



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation of

Csete Katona

on

Rus' warriorhood. Warfare, society and culture in the Viking Age East (ca. 750–1050)

will be held on

Thursday, 1 February 2024 2:00 pm CET

Examination Committee

Chair: Matthias Riedl, CEU, History Department

Members: Márta Font, University of Pécs, Department of Medieval and Early
Modern History

Daniel Ziemann, CEU, Department of Medieval Studies

József Laszlovszky, CEU, Department of Medieval Studies
(supervisor)

External readers and external members:

Neil Price, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Jonathan Shepard, (formerly) University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection on the CEU e-learning site.

Should you wish to access it and/or join the defense contact Csilla Dobos

(dobos@ceu.edu)

Dissertation Abstract

This study seeks to explore Rus' warriorhood together with its related social and cultural aspects during the Viking Age (ca. 750–1050). A violent outburst of population from Scandinavia forms the central feature of this epoch, a characterization twentieth-century scholarship was keen on revising for long. However, it remains true enough that the concept of the period is to be sought in violence, and viking warfare with its all-encompassing military, social, religious and cultural roles and connotations has always formed the subject of extensive inquiry. The case of the Rus' in this regard only recently started to gain impetus, the eastern Scandinavian voyages – and the Rus' – formerly usually relegated to a side track of the 'viking story', more like exotica than something crucially integral to the whole phenomenon. This scholarly gap will be filled here by examining Scandinavian and Rus' viking activity in the 'East', a territory encompassing the eastern Baltic region, today's European Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, as well as the Black and Caspian Sea region, the Caucasus, contemporary Byzantium, the Islamic Caliphates and even beyond.

The dissertation aims to contribute to the field of international viking studies through a multi-disciplinary examination of miscellaneous written sources produced in a variety of languages, including Byzantine Greek, Arabic, Persian, Old Church Slavonic, Old Norse and Latin, and the archaeological evidence from settlement, grave and stray finds. In terms of methodology, the historical and

archaeological evidence will be combined and contrasted in a comparative framework with the '(western) viking phenomenon' or as aptly referenced today, 'diasporas'.

The main goal is twofold: on the one hand to illuminate the various spheres of eastern viking/Rus' military activity and complexities of 'warriorhood' in social and cultural terms, on the other hand to offer results (with the involvement of hitherto neglected evidence or undrawn comparisons) concerning political history related to Rus' warfare in the perspective of the global Viking Age.

The first analytical section (Chapter 3), entitled *Warrior-merchants*, addresses the interrelated nature of mercantile and warrior activity in the East, mainly through a long discussion of Rus' sword production and trade. The chronological layers of these Rus' activities will be refined and put into the context of the same phenomenon in a Scandinavian Viking Age perspective.

Chapter 4, *Retainers*, deals with the most visible aspect of Rus' warriorhood: retinue service performed in various courts of the East. As the chapter will bring out, individual warrior experience benefitted from contacts with different cultures including those of the Slavs, Greeks and steppe nomads. The military-cultural impact of the latter markedly stands out in the Rus'-affiliated archaeological record, suggesting that it went hand-in-hand with borrowing elements of lifestyles from the Turkic elites of the steppes.

Building on this, some groups of Rus' might have developed a new, hybrid identity and be termed as *Steppe vikings* (Chapter 5) on account of their close

resemblance of the external appearance of steppe nomads. The evolving ritual traditions of the Rus', which manifest just as much uniformity as variation, drew extensively on this cultural sphere, curiously internalizing an amalgam of rites, customs and beliefs from the pre-Christian Slavic, Scandinavian and Turkic worlds.

Following up on the findings of the previous chapter, Chapter 6, entitled *Slave soldiers*, discusses a specific Rus' belief concerning afterlife military service, which will be put into a wider cultural context and illuminated through comparative examples across Eurasia. The discussion will be preceded by a historical summary on Rus' captives, which resulted in some warriors being enslaved and/or be recruited forcefully as fighters into the service of foreign powers. This will give ground to contrast various subordinate military positions into which Rus' warriors could fall in the East, including the service of enemies as well as one's own lords in this world and the afterlife.

Chapter 7, called *Raiders*, summarizes traditional military historical themes and returns to the basics of the viking phenomenon: raids and campaigns. The number of raids as well as larger expeditions of the Rus' will be presented with a focus on frequency, the relative scale of the undertakings, the organization and operation of warbands and armies. Features specific to Rus' military encounters as opposed to the West will be outlined too. The difference is to be sought in the geographical and political circumstances of the region, namely the steppe dwellers as immediate neighbours of the Rus'.

The (eastern) king's men is the title of the last chapter (Chapter 8). It would like to tentatively suggest a connection between two sources of otherwise late-provenance, both accounting of the same phenomenon: the presence of Scandinavian or Rus' warriors in Hungary during the very Late Viking Age. *Örvar Odds saga* and the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle* might have preserved snippets regarding this, which, if accepted, further widens the horizon of the global viking world.

Thus, this dissertation, approaching the society and culture of the Rus' through connected themes of warfare, serves to define the Rus' experience in relation to other eleventh-century 'eastern viking' groups and the western Scandinavian undertakings. By this, it further refines the dichotomy of the 'viking diaspora' as a place of cultural unity and of difference.

Curriculum Vitae

Education

- 2018 – 2023 PhD in Medieval Studies, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Vienna, Austria
- 2019 – 2014 PhD in History, Historical and Anthropological Doctoral School, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary
- 2018 – 2017 MA in Medieval Studies, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
- 2014 – 2012 MA in Viking and Medieval Norse Studies, Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Studies, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland
- 2011 – 2008 BA in History, Institution of Historical Studies, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

Work and research experience

- 2022 – 2020 Research assistant in Our Eastern Heritage Research Group at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary
- 2021 – 2020 Visiting postdoctor in Legends of the Eastern Vikings. Research project, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland
- 2020 Teaching assistant, Department of Medieval Studies and Cultural Heritage Studies, Central European University, Vienna, Austria
- 2019 – 2016 Research fellow in ‘Hungary in Medieval Europe’. MTA Lendület Research Group, Debrecen, Hungary
- 2014 Internship in FEM (Aarhus University Medieval Research Unit)

Fellowships and Awards

2023	Publication award of the year, University of Debrecen, Hungary
2023 – 2022	New National Excellence Program Scholarship in Postdoctoral category, Hungary
2022	Advanced Doctoral Student Award, Central European University, Budapest
2019 – 2018	Venture Catapult social innovation research scholarship
2018 – 2017	New National Excellence Program Scholarship in Doctoral candidate category, Hungary
2018 – 2017	Butler scholarship, Central European University, Budapest
2014 – 2017	Full CEU Doctoral Fellowship
2015	Winner (1st prize) on XXXII OTDK (National Scientific Students' Associations Conference)

Key Publications and Products

Vikings of the steppe. Scandinavians, Rus' and the Turkic world (c. 750–1050). London: Routledge, 2022.

“Scandinavian/Rus' Captives and Slave Soldiers: An Eastern perspective.” In *Viking Wars*. Special Vol. 1., ed. Frode Iversen and Karoline Kjesrud, 255–74. Oslo: Norsk Arkeologisk Selskap, 2021.

“Exotic encounters: Vikings and faraway species in motion.” In *Medieval Animals on the Move: Between Body and Mind*, ed. László Bartosiewicz and Alice M. Choyke, 167–77. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021.

“Otherness along the Austrvegr: Cultural Interaction between the Rus' and the Turkic Nomads of the Steppe.” In *Margins, Monsters, Deviants. Alterities in Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. Rebecca Merkelbach and Gwendolyne Knight, 189–213. Turnhout: Brepols, 2020.

“Vikings in Hungary? The theory of the Varangian-Rus bodyguard of the first Hungarian rulers.” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 13 (2017): 23–60.

Key Conference Contributions

Vikings of the steppe. Turkic impact on the construction of Rus' identity in the mid-10th century. Identity Abroad in medieval Europe and the Mediterranean. Caius and Gonville College, Cambridge, 2022.

Co-operation of Viking and steppe warfare in Eastern Europe. 27th Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA). Kiel, 2021.

Vikings of the Steppe. Scandinavia and the East in the Viking Age. British Museum, London, 2021.

“*They die when he dies.*” *The King of the Volga Rus' and his comitatus.* Sigfús Blöndal Memorial Conference on Varangian Studies. University of Iceland, Reykjavík, 2021.

Production, trade and smuggling. Viking Age swords in Eastern Europe in light of the written sources. Medieval archaeology of the Danube basin and the Russian plain II. Spatial distribution, Insignia and Representation of Power in the Early and High Middle Ages, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, 2019.

The Eastern World of Viking Mercenaries. Sagas, Contacts, Material Culture. 26th International Medieval Congress (IMC). University of Leeds, Leeds, 2019.

Methods of hiring Viking mercenaries along the Austrvegr. Weaving War. New perspectives on violence and society in the Viking Age, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo, 2018.