover, the sources that do address this topic use the term “Khāqān Rus” and say nothing of a Khāqānate, which leaves out chronology and geography of such a supposed entity. Ibn Fadlan himself in the early-mid tenth century uses the term “king” (*malik*) as opposed to “Khāqān” to describe the Rus ruler<sup>187</sup>. Finally, many of the major Arab sources do not ever ascribe this title to the Rus ruler. Concerning the reference in the *Annales Bertiniani*, Jonsson Hraundal hypothesizes that the Rus envoys simply seized upon the fame of the Khazarian Khāqānate and used it to bolster their own credibility in the eyes of the Franks<sup>188</sup>. Or perhaps the references in the annals indicates that the Rus were engaging in trade under the rule and jurisdiction of the Khazarian Khāqānate. On the whole though, Jonsson Hraundal finds the evidence overall inconclusive and sides with Golden’s analysis.

There exist some outlying theories that the notice in the *Annales Bertiniani* does not in fact refer to a Rus Khāqān at all. Ildar Garipzanov holds to the notion that the term in the annals, *chaganus*, refers in fact to King Hákon<sup>189</sup>. His primary argument is that the Germanic -h- was often recorded in Frankish sources as -ch-. The name “Hákon” was a well-known and attested name in Scandinavia, and so Garipzanov comes to the conclusion that the entry in the annals simply refers to a Swedish King. Furthermore, Louis’s recorded reply to the Byzantine emperor mentions that the use of the title “Khāqān” is known to be used only by the Avar tribe. This theory has little traction and has not been accepted by most scholars. The evidence from the Arab and Persian sources, while confusing and unclear as to the specifics, nonetheless do employ the title “Khāqān”.

The final view under consideration is that of Peter B. Golden. He starts with the sources that mention the “Rus Khāqān”. The obvious first source is the *Annales Bertiniani*, which has already been addressed. He next draws attention to lack of Rus sources which mention a Rus Khāqān: the two sources are the *Slovo o zakone i blagodati* (dated to 1040-1050 AD) of Ilarion,

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<sup>186</sup> Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, 174-182.

<sup>187</sup> For further discussion, see Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, 179.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>189</sup> Ildar Garipzanov. 2006. *The Annals of St. Bertin (839) and the Chaganus of the Rhos*.

and the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (authorship and dating uncertain)<sup>190</sup>. Finally, Golden asserts that the Arab and Persian sources that do employ the term “Khāqān” all fall under the same literary tradition: the Jayhāni tradition<sup>191</sup>. The lack of notices of a so-called “Rus Khāqān” in other sources and from other authors who clearly had information on the Rus, to Golden, raises suspicion. Furthermore, Ibn Fadlan’s account from the early-mid tenth century specifically used the Arab word for “king” (*malik*) and not “Khāqān”. The theories that the title must have been borrowed by the Rus is not plausible to Golden, who argues that to assume the title was borrowed by the Rus is to lack a fundamental understanding of the significance of the title “Khāqān”<sup>192</sup>. Given the importance of legitimacy and the strict criteria involved in obtaining such legitimacy make it highly unlikely that the Rus would simply have borrowed the title if they wanted to be taken seriously<sup>193</sup>. In light of these circumstances and the evidence available, Golden concludes that the most likely scenario is that the Rus Khāqān (if such an institution even existed) could only have been elevated as a subject vassal by the Khazar Khāqān. This could possibly have happened through marriage, a practice not unknown to the Turkic World<sup>194</sup>. The other option is that the Rus Khāqān was a deputy Khāqān and as such, enjoyed vassal status. Either way, concludes Golden, the Rus Khāqān is unlikely to have survived the ninth century and was probably a short-lived institution based on necessity, as evidenced by the Rus raids against the Khazars in the mid tenth century.

Given the available evidence available, Golden’s theory seems the most plausible. The lack of a “Rus Khāqān” in Ibn Fadlan’s account, and other notable works such as Ibn Kurdādhbih’s work, stands out conspicuously<sup>195</sup>. Both authors had enough information available to them and knew of the Rus sufficiently for them to have related such information. In addition, the *Primary Chronicle* makes no mention of such a ruler. The absence of such information evidently muddies the exact nature of a Rus Khāqānate if it even existed as modern scholarship would understand it.

In summary, what can be gleaned from the Arab and Persian sources as well as from the *Annales Bertiniani* does present a Rus Khāqānate, however, the exact nature of such an institution

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<sup>190</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1982. *The Rus Qaghanate*.

<sup>191</sup> For further discussion on the Jayhāni tradition, see Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, 71-75.

<sup>192</sup> See above for a description of the significance of that title.

<sup>193</sup> Golden, Peter B. 1982. *The Rus Qaghanate*.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> See Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, 177-178 for further discussion on the conspicuous lack of a Rus Khāqān in Ibn Fadlan’s account.

remains unclear. To what extent did the institution extend geographically or politically? If indeed a Khāqānate existed among the Rus, did its authority spread to all the various groups of Rus? Was the Khāqān a member of the Rus and was it independent of the Khazars, or did the Rus Khāqān function as a vassal of the Khazarian Khāqān? Do the references to the Khāqān Rus in fact refer to the Khazarian Khāqān, and were certain groups of Rus under the dominion of the Khazars, or at least subordinates in their tribal union? The exact nature continues to allude us and further research into this topic is required. Given the sacral nature of the Rus ruler as outlined in Ibn Fadlan's account, which gives the impression of Khazar influence, as well as the strict criteria in the Turkic nomadic world for the legitimacy of a Khāqān, Peter Golden's analysis and theory carries the most weight and seems the most conceivable. For a short while at least, the Kievan Rus operated under the influence and dominion of the Khazars as vassals. However, as we will consider later, this relationship broke down during the course of the tenth century and eventually relations between the two turned hostile.

## Cultural Exchange and Influence

When the Rus arrived in the Baltic region, they maintained Scandinavian cultural elements, while at the same time adopting many cultural elements from the local populations (Slavic, Baltic, and Finno-Ugric). Since we have dealt with the issue of the Rus Khāqānate, and have discussed the Rus-Khazar relations in light of the Arab and Persian sources, it seems clear that there existed a lot of contact among them, and the Rus in particular seem to have been influenced by the Khazars. The most illuminating passage in the Arab and Persian sources for cultural influence by the Khazars on the Rus is found in Ibn Fadlan's description of the Rus ruler. Ibn Fadlan records that the King of the Rūsiyyah customarily keeps a retinue of four hundred companions around him whom he trusts and who protect his person<sup>196</sup>. Each of the four hundred companions has two slave girls; one to attend his hygienic and dietary needs, and a second for his physical needs<sup>197</sup>. These companions sit below their ruler's massive couch, and with them sit the ruler's forty concubines, and whenever he desires, he has intercourse with one of them in the presence of all<sup>198</sup>. He also never leaves his throne, when he has a physical need, he satisfies it in a salver. When he does leave the throne, it is only to ride; the horse is brought right up to the throne and he mounts the horse there. Likewise, when the ride has finished, he rides right up to the throne and dismounts the horse onto the throne. Finally, like the Khazar Khāqān, the Rus ruler has a deputy who represents him and oversees the armies and state affairs<sup>199</sup>. Thus ends Ibn Fadlan's account of the Rus king. This description carries many similarities between the Khazar Khāqān and the Rus king. These have been noted by various scholars; the sacred person of the Rus ruler closely resembles the sacral person of the heavenly-mandated ruler of the Turkic Khāqānates. The large retinues of both companions and concubines also strikes of the Khāqāns of Central and Eastern Asia.

In addition, while this is minor, the *Primary Chronicle* records that the Varangians came from across the sea and after their initial raids, repulsion, subsequent invite back, and their eventual takeover of the region; their descendants are described as Varangians, but also as Slavs<sup>200</sup>. It is not unreasonable to assume that the Varangians who emigrated from Scandinavia and settled in the Baltic region assimilated into Slavic culture while maintaining elements of their home culture.

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<sup>196</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*. Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 54-55.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Cross, Samuel Hazzard., and Olgerd P. Showbowitz-Wetzor. 1953. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 59-60.

Throughout the *Primary Chronicle*, the Rus are distinguished from the local Slavic populations, but they are also distinguished from Scandinavia. Their Scandinavian homeland is recognized and acknowledged, but they seem to be distinct in the minds of observers.

Overall there exists little by way of specific evidence concerning a possible cultural exchange between the two people groups. However, given the description of the Rus king by Ibn Fadlan, as well as the evidence from the *Primary Chronicle*, it seems fair to assume there existed a degree of cultural influence and exchange between the two. Especially it seems the Rus borrowed from the Khazars more than the other way around.

## **The Fall of Khazaria**

Eventually, the domination of the Khazars came to an end. Their cultural influence and their power derived from their geographic location eventually came to an end. The exact circumstances that brought about this downfall remain murky. The *Primary Chronicle* elevates the Rus attack on Bela Vezha in 965 in the demise of the Khazars, however the evidence suggests this attack was one of many contributing factors. The tribal union which Dunlop states held more power than all its neighbors except the Byzantine Empire, and the Islamic Caliphate, eventually came crashing down<sup>201</sup>. As has been outlined above, Khazarian society rested on a semi-nomadic basis. Despite being a relatively sedentary society, the Khazarian Khāqān forbade his subjects from using bricks to build houses (See Ibn Fadlan's account above in Section I) and so the majority of people lived in their tents. In addition, the Khazars only maintained an army of twelve thousand soldiers according to Ibn Fadlan's account. According to al-Mas'ūdī's writings, the special guards of the Khāqān were foreigners: Muslim soldiers as well as Rus and Slavic guards. Thus, these two factors of nomadism and dependence on mercenaries made for a shaky economic base.

Dunlop believes this unstable foundation played a major role in the downfall of the Khazars<sup>202</sup>. He asserts that the material resources of Khazaria were limited. Al-Muqaddasi writes that the resources of the Steppe Volga region are barren and dry and have no livestock or fruits<sup>203</sup>. Dunlop, however, asserts that this is not entirely true since the Khazars are known to have possessed some livestock such as camels. Nonetheless, it is true they exported very little and imported almost

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<sup>201</sup> Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 222.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>203</sup> Muqaddasi, al-. 1870. *The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions (Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma 'rifat al-aqālīm)*, 361.

everything. Al-Muqaddasi himself writes later on the abundance of sheep in the country, and Dunlop also notes the ability of the Khazars to field a great number of cavalry which suggests access to large equestrian resources<sup>204</sup>. In addition, some of the Hebrew sources not addressed in this work mention some agricultural work within Khazarian territory<sup>205</sup>.

Nonetheless, Ibn Fadlan writes that the Khazars do not practice agriculture and emphasizes (as do the other sources) that the Khazarian economy relies heavily on imports and the tariffs derived therein. Many of the goods that came through the Khazarian emporium were of high value, such as furs, swords, excellent honey and wax, etc. These commanded large markets and the tariffs and taxes charged by the Khazars helped fuel their economy. Furthermore, Dunlop maintains that the Khazars had access to some gold and silver mines which helped provide pay for their mercenary army. Khazarian manufacturing, according to Dunlop, remained at a low level, and thus the economy relied primarily on taxes, tariffs, tributes, and advantageous geography<sup>206</sup>. In light of all these factors, Dunlop concludes that the Khazarian economy was at its core hollow, and that everything was dependent on prestige and military strength<sup>207</sup>. Such a precarious balance could not last forever and with diminishing importance of the trade routes that passed through Khazaria, known as the “Khazarian way”<sup>208</sup>, the military strength could not be maintained. In addition, the struggle to maintain authority over all the tribes and clans within the Khazarian union caused the Khāqān to lose his authority and hold over certain clans and tribes which would have further rendered the situation unstable<sup>209</sup>. However, Dunlop’s description of the Khazarian economy is not shared by all. Thomas Noonan believes the Khazarian economy was far from artificial<sup>210</sup>. He turns to Ibn Fadlan’s account that the Khazarian Khāqān possessed twenty-five wives from the neighboring peoples. Noonan asserts that the Khāqān rules over these peoples and thus derives tribute from them. Other Hebrew sources mention more vassal peoples which Noonan states places the number of Khazarian tributaries between twenty-five and forty<sup>211</sup>. Noonan continues that this gave the Khazarian Khāqānate a diverse economy on which to build itself. Based on the sources

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 355.

<sup>205</sup> See Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, Chap V and VI for more information and discussion concerning the Hebrew sources on the Khazars.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 231-233.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>208</sup> Jonsson Hraundal, Thorir. 2013. *The Rus in Arabic Sources*, p168.

<sup>209</sup> Golden, Peter, B. 1980. *Khazar Studies*, 111.

<sup>210</sup> Noonan, Thomas S. 2007. "Some Observations on the Economy of the Khazar Khāqānate." In *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium Hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute*, by Peter B Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai and András Róna-Tas, 207-244. Leiden: Brill, 208.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

just mentioned as well as some of the Arab sources mentioned previously, Noonan concludes that the Khazarian economy was in fact diverse and robust, resting on the pillars of a strong internal economy, as well as the levies and duties derived from their geographically favorable position<sup>212</sup>. Their downfall was due rather to shifting of trade routes, not due to an artificial economy.

By the late ninth century and into the tenth, the Rus grew powerful enough to control some former Khazar territories on the western fringe of the latter's sphere of influence. For example, according to the *Primary Chronicle*, Kiev, formerly a tributary of the Khazar state, came under Rus control by the year 882<sup>213</sup>. Nonetheless, relations did not turn totally bellicose. Al-Mas'ūdī, writing in the mid tenth century, tells of a large Rus force that requests permission from the Khazars to raid the Muslim provinces along the Caspian Sea in 913<sup>214</sup>. The Rus promise half of their plunder to the Khazars in return for access to the populations around the Khazar Sea. Thus, the Khazars still wielded enough might and influence that the Rus did not view it as particularly advantageous to directly attack the Khazars. Conversely, in need perhaps of funds to boost a fragile economy, the Khazars readily accepted the large Rus force sailing through their territory in order to reap one half of the total plunder. As noted above (See section II) this particular expedition proved disastrous for the Rus raiders as the Khazars permitted their Muslim inhabitants to exact revenge on the returning Rus troops. Furthermore, as relations presumably continued to deteriorate between the Rus and the Khazars, we learn from the Hebrew source, "The Reply of Joseph", that a few decades later, the Khazars actively sought to prevent the Rus from sailing down the Volga to the Caspian and to the Islamic territories beyond<sup>215</sup>. In the year 965, according to the *Primary Chronicle*, the Rus sailed down and sacked the Khazar city of Bela Vezha<sup>216</sup> as well as the Yasians and the Kasogians. Dunlop argues and presents evidence<sup>217</sup> that the Rus also sacked the Khazar capital before returning to Kiev though surprisingly, such events are not mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle*. Now, the account of the *Primary Chronicle* concerning the fall of Bela Vezha is not corroborated by the Arab sources; the only account that mentions the Rus attacking the Khazars is Ibn Ḥawqal in his work *Ṣūrat al- 'Arḍ*, and Ibn Ḥawqal only briefly records the destruction of the Khazar capital Itil<sup>218</sup>. The Khazarian Union had already withstood rebellion from its constituents

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 243-244.

<sup>213</sup> Cross, Samuel Hazzard., and Olgerd P. Showbowitz-Wetzor. 1953. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 61.

<sup>214</sup> al-Mas'ūdī. 1863. *Les Prairies D'or*, 19-20.

<sup>215</sup> Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 240.

<sup>216</sup> Cross, Samuel Hazzard., and Olgerd P. Showbowitz-Wetzor. 1953. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 84.

<sup>217</sup> See Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 241-247.

<sup>218</sup> Ibn Fadlan. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness* Translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, 178.

at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>219</sup>. In any case, the Khazar state did not withstand either the Rus onslaught or the rebellious Turkic tribes, and the nomadic union crumbled by the late tenth century. It was not the Judaization of the Khazars that caused their swift downfall, but the inherent weakness in the nomadic state<sup>220</sup>, as well as the uprisings of tribes within the union. After the Rus invasion the Khazar state and institutions seem to have not survived. There are references to the Khazars after the destruction of Bela Vezha, but the extent to which they maintained their independence remains unclear. They may have remained independent but controlled a much smaller section of territory in the Caucasus. They may have been subordinates to the Rus, or perhaps submitted to Muslim control. Moreover, Dunlop comes to the conclusion that the Khazar state itself did not survive the Rus invasion, and the fate and doings of the survivors is murky and unclear<sup>221</sup>. Thus ended the Khazar union, and their mentions in history after the year 965 are few and do not appear beyond the 12<sup>th</sup> century. And so we arrive at the end of Rus-Khazar relations.

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<sup>219</sup> Franklin, Simon, and Jonathan Shepard. 2013. *The Emergence of Rus, 750-1200*, 85-86.

<sup>220</sup> Golden, Peter, B. 1980. *Khazar Studies*, 11.

<sup>221</sup> Dunlop, Douglas Morton. 1954. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 248.

## Conclusion

The Khazar state emerged in the Caucasus region sometime during the course of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and came to a swift end in the mid-tenth century. Like the Turkic Khāqānates that preceded them, the Khazar state was largely nomadic in nature and that way of life dominated all aspects of the society; economic, military, social, and religious. This hybrid of nomadic and sedentary societies ultimately proved untenable. The Khazarian economy based itself largely on the advantages afforded by its geography. A vast trade network ran through the Caucasus and the Khazars positioned themselves to take advantage of such. Tariffs, taxes, and tributes formed the underpinnings of the economy, which Muslim, Rus, and Slavic mercenaries protected. Both elements, military and economic, could not exist independent of each other, and so rendered the economy fragile. Ultimately, the Khazarian Khāqān could not maintain indefinitely his control of the various members of the union which left the nomadic state vulnerable when the Rus arrived and devastated the city of Bela Vezha in 965. The Rus arrived in the Northern Baltic regions from Scandinavia sometime during the 8<sup>th</sup> century and they engaged primarily in fur and slave trades. They established themselves in the northern regions and various groups of Rus engaged in trade along the rivers and with different peoples.

The historical context of both the Khazars and the Rus were established despite convoluted sources and contradicting information. But working with what was accessible we succeeded in considering the points of contact between the Rus and the Khazars and as the reader now hopefully sees, their relationship was both unique and in much need of further historical research. With their economies so dependent upon trade and the doubtful existence of a Rus Khāqānate, the purpose of this thesis was achieved. Having demonstrated the points of contact without any sufficiently clear answers on the nature of their relationship the primary sources proved useful. Having examined the evidence found in the primary sources, as well as the arguments from various scholars, the most solid conclusion (though by no means the final one) is that the Rus functioned as vassals and subordinates to the Khazars who bequeathed to their ruler the title of Khāqān. The cultural influence, such as the fact of the Khazars having a far greater cultural impact on the Rus than the other way around, these played a big part in their depictions in primary sources. The description

found in Ibn Fadlan's account concerning the Rus king, and his use of the word "king" instead of "Khāqān" seems to indicate cultural influence but not an adoption of Khazarian customs. Finally, the Rus helped to bring about the downfall of the Khazars. Precarious economic and military systems, as well as insubordinate tribes under Khazarian control played a major role, and the Rus takeover of Bela Vezha in 965 further undermined Khazarian power. Thus the relationship between the Rus and Khazars underwent significant transformations during the course of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a result, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, it seems the Khazarian state, already on its back foot due to poor economic systems and loss of control of certain clans under their control, more or less ceased to exist after the Rus invasion of 965. Echoes of Khazarian influence persisted until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but then vanished in the wake of the Mongolian conquests in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

So, how should we view the Rus-Khazar relationship? What conclusions can we draw from the evidence reviewed? The picture of the Rus painted by the *Primary Chronicle* seems to depict a relatively unified people ready to embrace statehood and it could be tempting to consider their relations with Khazaria in such a light. However, this does not match the fuller picture when considering the other evidence available to us. Rather it seems, those Scandinavians who arrived in the North Baltic region formed distinct groups with different agendas and traveled to different regions. While these various factions certainly maintained a distinct "Scandinavianess" about them (the distinction caused observers to label them all as *Rus*), they nonetheless did not operate as a unified people. The evidence consequently does not present a nation, rather it presents a people group with distinct cultural elements spread across various locations and milieus, with diverse agendas and objectives. Thus, the questions of relations between the Rus people and the Khazar people must be approached with caution, since the various groups of Rus did not necessarily act in accordance with one another. It seems the more appropriate question is what relationship did certain groups of Rus (e.g. in Kiev, or those living in the Khazarian capital) have with the Khazars.

Concerning the notion of a Rus Khāqān, the evidence on the whole does not point positively towards such an idea. The Arab and Persian sources, with the exception of those in *Jayhāni* tradition, are conspicuously silent concerning such an institution. Furthermore, the idea of a Rus Khāqān appears in some Western sources like the *Annales Bertiniani*, but not in others, like the *Primary Chronicle*. If such a figure existed, it would have most likely been within the confines outlined by Golden (see page 44 and 45) as a subordinate Khāqān. Therefore, based on the

evidence available to us, it seems that some groups of Rus traded with the Khazars, and some even resided within the Khazarian capital functioning as bodyguards. The extent to which certain groups of Rus were subordinate to the Khazars is unclear. The Arab and Persian sources do not seem to depict the Rus people as being under Khazarian dominion, though they may very well have been subordinate trading partners. Thus, the Rus probably existed outside the Khazar Union, though of course had many mercantile contacts with the Khazars until the mid-tenth century. The attack on Bela Vezha from Kiev in 965 is not corroborated by the Arab and Persian sources and was probably not as devastating to the Khazars as the *Primary Chronicle* seems to make it. Rather, such an attack was but one of many factors (such as tribal uprisings, and economic concerns) that brought about the end of the Khazars. Noonan's conclusion (supported by Thorir Jonsson Hraundal) that diminishing trade played a far greater role in the Khazarian downfall seems more accurate. Thus, the majority of the Rus-Khazar relations were commercial in nature, until the Khazars ceased to be effective middlemen and contact with the markets south of them became accessible via other routes. After this, the Khazars faded from the scene as the Kievan Rus ascended to play a more prominent role. On the whole, further research is required on these topics as new evidence becomes available.

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