Hana Štěříková, *Stewards, Soldiers and Court Officials: Three Scandinavian Elements in the Language of Old Russian Law*, München: utzverlag, 2022, 255 pp. (Münchener Nordistische Studien Bd. 51)

From the perspective of a historian and archaeologist of (early) Middle Ages (called the Vendel Period and Viking Age in Scandinavia), this interesting and important book by Czech scholar Hana Štěříková (PhD from the Department of Scandinavian Studies at the Charles University in Prague) has just one weak point: the title does not reflect properly the content. This excellent volume in fact contains two very different parts of similar size.

The first and general part (in three chapters) is devoted to the so-called Varangian controversy, a dispute over a theory (but in reality a true fact) about the dominant role of Scandinavians of mostly Swedish origin in the foundation of Rus' as a state. The author stresses the ideological and political background of this academic discussion, from the early days of the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century, when the controversy began, until today. This part of the book is very general (and useful, although sometimes needs some criticism): Štěříková summarises arguments from almost all the fields of research involved in the discussion, including philology (Slavic/Russian and Old Norse/Nordic/Scandinavian, and even Indo-European perspective), history and also archeology. Although the latter is obviously not her favourite field, it is treated with due attention. What seems to be lacking here is the perspective of Byzantine and Arabic sources.

In the second part (one chapter divided into three sub-chapters), Štěříková, acting here exclusively as philologist and Nordist, attempts to demonstrate one of the core problems of the Varangian controversy by researching the story of three (out of many) substantives borrowed from Scandinavian culture (and most probably from the Old Swedish language): *jabednik*, *ti(v)un*, and *gridь*, all of them connected with princely power and retinue, and referring to some kind of prince's men, bureaucrats or officers, the "stewards, soldiers and court officials" mentioned in the title. In fact, however, the main point of the research is to contribute to the (*saepe dictum*) Varangian controversy by these three strictly philological and very detailed case studies, an attempt to obtain, as the author notes herself in the Conclusion of the book, a "politically unengaged view of the Varangian controversy" (p. 206). This is impressive and stays in accordance with the nineteenth-century idealistic view of the role of the humanities (and today's political correctness) but is entirely unrealistic and somewhat blurs the picture of historical truth – which Štěříková can certainly see quite correctly, by the way. The true title of the book should rather be "The Varangian controversy and three Scandinavian loanwords in Old Russian" (and not exclusively in the language of Old Russian law, as some of her evidence

comes even from *byliny* folk epics). It is good that the division of the book into two parts is noted already at the beginning, in the abstract (p. ii), but it also should be reflected clearly in the plan of the content.

The book begins with a clear Introduction (Chapter 1, pp. 1–22), outlining well the goal, which is "to answer certain linguistic questions connected with the historical links between […] Scandinavia and the East Slavic region" in order to understand "controversial subjects of debate of East Slavic historiography – the very foundation of the empire of old Rus', the ethnicity of its founder and the historical circumstances surrounding its birth" (p. 1). To be fully honest – for me as archeologist and historian there is nothing really controversial about it today (cf. Słupecki 2020), and I have no doubts that bands of Swedish warriors created Old Rus' as a state, but not an empire (having tried to capture the truly imperial city of Constantinople before); the most important among those bands was the successful clan of Rurikids, and its success story is told in their *letopis*/chronicle (*Povest vremennykh let*, called Nestor's Chronicle in old historiography). As medieval historian, I see this issue from the perspective of Viking expeditions in the West. Looking from that angle, the origins of Viking Rus' – the term introduced by archeologist Władysław Duczko in his book of the same title (Duczko 2004), a valuable contribution Štěříková is unaware of – seem to be simply an eastern part of the same story. All that process led by Scandinavians and catalysed by them in the large Russian melting pot, full of many ethnicities, including, of course, numerous Slavs, ends finally (but only after a long period of Mongol domination in the east of those regions, and Polish-Lithuanian domination in the west) with the creation of East Slavic, but not Scandinavian, nations of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians; thanks to conversion and Christianisation – in formally eastern and Greek but linguistically Church Slavonic version.

Hana Štěříková gives a very convincing explanation of her subject, task, goals and methods. Regarding sources, she covers all important written records related to the field, from the beginnings until the seventeenth century. In the case of Old Russian sources, she focuses on legal texts (which is rare and of great value) but also effectively uses birch bark letters as important testimonies, and even goes to folk epic texts of *byliny*. I really appreciate such a broad way of dealing with juridical texts and terms. What I appreciate even more is the same high competence in dealing with Old Scandinavian written sources, from runic inscriptions to Scandinavian legal codes. The author applies a good strategy to make the reader interested in the subject rather than terrify them with methodological nuances from the very beginning: the opening of this introductory part of the book includes vivid quotations from Nestor's Chronicle telling the story about Rurik and his arrival to future Rus'. Importantly, they come in two variants, from both Laurentian and Hypathian manuscripts; the latter – rarely quoted – echoes archeological reality from the early days of Scandinavian presence in the north of Russia even better than the former.

In the next chapter ("Science and Ideology: Disputes over the Beginning of Russian History", pp. 23–63), the author summarises the origins and background

of the Varangian controversy from its beginning in the eighteenth century (or, as some scholars argue, already in Nestor's Chronicle) until today, demonstrating a profound knowledge of relevant Russian scholarly literature. Štěříková authored a paper on this issue published in Czech (Štěříková 2020). As the controversy concerns mostly Russian historiography (but also archeology and philology), it is a very valuable contribution. Although the author does not intend to cover all the huge literature on the subject (she could easily develop this chapter into a large book), in fact she almost succeeds in doing so. What seems to be lacking here are references to some Western authors like, possibly, Jean Blankoff, and certainly British Byzantinist Jonathan Shepard (Frankiln and Shepard 1996).

Just one marginal question needs correction. There is a rather unfortunate passage in footnote 180 on page 44 about Polish Normanists, which is unfairly quoted in the passage about German racist use of Normanism in the twentieth century. As can be seen, then, Štěříková is entirely unaware of this question (it is worth recommending here Piotr Boroń's study (2013), a paper Štěříková has not consulted). Polish history was a victim of historiographic aggression of German Normanists in the first part of the twentieth century: they chauvinistically argued for the Nordic-German origins of civilisation in Polish territories. The true and simple difference between Poland and Old Rus' is that the Norse or Germanic element only played a marginal role in the process of state formation in Poland. However, this question, which is not a simple counterpart of the Varangian controversy in Russia, is far from the main scope of Štěříková's book. If it was not for the unfortunate footnote 180, the chapter would be perfect, including its second part, dealing with Scandinavian loanwords in Russian.

The third chapter, "Germanic Elements in Old Russian" (pp. 66–96), is devoted to Germanic loanwords in Russian, including those from Proto-Germanic, Scandinavian languages and Low German, and even High German in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Štěříková also considers the role they played (as evidence of Scandinavian influence in the formation of Rus') in the Varangian controversy, from its very beginning in the eighteenth century until today. In this mostly linguistic survey, she expertly mentions (among other issues) personal names of Scandinavian origin (p. 84). In my opinion, what needs some minor addenda is mainly her bibliography: the relation between Proto-Germanic and Proto Slavic on page 80 needs a mention of a study by Zbigniew Gołąb (1992); the comment about Gnezdovo (p. 83) should note Duczko's book mentioned above; and the *letopisy* term "*put' iz Variag v Greki*" ("route from the Varangians to the Greeks", p. 83) would very much need information about its obvious Old Norse and runic counterpart *austrvegr*, which appears on Swedish (so-called Varangian) runic stones. When Štěříková lists (on the same page 83) the most important goods traded along this route: "wax, furs, honey, amber, linen and slaves", she obviously does so in reverse order, as the most important among those goods were unfortunately slaves, traded for Arabic silver. Providing such information would require consulting Arabic written sources (why

not in numerous Russian, Polish and German translations?) and new archeological and numismatic literature, which argues that the development of early states in Central, Northern and Eastern Europe was largely financed from the trade in humans.

What is really valuable is that the author attempts to trace the linguistic connections between the Germanic and East Slavic worlds up to the seventeenth century, concluding with the era of Peter the Great. She aptly observes the role of Poland and Lithuania as intermediary towards the end of the period under investigation (p. 88). However, the statement about the "division (at that time) of Rus' and Western Europe by Poland and Lithuania" (p. 93) is somewhat puzzling, and sounds, so to say, a bit "German". At that time, Rzeczpospolita was the easternmost country of West-European, Latin civilisation, embracing, of course, an important Russian and Greek Orthodox component, well known to Štěříková (p. 91 and e.g. p. 144).

As I have already mentioned, the author could easily develop the first part into a separate book. Despite a sense that something is missing that archaeologists and historians may have reading it, a view from the perspective of another discipline is always interesting.

The next, and last, strictly and deliberately (see p. 96) philological part of the book (pp. 96–198) comes in one chapter divided into three sub-chapters. This part deals with three Old Russian loanwords of Scandinavian origin: *jabednik*, *ti(v)un*, and *gridь*. The author published two articles devoted to two of them (Štěříková 2019, 2021). It is very interesting to read the stories of those words, well documented with many kinds of sources, introducing not only Germanic/Scandinavian and East Slavic, but also Polish and even Lithuanian evidence. And it is interesting to see their semantic shifts (especially significant in the case of *jabednik*, the only of the three words which, after such a shift, has survived in use until today) and derivatives (like *gridnica* from *gridь*, a word highly interesting for me in its meaning "prince's hall", especially in the context of *byliny* folk epics, pp. 164–165).

As historian and archeologist I may only say here that it is a good, interesting study, and benefit from Štěříková's conclusions. And for me, the most important one is that all those Scandinavian words closely connected with princely power were borrowed in the tenth century or a bit earlier, which means for me: at the time of the strongest Scandinavian presence and domination in Rus'. It would be very interesting indeed to read other such stories of other words of this kind (including personal and topographic names) written by Štěříková. Among other interesting conclusions, I may benefit from the finding that all those words originally denoted people who were powerful but strongly dependent on the ruler. In this context, I have always been interested in the Old Russian word *otroki* (referring to some members of the retinue, but denoting also slaves and children, cf. Gąsiorowski 1967) and the Scandinavian toponym Trelleborg (with quite obvious meaning), which appears in two locations boasting Danish circular strongholds from the late tenth century. I really value Štěříková's very well balanced approach to the problem of the etymology of the Old Russian *gridь* – whether it originates from

the Scandinavian *grið* or from *hird*. Its meaning after borrowing points at *hird*, but phonetics suggests *grið*, and the latter is what Štěříková opts for as a linguist, which I, as a dilettante in her field, have to humbly accept (but both options are interesting and well elaborated, pp. 179–184).

In brief Conclusions (pp. 198–207), Štěříková suggests that the introduction of offices called in Old Russian *jabednik*, *ti(v)un*, and *gridь* could have taken place at the time of Olga's rule. I am rather sceptical here, although of course such a possibility exists and even finds some support in *Povest vremennykh let* (*sub anno* 947). Still, I think this happened simply with the coming of Scandinavians to Rus' and their rule in that country.

The book includes an appendix with some excerpts from primary sources, a large bibliography, and full colour illustrations featuring mostly birch bark inscriptions used by the author.

To sum up – it is a valuable book worth reading.

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