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An Investigation of the 'Island of Bujan' Motif in Russian and Scandinavian Tradition

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**An Investigation of the 'Island of Bujan' Motif
in Russian and Scandinavian Tradition**

(Spine Title: The Island of Bujan Motif)

(Thesis Format: Monograph)

by

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Graduate Program in Comparative Literature



A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the ‘Island of Bujan’ motif in Russian tradition and studies it with reference to the Yggdrasill myth in Scandinavian tradition. It examines some scholarly claims that state that owing to contacts between the Slavs and the Scandinavians during the early Middle Ages, myths and beliefs may have traversed geographical boundaries. The thesis begins with a detailed account of the proposed interaction between the Slavs and the Scandinavians and includes a brief summary of the Normanist controversy and the evidence that supports and negates it. It then proceeds to study Bujan in Russian incantations and Yggdrasill in the Scandinavian *Eddaic* texts to define the current state of information on them and to isolate similarities between them. In the process, the thesis also highlights the fragmentariness of the primary material available, which ensures that some questions relating to influence between cultural constructs of the two traditions are left unanswered.

Keywords

anti-Normanist, *Edda*, *Eddaic*, Island of Bujan, Normanist, Russian incantations, Russian Primary Chronicle, Yggdrasill.

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Introduction

In the eighth century CE, there began a period of cultural interactions, motivated by trade, between the Scandinavians from Northern Europe and Slavs of Eastern Europe. Scandinavian presence in the Slavic world is believed to have culminated in the establishment of the Old Russian State, run by a ruler of Scandinavian ethnicity.

Trade and travel often go hand in hand with exchanges of religious perceptions. Furthermore, while there are systems of belief that are firmly codified, there are those that are less codified in practice and prone to influence and innovation, such as belief at the 'informal' level of a household, which is often tied in with folklore. Mircea Eliade, in his extensive study of comparative religions entitled *Patterns in Comparative Religion* has shown that there are several symbols of the sacred, embodying divine power of some sort, each offering one facet of the many sacred experiences that exist which are common between religions. For example, he discusses solar, cosmic and biological hierophanies and finds parallels in several cultures in his attempt to identify some overarching principle in each culture that would define not only the whole, but also the individual myth or rite or symbol to some extent. Thus, the worship or revering of stones, trees, serpents, the earth, the Sun and other celestial bodies is not unique to one culture, even though it may retain some unique feature in one particular culture that is local to it and is not seen elsewhere.

There are also scholars, such as Hilda Ellis Davidson, who have speculated that the Viking forays into the east may have resulted in access to new mythical and religious traditions which may well have influenced the prominent Norse myth of the World-Ash Yggdrasil. Davidson says that "the clarity and detail of the picture of Yggdrasil is such

as to suggest that new inspiration concerning the World Tree had come into Scandinavia from the east during the Viking age. The penetration of the Viking settlers down the rivers of Russia to the Black Sea opened the road to Byzantium and the East” (*Gods and Myths* 196).

In commenting on hypotheses like Davidson’s, Elena Mel’nikova, a prominent contemporary scholar who studies the interactions between the Slavs and Scandinavians during the early Middle Ages, has noted that for several socio-religious reasons, the traces of this interaction are very difficult to find in Old Russian literature. The same problem is encountered with literary sources of the ancient pagan religions from the two cultures. Indeed, the materials that have survived vie with each other in terms of their fragmentariness. Eliade has commented on the difficulties faced by the scholar of comparative religions when dealing with these two cultures. He says – “in the case of the Germanic or Slavonic religions, we are obliged to make use of simple folklore, with the inevitable risks attaching to its handling and interpretation. A runic inscription, a myth recorded several centuries after it had ceased to be understood, a few symbolic pictures, a few protohistoric monuments, nothing could be more ill-assorted than the material available to the historian of Germanic and Slavonic religion” (Eliade 5).

Keeping in mind Eliade’s extensive discussion of common symbols in world religions, and seeking to assess Davidson’s claim that Yggdrasill must have been influenced by eastern myths, we embark on a comparative study of the pagan beliefs of the two regions with the view to finding certain common features between specific beliefs in the ancient Slavic and Norse religions. Thus, the present thesis aims to focus

upon the image of the island Bujan in Russian tradition and to see how far analogues to it can be identified in Scandinavian tradition.

Chapter 1 will look at the economic, socio-cultural, political and ethno-religious milieu of the proposed interaction between the Scandinavians and the Slavs, and will attempt to arrive at certain concrete conclusions as to the precise nature and extent of any influence that either culture may have had on the other. Chapter 2 will examine Bujan in incantations and study both the island and its ancillary motifs extensively. Chapter 3 will examine Yggdrasill as it is depicted in the *Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda*, as a preparation toward comparison and contrast of the Mysterious Oak on Bujan with Yggdrasill. The hope is to identify some new leads in considering possible Russian-Scandinavian cultural contacts.

In conclusion, I hope to offer some evaluation of claims like those of Ellis Davidson, in the light of the evidence and of modern scholarly methodology.

Chapter One

The Varangians and the Old Russian State

“They thus selected three brothers, with their kinsfolk, who took with them all the Russes and migrated. The oldest, Rurik, located himself in Novgorod; the second, Sineus, at Beloozero; and the third, Truvor, in Izborsk. On account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of Rus’.” – Russian Primary Chronicle (59)

In any comparative study examining possible cross-cultural influences in religion, belief and social culture, it is necessary to establish the basis upon which rests the assumption that cross-cultural influences may have existed in some point in time. This chapter discusses the literary and archaeological evidence for the presence of Scandinavians in Kievan Rus’. Some account will be taken of the Normanist controversy.

Part – I

“Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us.”

– Russian Primary Chronicle (59)

The *Повѣсть времяньныхъ лѣтъ* (*Povest' Vremennikh Let – Tales of Bygone Years*, also known as the *Russian Primary Chronicle*) (*PVL*) chronicles the history of Kievan Rus' from the period of its origin, the mid-ninth to twelfth centuries. It was formerly attributed solely to the monk Nestor, but more recently scholars have claimed that it is the work of more than one hand (*Russian Primary*, 3).

The *PVL* starts with the ‘ethnogeographic introduction’ that explains the division of the lands of the earth amongst the three sons of Noah – Shem, Ham and Japeth, a common principle used by medieval geographers/historians and one also used by the author of the Norse *Landalýsingar* (Mel'nikova, *Eastern World* 20). The *PVL* gives an extensive description of the lands that fell to the share of each son. To the lot of *Афеть* (Japeth) fell the *Словѣне* (the Slavs) (*Russian Primary* 2). The *PVL* also mentions the Varangians. ‘Varangians’, or ‘варяги’, was the appellation used to describe Scandinavians who came to Eastern Europe (EE) as invaders, merchants, mercenaries or administrators, and settled there. The Varangians are believed to have played an important role in the formation of the Old Russian State (ORS). The *PVL* describes them in some detail at the very beginning:

В Афетовѣ же части сѣдять Русь, Чюдь и вси языци: Меря, Мурома, Вель,

Морьдва, Заволочская Чюдь, Пермь, Печера, Ямь, Угра, Литва, Зимѣгола,

Корсь, Лѣтьгола, Любь. Ляхъве, же, и Пруси, Чюдъ пресѣдять к морю
 Варяжьскому; по сему же морю сѣдять Варязи сѣмо ко вѣстоку до предѣла
 Симова, по тому же морю сѣдять къ западу до землѣ Агнянски и до
 Волошьски. Афетово бо и то колѣно: Варязи, Свеи, Урмане, [Готе], Русь,
 Агняне, Галичане, Волъхва, Римляне, Нѣмци, Корлязи, Веньдици, Фрягове и
 прочии ... (*Tales of Bygone 4*)

[In the share of Japeth lies Rus', Chud', and all the gentiles: Merya, Muroma,
 Ves', Mordva, Chud' beyond the portages, Perm', Pechera, Yam', Ugra, Litva,
 Zimegola, Kors', Let'gola, and Liv'. The Lyakhs, the Prussians, and Chud' border
 on the Varangian Sea. The Varangians dwell on the shores of that same sea, and
 extend to the eastward as far as the portion of Shem. They likewise live to the
 west beside this sea as far as the land of the English and the French. For the
 following nations also are a part of the race of Japeth: the Varangians, the Swedes,
 the Normans, the Gotlanders, the Russes, the English, the Spaniards, the Italians,
 the Romans, the Germans, the French, the Venetians, the Genoese, and so on.
 (*Russian Primary 52*)]

This is also the first reference in the *PVL* to the “Russes” of (presumably) Rus' who are
 associated with the Varangians further in the *PVL*:

859 Въ лѣто 6367. Имаху дань Варязи изъ заморья на Чюди и на Словѣнехъ, на Мери и на Всѣхъ, [и на] Кривичѣхъ; а Козари имаху на Полянѣхъ, и на Сѣверѣхъ и на Вятичѣхъ, имаху по бѣлѣи вѣверицѣ отъ дыма.

862 [Въ лѣто 6370]. Изгнаша Варяги за море, и не даша имъ дани, и почаша сами в собѣ володѣти, и не бѣ в нихъ правды, и вѣста родъ на родъ, [и] быша в нихъ усобицѣ, и воевати почаша сами на ся. [И] рѣша сами в себѣ: “поищемъ собѣ “князя, иже бы володѣль нами судиль по праву”. [И] идоша за море къ Варягомъ, к Русі; сиче бо тѣи звахуся Варязи Русь, яко се друзии зовутся Свие, друзии же Урмане, Анѣгляне, друзии Гѣте, тако и си. Рѣша Руси Чюдѣ, [и] Словѣни, и Кривичи [и] Все: “земля наша велика и обилна, “а наряда в ней нѣтъ; да поидѣте княжить и володѣти нами”. И избрашася 3 братья с роды своими,[и] пояша по собѣ всю Русь, и придоша; старѣйший, Рюрикъ, [сѣде Новѣгородѣ], а другой, Синеусъ, на Бѣлѣ-озерѣ, а третій Изборьстѣ, Труворъ. [И] отъ тѣхъ [Варягъ] прозвася Руская земля, Новугородъци, ти суть людье Новогородъци отъ рода Варяжьска, преже бо бѣша Словѣни. (*Tales of Bygone* 18-19)

[6367 (859). The Varangians from beyond the sea imposed tribute upon the Chuds, the Slavs, the Merians, the Ves', and the Krivichians ...

6368-6370 (860-862). The tributaries of the Varangians drove them back beyond the sea and, refusing them further tribute, set out to govern themselves. There was no law among them, but tribe rose against tribe. Discord thus ensued among them, and they began to war one against another. They said to themselves, "Let us seek a prince who may rule over us and judge us according to the Law." They accordingly went overseas to the Varangian Russes: these particular Varangians were known as Russes, just as some are called Swedes; and others Normans, English, and Gotlanders, for they were thus named. The Chuds, the Slavs, the Krivichians, and the Ves' then said to the people of Rus', "Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us." They thus selected three brothers, with their kinsfolk, who took with them all the Russes and migrated. The oldest, Rurik, located himself in Novgorod; the second, Sineus, at Beloozero; and the third, Truvor, in Izborsk. On account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of Rus'. The present inhabitants of Novgorod are descended from the Varangian race, but aforesaid they were Slavs. (*Russian Primary 59-60*)]

Soon after, the *PVL* seems to clarify this point even further, as if leaving no doubt at all as to who these *варяги* (Varangians) were, and what their status in these cities was:

И по тѣмъ городомъ суть находни//ци Варязи, а перьвii насельници в Новѣгородѣ Словѣне, [въ] Полотьстѣ Кривичи, в Ростовѣ Меря, в Белѣ-озерѣ Весь, в Муромѣ Мурома ... (*Tales of Bygone 19*)

[In these cities there are thus Varangian colonists, but the first settlers were, in Novgorod, Slavs; in Polotsk, Krivichians; at Beloozero, Ves', in Rostov, Merians; and in Murom, Muromians. (*Russian Primary* 60)]

There is another instance of requesting a ruler from 970 CE:

В се же время придоша людье Ноугородьстии, просяще князя собѣ: “аще не поидете к намъ, то налѣземъ князя собѣ ...” (*Tales of Bygone* 68)

[At this time came the people of Novgorod asking for themselves a prince. “If you will not come to us,” said they, “then we will choose a prince of our own.”

(*Russian Primary* 87)]

There are also several references to the Rurikid rulers (the Russes) sending for the Varangians, evidently considered a formidable fighting force that had long proved itself in battle.

Игорь же пришедъ нача совкупляти воѣ многи, и посла по Варяги многи за море, вабя е на Греки, паки хотя поити на ня. (*Tales of Bygone* 44)

[Upon his return, Igor' began to collect a great army, and sent many messengers after the Varangians beyond the sea, inviting them to attack the Greeks, for he desired them to make war upon them. (*Russian Primary* 72)]

Хотящю Володимеру ити на Ярослава, Ярославъ же, пославъ за море,
приведе Варягы ... (*Tales of Bygone* 127)

[While Vladimir was desirous of attacking Yaroslav, the latter sent overseas and
imported Varangian reinforcements ... (*Russian Primary* 124)]

... и приведоша Варягы, [и] вдаша имъ скоть, и совокупи Ярославъ воя
многы. (*Tales of Bygone* 140)

[With these funds they recruited Varangians whom they imported, and thus
collected for Yaroslav a large army. (*Russian Primary* 132)]

The Norman Problem

The description of the foundation of the ORS in the *PVL* has led to a prolonged debate between scholars for the past three centuries. It led to the development of what is called the 'Norman Problem' or the 'Varangian Problem'. A. D. Stender-Petersen defines the Varangian Problem as the "the problem of the part played by the Nordic-Scandinavian ethnic element in the history of the political and cultural creation and early development of the ancient Russian state" (5). Normanist scholars believed that the *PVL* points to the establishment of the ORS by the Scandinavians. Anti-Norman scholars have tried to disprove the claims of the Normans.

The Normanist school was firmly established with E. Kunik's work in 1844-45 and Vilhelm Thomsen's Oxford lectures in 1876 (Stender-Petersen 5-6). Important early anti-Normanists were M. V. Lomonosov and S. A. Gedeonov. The Normanists tried to prove that the word Rus' (from which 'Russia' was born) derives from Swedish sources. The anti-Normanists produced varying derivations from the Iranian, Slavic, Khazarian,

Hungarian, Finnish, Lithuanian and Gothic languages. Braun criticized the work done by both parties and felt that their conclusions were anything but unshakeable (Stender-Petersen 5-6). Also part of the controversy were the names of important landmarks on the river routes. Thomsen interpreted the names of the cataracts on the Dnepr as Scandinavian in etymology, supported by F. Braun in *The Varangian Problem* (1892). S. A. Gedeonov for his part found Slavic-Russian place-names (primarily those of rivers) which could be the source of the word 'Rus' (Stender-Petersen 6).

Stender-Petersen critiques alleged Normanist tendencies 1) to model Scandinavian (primarily Swedish) movements in the east on the basis of known Scandinavian activity in the west (primarily Danish and Norwegian); 2) to see the eastern expansion as initiated by Swedish traders who were followed by Swedish warriors; 3) to accept the relevant passages of the *PVL* as literal truth; and 4) to use numismatical evidence in order to infer the ethnic composition and movement of the population (Stender-Petersen 8). He argues that the western model of Scandinavian activity cannot be applied to the east and that neither the traders nor the warriors were the initiators of the eastern expansion of the Scandinavians (7-8).

Recent scholars such as Elena Mel'nikova and Thomas Noonan have produced work that is more cautious and skeptical of both the archaeological and linguistic evidence. They accept that although there is considerable evidence for the presence of Scandinavians in EE, more than one interpretation of this presence is possible and its precise nature remains only partially understood. Their arguments will be discussed in detail presently.

The Archaeological Evidence

The period 750-900 CE saw great changes and political and cultural movements in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. After a hiatus, during which the Khazars (a Turkic people who lived in the region of the Caucasus mountains and the Caspian Sea and, later, the south-eastern Russian steppes) and the Arabs were constantly at war with each other, peace was established in the 760s. At this point, trade became possible, and this propelled the inflow of Arab silver *dirhams* into EE. These were eagerly sought after, but more for their valuable silver content than as units of currency (Noonan ix). This quest for silver *dirhams* led to a whole new system of contacts established over the Baltic, the Caspian and the Mediterranean seas as well as the many rivers connecting them, creating a network of trade that spanned Gotland, Ladoga, Novgorod, Kiev, Constantinople, and even Baghdad.

Given the decidedly inhospitable terrain and relative poverty of EE in comparison with countries of Western Europe, such as France and England, where wealth was concentrated mainly in urban centres and monasteries that were conveniently located on the North Sea or on rivers that emptied into the sea or on channel coasts, the motivation behind the Scandinavians' coming to the area remains unclear until the influx of *dirhams* is considered (Noonan 321). Noonan proposes that *dirhams* first reached Russia in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Neither EE nor Scandinavia had local sources of silver.

When Scandinavian merchants appeared in the east to trade furs in exchange for Arab silver in the eighth century, they discovered new passages to the Volga and “maintained direct communications from the Baltic to the Volga” (Mel’nikova, *Eastern*

Vikings 31-33). The fact that the Baltic-Volga route was used to trade with the Arabs in exchange for *dirhams* is attested by hoards in Ladoga and its environs. Noonan dates the hoard found at Old Ladoga as the earliest – 786/787 (341). The huge demand for *dirhams* led to an increased supply of these coins along the newly discovered river routes, as demonstrated by the increasing size of hoards. Noonan notes that the primary flow of *dirhams* went north through the Volga route, while the Dnepr route was of secondary significance (343). It is significant that a large number of *dirhams* actually stayed in Russia, and probably only 36% were re-exported from Russia to the Baltic. It was at Old Ladoga that the Scandinavians first settled and from here that they forged south. Noonan says: “Only at Old Ladoga is there sufficient evidence to show that Scandinavian-Russian relations of more than a sporadic nature had developed by the early Viking Age and that Vikings had, in fact, come to dwell among the inhabitants of northern Russia at this time” (330).

Finds from the oldest level (eighth-century) in Old Ladoga include jewellery, shoes, ornamental combs, etc., that may have Scandinavian origins, but the most important archaeological finds are glass beads, of which about 50% have a barrel or cask-like (*бочонкообразные*) and twisted (*крученые*) configuration found virtually exclusively in Northern Europe. The inference is that these beads reached Ladoga as a result of contacts with the Scandinavians through the Baltic Sea (Noonan 336-337). Another find that convinces even a cautious scholar like Noonan of Scandinavian presence is a hoard (in the same level) of “twenty-six smithy’s tools and related objects in a craft-shop” (337).

Noonan believes that Old Ladoga began as a “seasonal emporium ... [and eventually] led some of the foreigners to become permanent residents” (339). In any case, the cemetery at Plakun, located opposite Old Ladoga, firmly indicates that there were some Scandinavian permanent residents by the early ninth century in the region, because this is the *only* absolutely Scandinavian cemetery in Russia. Burial mound No. 7, a cremation boat grave which dates from this period, contains a Frisian jug and four beads. The Plakun graves provide good evidence of the transition from temporary sojourns to permanent living in Russia, because these were burials of migrants who came and stayed, even with their families, rather than of visiting merchants or warriors or mercenaries (see Noonan 340).

Noonan’s numismatic research pushes back the temporal frontiers of the ORS at Kiev by about a century. While the *PVL* presents the beginning of the construction of the ORS with the arrival of Rurik (862 CE), the real Scandinavian association that led to the development of the state polities of Novgorod and Kiev which eventually united to form the ORS appears to be trade, and the evidence strongly suggests that this trade was well underway already in the eighth century, with Scandinavians settling permanently in the early ninth century. Thus, Noonan, along with scholars like Mel’nikova, has emphasized the role of trade in the initial stages of state building and the establishment of towns necessary to service that trade. Although these economic conditions cannot be said to be wholly responsible for the establishment of the ORS, they performed two vital tasks: they fuelled Scandinavian movement through Russia, thereby establishing the two river routes that proved integral to the connection of the Northern polity with the Southern (see below), and they caused the subjugation of local tribes by Scandinavians in order to

establish the opportunity to trade with them, thereby creating conditions for a centralized state.

From key points on Lake Ladoga and Lake Il'men' (in the Novgorod region), Scandinavian merchants had several river routes as options before them that would connect them eventually to the Volga, thereby creating the great, critical Baltic-Volga route. In all probability, this route came into use in the ninth century (Mel'nikova, *Eastern World* 31-33). Another significant feature of the emergence of the Baltic-Volga route is the rise of Novgorod. Strategically located near Lake Il'men', Novgorod became a prominent trade centre in the tenth century. The region's importance was further reinforced by the emergence of nearby Gorodishche as the seat of the Novgorod princes.

The second region that developed as a flourishing centre in Russia was Kiev, because of the Dniepr, along whose course the Baltic-Dniepr route was formed. Mel'nikova sees this route as a continuation of the Scandinavians' foray along the Baltic-Volga route. It came to be in use from the middle of the ninth century. It is important to note that while the Baltic-Volga route was mainly a trade route, the Baltic-Dniepr was as much "the spine of the Old Russian state and its primary communication line" as it was an important trade route. Indeed, it enabled the connection between the Northern and the Southern polities with Novgorod and Kiev as their foci respectively (Mel'nikova, *Eastern World* 37).

Mel'nikova suggests that the larger aim of the Scandinavians in Russia was to control Constantinople, and that it is for this reason that the Dniepr route was so important to them. She has used the model '*X-garðr*' to highlight the common form of designation given to the three major centres on this route. These places formed the

beginning, the middle and end of the *Austrvegr* (East-Way), and their names fall under one linguistic pattern – *Holmgarðr* (Novgorod), *Kænugarðr* (Kiev) and *Miklagarðr* (Constantinople). According to Mel'nikova, Rurikid Grand Prince Oleg in the tenth century realized part of the original ambition, albeit in different circumstances and probably, by then, a different cultural milieu as well. He managed to gain complete control over the Baltic-Volga trade by joining the Northern and Southern polities of Novgorod and Kiev respectively, thereby creating the ORS.

As mentioned before, aside from the numismatic evidence, the strongest indicator of a considerable Scandinavian presence in EE is provided by the burials of nobles and warriors. Mel'nikova asserts that there is no significant difference between burial types in medieval Scandinavia and the tenth-century burials of Rus' nobles and warriors. Burials have been found that have specific Scandinavian features (burials in boats, chambers and urns with votive objects that are always associated with Scandinavian burials and are not found in Slavic burials before the mid-eighth century).

It is evident that the Rus' brought this tradition to EE, where it was incorporated into the retinue culture of the State. In 922, Ibn Fadhlān, sent by the Caliph of Baghdad to the Bulgar Khanate at Kazan' as secretary of an embassy, witnessed and wrote a detailed account of a Rus' chieftain's funeral. The ritual involved placing the dead man in a grave while preparations were made for the actual funeral. On the day of the interment the chieftain's boat was brought onto land, the chieftain was dressed in rich clothes (prepared for him in the few days past), and *nabid* (mead), fruit, a musical instrument, fragrant plants, bread, meat, onions, weapons, a dog, horses, cows, rooster and hen were sacrificed and placed in the boat with him, and the female slave who had volunteered to

die with her dead master was brought forth and put in the chamber and killed, after which the whole apparatus was set on fire and burnt. After this happened, a small mound was erected where the ship had been (Smyser 97-101).

Excavations have also revealed that in several East European burial mounds in Gnjozdovo and Chernigov, along with the usual grave goods (favourite wife/consort, dog, stallion, bed, weapons, food etc.), the remains of goat(s) have been found. Urns covered with goat skins and another one topped with a male goat skull has been found. Goats were uniquely part of the Norse god Þórr's cult. Two goats - Tanngníost and Tanngrisnir – pull his chariot. In this avatar, Þórr is known as Oku-Þórr, or Driving-Þórr. It is significant that goats are so important to Þórr's cult that he actually derives one facet of his identity from them. In the *Gylfaginning* section of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, Þórr and the god Loki, with Oku-Þórr's goats pulling his chariot, are described as out on an expedition. They spend the night with a peasant family where Þórr sacrifices his two goats for food. Þórr's instructions to the party are to throw the bones onto the goatskins, which he intends to bless at dawn the next day using Mjöllnir, thereby bringing the goats back to life. However, one of the goats becomes lame because the farmer's son Thjalfi broke the bone to reach the marrow. Þórr is furious with Thjalfi's carelessness and takes him and the peasant's daughter as his bondsmen (Snorri 38).

By association, it seems that the goat remains found in burials may have been part of a funeral feast and then put into the burial in order to supply the dead with a never-ending source of sustenance for the journey to the afterlife and the afterlife itself. Another function, given that goat remains are associated with cremation graves without boats, may be that the goat replaces the boat as a mode of transport into the other life. The

connection with Þórr is further reinforced by the presence of a bronze figurine of Þórr along with goat remains in *Чёрная могила* (Black Mound) – a tenth-century mound in Chernigov. Amulets in the shape of hammers have also been found, both in burials and without. A few coins with hammer markings have also been found (Mel'nikova, *Old Norse Myths* 68).

The Varangians, who formed the warrior elite of Rus', were mostly composed of men of no particular 'high' aristocratic birth, and therefore revered Þórr, who was a popular god in the homelands (Mel'nikova, *Old Norse Myths* 70). All this justifies the presence of Þórr's hammers and other symbols in noble burials of Rus'. According to Mel'nikova, the Varangians innovated on Scandinavian burial practices by burying hammers and goats, in an apparent appeal to Þórr in his avatar as the protector of humans and animals against giants and chthonic creatures. In the case of hammer amulets not associated with burials, Þórr is no doubt invoked as a protector of the living, while on coins Þórr's hammers seem to protect against theft. In an alien ethnic environment, Þórr's protection would have been a welcome haven, both in life and in death.

Another reason for Þórr's popularity may have been his functional similarity with the Slavic god Perun'. Þórr, as god of thunder and lightning, is often compared to Perun', who was the god of thunder and war. In the *PVL*, Perun' is mentioned as the god the Rus' prince and his retinue swear by in two instances when they sign a treaty with the Byzantines (*Russian Primary* 65, 74, 77). The Christian annalist of the *PVL* was probably unaware of the distinction between Þórr and Perun' and thus mentions Perun' instead of Þórr. Alternatively, perhaps it is not the annalist's ignorance that is at work here, but the

assimilation of Þórr as Perun' in the new hybrid Scando-Slavic culture. Perun' is the most frequently mentioned god in the *PVL*.

Conclusion

The archaeological evidence thus far establishes that firstly, the Scandinavians were present in EE at least since the mid-eighth century; secondly, that their primary motivation was trade, specifically, the trade of furs and Russian forest produce en route for Arab silver *dirhams*, which they came not only to procure but also to look for its source and thereby develop better trading opportunities for themselves; thirdly, that their quest for the source of *dirhams* led them to discover and establish the Baltic-Volga route and the Baltic-Dnepr route, which together connected Novgorod and Kiev and proved to be instrumental in the development of the centralized ORS. The archaeological evidence tentatively suggests that firstly, Rus' prince/regent Oleg, who was believed to belong to the group who accompanied Rurik when he came to Russia, was responsible for the actual consolidation of the ORS when he united the Northern and Southern polities (880-882 CE); and secondly, that owing to the evidence of burials and the demographic distribution of the Varangians, Þórr was their main god who may have become assimilated with Perun' and henceforth identified with him.

Part – II

“I’ve heard that east in Russia King Valdimar has died, and his kingdom is in the hands of his three sons, all good men ... Now, what I have in mind is that, as long as you agree, we go to Russia, visit these kings, and stay with one of them, preferably one who intends to hold on to his realm but is satisfied with the way their father divided the country, for we’re sure to win fame and fortune there.” – Eymund’s saga (*Vikings* 71)

Archaeology is important for the study of early medieval relations between Eastern Europe and Scandinavia not only because the *PVL* states with frustrating simplicity (and therefore, some vagueness) what its writer assumes was the nature of the Scandinavian presence in EE, but also because of the sheer sparseness of other relevant textual evidence. Although they often complement each other and provide valuable information, most foreign (Byzantine, Arab, Scandinavian) historical and travel accounts only add to the confusion, suggesting a multitude of significations for key terminologies which are closely related to this milieu of economic, cultural and political relations between Eastern Europe and Scandinavia.

In an essay that addresses the problem of locating traces of Scandinavian culture in Old Russian culture, Mel’nikova points out that an important reason for the lack of concrete evidence of Scandinavian pagan beliefs in Russian culture and literature was the arrival of Christianity in Scandinavia (911 CE). While Slavic non-Christian beliefs still managed more or less to coexist with Russian Christianity (988 CE), Scandinavian Christianity soon swept away their non-Christian beliefs, so that not only did they fade away from Northern Europe, they also eventually disappeared from Russia.

Scandinavian non-Christian beliefs are most likely to have been part of cultural interaction in tenth-century Russia when Scandinavian culture was at its height there. Furthermore, the legends that form the core of works such as those about Rurik, Oleg,

Igor', Ol'ga, Svjatoslav and Vladimir flourished in the milieu of the retinue culture of the ninth and tenth centuries, when the ethnic composition of the retinue was largely Scandinavian. In later centuries, this ethnic composition first became multi-ethnic, and then mono-ethnic, with Slavs dominating the scene. Mel'nikova thinks that these ethnic changes in such an important socio-political organisation as the royal retinue may have affected the passing down of the legends over time (*Old Norse Myths* 71).

Furthermore, it seems logical to assume that after the assimilation of the Varangians in the socio-cultural surroundings of Rus', Norse beliefs and culture ceased to be novel and either assimilated into the local culture so thoroughly as to become indistinguishable from it or disappeared entirely with their corresponding disappearance from Scandinavia itself.

The Russian Primary Chronicle

Assessment of the *PVL* is made difficult by the fact that although its information comes from sources dating from the late eleventh century and was compiled in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, it survives in manuscripts from no earlier than the fourteenth century. Furthermore, sources for Russian historical works are “quasi-historical oral narratives”, heavily modified by annalists writing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, who revised and innovated upon many of the legends that form the core of these resultant works in order to preserve early Rus' history for posterity and to suit their contemporary readership (Mel'nikova, *Old Norse Myths* 66). The compilation of the *PVL* was also influenced by political, ethnic and religious concerns in Russia itself. The *PVL* annalist reveals his agenda at the beginning:

Се повѣсти времяньныхъ лѣтъ, откуда есть пошла руская земля, кто въ Киевѣ
 нача первѣе княжити, и откуда руская земля стала есть. (*Tales of Bygone 1*)

[These are the narratives of bygone years regarding the origin of the land of Rus',
 the first princes of Kiev, and from what source the land of Rus' had its beginning.]

(*Russian Primary 51*)

He wanted to write “the first national history of the Eastern Slavs” (Mel’nikova, *Eastern World 95*). So, the establishment of the state and the legitimacy and solid continuity of the ruling dynasty were important motivations behind the process of compilation.

Sources for the *PVL* were the *Initial Compilation* which combined previous Old Russian historical compilations with the *Old Russian Chronograph*, the *Bible* and the *Апоскрыфа*, and, lastly, *былины* (byliny), heroic epics centering on Old Russian princes which along with other forms of oral narratives – both from the tribal period and the milieu of retinue culture – were probably sources that preserved the historical memories of Rus'. The *Initial Compilation* provided the translation of a Byzantine history which acted not only as a model for history writing but also provided a broad view of world history in which to situate the history of the Eastern Slavs. The Bible provided the annalist with the opportunity to correlate the history of the Eastern Slavs with that of the rest of the Christian world. It was also the natural ideological point of view to adopt, given that the *PVL* was compiled by a monk(s) of the Crypt Monastery, and was written in all probability for a Christian readership and was meant to establish the religious (besides the political and the ethical) “self-identification of Eastern Slavs” (Mel’nikova,

Eastern World 96). The *byliny* were probably rich sources of information, part legend and part history. The retinue tradition of the *byliny* consisted of both prose and poetry, with poetry dominating. The legends that were used in the *Primary Chronicle* were those centred on Askold and Dir, who took Kiev (circa 862) as Rurik's 'boyars' (nobles), and the Rurikid princes – Rurik, Oleg, Igor', Ol'ga, Svjatoslav and Vladimir.

As far as the history of the Eastern Slavs before the establishment of the ORS is concerned, the annalist focuses on the history of the Poljane tribe, which historically settled in the Middle Dniepr region and made Kiev their centre. The next stage in the literary construction of the establishment of the ORS was the Varangians's arrival and the agreement between the Varangians and the Slavs over "how their relations got settled" (Mel'nikova, *Eastern World* 105). The legend of Rurik taking over the reins stems from a tradition that grew after this agreement. Rurik's was the first legitimate rule in the Scandinavian part of this history and established the "dynasty"¹ that the annalist highlights as producing the line of (continuous) rulers of Rus'. Starting with Rurik, the annalist describes the main exploits of the Old Russian princes and presents a consecutive line of rulers. In those periods of Rus' history when the breakup of the State into petty princedoms appears imminent, he goes so far as to appeal to the princes to recall their forefathers and, being the offspring of a single line, to prevent it happening.

This description of an unbroken line of rulers is not entirely beyond suspicion, because the annalist, in order to present a legitimate genealogical father-to-son succession, may have modified key details of the history. According to the *PVL*, Oleg's right to wrest

¹ - The Rurikid princes cannot be called a dynasty in all conviction because Oleg, who took over after Rurik, has been described as a kinsman of Rurik by the annalist of the *PVL*, has been described as his commander-in-chief by the annalist of the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* (see Mel'nikova, *Eastern World* 107).

Kiev from Askold and Dir is justified by his position as Igor's foster-father (appointed by Rurik) and he takes control of that city as Igor's regent. Askold and Dir had originally asked for permission to go to Constantinople with their families and are presented as Rurik's nobles. On their way to Constantinople, they chanced upon Kiev and stayed back and "established their dominion over the country of the Polyanians at the same time that Rurik was ruling at Novgorod" (*Russian Primary* 60). In the absence of references to the origins of Igor, the annalist made Igor Rurik's son. There are no references to Igor being Rurik's son in other contemporary writings. Oleg's relationship to Rurik is also suspect, because while the *PVL* suggests that they were kinsmen, the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* says that Oleg was Rurik's commander-in-chief.

The annalist of the *PVL* also had the ideal ruler in mind when he wrote his history. The sections of the *PVL* that deal with the lives and deeds of Old Russian princes are constituted of the following motifs: "his (her) coming to power; subjugation of neighbouring tribes, in most cases Slavic tribes; foundation of one or many towns; introduction of fixed tributes and laws; expedition to Constantinople; and death, most often a violent or strange death" (*Old Norse Myths* 72). The annalist was particularly concerned with the first and last two motifs and so renders them in greater detail, and it is here and in other stories that are not part of these legends, that traces of Old Norse beliefs are found (Mel'nikova, *Eastern World* 72-73).

The most significant echoes of Old Norse beliefs in the *PVL* are found in the sections devoted to Oleg and Ol'ga (Igor's wife). Prince Oleg's death is predestined:

И приспѣ осень, и помяну Олегъ конь свой, иже бѣ поставилъ кормити и не
вседати на нь, бѣ бо въпрашалъ волхвовъ [и] кудесникъ: “отъ чего ми есть
умрети?” и рече ему кудесникъ одинъ: “княже! Конь, егоже любиши и бѣ
здиши на немъ, отъ того ти умрети”. (*Tales of Bygone* 37-38)

[Now autumn came, and Oleg bethought him of his horse that he had caused to be
wellfed, yet had never mounted. For on one occasion he had made inquiry of the
wonder-working magicians as to the ultimate cause of his death. One magician
replied, “Oh Prince, it is from the steed which you love and on which you ride
that you shall meet your death.” (*Russian Primary* 69)]

Oleg commanded that the horse be looked after but never brought before his sight. He let
a few years pass and then asked for his horse and when he was told that it was dead,
mocked the magicians. He asked to see the bones of the horse and when he reached the
spot, he dismounted, laughed and kicked the skull, from which a serpent crept out and bit
him, which resulted in his death.

Oleg’s death is comparable with the death of Örvar-Oddr (Arrow-Odd) in *Örvar-
Odds saga*. Örvar-Oddr rises to the position of the ruler of Rus’. When a child, he
unwillingly listens to the witch Heiðr’s prophecy about his death:

Skal þér ormr granda

eitrblandinn,

fránn ór fornum

Faxa hausi.

Naðr mun þik höggva

neðan á fæti,

þá ertu fullgamall

fylkir orðinn.

[The snake will strike,

venom-filled, flashing

from the time-worn

skull of Faxi;

the serpent strike

at the sole of your foot

when, leader of men,

you are full of years.

(Arrow-Odd 6)

Oddr enlists the help of his blood brother Asmund to dig a pit, into which they throw the horse Faxi's remains after they kill him. They get large boulders and pile them on top, after which they slip sand between the boulders and make a mound. Believing that he has cheated his destiny and that the only way Faxi can ever get out is if trolls help him, Oddr then puts as much distance between himself and Faxi as possible (*Arrow-Odd 7*). But in the twilight of his full life, amidst his family and friends, Oddr decides to go to Berurjod to see what has become of his childhood home. When he goes there, he is reminded of the prophecy. At that moment, a horse's skull is sighted, and Oddr walks up to it with his

men, wondering if it could possibly be Faxi's. He prods the skull with his spear, and a snake crawls out and bites him. This snake-bite turns out to be fatal.

However, the death of the horse in the two stories has a different tale to tell. Note that in the saga version, the horse is killed as soon as possible, almost after the prophecy is made. By contrast, in the *PVL* and the *First Novgorodian Chronicle*, the horse is not killed but is kept away from Oleg, so that he may never see it and thus be free of its predicted fatal presence. Oleg finds out about its death only after a certain amount of time has elapsed. The *PVL* and the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* are the oldest Old Russian manuscripts and date back to the early twelfth century, even though they survive from manuscripts from no earlier than the fourteenth century. On the other hand, later Russian chronicles preserve a different version of the story. The fifteenth century *Tverskaja* and *Voskresenskaja chronicles* mention Oleg as ordering that the horse be killed immediately. The *Arkhangelskaja Chronicle* elaborates upon this and describes how Oleg ordered that the horse be taken far away in the fields, presumably to put as much distance between himself and the horse's evil influence as possible, and that he be decapitated with the body to be left behind for the birds and animals. From these two versions, one in which the horse is killed immediately or as soon as possible, and the other in which it probably dies its own death after living for some years at least, it is possible to discern two variants of the tale that were known to the compilers of the Russian chronicles. Mel'nikova does not believe that either of the two versions presents the tale in its original form as a whole, but that they point to a prototype that is now no longer extant (*Old Norse Myths* 77-79).

Mel'nikova also mentions the loss of the ritual and mythological connotation of the horse in the *PVL* version resulting from the compiler's ignorance concerning Norse

mythology and belief. The magicians mentioned by the *PVL* specifically refer to Oleg's war-horse, whereas Faxi, in *Örvar-Odds saga*, is just an ordinary farm horse. She speculates that originally the role of the horse in the Oleg/Oddr tale may have been to act as the intermediary between the hero and the agent of his death. Not only does the killing of the horse in the saga version recall the Norse ritual of horse sacrifice, Mel'nikova observes that it also bears similarity to burials of evil or potentially evil creatures, such as sorcerers and people possessed by evil spirits described in sagas of Icelanders. Like the burial of Faxi, these burials involved digging a deep pit into which the corpse was placed and then piled up with heavy stones. The stones were placed in order to lock the evil in and to prevent it from escaping, the evil evidently being in a very strong way attached or confined to the body even in death.

However, in spite of the vanished mythological traces, the presence of motifs that point to key Norse pagan conceptions, such as the important intermediary role played by the horse and its skull, the prophecy made by the magicians, and the evil effect of the horse, suggests that the tale rose out of a Scandinavian cultural milieu. Furthermore, the prominent representation of the hero as the ruler of Rus' and the very background of Rus' in both the saga and the *PVL* suggests that the tale may have appeared and flourished during the period of the cultural interaction between Scandinavia and Eastern Europe.

The other most obvious interplay between Norse and Slavic narrative traditions is seen in the legend of Ol'ga's revenge in the *PVL*. Ol'ga (reign 913-945) is informed that her husband Prince Igor' has been killed by the Drevljanians who then come to take her as bride for their Prince Mal. Ol'ga is gracious enough and gives them the impression that she is in agreement with their proposal, but, as the Drevljanians are soon to find out, her

revenge is planned in three stages. First, she buries alive the first Drevljanian envoys in their boat. Then, she sends for another embassy from the Drevljanians, saying that she needs an escort to proceed in state as their prince's bride. She has this second group burnt in a bathhouse. Finally, she proceeds to meet the Drevljanians, and, upon reaching their land, weeps on her dead husband's grave, ensures that the Drevljanians are well-fortified with drink, and when they are intoxicated, has her retinue pounce on them and kill them. She then goes back to Kiev and returns with an army and besieges their land, making it a Kievan territory.

Mel'nikova points out that the motif of a dead chieftain's widow having to marry the victor is traditional in many cultures. The folklore quality of the narrative can be observed in several instances. For example, the folklore triad can be seen in the three groups of Drevljanians and Ol'ga's innovative three-step revenge. Furthermore, Ol'ga's instructions to the first embassy are also folkloric in terms of imagery and drama:

“... азъ утро послю по вы, вы же // рыцѣте: не едемъ на конѣхъ, ни пѣши
идемъ, но понесѣте ны в лодѣ; и възнесутъ вы в лодѣи ...”

(Tales of Bygone 55)

[“I shall send for you on the morrow, and you shall say, ‘We will not ride on horses nor go on foot; carry us in our boat.’ And you shall be carried in your boat.” *(Russian Primary 79)*]

Although these observations show that this legend about Ol'ga is not merely a historical and/or legendary account but also retains vestiges of being a literary narrative, an

aesthetic creation constituting a part of the folklore of a particular tradition, they are fairly widespread motifs and do not necessarily show any particular connections between Slavic and Norse traditions (Mel'nikova, *Old Norse Myths* 73-74).

However, the methods by which Ol'ga exacts her revenge are significant, and stand out on account of their extraordinary similarities with Norse equivalents (Mel'nikova, *Old Norse Myths* 74). The first stage, where the Drevljanians are buried alive in their boat, is an innovative construction of a traditional boat burial, which as discussed before, was a common funerary practice in Scandinavia and was brought by the Rus' to Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the practice of burning enemies alive in a house was also a traditional method of seeking revenge in Scandinavia. In the version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, the saga written about King Olaf Tryggvason (reign 995-1000), incorporated into Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (thirteenth century), Sigríðr the Proud, also a rich and powerful widow, kills her suitors by burning down the house they are lodged in. One of these suitors is a minor Russian chieftain called 'Visavald'. Not only does Sigríðr have them burnt, but she orders that they be attacked at night with fire and with swords, after ensuring that everyone has been well fortified with drink at the evening meal. Thus, not only does Sigríðr's revenge match almost exactly Ol'ga's second revenge, it also shares common features with the third stage of Ol'ga's revenge, which is the massacre of the Drevljanians by her retinue after they are hopelessly intoxicated and unable to defend themselves. It is possible therefore, that both the second and third revenge have Norse antecedents.

Literary references in Scandinavian literature to Rus' and Russian towns

The presence of Scandinavians in Rus' and Rus' identity as a trading/raiding centre and recruiting post for Scandinavian mercenaries is testified by numerous references to Rus' and its cities in Scandinavian texts. In their book *Древнерусские города в древнескандинавской письменности* (Old Russian Towns in Old Norse Writing), G.B. Glazyrina and T.N. Jackson extract these references from sagas, geographical treatises and runic writings of Scandinavians. This section will focus on references to key geographical entities associated with the Eastern Slavs in these medieval works – *Garðaríki/Garðar* (Rus', North Rus'), *Aldeigja/Aldeigjuborg* (Ladoga), *Holmgarðr* (Novgorod) and *Kænugarðr* (Kiev). It is significant that given the constant traffic between the two regions, not only were the names of cities and rivers and other geographical markers mentioned in literary references, there also grew a vocabulary surrounding the people who forayed into this territory (see below).

The name of Rus' in medieval Scandinavian texts was *Garðaríki* – the kingdom of towns. It came from the Norse name for Rus' – *Garðar*. *Garðar* originated probably in the second half of the ninth century and was used with reference to “a chain of fortified points along the Volkhov” and was especially a name for Northern Rus' (Glazyrina 18). The oldest reference to *Garðar* is found in a stanza of *Olafs drápa* (996 CE), composed by Hallfreðr Difficult-Skald. *Garðar* is also found in the *Heimskringla* commonly attributed to Snorri Sturluson. References to *Garðaríki* are found in *Heimskringla*, *Orkneyinga saga*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar*, *Yngvars saga Viðforla* and *Orvar-Odds saga*. A derivative form of *Garðar* is found in the expression *ríki Garðamanna* – ‘State of the *Garðar*-people’ – in *Fagrskinna* in reference

to the inhabitants of *Garðar* or Rus'. An adjectival form of *Garðar* – 'gerzki' – is found in *Heimskringla* and is used to describe the nationality of people from Rus' or associated with Rus'. Thus, *Guðleikr gerzki* is 'Guðleikr-the-Rus'' and *sendimenn gerzku* are 'ambassadors from Rus''.

Jackson emphasizes that the praise-poem *Bandadrápa* (c. 1010) contains the earliest mention of (Aldeigja) – Ladoga. Reference to *Aldeigja* is also made in *Sturlaug's saga Starfsama* (Glazyrina 165). The term *Aldeigjuborg* for the same place, although of secondary importance, appears first in the *Olafs saga Tryggvasonar av Oddr Snorrason munkr* (42). Jackson discusses how *Aldeigjuborg* is formed by the addition of *-borg* to *Aldeigja*. The root *-borg* was used by Scandinavians in the formation of toponymy of Western Europe and is unusual for Rus'. The reason appears to be the location of Ladoga on the 'Route from the Varangians to the Greeks', of which it formed the first link. The Scandinavians knew Ladoga well already in the second half of the eighth century and they therefore gave it a name based on a formula (*X-borg*) that was familiar to them (42, 43). References to *Aldeigjuborg* are also made in *Heimskringla*, *Orkneyinga saga* and *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar*.

The earliest attestation of the toponym *Holmgarðr* (referring to modern Novgorod) occurs in a runic inscription from Esta in Södermanland dating to the first half of the eleventh century:

“Ingifast ordered that a rock to Sigvid, his father, be hewn. He fell at Novgorod, helmsman with his shipwrights.” (Glazyrina 12)

Two other runic inscriptions from Sweden, the first from Gotland dating from the mid-eleventh century and the second from Uppland dating to the second half of the same century, also refer to persons who died in *Holmgarðr*. While the first is only partially legible and says: "... -geir, who died in Holmgarðr", the second is more elaborate:

"Runa ordered that (this) memorial to Spjalbud and Svein be made, and to Andvett, and to Ragnar, sons of her and Helgi; and Sigrid to Spjalbud, her spouse. He died in Holmgarðr i Olafs krika."² (Glazyrina 13)

Holmgarðr is also referenced in *Morkinskinna*, *Snorra Edda*, *Heimskringla*, *Orkneyinga saga*, *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar*, *Hervarar saga ok Hreiðreks konungs*, *Yngvars saga Viðforla*, *Gongu-Hrólf's saga*, *Orvar-Odds saga* and the genealogy and tales from *Flateyjarbók*.

Landnámabók mentions a man called *Skinna-Björn* – Bjorn of Furs – as a *Hólmgarðsfari* – a Novgorod-voyager (Glazyrina 22-23). *Hólmgarðsfari* is evidently not only an appellation for Novgorod-voyagers (i.e. people who travel to Novgorod), it also specifically refers to merchants. The reference to fur is also telling, since Novgorod fur was its most famous export, known not only in Scandinavia but also in Western Europe and Byzantium. There is also a reference in the *Heimskringla* to the skald Sigvatr, who "often asked, when he met merchants, *Hólmgarðsfarar*, what they could tell him of Magnús [Olafsson]" (Glazyrina 24). *Hólmgarðsfari* is proposed to be a term for one of the categories of Scandinavian merchants. That there exists a term specifically reserved

² - The compilers comment on the various interpretations of 'i Olafs krika', and using Mel'nikova's translation into Russian, consider it safer to leave this phrase untranslated.

for merchants traveling to Novgorod is telling in terms of the frequency and commonness of this level of contact between Scandinavia and Rus'. Another toponym associated with Novgorod – *Hólmgarðaríki* – is found singularly in *Gongu-Hrólfs saga*, and is formed by suffixing *-ríki* 'state' to *Hólmgarðr*(=Novgorod). *Hólmgarðaríki* literally means 'Novgorodian state'.

Jackson draws attention to the fact that there are no references to Kiev earlier than the twelfth century, whether it is runic inscriptions of the tenth and eleventh centuries, or skaldic verses from the eleventh to twelfth centuries, or (with the exception of *Eymunds Saga*) in the royal sagas. However, the fact that *Kænugarðr* belongs to the same group of *X-garðr* toponymic appellations as the other two key cities on this route – Novgorod (*Hólmgarðr*) and Constantinople (*Miklagarðr*), and that these two were already in use in runic inscriptions and skaldic verse by the first half of the eleventh century and the mid-eleventh century respectively, must surely indicate that *Kænugarðr* was known much earlier than the twelfth century. This Novgorod-Kiev-Constantinople route, famously known as the 'пусть из варяг в греки' (route from the Varangians to the Greeks) was known to the Scandinavians as early as the ninth century. The overlooking of Kiev can only be explained by the fact that it was overshadowed by Novgorod, which was the earlier capital of the princes. The northern region, starting from Ladoga and then the Novgorod area around Lake Il'men' also boasted the first ethnic Scandinavian settlers in Russia. *Kænugarðr* is also found in *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar* and *Gongu-Hrólfs saga*.

Gongu-Hrólfs saga gives another toponym associated with Kiev – *Kænugarði* (Glazyrina 172, 174). Here, Glazyrina points out that *Kænugarðar* is the plural of *Kænugarðr* (=Kiev) and may denote 'Kievan land' or 'Kievan principality' and not the

city of Kiev. *Kænugarðar* is also found in *Örvar-Odds saga* (late thirteenth century) and *Bærings saga* (thirteenth century). Another reference to 'Kievan land/principdom' is found in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus as *Cønogardia*.

Several sagas are specifically dedicated to Russian expeditions by Scandinavians. *Yngvars saga viðförla* is primarily devoted to the adventures of the "visionary" explorer Yngvarr, who goes on a perilous quest in search of the source of a great East European river ('Lindibelti') (*Vikings* 30). *Eymundar saga* describes the life and experiences of King Eymund at the court of Prince Yaroslav ('Jarisleif'), where he and his men serve as mercenaries and provide the king with their support in times of battle (*Vikings* 69-89). *Örvar-Odds saga* talks about the legendary hero Örvar-Oddr (Arrow-Odd), who becomes the king of Russia, and then finally returns home glorious and respected, where he dies in accordance with a prophecy made in his youth (discussed before) at the age of three hundred (*Arrow-Odd* 1-109).

Conclusion

The Scandinavians who came to Eastern Europe in the ninth to eleventh centuries are believed to have played a significant role in the political, ethnic and religious construction of the ORS. The present chapter was aimed at discussing the extent of Scandinavian influence on the world of the Eastern Slavs, identifying the main historical sources that have initiated and fanned debate over the subject for centuries, and underlining the challenges in terms of lack of literary traces of this influence (thus far) in spite of the burgeoning wealth of archaeological artifacts pointing to the important presence of the Scandinavians in Eastern Europe in the early Middle Ages. In the light of

this deficiency, it is also aimed towards the development of a more tolerant, patient and penetrating view of Russian literary and cultural texts towards the aim of tracing Scandinavian influences, if any, in them.

Having established the milieu in which this cultural exchange took place and discussed the problems associated with it in this chapter, the next chapter will be devoted to the image of the island Bujan in Russian incantations. This will be followed by the final chapter which discusses this image in the light of the Norse myth of Yggdrasill and some Eddaic poems.

Chapter Two

Bujan and its Ancillary Motifs

“On the ocean-sea, on the island of Bujan, the Fair Maiden sewed; she did not stop sewing, the blood stopped flowing.” These words are also spoken three times, without breathing air, or otherwise the bleeding will intensify. (*Russian Folk* 266)

This chapter will study representations of *остров Буян* (the Island Bujan), primarily as they occur in oral incantations but also referring to some fairy tales. Also considered will be the various scholarly arguments concerning its real and abstract connotations. The chapter will also extensively discuss some of Bujan’s ‘accessories’ – objects and figures situated on and around Bujan – and analyze their presence and importance on the island. The objective will be to discover the importance and meaning of Bujan as it features in Russian folklore.

The oral incantations used in this thesis are taken from *Русский народ – его обычаи, обряды, предания, суеверия и поэзия* (The Russian Folk – Its Customs, Rituals, Legends, Superstitions and Poetry) by M. Zabylin, who has compiled this collection from works of prominent eighteenth and nineteenth-century scholars (N. Sakharov, G. D. Knigoljubov among others); from *Русские заговоры и заклинания – Материалы фольклорных экспедиций 1953-1993*²² (Russian Incantations and Spells – Material from Folklore Expeditions of 1953-1993), which contains incantations collected in the twentieth century by academic scholars and is edited by V.P. Anikin; and from *Русское народное чернокнижие* (Russian Folk Black Magic), compiled by I. P. Sakharov in the nineteenth century. The fairy tales used here are from A. N. Afanasyev’s three-volume collection *Русские народные сказки* (Russian Folktales).

Part – I

Bujan appears as part of the introductory formula in folk incantations:

На море Окиане, на острове на Буяне, девица красным шелком шила; ...

(*Russian Folk* 266) (Source unspecified)

[On the ocean-sea, on the island Bujan, a maiden with red thread sewed; ...]

На море на Окиане, на острове на Буяне лежит тоска; ... (*Russian Folk* 277)

(From Sakharov's 'Legends of the Russian People', 1841).

[On the ocean-sea, on the island Bujan lies melancholy; ...]

It is depicted in incantations used for healing purposes, to protect warriors before they go into battle, for hunting and fishing and so on. It is also the location where the agent or catalyst (animate or inanimate) of the incantation that performs or hosts the action as a 'sympathetic' helper, is situated. The most commonly occurring agents are discussed below.

Incantations have been identified as an extremely ancient genre of folklore and references to them go back as far as the *PVL* (*Russian Primary* 153). I. P. Sakharov says they are well-preserved because they were passed by sorcerers from generation to generation amidst an atmosphere of privileged exclusivity and secrecy, protected from persecution from the state or the church (9-10). Their age has also been attributed to the unchanging lives of Russian peasants since the early Middle Ages by Sakharov ("Observe their activities in the nineteenth century. They are the same, as they were in the tenth [and] twelfth centuries, in the eighteenth century"), who says that this has

succeeded in preserving many of their oldest pagan rituals and traditions (8). In addition to this, there is also manuscript evidence dating from the Middle Ages, written by Russian church elders who denounce pagan practices, such as sorcery and the clandestine observance of many pagan traditions amongst the folk. Nineteenth-century scholar V. I. Mansikka presents a detailed discussion of these manuscripts in his book *Религия восточных славян* (Religion of the Eastern Slavs). However, the recording of incantations and scholarly research on them began only with Sakharov in the early nineteenth century.

V. Vilinbakhov claims that Bujan incantations are probably the most ancient. In his 1967 article *Тайна острова Буяна – легенды и факты* (The Secret of the Island of Bujan – Legends and Facts), Vilinbakhov complains how magical formulae used in incantations are not understood by the sorcerers themselves. They are unable to explain what *‘Алатырь камень’* (‘Alatyr’Stone’) and *‘Остров Буян’* (the island Bujan) mean and justify their usage by explaining that these formulae were used by their “grandmothers and great-grandmothers” (52). Thus, ironically, the concept of Bujan is little understood anymore by sorcerers – the very people who have perhaps succeeded in preserving it for many centuries by passing it on amidst great secrecy from generation to generation.

Ancillary Motifs of Bujan

References to Bujan are always accompanied by its ancillary motifs:

Окиан-море (‘Ocean-Sea’) is the body of water most commonly mentioned as surrounding Bujan. It is depicted thus in incantations:

На море Окиане ... (*Russian Folk 266*)

(Source unspecified)

[On the Ocean-sea ...]

На море на Окиане ... (*Russian Folk 266*)

(Source unspecified)

[lit. On the sea on the Ocean ...]

... на море на Окиан, под дуб мокрецкой. (*Russian Folk 270*)

(From Knigoljubov's manuscript)

[... on the sea on the Ocean, under a wet oak]

... на море Кияне! (*Russian Folk 269*)

(From Knigoljubov's manuscript)

[... on the sea Kiyan!]

Most incantations locate Bujan on the Ocean-Sea, and do not provide any further information about the Ocean-Sea itself. In some incantations, the Ocean-Sea is described as being situated in the 'чисто поле' (open/clear field).

Стану я не благословясь, пойду не перекрестясь, из избы не дворами, из двора не воротами, в чисто поле. В том поле есть Окиан-море, в том море есть Алатырь-камень, на том камне стоит столб от земли до неба огненный, под тем столбом лежит змея жгуча, оплюча. (*The Russian Folk 284*) (Supplied to the Report of the Ethnographic Department of 1878 by P. A. Ivanov of Pinega)

[I don't stand blessed, don't set out crossed, from the izba not to the courtyards,
from the courtyard not to the gates, to the open/clear path/field. In that path/field
is the Ocean-sea, in that sea is the Altar-Stone, on that stone stands a fiery pillar
from the earth to the sky, under that pillar lies a burning serpent, spitting.]

In other incantations, the Ocean-Sea is entirely replaced by another body of water, such
as the Black Sea or the Caspian Sea:

Есть в западной стороне море Черное; в том море есть остров. На том же
острову выросло древо ... (*Russian Folk* 343) (Written by P. S. Efimenko from
an old manuscript, obtained from a peasant from Arkhangel'sk province. Date
unknown.)

[There is in the west the Black Sea; in that sea is an island. On that island there
grew a tree ...]

За морем за синим, за морем Хвалынским, посредине Окиан-моря лежит
остров Буян ... (*Russian Folk* 294) (From Sakharov's 'Legends of the Russian
People', 1841)

[Beyond the blue sea, beyond the Caspian Sea, in the middle of the ocean-sea lies
the island Bujan ...]

In all probability, the Ocean-Sea is the 'Great Ocean' or 'World-Ocean' that surrounds
the landmass inhabited by living creatures in cosmologies of several cultures. In Russian

tradition, the *Глубинная книга* (Book of Deep Wisdom) states that the Ocean-Sea “runs around all lands” (Afanasyev, *Poetic Impressions* Vol. II 122).

Дуб / Мистический дуб (‘Oak / Mystical Oak’) is the oak tree standing on Bujan. Occasionally, the tree is not mentioned as standing on Bujan at all and is described as standing on the Alatur’Stone (see below) in the middle of the sea. At times, it is replaced (or indicated?) by a *столб* (‘post’ or ‘pillar’) depicted as standing in the sea. This tree or post acts as a background for the action of the incantations.

На море на Кияне, на острове на Буяне, на полой поляне, под дубом
мокрецким сидит раб Божий (имя) ... (*Russian Folk* 269)

(From Knigoljubov’s manuscript)

[On the Kijan-sea, on the island of Bujan, on the land of the Poljan, under a greasy oak sits the servant of god (name)...]

За дальними горами есть Окиан-море железное, на том море есть столб медный, на том столбе медном есть пастух чугунный, а стоит столб от земли до неба, от востока до запада, завещает и заповедывает тот пастух своим детям: ...(*Russian Folk* 272)

(From Sakharov’s ‘Legends of the Russian People’, 1841)

[Beyond the far mountains is the iron ocean-sea, on that sea is the iron pillar, on that iron pillar is the cast-iron shepherd, and stands the pillar from earth to sky, from east to west, bequeathes and preserves that shepherd for his children: ...]

Мистический is not the only adjective attached to the oak. *Мокрецкий* or *мокрый* (greasy, wet) is also frequently applied to it (see above). In many incantations, the Oak or post/pillar is the place where different magical creatures (e.g. Raven, Falcon, Serpent, old men) are located. Some of these creatures are appealed to for help:

За морем за синим, за морем Хвалынским, посредине Окиан-моря лежит
остров Буян, на том острове Буяне стоит дуб, под тем дубом живут
седмерицею семь старцев, ни скованных, ни связанных. (*Russian Folk* 294)

(From Sakharov's 'Legends of the Russian People', 1841)

[Beyond the blue sea, beyond the Caspian Sea, in the middle of the Ocean-sea lies the island of Bujan, on that island stands an oak, under that oak live seventy-seven old men, neither fettered nor chained.]

Oaks are associated with wonderful and magical creatures in Russian folklore. In a fairy tale, a young princess procures two magical dresses with the stars, the Moon and the Sun on them, and a swine's hide, and leaves home. The overcast sky threatens a storm and, seeing a huge oak, she sits amongst its thick branches. A tsar's servants are frightened by the young princess in the swine's hide and cry out at the sight of "not a beast, but a monster monstrous, a marvel marvellous" (Afanasyev, *Russian Folktales* Vol. II 395). Russian fairy tales also ascribe mystical powers – both good or bad – to the oak itself. For example, two peasant brothers set out on a quest and decide to spend the night under a huge oak which soon becomes an assembly of demons (Vol. I 115). Thus, *нечистые силы* ('evil forces') collect at the oak (Vol. III 533). The oak becomes a

helping agent when the hero needs a ship and is told – “go to such-and-such an oak, knock on it thrice with [your] club and say: come out, ship! come out, ship! come out, ship! As the ship comes out to you, at that same time, give the oak a command thrice so that it shuts itself up” (Vol. I 284).

The following incantation presents a picture of the Post/Pillar which spans the earth and the sky, and reach across east and west:

В том поле есть Окиан-море, в том море есть Алатырь-камень, на том камне
стоит столб от земли до неба огненный, под тем столбом лежит змея жгуча,
оплюча. (*Russian Folk* 284)

(Supplied by P.A. Ivanov to an 1878 report by the Ethnography department of
Pinega)

[In that field is the Ocean-sea, in that sea is the Alatyry' Stone, on that stone sits a
post/pillar from earth to the fiery sky, under that pillar lies a fiery, biting serpent.]

Красная девица ('Fair Maiden') is probably the most important and most
intriguing of all of Bujan's ancillary motifs:

“На море Окиане, на острове на Буяне, девица красным шелком шила; шить
не стала, руда (кровь) перестала.” Эти слова тоже говорят три раза, не
переводя духа, а иначе кровотоечение может усилиться. (*Russian Folk* 266)

(Source unspecified)

[“On the Ocean-sea, on the island of Bujan, the Fair Maiden sewed; she did not stop sewing, the blood stopped flowing.” These words are also spoken three times, without breathing air, or otherwise the bleeding will intensify.]

Although *красная девица* can refer to any ‘fair maiden’, a young, usually unmarried woman, the frequent appearance of this figure in folklore and fervent invocations to provide aid in difficult situations reveals that it also represents a divine concept. She is thus depicted in two ways in incantations: as a mortal, and as a divine figure. This section will distinguish between and address both types of references, with particular emphasis on the latter type.

A common use of the terminology *Красная девица* is seen in ‘Love/Amorous incantations’, incantations related to beauty or beautification, and those intended to ward off the evil eye, where it is merely a poetic reference to a beautiful young, unmarried woman. For example:

...Выпускаю я силу могучу на (такую-то) красную девицу ... Будь ты, сила могуча, ее кровь горячую, ее сердце кипучее на любовь к (такому-то) полюбовному молодцу. (*Russian Folk* 279)

(Source unspecified)

[I release powerful force(s) against (so-and-so) fair maiden ... May you (make), powerful force, her blood hot, his heart turbulent in love towards (so-and-so) lovelorn youth.]

Молитвами святым, Боже, Отец наш, милуй мя Господи, рабу (имя) от сглазов – от старых стариков, от молодых молодцев, от старых старушек, от

МОЛОДЫХ МОЛОДОК, ОТ КРАСНЫХ ОТ ДЕВОК ... (*Russian Incantations* 80)

[Through prayers sacred, God, our Father, pardon Lord, the servant (name) from the evil eye(s) – from old men, from young youths, from old women, from young men, from fair maidens ...]

The instructions along with the second incantation (rec. Kaluga province, 1979 from T. B. Vorob'eva (born 1899)) require that it be read three, five and/or (unclear in instructions) twelve times at daybreak over water that must be sprinkled on the child (for whom the incantation is uttered) without startling him, and such that people do not see one chanting or performing this ritual. The child should then be taken to the threshold and bathed. A closing prayer would be said to seal the effects of the previous ritual and incantation.

However, there is another kind of depiction of the *Красная девица* as well. It is significant that the *Красная девица* and the *Мать Пресвятая Богородица* (lit. 'Holy Mother the Blessed Virgin, Giver of Birth to God', presumably refers to Jesus Christ's mother Mary, judging from the presence of this character in 'Christian' incantations) are found to be interchangeable in incantations:

Хозяйка снимает пояс и перевязывает правую ногу, на которую садится.
 Господи, благослови, дай, Господи, в добрый час. Пятница Прасковья
 принесла, Пресвятая Богородица ума-разума дала. Как богородица на
 престоле сидит, красная девица под венцом стоит, так и ты, матушка-
 коровка стой. Пеструнюшка, стой горой, дой рекой. Гора не сдвигается, река

не перебегаются, замок ключом закрывается, так, мои слова, запирайтесь,
заложайтесь. Во веки веков. Аминь. (*Russian Incantations* 186)

[The owner removes the girdle and dresses the right foot, on which it sits. Lord,
bless, give, Lord, good luck. Praskovja Pjatnitsa bore, the Holy Mother the
Blessed Virgin gave a mind. Like the Blessed Virgin sits on a throne, the Fair
Maiden under a halo stands, so may you, mother-cow, stand. Lemming, stand on a
hill, milk like a river. The mountain does not budge, the river does not run over,
the lock is locked with a key, thus, my words, lock up, lie in place. For all time.
Amen.]

This incantation falls under the category 'For Cattlekeeping', and was recorded in Arkhangel'sk province from M. S. Zlovidova (born 1873) in 1963. It appears that with the arrival of Christianity in Russia, the Fair Maiden was often replaced in incantations with the 'Blessed Virgin Mother of God' or Mary, easily the most important female figure in Christianity. This suggests that the Fair Maiden must have been an important figure of veneration in her own right and that the expression '*Красная девица*' is not restricted to descriptions of youthful female beauty.

N. Poznanskii notes the abundant references to the Fair Maiden in incantations related to blood. She is usually pictured as sitting on the Alatyry Stone, where she sews with thread (often red-coloured). For example, she prominently figures in incantations that are meant to stop blood from flowing from wounds:

На море на окиане, на острове на Буяне лежит бел-горюч камень Алатырь,
на том камне, Алатыре, сидит красная девица, швея мастерица, держит иглу
булатную, вдевает нитку шелковую, руда желтую, зашивает раны кровавые.
Заговариваю я раба (такого-то) от порезу. Булат, прочь отстань, а ты, кровь,
течь перестань. (*Russian Folk 266-267*)

(From Sakharov's 'Legends of the Russian People', 1841)

[On the ocean-sea, on the island Bujan lies the white-hot stone Alatur', on that
stone, Alatur', sits the Fair Maiden, expert-seamstress, holds a damask needle,
threads [it with] silk thread, yellow ore, sews bloody wounds. I, servant (so-and-
so) cast a spell against the cut. Damask, away you go, and you, blood, stop to
flow.]

Poznanskii believes that '*Красная девица*' in these incantations must be understood
literally as the 'Red' Maiden and not the 'Fair' Maiden. Thus, incantations that depict the
'Red Maiden' are examples of sympathetic magic, where the patient is 'cured' by the act
performed by a supernatural figure upon an object. The epithet '*красная*' (red) is
"directed to that phenomenon which the incantation addresses, and [which] is carried out
in the incantation", i.e – it is directed at the flow of blood, which will stop after the 'Red'
Maiden finishes sewing. The red thread is a further development of this epithet
(Poznanskii 223). However, Poznanskii's theory holds good only for incantations related
to blood. There are several other incantations as well that mention the *Красная девица*,
and his dismissal of this widespread motif in the rest of Russian folklore as referring only
to beautiful, young women does not address them.

The epithet *красная* (nominative, singular, feminine) is significant because it is attached to the identity of the woman, whether mortal or divine. George Vernadsky says that in modern Russian, the adjective *красный* (nom., masc., sing.) means ‘red’, while in ancient times, *красное* (nom., sing., neut.) meant ‘beautiful’ and was the most common epithet for the Sun in folklore (*красное солнце*) (32). Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev (956-1015) is also known as *Красное солнце* when he figures in *byliny*. Here is a relevant excerpt from a ‘Love/Amorous incantation’:

“Как раб Божий Н. любит рабу Божию Н., так чтобы и раба Божия Н. не могла без него ни жить, ни пить ... и почитала его лучше отца и матери, белого месяца и красного ясна солнышка ...” (*Russian Folk 287*)

(Provided by P. A Ivanov of Pinega)

[Like the servant of God N. loves the servant of God N., then so that the servant of God N. is not able to live, or drink without him ... and may consider him better than [her] father and mother, the white Month and the ardent clear Sun ...]

References to dawn are found in incantations, which is depicted as feminine (an easy conclusion to draw since *заря* – ‘dawn’ is a feminine noun) and is usually associated with the Fair Maiden, where the *Красная девица* is called *заря зарница* – (‘заря’ = ‘dawn’, ‘dusk’, ‘зарница’ = ‘lightning’). Thus, she is associated with sunrise and sunset, and in the second case, with midnight as well:

Заря зарница, красная девица, полношница! В поле заяц, в море камень ...

(Russian Folk 335)

(From Sakharov's 'Legends of the Russian People', 1841)

[Dawn-Lightning, Fair Maiden, midnight! In the field is a rabbit, on the sea a stone ...]

Надо на зарю три раза сносить и сказать, и поклоняться: Заря-зарница, заря – красная девица, дай рабу Божьему (имя) сон, возьми бессонье, дай упокой, возьми беспокойство. *(Russian Incantations 49)* (rec. 1975 from A. I. Jarina (born 1883) of Arkhangel'sk province)

[Must be brought in front of Dawn, and to say, and to be made to bow: Dawn-Lightning, Dawn – Fair Maiden, give the servant of God (name) sleep, take away sleeplessness, give peace, take away restlessness.]

The first incantation is chanted to alleviate toothache while the third falls in the category 'To Prevent Sleeplessness and Crying [of Infants]'. Other incantations mention both dawn and dusk, and ask that the child be made to greet and often bow before both. In some cases, this procedure has to be repeated again for success. In all cases, it is compulsory to go out and face the dawn or dusk or at times, both.

Алатырь / Латырь камень ('Alatyr'Stone') is often described as located on Bujan, although there are several incantations in which the island is omitted entirely, and the stone is vaguely described as being situated on the Ocean-Sea. On occasion, it replaces Bujan. In some incantations, reference is made to an 'ocean-stone' in an

open/clear field/path on which the Fair Maiden is seated. Often, the Fair Maiden or a certain number of old men (usually seven, seventy or seventy-seven) are found sitting on the Alatyр’Stone and performing miracles or rendering aid. The following are two examples that depict the Alatyр’Stone:

На море на окиане, на острове на Буяне лежит бел-горюч камень Алатырь,
на том камне, Алатыре, сидит красная девица, швея мастерица, держит иглу
булатную, вдевает нитку шелковую, руда жёлтую, зашивает раны
крававые... (*Russian Folk 266-267*)

(From Sakharov’s ‘Legends of the Russian People’, 1841)

[On the ocean-sea, on the island Bujan lies the white-hot stone Alatyр’, on that
stone, on Alatyр’, sits the Fair Maiden, expert seamstress, holds a damask needle,
threads silk thread, yellow ore, sews bloody wounds ...]

... В чистом поле стоит свят окиан-камень, на святом окиан-камне сидит
красная девица с шелковой ниткой ...(*Russian Folk 267*)

(From ethnographic reports from 1847)

[... In the open/clear field/path stands the holy ocean-stone, on the ocean-stone
sits the Fair Maiden with a silk thread ...]

Thus, the Alatyр’Stone is often described as ‘бел-горюч’ or ‘white-hot’, and is significantly also described as ‘свят’ – ‘divine’ or ‘holy’ in the second incantation above. Often, it is depicted as if floating in the ocean-sea, the Post/Pillar standing on it ‘от земли до неба огненный’ – ‘from the earth to the fiery sky’:

... В том поле есть Окиан-море, в том море есть Алатырь-камень, на том камне стоит столб от земли до неба огненный, под тем столбом лежит змея жгуча, оплоча. (*Russian Folk* 284)

(Supplied by P.A. Ivanov to a report by the Ethnography department of Pinega)

[... In that field is the ocean-sea, in that sea is the Alatyr'-stone, on that stone stands a pillar from the earth to the sky fiery, under that pillar lies a fiery, biting serpent.]

In some incantations, the Alatyr' Stone is not a real participant in the action and appears only at the end as ratification, where its power is invoked in order to keep the effects of the incantation safe from the possibility of reversal upon the sorcerer or the patient/client. For example:

Замыкаю свой заговор семьюдесятью семью замками, семьюдесятью семью цепями, бросаю ключи в Окиан море, под бел-горюч камень Алатырь.

(*Russian Folk* 277)

(From Sakharov's 'Legends of the Russian People', 1841)

[I lock my incantation with seventy seven locks, seventy seven chains, throw the keys in the Ocean-sea, under the white-hot stone Alatyr'.]

This practice of *sealing* one's words by putting a lock and key on them and then

tossing the key under the Alatyр'Stone is a common image in incantations, and attributes to the Alatyр'Stone the added function of acting as a 'safe' or protector. Under it, precious things or magical creatures lay hidden, such as the *Щука* ('Pike'), which has the key to the said incantation in its belly.

The Alatyр'Stone is also mentioned at the end to help assert the power and permanence of the incantation itself, after it has done its work. Stone as a material was often considered magical because of its enduring hardness:

“Слово моё крепко, как бел-горюч камень Алатырь.” (*Russian Folk* 279):

(Source unspecified)

[My word is hard, like the white-hot stone Alatyр'.]

Also, in battle/war incantations, incantations meant to protect soldiers from bullets and arrows invoke the hardness of the Alatyр'Stone and ask that they might be as invincible as the Alatyр'Stone itself. In the second incantation, it is believed to possess unlimited strength:

... А будь мое сильнее воды, выше горы, тяжелее золота, крепче горючего
камня Алатыря, могучее богатыря. (*Russian Folk* 271)

(From Sakharov's 'Legends of the Russian People', 1841)

[And may I be stronger than water, higher than a mountain, heavier than gold,
stronger than the hot stone Alatyр', more powerful than a bogatyr'.]

“На море на окиане есть бел-горюч (светящийся) камень Алатырь, никем неведомый, под тем камнем сокрыта сила могуча, и силы нет конца.”

(Russian Folk 279)

(Source unspecified)

[On the ocean-sea is the white-hot (luminiscent) stone Alatyr', invisible to all, under that stone is concealed mighty strength, and strength without end.]

Incantations that depict the Alatyr' Stone often start with an introductory formula that shows the sorcerer “going east”:

Стану я, раб такой-то, благословясь, пойду, перекрестясь, из дверей в двери, из ворот в ворота, в чисто поле, в подвосточную сторону, к морю к Окиану, в море-Окиане лежит Алатырь-камень ... (Sakharov 68)

[I stand, servant so-and-so, blessed, go, crossed, from door to door, from gate to gate, into the open/clear field/path, on the eastern side, to the ocean-sea, in the ocean-sea lies the Alatyr' stone ...]

Огненный змей (**Fiery Serpent/Dragon**) is the usual term used to describe the Bujan Serpent:

... В том поле есть Окиан-море, в том море есть Алатырь-камень, на том камне стоит столб от земли до неба огненный, под тем столбом лежит змея жгуча, оплюча. Я той змее поклонюсь и покорюсь: “Ой еси, ты змея! не жги,

не пали меня, подлтай под восточну сторону, в высок терем, в новый покой (покой), пухову перину, шелкову подушку, к девице Н., разожги и распали у той девицы белое тело ... (*Russian Folk* 284)

(Supplied by P.A. Ivanov to a report by the Ethnography department of Pinega)

[... In that field is the Ocean-sea, in that sea is the Alatyr's stone, on that stone stands a pillar from earth to the sky fiery, under that pillar lies a fiery, biting serpent. I bow and submit to that serpent: "Oh you serpent! Do not burn, do not scorch me, fly in the eastern direction, to a high tower, in a new chamber, on a bed of down, on a silk pillow, to the maiden N., inflame and scorch the white body of that maiden ... "]

The ancient name of the Bujan Serpent was *Гарафен* – *Garafen*. It is first and foremost fiery and is described either as flying off to a particular destination to perform the action that it is being invoked to perform, or as lying at the foot of the Bujan oak or post/pillar, guarding an object of significance. It always participates as an adversary or evil figure.

In *Исторические корни волшебной сказки* (Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale), Vladimir Propp expresses regret that the serpent is never described in the Russian fairy tale – “We know what a snake looks like [in reality], but we do not know this in terms of tales” (197). The same can be said for incantations. Propp also believes that the teller of fairy tales himself did not know what the serpent looked like, and that it was a very ancient image that has gradually faded in the folk imagination, so that its reconstruction becomes a difficult and complex task.

The depictions of the serpent in this incantation bring out its key folkloric features. The fairy tale Serpent/Dragon is always ‘fiery’, even though the audience is never told

how the fire is actually produced. It is possible that it breathes fire. It is only certain that the serpent carries the fire within itself and spews it forth at the right moment. Secondly, several fairy tales present a corresponding picture of a flying serpent. In the incantation mentioned above involving the ‘inflaming’ of a young maiden’s heart with desire for a particular suitor, the serpent’s power to fly is invoked – “не жги, не пали меня, полетай под восточну сторону, в высок терем, в новый покой (покой)” (“do not burn, do not scorch me, fly east to a high tower, in a new chamber”) (*Russian Folk* 284). Like the fiery aspect, it is unclear how these serpents fly, and in Afanasyev’s collection of folktales, Propp notes only one fairy tale that makes reference to ‘fiery wings’ – “огненные крылья” (Vol. I 244). None of the incantations studied here contain any such reference. This ability to fly is interwoven with another fairy tale motif – kidnapping of women, modified to suit the purpose of the incantation. Often, the Serpent/Dragon terrorizes an entire village or town, taking as extortion one fair maiden (sometimes annually) to serve as food (Afanasyev, *Russian Folktales* Vol. I 327). Sometimes, the Serpent/Dragon kidnaps fair maidens to be his wife (Vol. II 93). In some cases, the kidnapper may also be Koschei the Deathless, a notorious figure usually pictured as an emaciated demonic old man. His death, which the hero must bring about if he is to free his captive beloved, is contained in a chest kept under the Bujan oak. The chest contains a hare, which contains a duck, which in turn contains an egg. Inside the egg is a needle with Koschei’s death on its tip that must be destroyed if he is to die (Vol. I 359).

In the incantation mentioned, however, the figure of the serpent-kidnapper is modified so that the serpent does not actually kidnap the young maiden, but performs the act of flying to the tower where she sleeps, totally oblivious, and ‘inflames’ her heart

with desire, presumably by stinging her and perhaps injecting into her the 'fire' of desire, instead of venom. Thirdly, as shown by the incantation, another key function of the serpent is to fiercely guard an important object that must be retrieved if the sorcerer and the fairy tale hero are to succeed in their various quests. In incantations, this could be a concrete object, while in fairy tales the serpent guards the Kalinovy Bridge that contains entry to the Thrice-ten Tsardom, a mysterious world that the hero must visit if his quest is to be successful.

Ворон (Raven) is the sorcerer's helper in incantations. It is the agent of sympathetic magic. The second excerpt below is an incantation used by military men who need to free from the clutches of the 'Змей огненный' a seven-pood³ key that unlocks the royal tower of Vladimirov, where a coveted harness possessing incredible powers and belonging to the *bogatyry* of Novgorod, is kept. The Raven, who is enigmatically described as "всем воронам старший брат" (the eldest of all ravens) (emphasizing, in all probability, its wisdom and magical powers) is supposed to procure the seven-pood key from the Serpent. It harbours a perpetual enmity with the Bujan Serpent, and Afanasyev says that the main task of the Bujan Raven is to attack the Fiery Serpent/Dragon of Bujan (Afanasyev, *Poetic Impressions* Vol. II 133).

В Мещовском уезде над обрезанным или порубленным местом знахари говорят три раза: "Летит ворон через Черное море, несет нитку шелковинку; ты, нитка, оборвись, а ты, кровь, уймись". После того каждый раз дуют на порезанное место. (*Russian Folk* 267)

³ - A pood is an Old Russian measure of weight, equivalent to 16.38kg.

(From Kaliostro's 'Secret Charms', 1876)

[In the Meschovskii distt. In a truncated or cut-down place, sorcerers say three times: "There flies a raven across the Black Sea, holds a silk thread; you, thread, snap, and you, blood, stop." After this each time they blow on the wounded part.]

... Есть на море на Окиане, на острове на Буяне ворон, всем воронам старший брат; он долетит до моря до Хвальинского, заключает змея огненного, притащит ключ семипудовый: а ворон посажен злою ведьмою Киевскою.

(*Russian Folk* 275)

(From Sakharov's 'Legends of the Russian People', 1841)

[... There is on the Ocean-sea, on the island Bujan a raven, the eldest brother of all ravens; he flies to the Caspian Sea, bites the fiery serpent, hauls a seven-pood key: and the raven is a proxy to an evil Kievan witch.]

In a fairy tale that depicts a prince's attempt to rescue his mother from Koschei the Deathless, a raven, whose life the hero had spared earlier, comes to his aid. The raven helps him by catching the duck (which carries the egg that contains Koschei's death) and delivering it to Ivan (Afanasyev, *Russian Folktales* Vol. I 359). The same motif of the hero sparing the life of the raven is seen in another fairy tale. The significant feature of this story is that this time the raven not only tells the prince how to save himself each time, but it also predicts the three attempts that will be made by the prince's stepmother to kill him (Vol. II 231). This is the prophetic (вещий) gift of the Raven often referred to in incantations as well. Another tale narrates how the grey wolf, the helper and well-wisher of the hero, threatens to kill a raven's offspring as they feed on his dead corpse.

The wolf, desperate in his attempt to somehow save the hero, attacks the baby bird. The raven appeals for mercy and is told to go to the other end of the world to the Thrice-ten Tsardom and fetch ‘живая вода’ (water of life), and ‘мёртвая вода’ (water of death), which the raven eventually manages to bring in two phials and which saves the hero (Vol. I 422-23).

The Raven is not alone in its enmity with the Serpent. The incantation below, categorized under ‘For the well-being of the family’ and recorded from L. D. Golomidova (born 1912) of the Kirov Province in 1990, depicts a falcon on the Bujan Oak as performing the same task of attacking the serpent, this time with fire:

Волос-то с его головы обрежь, а за печку заложь и скажи: Во море-окияне, на острове Буяне стоит дуб широколист, на том дубе сидит сокол, под тем дубом – змея, и как они там сидят, так чтоб, изменушка раба Божьего (имя), там ты сидела. А мы тот дуб подождем и там сгорит сокол и змея, так пусть и изменушка раба Божьего (имя) сгорит. Тут волос из-за печки вынешь и сожжешь. (*Russian Incantations* 157)

[Remove hair from his head, and put it in the stove and say: In the ocean-sea, on the island Bujan stands a wide-leafed oak, on that oak sits a falcon, under that oak – a serpent, and as they sit here, then so that, betrayer of the servant of God (name), there you sit. And we that tree wait and there burn the falcon and the serpent, then let also the betrayer of the servant of God (name) burn. Now take out the hair from the stove and burn.]

Лебедь (Swan) is described in one incantation as swimming in the Volga. The sorcerer appeals to it to retrieve a key to a tower from the Bujan Serpent:

“Под морем под Хвалынском стоит медный дом, а в том медном доме
закован змей огненный, а под змеем огненным лежит семипудовый ключ от
княжева терема Володимирова, а в княжем тереме Володимировом сокрыта
сбруя богатырская, богатырей Новгородских, соратников молодеческих. По
Волге широкой, по крутым берегам плывет лебедь княжая со двора княжева.
Поймаю я ту лебедь, поймаю я ту лебедь, поймаю, схватаю. Ты, лебедь,
полети к морю Хвалынскому, закрой змея огненного, достань ключ
семипудовый ... (*Russian Folk 275*)

(From Sakharov’s ‘Legends of the Russian People’, 1841)

[Under/Near/On the Caspian Sea there stands a copper house, and in that copper
house is captive a fiery serpent, and under/near the fiery serpent lies a seven-pood
key from the princely tower of the Volodimirs, and in the princely tower of the
Volodimirs is hidden a bogatyr’s harness, of Novgorodian bogatyrs, young
brothers-in-arms. On the wide Volga, on the steep banks swims a princely swan
from the court of the prince. I try to catch that swan, I try to catch that swan, I try
to catch, grab it. You, swan, fly to the Caspian Sea, make captive the fiery serpent,
get the seven-pood key ...]

Thus, in this incantation, uttered for a military man going into battle, the “princely swan” is depicted as yet another feathered adversary of the Bujan Serpent.

In a fairy tale, the soldier Tarabanov sees twelve swans fly into a palace and take off their wings to become fair maidens. He steals the wings of one maiden, who agrees to Tarabanov's condition that he will give her the wings if she marries him. When the Tsar hears of her magical powers, he wants to get rid of the husband and get her for himself. He sets Tarabanov a set of impossible tasks, each of which Tarabanov successfully completes using a ring given him by his wife and obeying her instructions (Afanasyev, *Russian Folktales* Vol. II 149-153). In *Frog Princess*, the beautiful Vasilissa the Wise, disguised as a frog, marries Prince Ivan, the youngest son of the Tsar. She reveals her real self at a court banquet. When she dances, she holds out her left hand, and a lake appears. When she throws out her right hand, white swans appear floating on the lake. Prince Ivan sneaks home and throws out her frog skin. She turns into a white swan and disappears, leaving Prince Ivan to rescue her from her fate as Koschei's captive (Vol. II 333-337). In another tale, the swan is associated with the Fair Maiden. To complete a royal task, the hero needs the help of the Swan-Bird. This "Swan-Bird, the Fair Maiden" is found by asking *Чyдо-юдо*, a monster who emerges out of the blue sea at midnight (Vol. III 19-20).

It is observed that all fairy tale references to swans associate them with beautiful and wise women. It was easy for the ancient Slavs, Afanasyev writes, to associate the swan with a maiden, since the Russian word for swan – 'лебедь' is a feminine noun (*Poetic Impressions* Vol. III 187). As has been observed, swan maidens are always described as divine and wise in fairy tales. They often perform difficult, supernatural tasks that are beyond the capabilities of human beings.

Part – II

In *Поэтические воззрения славян на природу* (Poetic Impressions of the Slavs about Nature), nineteenth-century Slavic folklorist A. N. Afanasyev discusses Bujan. He asserts that the Ocean-Sea is a poetic reference in incantations to the ‘ocean of air’ (Vol. II, 121-22). Thus, to access the Sun’s kingdom, one has to ‘sail’ across the waves of air. This kingdom is the island Bujan, whose name derives from the adjective ‘буевой’ (‘bujevoi’, ardent, tempestuous). Afanasyev concludes that ‘остров Буян’ (the island Bujan) “is a poetic name for the spring sky ... Around [it] ... are centred all the great powers of the spring thunderstorm, all the mythical personifications of thunder, the winds, and storms”. The spring Sun in all its manifestations is also situated on Bujan (131-33).

Vilinbakhov, on the other hand, believes that the Ocean-Sea is in reality the Baltic Sea (54), and does not mention Afanasyev’s symbolical interpretation that transforms the Ocean-Sea from terrestrial to celestial. He refers to *byliny* (heroic epics) where the Ocean-Sea is described only as ‘Киян-море’ (‘Kijan-more’, the Kijan sea). This ‘Киян-море’ is also found in incantations, as seen earlier. Furthermore, the Gulf of Bothnia was known as ‘Каяно море’ (‘Kajano-more’, the Kajan sea) in ancient times, and Vilinbakhov believes that ‘ocean-sea’ is an adaptation of that name (55). He states that the real prototype of Bujan is the modern Baltic Sea island of Rügen, whose ancient name was Rujan (twelfth-century Saxon historian and priest Helmold uses ‘Rujani’ in his chronicle, among other appellations (‘Rani’ and ‘Rugiani’) to denote the inhabitants of the island, but he doesn't mention the name of the island anywhere (52, 152, 370)).

Gradually, Vilinbakhov maintains, Rujan became known as ‘Буян-остров’ (‘Bujan-ostrov’, Bujan-island) to the Eastern Slavs (ES) (53).

Vilinbakhov says that the island was inhabited by a warlike tribe of Baltic Slavs and in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, played an important role in the religion of all pagan Slavs (53). A shrine situated at Arkona on Rujan, dedicated to the Slavic god Svjatovit (chief god of the Baltic Slavs and associated with victory in battles) was no less than the “Mecca of the pagan Slavs” (53). This is confirmed by Helmold who observes that the Rujani “maintain a primacy over every Slavic tribe and have ... a very celebrated fane ... on account of the special veneration paid this fane, they hold the first claim to respect” (125), and that the god Svantovit (Svjatovit) “secured a primacy among all the divinities of the Slavs, as being most illustrious in victories” (276). The temple on Rujan was served by a priestly class. The sanctuary was hidden from common view and shrouded in secrecy behind tall ramparts. Vilinbakhov, who quotes Helmold, believes that this careful preservation of pagan traditions was also fuelled by pagan resistance to Danish pressure to convert to Christianity. Helmold states that the inhabitants had been converted to Christianity in the ninth century, but had gone back to their pagan roots, only to be converted again by the Danes in the twelfth century (60-61). Vernadsky also mentions the inhabitants of Rujan, in his references to Saxo Grammaticus’ account of cattle sacrifices and rituals with mead being performed before Svjatovit’s (or Svantovit’s) statue to celebrate post-harvest thanksgiving. He says that the pagan Eastern Slavs probably had analogous celebrations (114-15), asserting also that they probably knew Rujan well, and that many may have made pilgrimages to that place. This seems possible in the light of the fact that Helmold asserts more than once that Svantovit’s shrine was the dominant religious centre of all the Slavic tribes.

Vilinbakhov also has an explanation for the Bujan Oak. He suggests that Rujan (proposed prototype of Bujan) was home to a highly venerated oak tree, which is why the oak-tree is included in incantations referring to Bujan (53). Afanasyev says that in ancient times, rain-clouds were associated with a great tree whose height extended from the earth to the sky, and which is found in Russian incantations depicted as a white birch (*Poetic Impressions* Vol. II 277). Vernadsky describes Slavic rituals and festivals associated with Sun-worship where the birch plays an important role (112-13, 115). However, most Russian incantations picture the *oak*. The Bujan tree is also oak. In all three anthologies consulted for the purpose of this thesis, incantations that mention the birch tree are virtually negligible in number when compared to those that mention the oak.

Afanasyev also believes that the Fair Maiden was believed to be the Sun-goddess and is depicted in fairy tales as Dawn Maiden and the Thunder goddess (*Poetic Impressions* Vol. I 124). However, incantations only refer to her as associated with Dawn and Lightning. Furthermore, if Rujan (Rügen) was really Bujan as declared by Vilinbakhov, then a solar connection is not possible because Helmold does not mention a solar altar or a solar deity in his extensive account of worship at the Arkona shrine, and Vilinbakhov also says nothing of the sort. Like his sources (Helmold and Saxo), he maintains the dominance of Svantovit on the island. Afanasyev also believes that swans and their anthropomorphic forms were metaphors for rain clouds in folklore because Swan maidens are 'daughters' of the Ocean-Sea and swans in incantations and fairy tales are always white (217-218). Similarly, he believes that because the raven has access to and transports the water of life in fairy tales, it was believed to be connected to dark spring rainclouds that bring life-giving rainwater to the fields (Vol. I 501-502).

The Alatyr' Stone of Russian incantations was the Spring sun according to Afanasyev, which is why the Fair Maiden is seated on it and introductory formulae of relevant incantations mention the sorcerer "going east", in the direction of the rising Sun (143). For Afanasyev, the twin association of the Sun and clouds with the Fair Maiden (as Dawn and Lightning) arises out of the Alatyr' Stone image, because not only was the Sun identified as a precious, fiery stone, but stone was also used to denote clouds (142-143). Vilinbakhov believes that the Alatyr' Stone was situated on Rujan and was actually amber, a resource for which the Baltic has been famous since antiquity. Afanasyev too prefers the etymology provided by the word 'янтарь' ('amber') (*Poetic Impressions* Vol. II 148), and rejects assumptions that 'алатырь камень' ('alatyr' stone') meant 'altar-stone' because the word 'алатырь' appears similar to 'алтарь' (altar). Vilinbakhov also says that ES may have even carried amber to the mainland as a holy souvenir, but there is no evidence for this practice. He believes that the Alatyr' Stone may also have been thought to have the power to cure all diseases and provide immortality (53). However, only one incantation (out of those studied) referring to amber has been found.

Vilinbakhov attributes the Bujan Serpent motif to his belief that serpents may also have been kept in the Rujan sanctuary (54). Afanasyev says that the fiery, flying serpent was associated with lightning, and goes back to an old tradition of associating celestial phenomena such as lightning and shooting stars with serpents (*Poetic Impressions* Vol. II 510).

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to present Bujan and its ancillary motifs as they are depicted in incantations and to list important theories that are associated with Bujan. While Vilinbakhov strives to establish the historical and geographical prototype of Bujan, Afanasyev attempts to understand its religious and aesthetic significance in the Slavic imagination and its development as a complex metaphor. It would have been significant to know what Vilinbakhov thought of Afanasyev's postulations (especially his proposed etymology of 'Bujan' as deriving from 'буевой', and not from 'Rujan'), but it is not clear if Afanasyev's work was familiar to him. Afanasyev's work was totally discredited in the twentieth century by scholars, who said that it "was a failure, in spite of the author's erudition and wealth of ideas" (Fedotov 8). He followed the "German-Aryan mythological background and was under the spell of the solar theory, which ... does not explain much in Russian mythology" (8). As far as Vilinbakhov's postulations about Bujan as Rujan are concerned, some can be corroborated by chronicles of the early medieval period, such as that of Helmold, and also by modern religious historians such as Vernadsky. For example, the chroniclers confirm that Rujan was home to an all-important Slavic shrine, the abode of the god Svantovit which commanded reverence not only in the minds of the Rujani, but also all other Slavs. Svantovit may also have been, at some point, the chief Slavic divinity. But, contemporary medieval sources do not attest the presence of a venerated oak or serpents in the Arkona shrine, nor do they, significantly mention amber as occupying a special place in it. Vilinbakhov's conclusion that 'Rujan' became 'Bujan' is still more speculative. Helmold occasionally refers to the

inhabitants of the island as 'Rujani', but he doesn't mention the name of the island, preferring to say that the Rujani "dwell in the midst of the sea" (61).

It is clear from the incantations however, that Bujan is a sacred space, the 'свят остров' (sacred island) (*Russian Folk* 268). Its ancillary motifs also appear to be venerated. It appears that the concept of the Ocean-Sea is identical with the sea described as encompassing all lands in the *Глубинная книга* (Book of Deep Wisdom). Incantations suggest that the Fair Maiden may have been a divinity associated with Dawn, Dusk, Lightning and perhaps Midnight as well.

Chapter Three

Yggdrasill and its Ancillary Motifs, and Possible Linkages with Bujan and its Motifs

An ash I know there stands
 Yggdrasill is its name ...
 - *Völuspá* (*Poetic Edda* 12)

The present chapter will discuss some myths in the Norse tradition and analyze the possibility of parallels existing between the Slavic and Norse traditions of Bujan and Yggdrasill respectively.

The most important myth that will be discussed relates to Yggdrasill – the World Ash. The primary sources for this myth include the poem-prophecy *Völuspá* from the *Poetic* or *Elder Edda* (ninth to twelfth centuries), also known as *Sæmundar Edda*. It is thought to have been transmitted orally for one or more centuries before being committed to writing (*Poetic Edda* 63). The more extensive prose description of Yggdrasill in the chapter entitled *Gylfaginning* within *Snorra Edda* will also be examined. Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) – scholar, poet and courtier – is believed to be the author or at least the compiler of this work, hence the conventional title. *Snorra Edda* was intended as an instructional work for poets who wished to praise kings; it also dealt with poetic style and meter. In addition to this, it includes *Gylfaginning* (The Beguiling of Gylfi), which records ancient Norse myths. Aside from *Völuspá*, this chapter refers to some other poems from the Elder Edda, including *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* (The First Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane), *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana önnor* (The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane), *Fáfnismál* (The Lay of Fafnir) and *Völundarqviða* (The Lay of Volund).

The *Poetic Edda* contains the poem-prophecy *Völuspá* ('Sybil's Prophecy'), in which a *völva* (prophetess) who was born before the world began, describes the giants, the creation of the world from the body of the giant Ymir by the three young gods - Óðinn, Vili and Ve, the coming of men, the corruption of the gods and their eventual downfall with the coming of *Ragnarök* ('Judgement of the gods').

The *völva* describes the place where the gods assemble every day to hold their council. This is at the tree Yggdrasill – the “centre of the divine world” (Turville-Petre 279):

Ask veit ek standa,

heitir Yggdrasill,

hár baðmr, ausinn

hvítaauri.

Þaðan koma döggrar

þærs í dala falla.

Stendr æ yfir grœnn

Urðar brunni.

Þaðan koma meylar

margs vitandi,

þriár, ór þeim sæ,

er und þolli stendr.

Urð héto eina,

aðra Verðandi

– skáro á skíði –

Skuld ena þriðio.

Þær lög lögðo,

þær líf kuro

alda börnom,

ørlög seggia.

(Poetic Edda 11-12)

[An ash I know there stands,

Yggdrasil is its name,

a tall tree, showered

with shining loam.

From there come the dews

that drop in the valleys.

It stands forever green over

Urðr's well.

From there come maidens

deep in knowledge,

three, from the lake

that lies under the tree.

Urðr they called one, 'Had to be,'

the second Verðandi, 'Coming to be'

– they incised the slip of wood –

Skuld the third, ‘Has to be’.

They laid down laws,

they chose out lives

for mankind’s children,

men’s destinies.

(*Poetic Edda* 11-12)]

The second source that depicts Yggdrasil is found in the section *Gylfaginning* (The Beguiling of Gylfi) of *Snorra Edda* where the author recounts the adventures of Swedish king Gylfi. Gylfi is curious about the magical powers that the *Æsir*-people possess, and, guessing that their powers might somehow be connected to the divine powers they worship, decides to make a trip to Ásgarðr – the abode of the gods – under disguise. He calls himself Gangleri and after several questions about creation and the gods, he asks about the holy place of the gods:

Þá mæli Gangleri: ‘Hvar er höfuðstaðrinn eða helgistaðrinn goðanna?’

Hár svarar: ‘Þat er at aski Yggdrasils. Þar skulu guðin eiga dóma sína hvern dag.’

(Snorri 17)

[Then spoke Gangleri: ‘Where is the chief centre or holy place of the gods?’

High replied: ‘It is at the ash Yggdrasil. There the gods must hold their courts each day.’

(Snorri 17)]

The author of *Snorra Edda* refers many times to *Völuspá*, which was one of the sources for the information given to Gylfi about the gods and the creation and destruction of the world, but he also supplements this information from other Eddaic poems, some extant and some lost (Turville-Petre 23).

Gylfaginning describes Yggdrasill as being “allra tréa mestr ok beztr” (“of all trees the biggest and best”) (Snorri 17; Snorri 17). Gangleri is told that its towering branches extend across the sky, and that it is supported by three of its roots, each of which is very long and extends into a different world. One extends into the world of the *Æsir* – the gods. This is Heaven, and *Urðarbrunnr* (‘Urðr’s well’), which is considered very holy, is located under this root. The second goes into the world of the frost giants, and *Mímisbrunnr* (‘Mímir’s well’), the well of wisdom and intelligence, is located under this root. From a hall near *Mímisbrunnr* emerge three Norns – Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld – who shape lives. The third extends over Niflheimr, a place from where arises “kalt ... ok allir hlutir grimmir” (“coldness and all things grim”) (Snorri 10; Snorri 10). A wise eagle sits in the branches of the ash, and between the eyes of the eagle is a hawk called Veðrfölnir. Ratatoskr the squirrel runs up and down the ash tree, carrying spiteful messages between the eagle and the serpent Níðhöggr.

The ash tree is constantly under attack from all kinds of creatures, one of whom is Níðhöggr the serpent, who gnaws at the third root. This constant gnawing of the tree damages it, and it continues to suffer as there are many more serpents lying in its roots. There are also four stags – Dain, Dvalin, Duneyr and Durathror – who run in the branches of the tree and feed on its foliage. To make up for some of the wear and tear caused to the

tree, the three Norns pour over it a paste of mud and holy water from Urðr's well. There are also two swans that feed in Urðr's well.

Although Yggdrasill is best known for its role within the Norse cosmological model, this thesis is primarily concerned with the fact that it is identified as the “höfuðstaðrinn eða helgistaðrinn goðanna” (“chief centre or holy place of the gods”) in *Snorra Edda*, and that it is here that the gods converge each day to hold their council (Snorri 17; Snorri 17).

Yggdrasill is also associated with one of the most famous Scandinavian temples, located in Uppsala in Sweden. It appears to have still been in use in the eleventh century, when Adam of Bremen wrote an account of it that he had heard from an eye-witness. He writes in his work *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (History of the Bishops of Hamburg) that the temple at Uppsala contained three idols made of gold. Thor (Þórr) stood in the middle, with Wodan (Óðinn) and Fricco (Freyr) on either side. Every nine years a festival was held here which involved human and animal sacrifices, after which the bodies were hung on trees in a grove which was sacred to the pagan believers. Because of the sacrifice made and the blood spilt, each of the trees was believed to be divine. Adam's notes to this section add some more information about the temple. He describes in No. 138 the enormous tree that grows beside the temple:

Beside this temple stands an enormous tree, spreading its branches far and wide; it is ever green, in winter as in summer. No one knows what kind of tree this is.

There is also a well there, where heathen sacrifices are commonly performed, and

a living man is plunged into it. If he is not found again, it is deemed that the will of the people will be fulfilled. (Turville-Petre 245)

It is significant that out of all the trees in the divine grove, the one described in Note No. 138 remains the most divine, holier than the rest. It was also evergreen. Turville-Petre believes that this tree “may be seen as its [Yggdrasil’s] earthly replica” (279). He also compares the sacred well mentioned here to the “mystical Urðarbrunnr (Well of Fate)” (246).

Ancillary Motifs of Yggdrasil

***Umsjár* (‘World-Ocean’):**

In *Snorra Edda*, Gylfi asks how the earth was arranged and receives this reply:

“Hon er kringlótt útan, ok þar útan um liggr hinn djúpi sjár, ok með þeiri sjávar ströndu gáfu þeir lönd til bygðar jötna ættum. En fyrir innan á jörðunni gerðu þeir borg umhverfis heim fyrir ófriði jötna, en til þeirar borgar höfðu þeir brár Ymis jötuns, ok kölluðu þá borg Miðgarð.” (Snorri 12)

[“It is circular round the edge, and around it lies the deep sea, and along the shore of this sea they gave lands to live in to the races of giants. But on the earth on the inner side they made a fortification round the world against the hostility of giants, and for this fortification they used the giant Ymir’s eyelashes, and they called the fortification Midgard.” (Snorri 12-13)]

Thus, Miðgarðr ('Middle Enclosure') is the area occupied by humans, surrounded by the land of giants, which in turn is surrounded by the 'deep sea'. Through the centre of Miðgarðr passes Yggdrasill. More is said about this sea, which was created by Óðinn, Vili and Vé from the dead giant Ymir's blood:

“Af því blóði er ór sárum rann ok laust fór, þar af gerðu þeir sjá þann er þeir gerðu ok festu saman jörðina, ok lögðu þann sjá í hring útan um hana, ok mun þat flestum manni ófæra þykkja at komask þar yfir.” (Snorri 12)

[“Out of the blood that came from his wounds and was flowing unconfined, out of this they made the sea with which they encompassed and contained the earth, and they placed this sea in a circle round the outside of it, and it will seem an impossibility to most to get across it.” (Snorri 12)]

This sea, “which lies around all lands” (Snorri 27), is called ‘umsjár’ in *Snorra Edda*. Mel’nikova argues that even though the idea of the ‘World-Ocean’ was widespread in medieval western European geographical works, it closely conforms to the idea of the World-Ocean in Scandinavian cosmological myth and that the term ‘World-Ocean’ has been borrowed from Scandinavian mythology (*Image of the World* 194).

Mel’nikova says that the reason behind the conception of a body of water surrounding all land is the geographical location of Scandinavia in terms of its proximity to the sea. It also reflects contemporary Scandinavian knowledge about the world (Mel’nikova, *Image of the World* 195). Furthermore, even though this idea of the world-ocean closely corresponds with medieval western European ideas, it also retains the most

archaic concepts associated with the creation of the world in Scandinavian tradition, such as *Ginnungagap* ('Mighty/Deceptive Gap'), which became a part of the 'World Ocean' after Óðinn, Vili and Ve constructed the world out of Ymir's body.

***Океан-море* ('Ocean-Sea') and *Umsjár* ('World-Ocean')**

A body of water surrounding all lands is a common feature between the Slavic and Scandinavian traditions. As discussed above, *Miðgarðr* is surrounded by this World-Ocean. In the case of Bujan, it was observed that it is always situated on the Ocean-sea, and even if Bujan is absent, its chief accessories (such as the Mystical Oak and the *Alatyr*'-Stone) are described as being located on the Ocean-sea.

In the case of Bujan, the perception of the Ocean-Sea is complicated. Firstly, as we have seen, some scholars identify Bujan with the island of Rujan, which is identified with the Baltic Sea island Rügen. Secondly, the innovations of sorcerers, who have either used more than one body of water to replace the Ocean-Sea or have given a completely different location of the Ocean-Sea itself, have contributed both variety and confusion to the image. Thus, at times the Ocean-Sea is completely replaced by the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea or the White Sea, and Bujan is said to be located on that particular sea. The sea chosen is often perplexingly distant from the province where the incantation is being uttered. Furthermore, in some incantations, the Ocean-Sea itself is described as being situated in the open/clear path/field which by definition, is not the ocean-sea that "runs around all lands" as mentioned in the *Глубинная книга* (Book of Deep Wisdom) (Afanasyev 122).

It is difficult to glean the standard model of the Ocean-Sea associated with Bujan, if ever there was such a model. The idea of the Ocean-Sea as surrounding all land,

described in the *Глубинная книга* (Book of Deep Wisdom), goes back to at least the late Middle Ages, which suggests that if the image has been consistently represented in Russian incantations for many centuries, it must have been exposed to changing world views and independent imaginations, which is why there are references to different seas. But, most Bujan incantations mention the Ocean-Sea. This suggests that the idea of Bujan originally seems to have been inextricably linked with the Ocean-Sea.

***Yggdrasill* (World-Tree):**

This section will discuss the Norse World-Tree itself. *Yggdrasill* is described as rising from the ground and growing right up to the sky, its branches spreading all over the whole world. Its roots go into different worlds, and its centre goes through *Miðgarðr*. For this reason, because it connects all the constituent parts of the universe, it may be considered to hold up the universe (Turville-Petre 279).

Some scholars believe that *Yggdrasill* might be associated with the lord of the gods, Óðinn, because of the name ‘*Yggdrasill*’, comprising ‘*Ygg-*’ – possibly “the terrifier, awe-inspirer” – which is one of Óðinn’s names, and ‘*drasill*’ – a common word in poetry for a horse (Turville-Petre 48). Thus, *Yggdrasill* might be the ‘steed of Óðinn’. This depiction of Óðinn is believed to be derived from his avatar as the god of the hanged dead (‘*Hangaguð*’) (Turville-Petre 62). Óðinn is also the god who sacrificed himself to himself (‘*Hangi*’). Not only was he the receiver of the sacrificial victims of the gallows, he was himself a victim of the gallows. The relevant episode is presented in the *Hávamal*. Óðinn hangs for nine days and nights on the World-Ash with a spear run through his body, after which he receives the knowledge he was seeking:

Veit ec, at ec hecc vindgameiði á
 nætr allar nío,
 geiri undaðr oc gefinn Óðni,
 siálfr siálfom mér,
 á þeim meiði, er mangi veit,
 hvers hann af rótomm renn.

(*Edda* 40)

[I know that I hung on a high windy tree
 for nine long nights;
 pierced by a spear – Odin’s pledge –
 given myself to myself.

No one can tell about that tree,
 from what deep roots it rises.

(*Poems* 31)]

Turville-Petre discusses how skalds frequently referred to the gallows or gallows-tree as a horse (48). This could be because horses are symbols of death and carry the dead to the other-world, and the gallows or gallows-tree also ‘carries’ the victim and in effect, leads him to death. The concept of ‘riding the gallows’ is not alien to English speakers. A similar function is assigned to the verb *riða* – to ride – in Old Norse to take the metaphor further. Thus, Óðinn rides the gallows for nine days and nights in order to gain the esoteric knowledge of the runes. This is why the World-Tree is identified as Óðinn’s

steed, since the action of riding is considered common to both a ‘gallows-bird’ and a horse-rider. Óðinn’s association with the gallows and those who hang on it is also significant. The *Hávamál* says:

Þat kann ec iþ tólpta, ef ec sé á tré uppi

váfa virgilná:

svá ec ríst oc í rúnom fác,

at sá gengr gumi

oc mælir við mic.

(*Edda* 43)

[I know a twelfth: if up in a tree

I see a corpse hanging high,

the mighty runes I write and colour

make the man come down

to talk with me.

(*Poems* 33)]

The *völva* also seems to remember Yggdrasill from much before the actual creation of the universe. In fact, it has already begun to decay when it appears as the World-Tree, “in its full stature” (Turville-Petre 279). When *Ragnarök* (‘Judgement of the gods’) takes place, the tree will creak and shiver.

Yggdrasill (World-Tree) and Дуб / Мистический дуб ('Oak/Mystical Oak'):

In Russian incantations, as seen in the previous chapter, the ‘мистический дуб’ (‘Mystical Oak’) or just ‘дуб’ (Oak) is usually depicted as standing on Bujan, but its image does not seem dependent upon Bujan. Occasionally, the tree is replaced by a ‘столб’ (post or pillar), and that pillar is often described as standing from the earth to the sky, from east to west – “а стоит столб от земли до неба, от востока до запада” (*Russian Folk* 272). The description of the pillar is echoed in the prominent description of Yggdrasill in *Snorra Edda* (mentioned earlier) as “allra tréa mestr ok beztr” (“of all trees the biggest and best”) (Snorri 17; Snorri 17).

The Norns’ action of making a mix of the water from Urð’s well, mixing it with clay, and then pouring it on the tree points to a possible commonality with the Russian tradition, where, as we have seen, the oak is described as being ‘мокрецкий’ (greasy) or ‘мокрый’ (wet), but lack of further information on this greasy or wet oak makes it difficult to do more than hint at a similarity between it and Yggdrasill.

Óðinn’s association with the oak tree and his use of magic to waken the dead in order to communicate with them is also found in the Russian tradition. Similar associations of the knowledge possessed by corpses in the vicinity of trees are seen in incantations, especially those that deal with curing toothache.

Any scholarly discussion of Yggdrasill must refer to its cosmological role as well. Yggdrasill connects the world of the dead (Hel) and the world of the gods (Ásgarðr) with the world of humans (Miðgarðr). The Slavic tree of life plays an important role in fairy tales, where it is seen as a sacred zone, and in the image of Bujan as well. However, both in tales and in incantations, it is unclear which regions of the world the tree connects,

unlike in the case of Yggdrasill, which is clearly described as passing through the centre, marked by Miðgarðr.

Norns (Fate-goddesses):

Gylfaginning mentions three Norns – Urð, Verðandi and Skuld – who come out of a hall by the holy *Urðarbrunnr* ('Urðr's well'), situated under the second root of Yggdrasill. The *Poetic Edda* situates the Norns as coming "ór þeim sæ, er und þolli stendr" ('from the lake / that lies under the tree') (*Poetic Edda* 12). These three maidens are said to shape the lives of people (Snorri 18). *Snorra Edda* also mentions other Norns that visit children at birth in order to shape their lives. Norns are not necessarily all born of divine parentage. Some have *Æsir* parentage and some are born to elves and dwarves. However, parentage distinguishes good Norns from bad Norns. *Gylfaginning* emphasizes that Norns of noble parentage shape good lives, while evil Norns produce unfortunate fates (Snorri 18). One example of the impact of evil Norns is found in the *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana önnor* (The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane):

Erat þér at öllo, alvitr, gefið,
þó qveð ec nocqvi normir valda;

fello í morgon at Frecasteini

Bragi oc Högni, varð ec bani þeira.

(*Edda* 155)

["Sigrun, I will grieve you by what I say

but evil Norns must bear the blame:

there fell this morning at Freka Stone

Bragi and Hogni; I was their bane.”

(*Poems* 129)]

Norns also perform the vital task of reviving Yggdrasill. In fact, they are the only creatures that try to repair the damage that is constantly being done to Yggdrasill so that its branches may not rot. They play a crucial role since upon this tree “the welfare of the universe seems to depend” (Turville Petre 277). Furthermore, the Norns are also responsible for sustenance by extension through their nurturing association with Yggdrasill. This is because the water from the healing mixture that they pour over Yggdrasill falls upon the earth – i.e. over the space where humans, plants and animals live – and forms “what people call honeydew, and from it bees feed” (“þat kalla menn hunangfall, ok þar af fœðask býflugur”) (Snorri 19; Snorri 19).

The Norns’ association with nurturing and healing is not restricted to Yggdrasill. In the *Poetic Edda*, in the poem *Fáfnismál* (The Lay of Fafnir), Norns help women in childbirth:

“Segðu mér, Fáfnir, allz þic froðan qveða

oc vel mart vita:

hveriar ro þær nornir, er nauðgönglar ro

oc kíosa mœðr frá mögom?

Sundrbornar miöc segi ec at nornir sé,

eigoð þær ætt saman;
 sumar ero áskungar, sumar álfkungar,
 sumar dœtr Dvalins.

(*Edda* 182)

[“Sigurd said:

“Tell me, Fafnir, famed for your wisdom –
 I know you’ve learned much lore,
 what Norns will help women in their
 need before they give birth?”

Fafnir said:

“The Norns descend from different races,
 they have no common kin,
 some from the gods, some from the elves,
 some are Dvalin’s daughters.”

(*Poems* 154)]

The Norns are also associated with spinning in the *Poetic Edda* in *Helgaqviða*

Hundingsbana in fyrri (The First Lay of Helgi Hunding’s Bane):

Snero þær af afli ørlögþátto,
 þá er borgir braut í Brálundi;
 þær um greiddo gullin símo
 oc und mána sal miðian festo.

(*Edda* 130)

[Then they wound the threads of fate,
in Bralund's castle where the hero was born,
gathered the strands into a golden rope,
and made it fast in the moon's high hall.

(*Poems* 115)]

Norns (Fate-goddesses) and Красная девица ('Fair Maiden')

In Chapter 2, we discussed the figure of the *Красная девица* ('Fair Maiden'). Just as the Fair Maiden is the only anthropomorphic female presence on Bujan, the Norns are the only female anthropomorphic figures associated with Yggdrasill. The Fair Maiden is depicted on Bujan, often sitting on the Alatyř'-Stone, while the Norns are said to come out of the hall under the first root of Yggdrasill in *Snorra Edda*, and from a lake under the tree in *Sæmundar Edda*. We have seen that in the Russian incantations, the perennial epithet associated with the Maiden (both in case of a real young woman or the Fair Maiden of Bujan) is 'красная' (nominative, feminine, singular) ('fair'). By contrast, Norns are not uniformly beautiful. For example, in *Völuspá*, they are described thus:

... þriár kvómo

þursa meyiar,

ámátkar miök,

ór iötunheimom.

(*Poetic Edda* 9)

[... there came three

ogres' daughters,
of redoubtable strength,
from Giant Realms.
(*Poetic Edda* 9)]

We have also discussed the healing and nurturing functions of the three Norns of Yggdrasill. The Fair Maiden of Bujan also plays the role of healer and nurturer, despite the detailed differences in function, as can be seen in the many incantations that appeal to her to sew so that wounds heal and blood coagulates, or others that ask that she dispel melancholy, or those that ask for her protection when faced with the guns of “Turks, Tatars, Germans, Cherkesses, Mordvinians, of all languages and enemies” (*Russian Folk* 273).

The Fair Maiden is also often called an “expert-seamstress” (*Russian Folk* 267) and is depicted as sewing in some incantations. The Norns were associated with spinning. While spinning and sewing are two different activities, they nevertheless share some common characteristics in that they are stages in the production of garments and are both traditionally considered exclusively the work of women. Furthermore, both activities are related in terms of technique, since spinning produces the thread one sews with. Mokosh, the only feminine deity of the Slavic pantheon, sponsored spinning and weaving, and was venerated by women. There was also a set of rituals associated with spinning and weaving that were connected to Mokosh and which were performed by women, her chief worshippers (Vernadsky 123, 137-38). Spinning might also have been associated with the ‘Рожаницы’ (‘Rozhanitsy’ – from verb ‘родить’ – to give birth) of Russian tradition,

who were the consorts of the god 'Род' ('rod', clan). Afanasyev mentions that while there are no exclusive references that depict the Rozhanitsy spinning, they may have performed such a function in ancient times and that it is only recently that this has faded from folk memory (*Poetic Impressions* Vol. III 333). However, strictly speaking, in terms of spinning, the only Slavic feminine figure of veneration that can be connected to the Norns is Mokosh.

The Rozhanitsy also appear to have more in common with the Norns in terms of their role as fate-goddesses associated with childbirth. The Norns of Yggdrasill are depicted as deciding the fate of people, while there are other Norns that actually visit children at birth and shape their lives. The Rozhanitsy play the same role in Russian tradition, and the fate set by them is inescapable just as it is in the case of the Norns. The Rozhanitsy are said to come in person to the birth of children and determine their fate. However, the clear distinction between "noble" Norns and Norns of common parentage and the consequent effect on their identity as deciders of fate is not found in Russian tradition.

It is tempting to see similarities between the figure of the Fair Maiden of Bujan, a nurturing, sewing figure, at times associated with the Oak-Tree or the Altar-Stone, and the Norns of Yggdrasill, who are situated at the roots of the World-Ash and are associated with nurturing and spinning, even though the information that we have about these figures is inconclusive.

***Frekasteinn* ('Harsh-Stone'):**

In some poems of the *Poetic Edda*, particular reference is made to a stone called *Frekasteinn* ('Harsh Stone'). The noun 'freka' in Old Norse means 'rigour', 'severity' or 'harshness'. *Frekasteinn* seems to be more than just a landmark for events, especially when encountered in curse incantations. For example,

Fyrr vilda ec at Frecasteini
 hrafna seðia á hræm þínom,
 enn tícr yðrar teygia at solli
 eða gefa göltom; deili gröm við þic!

(*Edda* 137)

["Ravens will feed at Freka Stone –
 I will delight them with your dead body –
 Before I summon swine to the swill
 Or your dogs either, devils take you!"

(*Poems* 121)]

At this point in *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* (The First Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane), Gudmundr curses Sinfjotli, enraged and indignant at the unprovoked attack on his father's kingdom by Sinfjotli's half brother Helgi. There is another reference in the same poem to Freka-Stone:

Svipr einn var þat, er saman qvómo

fölvir oddar at FrecaSteini;
 ey var Helgi, Hundings bani,
 fyrstr í fólki, þar er firar börðuz,
 æstr á ímo, alltrauðr flugar;
 sá hafði hilmir hart móðacarn.

(*Edda* 138)

[With one sweeping turn as spears clashed together
 they met to fight at Freka Stone;
 ever was Helgi, Hunding's bane,
 in front of the host where battle was hottest,
 eager for the fray and hating flight –
 this was a man with a mighty heart.

(*Poems* 122)]

A further reference to Freka Stone in *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana önnor* (The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane) where Helgi's men challenge the long-suffering Gudmund and his brother Hodbrodd, whose betrothed has promised herself to Helgi and asked for his protection. Gudmund wants to hold Helgi and his Volsungs to account for their actions, both past and present, and says:

Því fyrr scolo at FrecaSteini
 sáttir saman um sacar dœma;

(*Edda* 156)

[Let us first at Freka Stone
Meet in combat to judge the case.”

(*Poems* 128)]

Note the description of the stone in the following reference from the same poem:

... at ino liósa Leiptrar vatni
oc at úrsvöloom Unnar steini.

(*Edda* 157)

[“... vows you swore by the shining Leiptr
Witnessed by Unn’s cold wet stone.”

(*Poems* 130)]

In all four examples given above, the stone is seen as a witness or an impartial source of justice. In the first example, it is a case of just deserts, with the stone acting as witness in order to put wrong right. In the third example, it appears to be a symbol of justice. In the fourth example above, the stone is not explicitly referred to as *Frekasteinn*. However, since it is the same poem and the location has not changed, it seems fair to associate the stone with *Frekasteinn*. The fact that it is called Unn’s “cold wet stone” might point to Óðinn, one of whose names is Unn (Snorri 21). Thus, these references to *Frekasteinn* seem to evoke the quality of stone as pure and therefore, in some way, it is symbolic of justice or at least presents an attitude of neutrality. It is also associated with divinity in some way, if Unn is indeed a reference to Óðinn.

***Frekasteinn* ('Harsh Stone') and the *Алатырь камень* ('Alatyr'-Stone):**

In Chapter 2, we discussed the presence of the *Алатырь камень* ('Alatyr'-Stone') in Russian incantations. The Alatyr'-Stone is often mentioned at the end of incantations as ratification, as we have seen earlier, and helps to assert the strength of the incantation itself by invoking the hardness of stone as a material. Battle incantations also invoke the hardness of stone to protect soldiers from enemy bullets. The fact that the Scandinavian tradition also considers the roughness or harshness of the stone worth mentioning in its appellation '*Frekasteinn*' ('Harsh Stone') suggests some possible linkage between these traditions. It is significant that in an incantation quoted in Chapter 2, the Alatyr'-Stone is openly described as 'свят' – divine or holy. It is unclear if *Frekasteinn* was associated with divinity, but as a neutral witness or judge to the events that take place in the heroic poems quoted above, it definitely appears to be venerated. In addition to this, in the event that "Unn's wet stone" of the *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana önnor* (The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane) is indeed equated with *Frekasteinn* and if Unn is indeed Óðinn, then *Frekasteinn* can be said to have divine associations with some certainty.

A significant feature of Scandinavian pagan religion that might suggest the veneration of stone is that rocks, along with hills, were venerated as abodes of gods and spirits, such as the *landvættir*, who were guardian spirits of a particular place or country. In fact, it has even been suggested by some scholars that Valhalla – the Hall of the Slain, where illustrious warriors go after they die, actually might not be a hall at all but rather a rock or a place made of rocks that was later glorified as the Hall of the Slain by skalds (Turville Petre 55). In some incantations, as we have seen, the Alatyr' Stone has the role

of keeping the effects of the incantation safe from the possibility of reversal upon the sorcerer or the client. Hence, the Alatyr'-Stone also has a protective function associated with it.

Given the scarcity of information about *Frekasteinn*, it is premature to assume that it is in some measure a counterpart to the Alatyr'-Stone, and yet a few points of similarity between *Frekasteinn* and the Alatyr' Stone remain interesting.

Jörmungandr, Niðhöggur and other serpents of Yggdrasill:

Yggdrasill is also depicted as being constantly gnawed at by the evil serpent Niðhöggur. *Gylfaginning* also mentions many other serpents that lie under the tree and attack it constantly:

Ormar fleiri

liggja und aski Yggdrasils

en þat of hyggi hverr ósviðra afa.

Góinn ok Móinn

(þeir ró Grafvitnis synir)

Grábakr ok Grafvölluðr,

Ófnir ok Sváfnir

hygg ek at æ myni

meiðs kvistum má.

(Snorri 19)

[“More snakes lie beneath the ash Yggdrasill than any old fool thinks. Goin and Moin – they are Grafvitnir’s sons – Grabak and Grafvollud, Ofnir and Svafnir I think will for ever mar the tree’s twigs.” (Snorri 19)]

But these are not the only serpents associated with Norse mythology. There is also Jörmungandr – the Miðgarðr serpent, who is one of the Ás (god) Loki’s three children with the giantess Angrboða. Their parentage is such that the gods expect mischief from them. Giants are believed to be evil and destructive, which automatically puts his mother’s nature into question. In addition to this, although Loki belongs among the *Æsir*, he is also the giant Farbauti’s son. He is cunning and frequently descends to evil. Evil begets evil, and thus, the gods expect trouble when they hear that Loki’s children are being brought up in Giantland. Strong measures are taken to keep them under control by Óðinn himself. Jörmungandr is thrown by him into the World-Ocean:

“...þá kastaði hann orminum í inn djúpa sæ er liggr um öll lönd, ok óx sá ormr svá at hann liggr í miðju hafinu of öll lönd ok bítr í sporð sér.” (Snorri 27)

[“...he threw the serpent into that deep sea which lies round all lands, and this serpent grew so that it lies in the midst of the ocean encircling all lands and bites on its own tail.” (Snorri 27)]

***Jörmungandr, Niðhöggr and Огненный змей* (‘Fiery Serpent/Dragon’)**

In Chapter 2, we discussed in detail the image of the *Огненный змей* (Fiery Serpent/Dragon). There are several possible parallels that can be made between the Bujan Serpent and the serpents of Yggdrasill. The Bujan Serpent is most often described as

being situated at the foot of the Bujan Oak, while the serpents associated with Yggdrasil are either those that are situated under the surface at its roots or Jörmungandr, who encircles the landmass Miðgarðr in the World-Ocean surrounding that land.

Like the Bujan Serpent, the serpents associated with Yggdrasil have negative functions and are fearsome adversaries, representatives of the opposing forces of evil or chaos that threaten the world of order represented by gods and men.

As discussed before, all references to serpents and dragons in Russian fairytales and incantations depict them as being ‘fiery’. We are not told whether Jörmungandr or any of the serpents associated with Yggdrasil spew forth fire. But water, which is another element manifested in dragons or serpents in Russian fairy tales, is also found in the Norse tradition. The Miðgarðr serpent was thrown by Óðinn into the sea where “hann liggr í miðju hafinu of öll lönd ok bítr í sporð sér” (“it lies encircling all lands and biting on its own tail”) (Snorri 27; Snorri 27). Other associations with the sea include serpent/dragon representations on the prows of Viking dragon ships, meant to instill fear and/or awe into those who viewed them from shore. These dragon-heads were believed to also have the adverse effect of frightening the *landvættir* (‘landspirits’) who were the guardians of that particular land, and so were usually removed before the ships were beached. These representations often also found their way into the name of the vessel as well. The most important example is *Ormr inn Langi* (The Long Serpent) – of Olaf Tryggvason, which was a huge ship with 34 pairs of oars by Snorri’s account (Simpson 85).

Serpents in Russian incantations and fairytales also often possess the ability to fly, even though there is but one reference to wings, and again, it is not clear exactly how

they fly. There is no such information given about any of the serpents associated with Yggdrasill, whether it is Jörmungandr, the Miðgarðr serpent, or Níðhöggr and the other serpents that gnaw at the tree's roots.

The functions of these serpents are different. While the Bujan Serpent is always guarding something, usually an object of significance like a heavy key that must be procured for the success of the incantation, the serpents of Yggdrasill maliciously gnaw at the tree's roots, damaging it. In fact, it is the image of Jörmungandr, the Miðgarðr serpent, that seems to retain this feature of 'guardianship', as it jealously guards all the lands, waiting for *Ragnarök*, when it will be free to attack Miðgarðr and wreak havoc. Another point of similarity emerges when one studies the object of the serpent or dragon's attention in Russian fairytales. While the serpent in Russian incantations jealously guards a tangible object, in Russian fairytales, it guards the entrance to the Thrice-ten Tsardom. The Thrice-ten Tsardom is often associated with the World-Tree. It is possible that the image of the Bujan Serpent, guarding a concrete object under the all-important Oak-Tree, could have developed from the older image of the serpent guarding the entrance to the Thrice-ten Tsardom, which can be represented by a tree.

The Eagle, *Veðrfölnir*, the Ravens *Huginn* ('Thought') and *Muninn* ('Memory'):

In *Snorra Edda*, Yggdrasill is depicted with an eagle perched on the top branches of the tree, described as possessing "margs vitandi" ("possessing knowledge of many things"). The eagle is a symbol of Óðinn, whose perpetual quest for knowledge has been discussed before, and seems to be one of the many features of Yggdrasill associated with

him. There is also a hawk called *Veðrfölnir* perched between the eyes of the *Yggdrasill* eagle (Snorri 18; Snorri 18).

Huginn ('Thought') and *Muninn* ('Memory') are two ravens that sit on Óðinn's shoulders and are sent out by him daily to bring him news from all over the world at dinner-time. Through this function, the ravens are associated with imparting information, and become another source by which Óðinn collects knowledge.

Huginn ok Muninn

fljúgja hverdan dag

jörmungrund yfir.

Óumk ek Hugin

at hann aptr ne komi,

þó sjámk ek meir at Munin.

(Snorri 32-33)

[“Hugin and Munin fly each day over the mighty earth. I fear for Hugin lest he come not back, yet I am afraid more about Munin.” (Snorri 33)]

***Veðrfölnir* and *Сокол* (Falcon), *Huginn-Muninn* ('Thought-Memory') and *Ворон* (Raven):**

Yggdrasill's eagle does not find a parallel in Bujan incantations, but eagles often feature prominently in fairytales, usually as the hero's helpers. Hawks are also associated with Bujan as observed in one incantation in Chapter 2, where the hawk sits on the tree, eyeing its adversary, the Bujan Serpent, lying below. This enmity between the hawk and the Serpent is not unique. The Bujan Raven also nurtures the same bitter hostility for the

Serpent (who reciprocates in full measure), and is usually the agent that is invoked when anything is to be procured from the Serpent. The Swan is also invoked in one incantation (see Chapter 2). This enmity is significant because it appears to be analogous to the hostility with which the Yggdrasill eagle and the serpent Níðhöggr react to each other, aided and abetted by the equally malicious Ratatoskr:

Íkorni sá er heitir Ratatoskr renn upp ok niðr eptir askinum ok berr öfundarorð milli arnarins ok Níðhöggs. (Snorri 18)

[A squirrel called Ratatoskr runs up and down through the ash and carries malicious messages between the eagle and Nidhogg. (Snorri 18-19)]

Of all the birds associated with Bujan, the one most frequently and prominently featured in incantations is the Raven. Valued for their wisdom, ravens act as helpers in both Russian incantations and in fairytales. Although no association between Yggdrasill and ravens has been found thus far, ravens are also considered wise in Norse tradition, as can be seen by the association of the ravens *Huginn* ('Thought') and *Muninn* ('Memory'), with Óðinn.

Swans and Valkyries ('Choosers of the Slain'):

In the *Poetic Edda*, swans are mentioned in *Völundarqviða* (The Lay of Volund), where three Finnish princes find three women spinning flax near a lake, their swan skins beside them. One of the maidens is called *Svanhvít* (Swan White):

Meyjar flugo sunnan, myrcvið í gognom,
 alvitr unga, ørlög drýgja;
 þær á sævar strönd settuz at hvílaz,
 drósir suðrœnar, dýrt lín spunno.

Ein nam þeira Egil at veria,
 fögr mæð fira, faðmi líósom;
 önnor var Svanhvít, svanfíaðrar dró;
 enn in þriðia, þeira systir,
 varð hvítan háls Völundar.

(*Edda* 117)

[Maidens flew from the south through Mirkwood,
 young and wise, on their way to wars;
 beside a lake the southern maidens
 sat down to rest and spin fine flax.

One of them embraced Egil,
 the fair maiden held him in her white arms;
 another was Swan White – she wore swan feathers,
 and the third, who was their sister,
 wound her white arms around Volund's neck.

(*Poems* 97)]

These maidens are described as Valkyries ('Choosers of the Slain') in the prologue to the poem. Valkyries are war-like maidens of Óðinn, and they perform the function of choosing who will die on battlefields and then guide the dead to *Valhöll* ('Hall of the Slain'), presided over by Óðinn. As *Gylfaginning* of *Snorra Edda* says:

Þær sendir Óðinn til hvernar orrostu. Þær kjósa feigð á menn ok ráða sigri. Guðr ok Rota ok norn in yngsta er Skuld heitir ríða jafnan at kjósa val ok ráða vígum.
(Snorri 30)

[Odin sends them to every battle. They allot death to men and govern victory. Gunn and Rota and the youngest Norn, called Skuld, always ride to choose who shall be slain and to govern the killings. (Snorri 31)]

As we have seen, swans are also mentioned as feeding at the very holy Urð's well under the first root of Yggdrasill. No other information is given about them in *Snorra Edda*.

***Valkyries ('Choosers of the Slain')* and *Лебединые деви* ('Swan Maidens')**:

In Chapter 2, we discussed the image of the swan associated with Bujan and the fairytale representations of Swan Maidens. In Old Norse tradition, the image of the Valkyries as described in the *Völundarqviða* (The Lay of Volund) and the swans that feed at Urð's well as described in *Snorra Edda* are similar to them. In both Russian and Norse traditions, the beautiful maidens can transform into swans and can remove their wings when they are not required. In both traditions, the Swan-Maidens perform supernatural

and divine tasks that cannot be performed by ordinary mortals. In the case of the swans of Urð's well, they might be divine in some way since they are present at the location where the gods hold their daily council, and because they are associated with the well of the Norns, which is known to be very holy.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to present Yggdrasill and its ancillary motifs as they are depicted in the works that mention them and to study possible parallels with Bujan and its associated motifs. Although it is not possible to make any direct or conclusive linkage between Bujan and Yggdrasill, some striking commonalities between the two traditions are evident and it may be that they draw upon related systems of beliefs.

Conclusion

In the Introduction to this thesis, we stated that it would examine the claims made by scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson that the Norse myth of Yggdrasill may be influenced by the mythical tradition of Eastern Europe owing to extensive interactions of Viking Age Scandinavia (eighth to twelfth centuries) with that region. To examine that claim, we aimed to study the Slavic island Bujan in Russian incantations with the view to compare it with ideas and motifs clustering around the tree of Yggdrasill in Scandinavian mythology and identify possible parallels between the two.

In Chapter 1, we established the economic, socio-cultural, political and ethno-religious milieu in which the transfer of mythical concepts were believed by Davidson to have happened. Chapter 2 was concerned with the depiction of the island Bujan in Russian sources. Chapter 3 described the myth of Yggdrasill as it is manifested in the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda* and sought analogues in the Russian materials.

The results of this exercise in comparative literature and mythology can be summarized as follows. With regard to the physical setting, the concepts of the Slavic Ocean-Sea and the Norse World-Ocean are quite similar and could possibly be linked in some way. The Bujan Oak and the tree Yggdrasill appear to have a few common features such as all-encompassing size, 'wetness' and, of course, holiness. On the other hand, little is known about the possible role of the Bujan Oak as a World-Tree, which is the dominating aspect of Yggdrasill. Frekasteinn, although not associated with the Yggdrasill myth, has some features in common with the Alatyry' Stone in terms of its use for

confirming and ratifying oaths. But once again we are hampered by the scarcity of primary sources on Frekasteinn.

As to the supernatural agents, we can state negatively that the Norns have little in common with the Fair Maiden, aside from similarities in location and the practice of a thread-based art (spinning and sewing, respectively) associated chiefly with women. On the other hand, they share functions with the Rozhanitsy of Russian tradition. While they are not associated with Bujan, the Rozhanitsy are analogous to the Norns because they decide human fate at the birth of a child.

As to non-human agents, there are some similarities between the serpents associated with Yggdrasill and the Bujan Serpent, in terms of functions, evil character, and location. Although there are no ravens associated with Yggdrasill, the eagle and hawk that are located at the top of the tree bear some similarity with the Bujan Raven in terms of location. The eagle is also, by way of its enmity with the serpent Níðhöggr, analogous to the Bujan Raven. Óðinn's ravens Huginn and Muninn are found to be similar to the Bujan Raven in terms of their association with cerebral faculties and the procurement of knowledge. Too little is known about the swans of Urðr's well for us to be able to compare them with the swan in Russian incantations, but the motifs of the Swan maidens and the Eddaic 'Swan-Valkyries' are strikingly similar.

To sum up, research for this thesis has produced evidence that while there may exist some similarities between the sets of ideas that cluster round Yggdrasill and Bujan respectively, it is not possible to talk about one influencing the other in the absence of information about some of their ancillary motifs. Here, we recall Eliade, whom we quoted in the Introduction to this thesis, as expressing regret concerning the fragmentary

nature of the records of ancient religions from both Germanic and Slavic regions. We also remember Mel'nikova's remarks on the difficulty of detecting traces of legends and myths typical of Old Norse culture in Old Russian literature. Thus, unless further information and more traces of the blending of the two traditions becomes available, perhaps through future archaeological investigations, to attempt to identify definite 'influences' would be utterly speculative. More plausibly, the commonalities between the motifs that I have noted in this thesis might have stemmed from a common source in informal systems of belief current in early Scandinavia and Eastern Europe in the Viking Age.

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