

FROM MERCENARIES TO MEMORY-MAKERS:
RETHINKING THE SCANDINAVIAN ROLE IN
BYZANTIUM

A Master's Thesis

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By Mert Oğur

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

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ABSTRACT

FROM MERCENARIES TO MEMORY-MAKERS: RETHINKING THE SCANDINAVIAN ROLE IN BYZANTIUM

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This thesis tracks the cultural, epigraphical, and artistic traces left by the Scandinavians, who were ascendant within the Byzantine world between the 9th and the 12th centuries, and their military action. Whereas the Scandinavians in the Empire had been typically mentioned simply as Byzantine imperial bodyguards within the historiography of Byzantium, the Scandinavians, within the present work, are analyzed within the context of personal searches for memory and group demonstrations for collective consciousness. Thesis examines how the Scandinavians expressed their presence within Byzantium with various sources, including runic graffiti at Hagia Sophia, graffiti of ships, iconographic scenes, and epichoric discoveries of weapons. The study depicts how the graffiti are not merely spatial leftovers, but signs of personal memory as well. Scandinavian warriors in the frescoes reflect how Byzantine society regarded the soldiers, and arms are signs of identity and status. In this context, the thesis not only studies the Byzantine-Scandinavian relations but inter-boundary-society relations, the diffusion of culture,

and the interrelation between the historical memory and space. The Scandinavians' imprint upon Byzantium is an echo not only of the military presence but also the desire to inscribe their cultural signs in a lasting way.

Keywords: Varangians, Byzantine empire, Graffiti, Runic Inscriptions, Hagia Sophia, Vikings, Byzantine Art, Military Identity, Cultural Interaction, Varangian Guard, Bathonea



ÖZET

PARALI ASKERLERDEN ANI YAPICILARINA: İSKANDİNAVLARIN BİZANS'TAKİ ROLÜNÜN YENİDEN DÜŞÜNÜLMESİ

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Ağustos 2025

Bu tez, 9. ve 12. yüzyıllar arasında Bizans dünyasında yükselmekte olan İskandinavların bıraktığı kültürel, epigrafik ve sanatsal izleri ve askeri eylemlerini incelemektedir. İmparatorluktaki İskandinavlar, Bizans tarih yazımında genellikle yalnızca Bizans imparatorluk muhafızları olarak anılırken, bu çalışmada İskandinavlar, kişisel hafıza arayışları ve kolektif bilinç için grup gösterileri bağlamında analiz edilmektedir. İskandinavların Bizans'taki varlıklarını Ayasofya'daki runik grafitiler, gemi grafitileri, ikonografik sahneler ve epikorik silah keşifleri de dahil olmak üzere çeşitli kaynaklarla nasıl ifade ettiklerini inceliyoruz. Çalışma, grafitilerin yalnızca mekânsal kalıntılar değil, aynı zamanda kişisel hafızanın da işaretleri olduğunu göstermektedir. Fresklerdeki İskandinav savaşçılar, Bizans toplumunun askerlere nasıl baktığını yansıtırken, silahlar kimlik ve statü göstergeleridir. Bu bağlamda, tez yalnızca Bizans-İskandinav ilişkilerini değil, aynı zamanda sınırlar arası toplum ilişkilerini, kültürün yayılımını ve tarihsel hafıza ile mekân arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkiyi de incelemektedir. İskandinavların Bizans

zerindeki izi, yalnızca askeri varlıklarını deęil, aynı zamanda kltrel izlerini kalıcı bir řekilde kazıma arzusunun da bir yansımasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Vargler, Bizans İmparatorluęu, Grafiti, Runik Yazıtlar, Ayasofya, Vikingler, Bizans Sanatı, Kltrel Etkileřim, Varg Muhafızları, Bathonea



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the material, cultural, and symbolic remnants of the Scandinavian influence in the Byzantine Empire from the 9th to the 12th centuries. The study focuses on archaeological findings, inscriptions, and iconographic representations, intending to reevaluate the body of material evidence and investigate what these artifacts can disclose about Scandinavian existence in Byzantium, apart from their function as mercenaries. The research adopts a multidisciplinary approach, integrating typological, iconographic, and textual analyses to construct an understanding of Scandinavian-Byzantine interaction and its hybrid cultural identity. In this way, the study challenges the traditional narrative that restricts the Scandinavian presence in Byzantium to a solely military level, placing the Byzantine-Scandinavian interaction at the forefront.

The expeditions of Scandinavians to foreign shores are testified in several historical accounts, oral testimonies, as well as in their own sagas. Sometimes they are said to be wild barbarians, while at other times they are given the status of heroes. These expeditions from the British Isles to the Caspian Sea, and Scandinavian influence greatly intensified in particular between the 9th and 11th centuries, and the historians identified this period as the Viking Age.¹ These expeditions, however, were not intended only for plunder, but oftentimes other objectives like trade, exploration, and settlement: indeed, travel and discovery are chief motifs in Norse mythology, which may well have motivated the early raids. According to Norse mythology, searching for knowledge, All-Father Odin forfeited

¹ See Peter Sawyer, *Scandinavians and the English in the Viking Age*, H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 5 (University, 1995), 3; Allen Mawer, "The Viking Age," *History* 1, no. 2 (1912): 94–107.

one of his eyes in order to get to the Well of Mimir, situated in the roots of Yggdrasil.² He descended to the realm of the dead, Hellheim, fought giants, and traveled through the nine realms. This mythological narrative actually reflects the desire for the unknown and exploration that exists within the Scandinavian people. Nordic seafaring and superior naval vessels for the time, in this regard, allowed them to raid the British and Frankish interiors, reach the Rus' steppes, and even Byzantium. Throughout these processes, they clashed with many societies, altered the demographic structures of regions over time, and impacted the political and cultural structures of those societies. In fact, thanks to their masterful seamanship, their voyages were not limited to Europe and Eurasia, but extended as far as the Americas. These extraordinary journeys are described in sagas such as *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlandinga saga*, and it was later revealed that the accounts in these sagas were based on historical fact to some extent after the discovery of the L'Anse aux Meadows settlement. One leg of these journeys, which extended as far as America, was made to Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, which was one of the most important cities in the world at that time. *Miklagarður* has become an important point for Scandinavians, both for trade and for mercenary work. In sagas like *Yngvars saga víðförla*, these journeys to the East and military service are described, and as can be seen in the narratives, those who participated in this journey were highly respected among the Scandinavians. Additionally, detailed information about these warriors can also be found in Byzantine and Arab sources.³ For example, Anna Komnene, the daughter of Emperor Alexios I, emphasized in her

² Anthony Faulkes, *Edda : Prologue and Gylfaginning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 17.

³ See Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsik, *Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae* 1 (Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies (distrib. by Augustin, Locust Valley), 2008); Ibn Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North* (London: Penguin, 2012); Anna Komnene et al., *The Alexiad*, Rev. ed. Peter Frankopan, (London: Penguin, 2009).

Alexiad, which chronicles her father's reign, that the Scandinavian guards were loyal, disciplined, and fearless warriors.⁴ Besides, Scandinavians were not only present in Byzantium as a military force, but also at key points through commercial colonies in Eastern Europe. They controlled the trade route that started in Novgorod and continued along the Dnieper River, and played an active role in protecting this trade route. Due to this trade route, cultural and economic interaction between the East and Scandinavia has increased. All these connections show that Scandinavians were not just raiders, but a complex society with political and military power, engaging in trade, and interacting with different cultures.

1.1 Definition of Viking, Varangian and Rus'

This people, with its complex and layered structure, is often referred to simply as *Vikings*, which puts the entire Scandinavian community into a specific mold, causing them to be seen only as marauding barbarians. It is necessary to deeply understand exactly what the term viking means and its significance. The word *viking* in the modern sense, according to Alex Woolf, have emerged in 19th century and describes Scandinavians; however, the Old Norse word *vikingr* actually referred more to any group engaged in piracy, even if they were English, Estonian, or even Saracen.⁵ From this perspective, the Knights of Rhodes, who engaged in piracy in the Mediterranean around the 15th century, also ought to be defined as *vikings*, which is how obvious the misuse of the term is. In a later article, Woolf further stresses the importance of distinguishing between the medieval common noun viking—a descriptor for pirates in contemporary sources—and the capitalised, pseudo-ethnographic “the Vikings,” which only developed into its current broad ethnic sense in the 20th century,

⁴ Komnene et al., *The Alexiad*, 77.

⁵ Alex Woolf, “Goodbye to the Vikings,” *History Today* 72, no. 6 (2022): 90.

particularly after the Second World War.⁶ On the other hand, Scandinavians - often those who raided westward; who fought Alfred or terrorized Ireland - were called heathens in contemporary sources such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which refers to the invaders as *hæþene* (“heathens”) in entries for the late ninth century.⁷ Furthermore, even among the Scandinavians of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, there are diverse opinions and behavioral and social differences, so it would be wrong to lump all these peoples under the term viking. Denmark is home to a society that prioritizes agriculture and trade due to its fertile land, whereas Norway focuses on hunting and fur trade, particularly due to its cold and harsh climate.⁸ Sweden, due to its proximity to the eastern rivers, had a policy specifically focused on the East, which led to emergence of Kievan Rus’.⁹ Particularly from the 11th century onwards, with the Christianization of Scandinavian societies, the modern understanding of *viking* idea had already begun to disappear, and a concept of Scandinavian society closer to the Western idea emerged. In short, the term *viking* is a misnomer that arose from the fact that Westerners attributed unknown pagan raiders and marauders to a single society.

On the other hand, the term *Varangian* is different from the term *Viking* in that it specifically refers to the name given to Scandinavians, particularly those of Swedish origin, who traveled east and settled in Rus’ lands. The term Varangian is generally derived from the Old Norse *væringi*, itself from *várr* (“pledge, faith, covenant”) and *gengi* (from the verb *ganga*, “to go, to walk, to proceed”), which

⁶ See Alex Woolf, “The Viking Paradigm in Early Medieval History,” *Early Medieval England and Its Neighbours* 51 (2025): 1–8.

⁷ James Ingram, trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Champaign, IL: Project Gutenberg, 1996), 866.

⁸ Pernille Rohde Sloth et al., “Viking Age Garden Plants from Southern Scandinavia – Diversity, Taphonomy and Cultural Aspects,” *Danish Journal of Archaeology* 1, no. 1 (2012): 27–38.

⁹ See *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, ed. Samuel Hazzard Cross, trans. Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 2020).

together convey the sense of “one who goes (to serve) under a pledge.” This formation is often traced back to Proto-Germanic elements: *wēraz* (“pledge, faith, agreement”) and *ganganq* (“to go, to walk”). In this sense, the word refers to a “stranger who serves a new lord under a covenant of fealty” or “protege,” particularly in the context of their role as military retainers in the Byzantine Empire.¹⁰ This society merged with the local Slavic peoples in the region and was perceived as a society that Byzantium called *Rus’*.¹¹ More clearly and concisely, the Scandinavians who traveled east and settled in eastern lands were called *Varangians*, while subsequent generations in these lands who were influenced by Scandinavian and Slavic cultures were called *Rus’*. Although the presence of Scandinavians, particularly those known as the *Varangians*, in the Byzantine military structure and their influence on Byzantium are well-known, the existence of Scandinavians who traveled from Western Scandinavia to Byzantine lands for various commercial activities or to help their varangian relatives is also recognized. However, Scandinavians in Byzantium were generally recorded uniformly in the military sphere, and the existence of a Scandinavian identity in a social context remained uncertain. Historians have attempted to examine the relationship between the Scandinavian - particularly the Varangians and the Rus’ - and the Byzantine Empire, but these studies have generally been conducted on a military level and from a Byzantine perspective.¹² This thesis, on the other hand, examines archaeological, artistic, and written sources reflecting the presence and cultural integration of the Scandinavians in the Byzantine world during the period from the 9th to the 12th century, investigating the multifaceted nature of this interaction from a Scandinavian

¹⁰ Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

¹¹ Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, 20.

¹² See Raffaele D’Amato, *The Varangian Guard, 988-1453* (Osprey, 2010); Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium*.

perspective. In this thesis, the term Viking is used solely in its broad modern sense to describe the overall phenomenon of Scandinavian raiding and seafaring. The term Varangian denotes those—predominantly of Swedish origin—who travelled eastward and entered Byzantine service, while Rus' refers to the hybrid Scandinavian–Slavic communities that emerged in Eastern Europe, particularly in the Kievan Rus'. Except these cases, the broader term Scandinavian and Norse are used to encompass peoples of Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, and related origins.

Academic studies in the field of Byzantine history have generally grouped the Norse within the territories and sphere of influence of the Byzantine Empire under the subtopic of the Varangian Guard, and research has focused on the Varangian Guard and military studies. However, especially for the Scandinavians, Constantinople - the most important center of wealth and trade in the ancient world - was not only a place for mercenary service but also served as a trade hub for them. The Varangians gained the right to trade in Constantinople and benefit from this hub through various agreements with the Byzantine Empire. Although the Scandinavians' presence in the empire was seen militarily among the general population, regular Scandinavian presence was generally not mentioned, except Varangian Guards. Scandinavian mercenaries also have almost no material evidence in Byzantium other than the runestones in Sweden and various graffiti and inscriptions in the empire. This has led to the study of the Scandinavian presence solely through Byzantine and Rus' written sources. However, the fact that the Scandinavian soldiers, especially those who came from foreign lands and had seen the wealth of Constantinople, were recorded only as a military part of this rich Byzantium suggests that some points may have been left out. In the West, as seen in examples like Normandy, England, and Ireland, and in the East, settling and dominating the area from Novgorod to the

Kievan Rus', the Scandinavians largely neglected - insofar as the evidence suggests - the rich lands of Byzantium, engaging there primarily as mercenaries; and there is almost no information about other aspects of their lives. This thesis aims to fill this gap and provide a more detailed perspective on cultural intermingling by bringing together graffiti and inscriptions, Scandinavian material evidence from regions like Bulgaria, archaeological findings from sites such as Bathonea and Yumuktepe, and an iconographic analysis of Scandinavian depictions in Byzantine art.

1.2 Material Evidence and Methodology

To reach the above aim, this thesis adopts a multidisciplinary framework consisting of archaeological analysis, typological categorization, iconographic analysis, and comparative historical analysis. With the available material—fragmentary, widely dispersed in regions, frequently interpretatively vague—what follows is crucially dependent upon an integrative approach to reaching reasonable inferences regarding Scandinavian-Byzantine interaction.

In order to avoid *circulus in demonstrando*—the situation in which material evidence is interpreted primarily through the lens of historical documents—this thesis adopts a material-oriented analytical approach. All objects are first examined for their intrinsic characteristics within their archaeological context, including typology, material composition, production techniques, decorative elements, inscriptions, and immediate find circumstances. Once this intrinsic analysis is complete, the objects are then compared with written sources and relevant data from other disciplines, situating existing scholarly interpretations within a broader interpretive framework. This two-stage process allows the material evidence to

inform historical reconstruction without falling into a circular argument, enabling a more balanced and independent assessment of Scandinavian–Byzantine interactions.

In the weaponry and weapon accessory component, the thesis owes much to Petersen's system of categorizing the swords of the Viking Age. To this, the typology of weaponry and personal belongings has also been correlated where appropriate, by virtue of further typological work by scholars such as Wheeler, Kirpichnikov, and Androshchuk. Weapons and objects encountered at crucial sites within the Balkans and Anatolia, such as Yumuktepe, Patara, and Opaka, by virtue of these typologies, have been placed within a typological framework and dated in an endeavor to place them in stylistic, as well as chronological, correspondence to documented Scandinavian types.

A separate section is dedicated to the material composition, decorative motifs, inscriptions (such as Ulfberht), and features that may indicate elite or ritual use, offering insights into cultural affiliation and mobility, and their roles and importance for identification is discussed. These objects are not studied in isolation; instead, their various relationships, such as their proximity to coins, ceramics, burial areas, or Byzantine architectural remains, is also considered, allowing for an comprehension of their potential functions and meanings through a comprehensive method.

The thesis also makes extensive use of iconographic analysis, particularly when evaluating depictions of armed figures in Byzantine religious frescoes. These visual resources, which focus on scenes such as *the Betrayal*, are examined in terms of their depictions of weapon types, military uniforms, and physical characteristics (e.g., hair color, beard, posture) that could indicate foreign - particularly Scandinavian - soldiers. By juxtaposing these visual elements with known examples

of Scandinavian weapons, the thesis demonstrates that Scandinavian soldiers were depicted in Byzantine art in the same way the Roman soldiers arresting Jesus were in the Roman tradition – which will be clearly explained in the fresco section – thus illustrating the portrayal of villains in *the Betrayal* in Roman tradition, Scandinavians of the time, and the purpose of this symbolism. For example, frescoes in Cappadocia (Çarıklı Church, Elmalı Church), Crete (Panaghia Myriokephala), and the Church of Saint John Chrysostom in Arabissos can be cited. The content of these works has been dated, stylistically and semantically analyzed by comparing them to Byzantine art and traditions, as well as Scandinavian military elements.

The third methodological method used in the thesis involves the interpretation of Russian and Byzantine historical records. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, believed to have been compiled by the Russians, is considered the main source, but Byzantine military treaties and imperial sources such as *De Administrando Imperio* are used for comparison in a historical context to try to reach an objective and accurate conclusion. Thus, the aim is to have an unbiased and objective approach.

Furthermore, current studies related to the Saint Mamas region, as well as the Bathonea excavations and the materials obtained from the excavations, were examined. Linguistic and Byzantine/Ottoman place name analyses were used to trace the historical name of the region currently called Bathenoa and the possible connections between the artifacts discovered through archaeological studies in this region and the Saint Mamas region, which is thought to have been colonized by the Russians. Thus, the aim was to base the region on geographical and philological data, leaving no room for speculative definitions.

Besides, the findings from the Bathonea excavation, such as the Ouroboros necklace, amber cross, Hnefatafl game piece, and stone cross, were examined by comparing them with parallel archaeological finds from known Scandinavian and Russian contexts like Birka, Polotsk, and Chornivka. These comparisons consider not only the physical context but also the symbolic function, their use in funerary contexts, and their religious meanings.

Specifically, the hybrid Slavic-Scandinavian identity found in Russia and the presence of both Christian and pagan motifs in the same burial complexes are used to try identify the hybrid Scandinavian-Byzantine identity of Scandinavian individuals living in Byzantine influence zones.

The thesis acknowledges the possibility of fragmentary and uncertain interpretations of material, inaccurate documentation, and material that may have come under Byzantine influence independently of its Scandinavian origins. To minimize these possibilities, it attempts to avoid making definitive conclusions except where multiple lines of archaeological, artistic, and textual evidence support interpretation.

Overall, this integrated methodology successfully moves beyond the simple narrative of the biased idea regarding the mercenary activities of the Scandinavian, instead enabling the reconstruction of Scandinavian-Byzantine relations, cultural encounters, the formation of Byzantine-Scandinavian identity in Byzantium, and a portrait of Scandinavian material culture during the Early Middle Ages and High Middle Ages.

1.3 Literature Review

The interaction between Scandinavia and Byzantium has become a topic of interest due to the increasing number of archaeological finds and the popularization of the Viking concept. While the eastern raids were not as popular as the western ones, groundbreaking works by prominent scholars such as *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200*¹³ by Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin; *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250*¹⁴ by Florin Curta are remarkably successful in explaining the migration of Scandinavian peoples into Rus' lands and Eastern Europe, following the Norman theory, which proposes that the rulers and elite of the Rus' polity, established in the 9th–10th centuries, were of Scandinavian descent rather than purely Slavic.¹⁵ Shepard & Franklin, and also Curta's works provide a foundation for understanding Scandinavian interactions with the East and the Byzantine world.

Additionally, Shepard's work, "The Viking Rus and Byzantium" in *The Viking World*,¹⁶ focuses on the interaction between the Scandinavian principalities on Rus' lands and Byzantium, highlighting the political dimensions between them. It reveals the historical relationship between the two states by describing the political approach that began hostilely and later evolved into a military alliance between the two nations.

In the last couple of decades, Fedir Androshchuk's work on Scandinavian-Russian relations, followed by Byzantine-Russian relations, has created a new focus of interest within academia and has proved to be a pioneer work in the field of

¹³ See Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus: 750 - 1200*, 1. ed., 2. impr, Longman History of Russia 1 (London: Longman, 1998).

¹⁴ See Florin Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500-1250*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁵ See Nicholas Riasanovsky, "The Norman Theory of the Origin of the Russian State," *Russian Review* 7, no. 1 (1947): 96–110.

¹⁶ See Jonathan Shepard, "The Viking Rus and Byzantium," in *The Viking World* (Routledge, 2008).

Scandinavian-Byzantine relations. By using local resources from scholars - such as Valeri Yotov - F. Androshchuk's work *Viking Swords: Swords and Social Aspects of Weaponry in Viking Age Societies*¹⁷ and Jan Petersen's sword typology have become key sources for the identification of Norse swords discovered outside of Scandinavia. Besides, Petersen's work, *De norske vikingesverd: en typologisk-kronologisk studie over vikingetidens vaaben*,¹⁸ constitutes a fundamental work for the typological characterization of Scandinavian swords and is directly employed in the present thesis. When analyzing swords and axes discovered in Anatolia and the Balkans, the aforementioned typologies were applied in the primary evaluation.

Moreover, Blazej Stanisławski's research on the Bathenoa, 16 km west of Istanbul, on the shores of Küçükçekmece Lake, excavations has been a significant guide to Byzantine-Scandinavian cultural hybridity. In the project "Vikings in Avcılar: Projects of the Varangian's Ways,"¹⁹ it is suggested that material traces such as game pieces, necklaces, and amber crosses found in Bathenoa are a hybrid local integration of Scandinavian and Byzantine traditions, challenging a sharp Scandinavian identity and religious idea. This thesis places Stanisławski's idea – Bathenoa can be related to St.Mamas, which is thought to be a Rus' colony close to Istanbul - at a significant point and highlights the region's importance for Scandinavian-Byzantine relations due to the hypothesis that the ancient city of Bathenoa could be a significant point for both the Scandinavian-Byzantine identity

¹⁷ See Fedir Androshchuk, *Viking Swords: Swords and Social Aspects of Weaponry in Viking Age Societies* (Stockholm: Historiska Museet, 2014).

¹⁸ See Jan Petersen, *De Norske Vikingesverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben* (Dybwad, 1919).

¹⁹ See Błażej Stanisławski, "Vikings in Avcılar 'Projects of Varangian's Ways,'" *Uluslararası Avcılar Sempozyumu Bütün Yollar Avcılar'dan Geçer/International Symposium on Avcılar All Roads Pass Through Avcılar*, 2018, 175–87.

and could correspond to St. Mamas, the Russian colony mentioned in *the Russian First Chronicle*.²⁰

Although Byzantine mosaics and graffiti are a heavily studied area in terms of art history, Anatolian frescoes in particular, and the Varangian soldiers in the frescoes, are a less studied area. However, Raffaele D'Amato's works, *The Varangian Guard, 988-1453*²¹ and "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord"²² are important sources for understanding how Varangian soldiers were perceived in Byzantine society and for gaining insight into their military equipment, as it mentions their presence in various mosaics and frescoes in regions such as Cappadocia, Crete, and Greece. Thus, the representation of the Varangians in Byzantine frescoes is essential because it allows for a typological comparison of the weapons they used with other weapons found in Bulgaria and Anatolia, and because it helps to understand how the idea symbolized by the Varangians, who were often depicted for religious purposes and specifically placed in frescoes, was reflected in the public.

Furthermore, academics such as Mel'nikovo, Thomov, Svärdström, Knirk, and Larsson have brought to light the lost Scandinavian traces in Hagia Sophia.²³ The inscriptions and graffiti that have come to light recently show that Hagia Sophia,

²⁰ See *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, ed. Samuel Hazzard Cross, trans. Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 2020).

²¹ See D'Amato, *The Varangian Guard, 988-1453*.

²² Raffaele D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," *Weapons Bring Peace*, 2013, 69–95.

²³ See Elena A Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," *Futhark: International Journal of Runic Studies* 7 (2016): 101–10; Thomas Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 2 (2014): 168–84; Elisabeth Svärdström, "Runorna i Hagia Sofia," *Fornvännen* 65 (1970): 247–49; James Knirk, "Runer i Hagia Sofia i Istanbul," *Nytt Om Runer* 14 (1999): 26–27; Mats G Larsson, "Nyfunna Runor i Hagia Sofia," *Fornvännen* 84 (1989): 12–14.

one of the most important structures in the center of the Empire, also became a significant point for the Scandinavians, and that they left various pieces of themselves and their culture at this point. The most important and pioneering studies that have shed light on the relationship between the Empire and the Scandinavians and paved the way for research have been the Scandinavian traces in Hagia Sophia. Therefore, the works produced by these academics are important sources, especially for the Hagia Sophia section, from an iconographic and epigraphic perspective.

Despite all these important resources, there are still gaps in the literature. These gaps stem from the lack of Scandinavian studies in Türkiye and information deficiencies. Most of the existing literature highlights Constantinople. In studies conducted in Anatolia, even if Scandinavian material presence was found, as in the case of Pattaya, it may not have been correctly classified for this reason. The material resources found in Bulgaria are close to the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, and due to research on Russian origins, Scandinavian studies have been more successful and yielded better results. By contrast, similar research in Türkiye remains less developed. Additionally, many of the historical artifacts unearthed were evaluated within the academic's own field, resulting in them being scattered across various disciplines such as military history, material culture, or epigraphy, and recorded as monotonous research far removed from the whole. This thesis aims to address these gaps by combining typological, iconographic, epigraphic and textual data into a unified narrative that highlights regional diversity and material hybridity in the Scandinavian-Byzantine interaction.

1.4 Thesis Plan

This thesis consists of three main sections, excluding the introduction and conclusion, which examine the interaction between the Byzantine and Scandinavian

worlds between the 9th and 12th centuries. The introduction provides the necessary information about the terms and the study from a broad historical and cultural framework; the final chapter re-evaluates the nature of the Scandinavian presence within Byzantium through an analysis and inference based on what is described in all chapters, and emphasizes the importance of illuminating this hidden Scandinavian-Byzantine hybrid culture through future studies.

The second chapter begins by historically examining what Graffiti and Inscriptions are. Then, focusing on Constantinople and the Hagia Sophia, it examines the inscriptions and graffiti discovered in the Hagia Sophia. It examines and analyzes four inscriptions that have been approved and accepted by the academy, as well as four ship graffiti that emerged from Thomov's work. Then, it discusses and examines in detail *Piraeus Lion*, which was formerly on Byzantine territory and features runic inscriptions, extremely rare so far from Scandinavia.

The third chapter begins by detailing Byzantine art. This section examining mosaics and frescoes from a historical perspective then analyzes the visual representations of Scandinavian warriors within Byzantine art, emphasizing their importance. Specifically, it addresses representations of *the Betrayal* scenes and similar iconographic contexts. By comparing the physical characteristics of the soldiers depicted, the weapons they used, and the Scandinavian weapons used in their time, the study attempts to shed light on the Scandinavian origin of the figures and to demonstrate, with supporting evidence, that these figures were deliberately placed in these artworks, representing the tradition they symbolize and their image in the eyes of the people.

The fourth chapter specifically analyzes the typology of Scandinavian-style weapons found in Anatolia and the Balkans. It examines military equipment such as swords, axes, and sword tips, utilizing the Petersen classification system and, when necessary, other systems. The materials found provide important data for understanding the Scandinavian identity in the region and Scandinavian regional mobility through comparison.

The final chapter focuses on the archaeological site of Bathonea, located on the shores of Lake Küçükçekmece, west of present-day Istanbul. The various materials discovered here, including finds such as an amber cross, a pendant with the Ouroboros motif, a Hnefatafl game piece, and a stone cross, are examined to explore their potential Scandinavian origins and cultural significance. These objects are analyzed by comparing them to similar objects in the Baltic and Russian regions, and the hypothesis is considered that Bathonea may be the St. Mamas region mentioned in Byzantine-Rus' treaties.

In conclusion, the thesis argues that the Scandinavian presence in Byzantium between the 9th and 12th centuries should be understood not solely through the lens of military service in the Varangian Guard, but as part of a broader network of sociocultural interactions. It emphasises the need for methodological caution, avoiding the definitive attribution of every artefact of Scandinavian typology to a Scandinavian individual, or the direct linking of every iconographic or epigraphic trace to a Scandinavian origin. The study examines each piece of evidence within its archaeological and historical context, identifying possible Scandinavian traces and analysing Byzantine – Scandinavian interactions through them. In doing so, it contends that the Scandinavian were not merely a military presence, but became

integrated into the Empire over time, leaving epigraphic, iconographic, material, and artistic evidence that reflects a transfer of their culture into Byzantium through sustained cultural interaction.



CHAPTER 2: GRAFFITI AND INSCRIPTIONS

Throughout life and even after death, humans aspire to leave a mark, to carry a part of themselves into the future. This drive to project one's essence forward can be interpreted as a subconscious defiance of the inevitable end, a challenge to mortality itself. Although biologically destined for a physical conclusion, humans possess the notion of continuing to exist in the future through the creation of a legacy—or, in other words, through abstraction.²⁴ Even for those who believe in the afterlife as conceptualized by religions, this effort to leave something behind in the world reflects the fundamental human pursuit of immortality. Graffiti and inscriptions have been created to achieve immortality, to transfer one's ideas or identity beyond death, or, in other words, to remind future generations of one's existence and thoughts.

2.1 History of Graffiti and Literature on Graffiti

Graffiti can be seen as humanity's first attempt to leave traces, and historically, it dates back as far as 40,000 years ago. In ancient Egypt and the Mesopotamian region, inscriptions carved into temple walls and public spaces demonstrate that graffiti was used as a means of communication in these areas.²⁵ In ancient Rome, wall writings and drawings in cities like Pompeii served as reflections of daily life, politics, personal expressions, and even commercial advertisements.²⁶ During the Middle Ages, inscriptions carved into church walls, such as the names and messages left by Crusaders at the places they visited, as well as symbols, helped to understand the social structure of the time, the influence of religion on the people, and the social dynamics

²⁴ Elizabeth G. Hunter, "Beyond Death: Inheriting the Past and Giving to the Future, Transmitting the Legacy of One's Self," *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 56, no. 4 (2008): 317–22.

²⁵ Peter Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2014), 13–73.

²⁶ Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity*, 193–200, 223–29, 282–83.

of the era.²⁷ With the Renaissance, graffiti became more of a tool for artists and travelers to leave their signature in the places they visited. By the 20th century, the purpose of graffiti shifted more toward political and critical expressions, evolving into a tool that allowed the public, particularly the lower classes, to voice their opinions fearlessly.

While graffiti holds a significant place in art history and sociological and cultural studies, in this context, it has somewhat diverged from its historical context and pertains to the use of contemporary graffiti. From a historical perspective, graffiti is an important source in terms of linguistics. Since graffiti is a reflection of written language in everyday life, it sheds light on the cultural structure of the period.²⁸ Moreover, since the everyday language of the people is highlighted in graffiti rather than formal language in inscriptions, it serves as a guide in understanding the social structure and ideas of the time.²⁹

2.2 Graffiti Types

In the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods, graffiti was an important form of expression that reflected the social, political, and cultural dynamics of societies. In civilizations such as Ancient Rome, Greece, and Egypt, graffiti was created by carving or painting onto public spaces as part of both individual identity and collective memory. During these periods, individuals sought to symbolically immortalize themselves or significant figures by inscribing names onto walls, as in Gaius Pumidius Diphilus's inscription;

²⁷ Mia Gaia Trentin, "Medieval and Post Medieval Graffiti in the Churches of Cyprus," in *POCA 2007: Postgraduate Cypriot Archaeology Conference*, ed. S. Christodoulou and A. Satraki (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010),

²⁸ Grisha Gasparyan, "Graffiti as a Linguistic Phenomenon," *Foreign Languages in Higher Education* 24, no. 1 (28) (2021): 39–51.

²⁹ Gasparyan, "Graffiti as a Linguistic Phenomenon," 39.

Latin Text:

*C(aius) Pumidius Dip(h)ilus h(e)ic fuit
 / a(n)te d(iem) V Nonas Octobre(i)s
 M(arco) Lepid(o) Q(uinto) Catul(o)
 co(n)s(ulibus) / cum*³⁰

English Translation:

*"Gaius Pumidius Diphilus was here on
 the 3rd day of October in the
 consulship of Marcus Lepidus and
 Quintus Catulus, with (?)."*

Roman soldiers, in particular, engraved their names and legions on walls in the areas where they were stationed, both as an expression of loyalty to their legions and as a way to leave a mark proving their existence.³¹

Furthermore, graffiti was used for social propaganda purposes. In Ancient Rome, wall writings were frequently employed to support candidates in election campaigns. Examples of this can be seen in the political graffiti found in Pompeii, such as:

Latin Text:

*M(arcum) Cerrinium Vatiam aed(ilem)
 o(ro) v(os) f(aciatis), d(ignum) r(ei)
 p(ublicae).*³²

English Translation:

*"I beg you to elect Marcus Cerrinius
 Vatia as aedile, worthy of public
 office."*

Besides, political graffiti criticizing the actions of rulers also existed, demonstrating that graffiti was used as a medium for political dissent. When analyzing other graffiti found in Pompeii, it becomes evident that a wide range of topics, from daily life to love affairs, were addressed through these graffiti.³³

During the medieval period, graffiti did not entirely lose its function as a signature or personal mark but was instead processed within religious and military contexts.³⁴ *Milites* and Crusaders often inscribed their names and prayers in the

³⁰ Pumidius at Pompeii. Written on the inside of a wall in the basilica at Pompeii, 78 B.C.

³¹ Luciana Nedelea, "Graffiti, Tituli Picti and Manufacturer Stamps Identified on Roman Earthenware from the Potaissa Legionary Fortress (2nd-3rd Centuries AD)," *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai-Historia* 65, no. 1 (2020): 125–26.

³² Pompeii. Electoral inscriptions for CIL IV 124, in Naples Archaeological Museum. I.N. 4673.

³³ Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity*, 282–83.

³⁴ Violet Pritchard, *English Medieval Graffiti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65–71.

places they visited, while sailors and soldiers left their names on city walls as a way of marking their presence.³⁵

2.3 Graffiti vs Inscriptions

Although graffiti and inscriptions are both written expressions applied to surfaces through carving, painting, or other techniques, they differ in terms of purpose, context, and duration of use. Graffiti typically emerge as a spontaneous reflection of an individual's thoughts, while inscriptions tend to possess a more official, monumental, and institutional character.³⁶ As part of everyday life, graffiti consist of free and improvised messages left by individuals in public or private spaces, whereas inscriptions are consciously created records—often by states or institutions—to commemorate religious events, legal decisions, or other significant occurrences.

From a technical perspective, graffiti and inscriptions also diverge. Graffiti tends to have an irregular and improvisational structure, whereas inscriptions are created with order and according to a specific scheme. While the distinction between graffiti and inscriptions was less pronounced in antiquity, their functions and usage areas gradually diverged over time. In Ancient Rome and Greece, inscriptions appear as official records, laws, and imperial decrees engraved by the state. Graffiti, on the other hand, reflect individual perspectives on daily life, political thought, and social relationships.³⁷

For instance, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, an inscription commissioned by Emperor Augustus to record his achievements, serves as a monumental official

³⁵ Pritchard, *English Medieval Graffiti*, 82–93.

³⁶ Anne Hrychuk Kontokosta, “Contests in Context: Gladiatorial Inscriptions and Graffiti,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, ed. Thomas F. Scanlon and Alison Futrell, 1st ed., 330–41 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

³⁷ Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity*, 2.

document. In contrast, the graffiti found in Pompeii, as mentioned earlier, are spontaneous expressions of everyday experiences.

In the Middle Ages, the distinctions between graffiti and inscriptions became even more pronounced. Inscriptions were used to document official records in churches, monasteries, and tombstones, while graffiti often represented the marks left by pilgrims, travelers, and warriors.³⁸ Pilgrims' markings on sacred sites especially reflect the graffiti practices of the time. One notable example is the cross symbols carved by pilgrims into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which represent religiously motivated graffiti from the medieval period.

2.4 Scandinavian Graffiti and Inscriptions

Scandinavian runic inscriptions and graffiti bear traces of the extensive geographical interactions of the Scandinavians during the Viking Age. These inscriptions and graffiti constitute significant archaeological and epigraphic evidence documenting the presence and cultural engagements of Scandinavians across various regions. Runic inscriptions and graffiti have been discovered in locations ranging from Greenland to Eastern Europe, and even in Constantinople, the heart of Byzantium. This widespread distribution reflects the aforementioned, universally shared human impulse—clearly visible among the Scandinavians as well—to leave behind a part of oneself and to achieve a form of symbolic immortality.

The Jelling Stones found in Denmark and the Rök Stone in Sweden represent notable examples of Scandinavian runic inscriptions.³⁹ Typically engraved with care onto monumental stones, these inscriptions were used to commemorate the deceased,

³⁸ Pritchard, *English Medieval Graffiti*, 131–41.

³⁹ Birgit Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), 7–23.

to celebrate victories, and to record significant events.⁴⁰ They also provide valuable information about the Old Norse language and mythology.

On the other hand, as one moves away from the Scandinavian heartlands, one more frequently encounters graffiti rather than formal inscriptions. However, making a clear distinction between inscriptions and graffiti of Scandinavian origin is quite challenging. Discovered artifacts are sometimes characterized as inscriptions—especially in the Scandinavian context—while other times they are labeled graffiti. In this study, inscriptions that attempt to leave a hereditary mark using runes are called inscriptions, as classified by Runearkivet, a Norwegian runic archive, while works thought to be more visual and spontaneous are labeled graffiti. For the purposes of this study, such distinctions are particularly relevant. These graffiti can be found in various geographical regions ranging from Constantinople to England. The specific focus of this study is the graffiti and inscriptions located in Constantinople and Byzantium. Given the fact that Scandinavian-origin individuals from the lands of the Rus' initially interacted with Byzantium through trade and later through military engagement, and that they gradually integrated into this culture to some extent, their desire to leave their marks in Constantinople—one of the most advanced and wealthiest cities in the world between the 9th and 11th centuries—should be considered understandable.

Over time, as the Scandinavians succeeded in securing positions within the Empire, they effectively became part of it, while simultaneously continuing to bear and express elements of their native Scandinavian identity.⁴¹ As a result, they attempted to engrave their presence onto some of the most important structures and most treasured masterpieces of the Eastern Roman Empire. The fact that these works—

⁴⁰ Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia*, 1–4.

⁴¹ D'Amato, *The Varangian Guard, 988-1453*, 3.

despite being located at the very heart of the Empire—were subjected to Scandinavian influence, highlights the depth and significance of the Norse impact on Byzantium.

This influence sometimes developed through commercial routes, particularly via the Kievan Rus', and at other times through military means—most notably in the form of elite military units such as the Varangian Guard,⁴² composed of Scandinavian soldiers. Considering that this unit served as the Emperor's personal guard, it must be acknowledged that they wielded a political influence and power far beyond that of an ordinary military contingent. This privileged status granted them access to areas that regular Byzantine soldiers could not enter and offered them certain exemptions from penalties that might be imposed on ordinary individuals. These privileges, in turn, allowed them to leave behind tangible remnants of their cultural heritage.

This legacy was shaped through the use of graffiti and the Younger Futhark (ᚷᚢᚦᚳᚱᚷ), a runic script belonging to Scandinavian culture. Three inscriptions and four pieces of graffiti have been identified within Hagia Sophia, one of the most iconic structures of Byzantium. Another prominent example can be found on the Piraeus Lion, which once stood in the port of Athens and is now exhibited in Venice. All known graffiti have been found in Hagia Sophia and Athens. These areas are significant due to their proximity to the center of the empire, making them likely stops for the Varangian Guard or wealthy Scandinavian traders heading to *Miklagard*. Additionally, the presence of these graffiti in Athens, one of the routes for expeditions involving the Emperor, and in Constantinople, where the Emperor resided, directly reflects the influence of the Varangian Guard in the Empire. Despite the central and prestigious

⁴² D'Amato, *The Varangian Guard, 988-1453*, 3–12.

locations of these monuments, their exposure to Scandinavian markings emphasizes the lasting influence and cultural reach of the Norse within the Byzantine world.

2.4.1 Halfdan Inscription

The first of the Hagia Sophia graffiti, located on a parapet in the upper level of the south gallery, was discovered and published by Elisabeth Svärdström in 1964.⁴³ Over time, the inscription (fig. 1) has eroded, leaving only the runes spelling “-ftan” legible today.⁴⁴ The inscription is 23 cm long, with runes 1.5–5 cm high.

ᚱᚠᚠᚠ ---ᚠᚱ--ᚠᚠᚱ-ᚠᚠ---ᚠᚱ

FTAN---TR--SAK-I-A---AR

Based on these remaining runes, it is highly probable that the individual who carved them was a Scandinavian mercenary named Halfdan. This name would unlikely belong to an ordinary Scandinavian who happened to travel from Scandinavia to Constantinople. The carver must have been someone with access to the South Gallery, which most individuals did not easily reach, but the royal family. The entire gallery of Hagia Sophia was initially designated as the women's quarter. Over time, it became an area accessible exclusively to the Imperial family. Given this restricted access, it is highly likely that the Scandinavian individual found in this area was a member of the Varangian Guard, the Emperor's elite personal protectors.⁴⁵ The name Halfdan, more frequently associated with Scandinavians of Danish and Norwegian origin, suggests that this individual may have been a Scandinavian who came to Constantinople as a mercenary. Considering the exclusive access required to carve these runes, it is plausible that he was a member of the Emperor's elite Varangian Guard. The inscription dating from the early 10th century to the early 11th century further

⁴³ See Svärdström, “Runorna i Hagia Sofia,” 247–49.

⁴⁴ Knirk, “Runer i Hagia Sofia i Istanbul,” 26.

⁴⁵ Erdem Yücel, Fatih Cimok, and M. Erem Çalıkoğlu, *Hagia Sophia* (Istanbul: A Turizm Yayınları, 1986), 28.

strengthens this theory. Contrary to popular belief, the runic inscription does not translate to “Halftan was here.” Upon examining the style and formula of the rune, it appears more likely to follow a common pattern seen in similar inscriptions, such as “... carved these runes”.⁴⁶ Although Scandinavian rune scripts have different styles to mention their carver, the structure in the Halftan inscription follows a pattern more similar to that of last part of Uppland Runic Inscription 605;

𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃:𐀄𐀅𐀆𐀇:𐀈𐀉𐀊𐀋

...FOTR RISTI RUNAR

If this assumption is correct, it is highly probable that this Scandinavian named Halftan carved the rune to prove his presence there and assert his existence. Moreover, it is likely that he intended for later Scandinavians who would encounter these runes to remember him, thus attempting to leave behind a legacy of his own, as indicated at the beginning of the inscription. The discovery of a rune carved by a Scandinavian on Hagia Sophia, illustrates the complex and multilayered nature of history. Furthermore, the scarcity of runic inscriptions in this location only increases the significance of this inscription, making it one of the southernmost examples of its kind.

2.4.2 ARI:K or ARNI Inscription

Another runic inscription was discovered in a niche on the northern side of the same gallery section by Folke Höglberg in 1975. According to Höglberg, the inscription read "ARNÍ".⁴⁷ Although he reported his finding to the Runology Department in Stockholm, no response was received, and the runes remained as they were until archaeologist Mats G. Larsson rediscovered them in 1988. Larsson suggested that the niche surrounding the rune might have served as a protective cover, concealing the person engraving the rune. Thus, the individual attempting to carve this inscription

⁴⁶ Knirk, “Runer i Hagia Sofia i Istanbul,” 27.

⁴⁷ Knirk, “Runer i Hagia Sofia i Istanbul,” 26–27.

managed to complete only "ARI:K" before being interrupted (fig. 2).⁴⁸ The total length of the inscription measures 24 mm, with three runes reaching heights of 16–17 mm, while one is approximately 22 mm. The only decipherable word, "ARI" is noteworthy, as it is uncommon in Scandinavia but frequently observed in Iceland.⁴⁹ This detail is significant, as the gallery of Hagia Sophia, as previously noted, was an area restricted to women, the imperial family, and their elite guards.⁵⁰ Consequently, it is plausible that this Scandinavian was likely of Icelandic origin. The "K" following "ARI" might have been intended to continue as *KIARPI*, meaning "carved".⁵¹ Additionally, Larsson noted Jan Paul Strid's observation suggests that the style of this rune could be attributed to a Swede.⁵² In 1997, an alternative perspective emerged. Svein Indrelid, a professor of archaeology at the University of Bergen, argued that the inscription indeed reads "ARNÍ," aligning with Högberg's initial interpretation.⁵³

ARH

ARNÍ

Indrelid further asserted that this was not a formal runic inscription but rather a simple graffiti marking, likely the name of its creator.⁵⁴ *Runearkivet* has confirmed and approved the new reading in 1997. Therefore, after 1997, this inscription became "Arni."

⁴⁸ Larsson, "Nyfunna Runor i Hagia Sofia."

⁴⁹ Erik Henrik Lind, *Norsk-Isländska Dopnamn ock Fingerade Namn från Medeltiden* (Lund: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1915), 31.

⁵⁰ Yücel et al., *Hagia Sophia*, 28.

⁵¹ Larsson, "Nyfunna Runor i Hagia Sofia," 14.

⁵² According to Jan Paul Strid; "In short-twig runes, the 'r' rune can appear in several forms. The form seen here, with its low-placed twig, is characteristic of relatively early Swedish inscriptions." Two runestones from the Uppland region of Sweden support this idea: U 742 (Myrby) and U 1173 (Lilla Ramsjö). See Larsson, "Nyfunna Runor i Hagia Sofia," 14.

⁵³ Knirk, "Runer i Hagia Sofia i Istanbul," 27.

⁵⁴ Knirk, "Runer i Hagia Sofia i Istanbul," 27.

2.4.3 The Arinbárðr Inscription

In 2009, Russian epigraphers discovered a runic inscription on the marble window sill of the northern gallery while searching for Cyrillic inscriptions in Hagia Sophia. The exact location of the inscription is on the eastern wall of the first floor's northern gallery, to the left of the arched opening leading to the central apse.

In addition to numerous medieval Greek, Arabic, and Cyrillic inscriptions, there has been a recently discovered third runic Scandinavian inscription which measures 26.8 cm in length.⁵⁵ Although the inscription's runes are generally well-preserved, there are two areas with significant wear (fig. 3), where the runes are not clearly legible. The inscription is created using a hybrid of short-twig and long-brach forms. Runes 1, 5, 8, and 14 are composite runes from the Middle Ages, featuring the /a/ branch on the left, a common form of the /ar/ rune.⁵⁶ The graphical form of the letter /r/ in the Hagia Sophia inscription is unusual, with a distinctly sharp point and a narrow rounded pocket.⁵⁷ The two runes following the ar section could not be definitively identified, but due to a thin scratch between them, they are believed to represent the long-dash forms of the /i/ and /n/ runes.⁵⁸ After the third rune, there is a pit, which is likely a separator.⁵⁹ The fourth rune is a /b/ with round pockets, but not very wide. Despite significant wear on rune 6, scans indicate that it is clearly /p/. Rune 7 is classified as an /r/ with a pointed top. Rune 8, like the first rune, represents the /ar/ sound formed by the combination of the /a/ and /r/ runes. In some cases, the sequence of the ar rune could be reversed, forming ra, which occurs when the branch

⁵⁵ Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," 103.

⁵⁶ Mindy MacLeod, *Bind-Runes: An Investigation of Ligatures in Runic Epigraphy*, vol. 15 (Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet, 2002), 15:190.

⁵⁷ Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," 103.

⁵⁸ Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," 104.

⁵⁹ Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," 104.

of /a/ descends to the left, making it the first recognizable element for the reader.⁶⁰ After rune 8, extensive wear is evident, and two or three runes appear to have been erased. The only visible mark left in this area is a vertical line on the right edge of the damaged section, suggesting that this rune might be /t/. Based on the typical equal spacing between runes, it is possible that narrow runes such as /i/, /a/, /t/, or /l/ or wider runes like /r/, /u/, or /s/ might have been inscribed between rune 8 and the /t/ rune.⁶¹ In the damaged area before the rune /t/, which resembles the structure of the /s/ rune, a faint trace of a vertical line on the left edge (ʞ) could belong to the lost rune, possibly indicating the /ʃ/ rune. The rest of the inscription remains in very good condition and is legible.⁶²

In rune 11, the /r/ has a much wider pocket compared to the other runes, and its leg extends directly from the pocket, not from the junction with the vertical line. In rune 14, the *ar* composite rune shows an open pocket, and the leg extends downward from the open end of the pocket. Rune 15, representing /p/, has a much wider pocket than rune 6 and shows signs of wear on the top part. The middle part of rune 18, representing /i/, is worn and nearly erased. When all the runes are read, the following translation can be made:

†=RI†B†=RPRR=†ʞ†R†††=R†††† *arīnbarprāstrunarþasi*

Up to rune 7, the inscription might represent the Nordic male name *Arinbárðr*. While this name does not directly appear in historical sources, it is commonly found in runic inscriptions and Old Norse sagas, particularly in the form of thematic compound names.⁶³ The first part of the name, Ar(i)n, is related to Old Norse *arnur*

⁶⁰ Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," 104.

⁶¹ Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," 104.

⁶² Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," 105.

⁶³ Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," 105–6.

('eagle') or *arinn* ('hearth'). Although the root is rarely used as a standalone name in sources, it frequently appears as the first element in compound names like *Arinbjörg*, *Arinbjörn*, *Aringeirr*, and *Arinmundr*.

The second part of the name, *Bárðr*, is a common name in Norwegian runic inscriptions (N 71, N86, N91) and can appear as a second element in compound names such as *Hár-bárðr* or *hag-barðr* (in the U 1041 inscription from Uppland). From rune 8 onward, the inscription forms the sequence */r̄aṣt/* which can be interpreted as the past tense form *reist* of the Old Norse verb *rísta* (to carve), commonly used in inscriptions to indicate that runes were carved on monuments and objects.⁶⁴ According to Melnikova, although the form does not exactly match the singular past tense ending, the regional variation in the language and inscriptions suggests that these runes convey the meaning of “carve.”⁶⁵

From rune 11 to 14, the inscription represents the word */runar/*, the accusative plural form of the word for “runes.” From rune 15 to 18, the plural accusative form of the pronoun *sú, þasi*, is used.

Thus, the full translation of the inscription is:

Arinbárðr r̄aṣt runar þasi

Arinbárðr cut these runes

Paleographically, the inscription cannot be precisely dated. However, the use of the */r̄aṣt/* rune provides a clue, as this form was not commonly seen on monuments until the 9th to 11th centuries.⁶⁶ Mindy MacLeod has identified approximately sixty examples of the bind-rune in Swedish inscriptions, most of which are from the regions of Uppland, Södermanland, and Gästrikland. Among these *bind-runes*, four

⁶⁴ Mel'nikova, “A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul,” 106.

⁶⁵ Mel'nikova, “A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul,” 106.

⁶⁶ MacLeod, *Bind-Runes: An Investigation of Ligatures in Runic Epigraphy*, 15:124.

are *ar*-bind-runes (three from Uppland).⁶⁷ MacLeod also points out the irregularity in the usage of *bind-runes* and the absence of inscriptions containing multiple *bind-runes*. However, she notes that multiple *bind-runes* can be found on various portable objects. For instance, on the Old Ladoga stone, dated to the early 9th century, at least three *bind-runes* are present in different compositions.⁶⁸ Typically, one bind-rune is found on monuments, whereas portable objects may feature multiple bind-runes. The use of bind-runes increased in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, becoming common in medieval inscriptions in Sweden and Norway.⁶⁹ Another important factor is the use of the /r/ rune in place of /ř/. The final "r" in “*ariṇbarpr*” and “*runar*” was used regularly in 9th-century Norway but sporadically in Denmark and Sweden. The /R/ rune continued to be used in Sweden until the mid-11th century, after which the use of /r/ became standardized in all positions.⁷⁰ Considering these factors, it is likely that the inscription was created between the mid-11th century and the early 12th century.

2.4.4 Four Ship Graffiti

The three previously mentioned inscriptions are not the only Scandinavian carvings found in Hagia Sophia. There are also four graffiti of various ships depicted in the South Gallery. Notably, all known Scandinavian graffiti are found in the gallery section of Hagia Sophia.

⁶⁷ Mel'nikova, “A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul,” 108; MacLeod, *Bind-Runes: An Investigation of Ligatures in Runic Epigraphy*, 15:125–27.

⁶⁸ Mel'nikova, “A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul,” 108–9; MacLeod, *Bind-Runes: An Investigation of Ligatures in Runic Epigraphy*, 15:125.

⁶⁹ Mel'nikova, “A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul,” 107.

⁷⁰ Patrik Larsson, *Yrrunan: Användning och Ljudvärde i Nordiska Runinskrifter*, Runrön 17 (Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet, 2002), 33–36; Mel'nikova, “A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul,” 108.

2.4.4.1 The First Ship Graffito

The first ship graffito (fig. 4) is located in the western part of the south gallery of Hagia Sophia. This graffito, carved approximately 139 cm above the floor on the northwest column, was most likely carved by someone standing.⁷¹ The ship's hull is depicted as long and narrow, and the graffito is 14 cm long and 1.5 cm high. Due to dirt and wear on the surface, not all details of the ship graffito are clearly visible, but the prow section, which features an animal figure, is more prominent. The animal figure is a dragon's head, which in many cases symbolizes power, wealth, and, in some cases, royalty.⁷² The length of the dragon's head is approximately 2.5 cm, and its height is about 4.5 cm.⁷³ Additionally, some lines in this highly detailed part extend to the side, and if these lines are part of the side, the resemblance to the Oseberg ship is quite evident, confirming that this graffito indeed depicts a Scandinavian ship. The round shapes depicted along the ship's edges on the sides are likely shields, as they resemble shields seen on other Scandinavian ships. If they are shields, considering that their position would prevent the oars from being lowered into the water, this ship likely belongs to a Scandinavian vessel anchored in port. Furthermore, the vertical line drawn in the middle of the ship represents the main mast, which closely resembles the style seen in Scandinavian ships, where a wooden structure in the center of the ship frames the main mast. However, there is no mention of a sail in the graffito, confirming that the graffito likely depicts a ship with its sail furled and anchored. The rudder at the stern of the ship is also drawn sideways, indicating that the ship is not in motion and most likely anchored, with its

⁷¹ Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 172.

⁷² Martina Sprague, *Norse Warfare: The Unconventional Battle Strategies of the Ancient Vikings* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 2007), 90.

⁷³ Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 172.

rudder turned to the port side. Thomov argues that this ship should be considered a short Scandinavian vessel, describing it as an early "warship" with the potential for both trade and warfare.⁷⁴ At this point, it is dubious that the ship in the graffito is a "dragon ship" (*drakkar*), as most Varangians coming to Constantinople would have to navigate narrow rivers in Russian territory and drag their ships overland at certain points.⁷⁵ The long structure and weight of the *drakkars* would reduce their mobility, making them impractical for use in Russian territories. Another element that strengthens the argument for this ship being an early warship is the particularly well-defined dragon head in the graffito, which resembles the Borre style that was prominent in the second half of the 9th century and the first half of the 10th century.⁷⁶

Since there is no written and definitive source regarding the names of the Varangian Guard, it is impossible to know for sure whose ship it was. Although some sagas describe journeys to Constantinople and joining the Varangian Guard, the only person confirmed as a Varangian guard from these sagas is Harald *Hardrada*. The authenticity of other individuals and narratives is doubtful due to the lack of corroboration in other historical sources.

2.4.4.2 The Second Ship Graffito

The second ship graffito (fig. 5) is located at the end of the western part of the North Gallery. The graffito, carved into a marble column, is approximately 170 cm above the floor.⁷⁷ According to Thomov, due to its shape, it depicts a warship sailing to the left. The shape and style of the drawing show a remarkable resemblance to the ship graffito

⁷⁴ Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 174.

⁷⁵ Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, 57.

⁷⁶ Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 176.

⁷⁷ Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 178.

found at Himmelev Church.⁷⁸ The ship has a single mast and sail. Additionally, the lines behind the sail might be connected to an added rudder.

2.4.4.3 The Third Ship Graffito

The third ship (fig. 6) graffito is located directly across from the marble containing the first ship graffito. It is carved at a height of approximately 153 cm from the ground and depicts the bows of three ships.⁷⁹ Upon closer examination, the figures at the bows and the slender, elongated shapes suggest that these ships could be the *drakkars*.⁸⁰ The presence of a figure at the bow of each of the three ships, and their depiction side by side, evokes the image of a Scandinavian fleet.

2.4.4.4 The Fourth Ship Graffito

The fourth ship (fig. 7) graffito is located on the eastern wall of the southern gallery, carved at a height of 130 cm from the ground, to the right of the first marble frame.⁸¹ These two ships, depicted as moving leftward, are smaller in size compared to the other graffiti, measuring only 7 x 4.5 cm.⁸² The bow of the first ship is adorned with zigzag patterns, while the stern is shaped like a tail. In this graffito, the bow is intricately detailed, while the rest of the ship is drawn in a more general manner. The upward line likely represents the mast of the first ship. The drawing immediately behind the first ship also features a figure at the bow, though it lacks the decorative patterns found on the first ship. It may indicate that the first ship belonged to an important person and was a leader ship, or it could result from the carver not having enough time to add further details to the second ship. The high bow of the second ship suggests that it

⁷⁸ Ole Thirup Kastholm, "Six Ship Graffiti from Himmelev Church," *Maritime Archaeology Newsletter from Denmark* 26 (2011): 30.

⁷⁹ Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 178.

⁸⁰ Viking long warships with animal figures were known as *drakkars*, dragon ships. See Jan Bill, "Scandinavian Warships and Naval Power in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," in *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, NED-New edition, ed. John B. Hattendorf and Richard W. Unger (Boydell & Brewer, 2003), 35–52.

⁸¹ Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 182.

⁸² Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 182–83.

could also be a warship. Similar depictions of these ships can be found on the Bryggen Stick and on the walls of a church in Fortun, Norway.⁸³

The carving details in the ship graffito are striking. Particularly, the details and patterns found at the bow resemble this discovered in the Gokstad ship burial in Norway.⁸⁴ Similar details can also be seen on the Ladby ship in Denmark, with various carvings on the ship's wooden planks.⁸⁵ If we were to date the graffito, considering the Varangian-Byzantine relations and the resemblance between the early Viking Age ships depicted in the graffito and commonly used Scandinavian ships, a timeframe between the mid-9th century and the late 10th century seems plausible.

2.4.5 Piraeus Lion

In ancient Greece, the lion symbolized courage, royalty, and power.⁸⁶ Due to the absence of lions in Greece, the ancient Greeks idealized the animal through an Orientalist approach, having heard of its strength and ferocity. As a result, they often depicted lions in a mythological context in a highly exaggerated manner. The lion came to represent a force to be conquered and ruled, and the task of defeating the Nemean Lion, one of the twelve labors of the demi-god Heracles, is framed within this sense.⁸⁷ The lion's strength and powerful nature were thus carved into stone and placed in various locations as spiritual guardians to protect cities.⁸⁸ The Piraeus Lion, placed at the Piraeus Port to protect Athens, served for centuries in this role. The sculpture, made

⁸³ Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 183–84.

⁸⁴ See Nicolay Nicolaysen, *Langskibet fra Gokstad ved Sandefjord* (Kristiania: Alb. Cammermeyer, 1882).

⁸⁵ See Anne C. Sørensen et al., *Ladby: A Danish Ship-Grave from the Viking Age*, with Vikingskibshallen, Ships and Boats of the North 3 (The Viking Ship Museum [u.a.], 2001).

⁸⁶ Krzysztof Ulanowski, "The Metaphor of the Lion in Mesopotamian and Greek Civilization," in *Mesopotamia in the Ancient World: Impact, Continuities, Parallels*, ed. Robert Rollinger and Erik van Dongen (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 265.

⁸⁷ Robin Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology: Based on HJ Rose's Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London: Routledge, 2009), 63–64.

⁸⁸ Ulanowski, "The Metaphor of the Lion in Mesopotamian and Greek Civilization," 270.

of white marble, stands at approximately 3 meters and is believed to have been created around 360 BCE.⁸⁹ It is thought to have safeguarded Athens first under the Athenians, then the Romans, and followed by the Byzantine Empire, and later the Ottoman rule, until it was taken to Venice by the Venetian admiral Francesco Morosini during the Great Turkish War in 1687.⁹⁰ A 17th-century Turkish traveler and writer, Evliya Çelebi, observed the Piraeus Lion during his travels and described it as a fountain in his work, *Seyahatname*. According to Çelebi, water flowed from the lion's back, coming from a distant mountain and collecting at its feet.⁹¹ This description provides an important clue about the function of the lion. However, another crucial detail that Çelebi either overlooked or failed to notice are the runic inscriptions on both sides of the lion.

According to Thomas D. Kendrick, the person who carved these runes (fig. 8) likely did so in the second half of the 11th century, and based on the style, the carver was likely Swedish.⁹² The style, characterized by a spiral curl resembling a dragon-headed lindworm, is consistent with other rune stones found in Sweden, suggesting the work of a Swedish runemaster.⁹³ The runes, carved in the shape of a lindworm, were first discovered in the late 18th century by Swedish diplomat Johan David Åkerblad. However, attempts to translate the runes did not occur until the mid-19th century. The first attempt at a translation by Carl Christian Rafn was as follows:

⁸⁹ Cornelius Vermeule, "Greek Funerary Animals, 450-300 B. C.," *American Journal of Archaeology* 76, no. 1 (1972): 53.

⁹⁰ It was looted during the Great Turkish War in 1687 when the Venetians, under the command of Venetian admiral Francesco Morosini, captured Athens from the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, it was brought to Venice, where it became one of the city's significant symbols. See Oikonomides, Nikos. "'On the Cover': The Lion of Piraeus." *The Classical Bulletin* 63, no. 2 (1987).

⁹¹ Gunnar Jarring, "Evliya Celebi Och Marmorlejonet Från Pireus," *Fornvännen* 73 (1978): 1-4.

⁹² T. D. Kendrick, *A History of the Vikings* (NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 176.

⁹³ The term "*suiar*" found in Erik Brate's translation could be a clear indication identifying these Swedish rune carvers.

ተካሃበተገጽ × *ገበ × ገበተገጽ × ህገተገጽ × ህተገጽ × ገሃብገጽ × ተገብ × ህገገገገጽ × ህገገገጽ × ተ
 ገብ × ገበተገጽ × ተገ × ህተገ × *ተገተገጽ × *ተሃተገ × ህገተገ × ሃገገገገጽ × ገሃ × *ገሃተገገጽ × ተገ
 ገ × ህተተገገጽ ×

ASMUDR : HJU : RUNAR : ህISAR : ህAIR : ISKIR : AUK: ህURLIFR :
 ህURፆR : AUK : IVAR : AT : BON : HARADS : HAFa : ህUAT : GRIKIAR :
 UF : HUGSAፆU : AUK : BANaፆU :

*Asmund cut these runes with Asgeir and Thorleif, Thord and Ivar, at the request of Harold the Tall, though the Greeks considered about and forbade it.*⁹⁴

This inscription was the translation for the runes found on the right side of the lion.

The translation of the inscription on the left side was as follows:

*ተገበተ × ገተገ × ህገጽ × ገገገጽ × ተገብ × ተካሃበተገጽ × ተገብ × ገገገጽ × *ተሃተገ × ህገተገ × ህገ
 ገ × ሃገገገጽ × ገተገገጽ × ተገ × ገብ × *ተገተገጽ × *ተሃገ × ገሃ ገተገገጽ × ገገገገገጽ × ገገገገጽ ×
 ሃገገገገገጽ × ገተገገጽ × ገተገገጽ × ገተገገገጽ × ገ × ሃገገገጽ × ገተገገጽ × ገገገጽ × ገተገጽ × ገ × ሃገ
 ገገጽ × ሃገገጽ × ገተገገጽገጽ × ገገጽ × ገገገገገጽ ተገብ × ተገገገጽ ×

HAKUN : VAN: ህገጽ : ULFR : AUK : ASMUDR : AUK : AURN : HAFN :
 ህESA : ህገጽ : MEN : LAGፆU : A : UK : HARADR : HAFI : UF IABUTA :
 UPRARSTAR : VEGNA : GRIKIAፆፆS : VARፆ : DALKR : NAUፆUGR : I :
 FIARI : LAPUM : EGIL : VAR : I : FARU : MIፆ : RAGNARR : TIL : RUMANIU
 AUK : ARMENIU :

Hakon with Ulf and Asmund and Örn conquered this port. These men and Harold Hafi imposed a heavy fine on account of the revolt of the Greek people.

⁹⁴ Carl Christian Rafn, *Inscription Runique Du Pirée* (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1856), 26–31.

*Dalk is detained captive in far lands. Egil is gone on an expedition with Ragnar into Romania and Armenia.*⁹⁵

The name, Harold (*Hafi*) the Long is particularly intriguing, and many have attempted to associate it with Harald Hardrada.⁹⁶ Although there are differing opinions regarding this individual's identity and whether he might be Harald *Hardrada*, it is impossible to reach a definitive conclusion. Over time, it was claimed that the inscription had been misinterpreted, leading to a new translation. This translation was accepted as correct by the authorities. In the new translation, the absence of a person named Harald Hafi put the issue of Harald's identity to rest. In 1914, Erik Brate carried out a second translation.

HIUKU ÞIR HILFNINKS MILUM
HNA EN I HAFN ÞESI ÞIR MIN
EOKU RUNAR AT HAURSA
BUNTA KUÞAN A UAH RIÞU
SUIAR ÞITA LINU FUR RAÞUM
KUL UAN FARIN

-

TRI(N)KIAR RISTU RUNAR
[A RIKAN STRIN]K HIUKU ÞAIR
ISK[IL-] [ÞU]RLIFR

-

LITU AUKA UI[I ÞIR A]
ROÞRSLANTI B[YKU] - A SUN
IUK RUNAR ÞISAR. UFR UK - LI
ST[INTU] A[T HAURSA] KUL]
UAN FARN⁹⁷

They knocked it down in the midst of their forces. But in the port, men cut runes by the sea in memory of Horsi, a good warrior. The Swedes put this on the lion. He continued his way with good advice, gold he earned on his travels. The warriors cut runes, carved them on an ornamental scroll. Æskell (Áskell) (and others) and Þorlæifr (Þorleifr) had them well-carved, they who lived in Roslagen. (N. N.) son of (N. N.) cut these runes. Ulfr (Úlfr) and (N. N.) colored them in memory of Horsi. He gained gold on his travels.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Rafn, *Inscription Runique du Pirée*, 12–25.

⁹⁶ See Rafn, *Inscription Runique du Pirée*, 16; Ian Heath and Angus McBride, *The Vikings*, repr, Elite Series 3 (Oxford: Osprey, 1999), 24.

⁹⁷ Omeljan Pritsak, *The Origin of Rus* (Harvard University Press Cambridge, MA, 1981), 1:348.

⁹⁸ Pritsak, *The Origin of Rus*, 1:348.

Many authorities have regarded Brate's translation as a more accurate interpretation.⁹⁹

However, reaching an entirely definitive translation is nearly impossible due to factors such as erosion, rain, and wind over time, which have significantly worn down the runes.

2.5 Discussion

The occurrence of Scandinavian graffiti and inscriptions inside Byzantine buildings including Hagia Sophia and the Piraeus Lion has a great deal, though complicated, to say about identity, memory, and cross-cultural exchange during the Middle Ages. Though it is hard to state exactly what the motives were, given that they are found on prominent and usually controlled areas, it is apparent that they were not mere random marks.

We would find it believable if such inscriptions were made by Varangian Guard members or Scandinavian travelers who wished to signify their presence within an important religious and imperial context. The use of rune inscriptions and ships would be indicative of personal expression, pride of culture, or even a wish to be recollected by future members of their homeland. Yet, because there are so few inscriptions and because they are so fragmentary, it is difficult at present to ascertain with any confidence what meaning or purpose they served.

Those present there are said by some scholars to have made spontaneous graffiti out of boredom or ritual demarcation within religious rituals.¹⁰⁰ Others suggest more symbolic explanations, that they helped legitimate the presence of Scandinavians

⁹⁹ This translation is considered probably more accurate because it references Roslagen, which supports the Norman theory. In this way, it likely gained the support of European normanist historians. By stating Æskell and Þorlæifr came from Roslagen, the translation suggests that they were Rus', therefore Varangians, providing evidence for the Norman theory. See Nicholas Riasanovsky, "The Norman Theory of the Origin of the Russian State," *Russian Review* 7, no. 1 (1947): 96–110.

¹⁰⁰ Thomov, "Four Scandinavian Ship Graffiti from Hagia Sophia," 184.

within a foreign yet dominant empire.¹⁰¹ Both are valuable explanations, and it is probable that motives for making such graffiti were multiple and varied based on the individual and circumstances. Ultimately, all of them must be considered within an overarching human desire to leave traces—be it for memory, communication, or claim of self—within historically and culturally meaningful places.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter pursued an analysis of Scandinavian graffiti and inscriptions within the Byzantium Empire, specifically within Hagia Sophia and on the Piraeus Lion, from a historical and cultural perspective. Although evidence does not permit unambiguous interpretation, analysis proposes that such inscriptions could have been used for multiple purposes, spanning personal expression to symbolic acts of presence.

Based on the geographical expanse and elitist composition of the Varangian Guard, their inscriptions would potentially symbolize a type of articulation of identity within the empire. However, caution is needed in presupposing any meaning or function for such markings without extensive comparative evidence. The runic inscriptions are incomplete, and their contexts, even when indicative, are yet obscure.

Future studies using digital epigraphy, corpus comparison, and archaeological context could potentially provide greater understanding into the motivations and significance of such graffiti. For the time being, these remnants are fascinating yet mysterious, opening a window into the nuances of medieval cultural encounter and

¹⁰¹ “In Constantinople, Justinian had a temple to God built which, in the Greek tongue, is called the Agia Sophia but which we call Ægisif. And that building is the best and greatest in the whole world as we know it.” See James Andrew Cross, “The World’s Saga: An English Translation of the Old Norse Veraldar Saga, a History of the World in Six Ages” (Master’s Thesis, University of Iceland, Hugvísindasvið, 2012), 30.

how people attempted to inscribe themselves—literally, and symbolically—onto history.



CHAPTER 3 : BYZANTINE ART

Byzantine Art refers to the Art produced during the dominance of the Byzantine Empire, which existed from the 4th to the 15th century and was prevalent in regions influenced culturally and politically by the Empire. The areas impacted by Byzantine Art include the Near East, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and Russia, where Byzantium had significant commercial and missionary influence. Following the emergence of the Germanic polities in western Europe, the influence of Byzantine Art also came to shape the Art of the Carolingians and Ottonians, contributing to their development. Byzantine Art began to emerge after the declaration of Emperor Constantine; Christianity was the state religion, and Christian themes are frequently found in the artworks. Prominent examples of Byzantine Art include mosaics, icons, frescoes, and illuminated manuscripts.¹⁰²

The evolution of Byzantine Art was primarily driven by the need to depict events from Christianity and the Bible.¹⁰³ Byzantine artists aimed to represent various religious figures of the Christian faith—God, the Virgin Mary, saints, and biblical scenes—through their Art. One of the most defining elements of Byzantine Art created for this purpose was the icon. Icons are religious paintings depicting sacred figures, usually painted on wooden panels. These icons were considered holy during religious rituals and carried both spiritual and artistic significance. The colors used in Byzantine Art also held great importance and symbolic meanings. Gold symbolized God's absolute power, while blue represented the sky and Heaven.¹⁰⁴ Red was associated with passion, love, sacrifice, and blood, which is why Christ's blood and saints were

¹⁰² Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 12–13.

¹⁰³ Thomas F Mathews, *The Art of Byzantium: Between Antiquity and the Renaissance* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 122.

¹⁰⁴ Liz James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 139–40.

often depicted in red garments.¹⁰⁵ Green symbolized nature, life, and rebirth, frequently appearing in depictions of paradise gardens.¹⁰⁶ White represented purity, cleanliness, and holiness; it was often used in divine light and immortality themes, as well as in the clothing of significant religious figures.¹⁰⁷ Yellow signified wisdom and goodness, adorning halos and beams of divine light around sacred figures.¹⁰⁸ Purple, a symbol of royalty and noble lineage, was commonly used in the garments of nobles and members of the imperial family.¹⁰⁹ Lastly, black represented death and the end, often used in scenes depicting mortality and the conclusion of earthly existence.¹¹⁰ Beyond colors, the postures and expressions of figures in Byzantine Art also carried symbolic meanings. Figures were idealized, often portrayed with serious and solemn expressions facing the viewer. This static and motionless representation emphasized God's eternity and conveyed the idea that death is not an end but a transition to spiritual eternity. Additionally, perspective and depth were deliberately avoided to highlight the insignificance of worldly values in the presence of God.¹¹¹

3.1 The Betrayal Iconography in Byzantine Art

The Betrayal, an essential scene in early Christian iconography, is depicted in all four surviving Byzantine frescoes that may represent Varangians. This scene, significant even before the Byzantine era, traditionally features Roman soldiers arresting Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.¹¹² Artists have typically modeled these soldiers on the

¹⁰⁵ James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, 121.

¹⁰⁶ George Galavaris, *Colours, Symbols, Worship: The Mission of the Byzantine Artist* (London: The Pindar Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, 127.

¹⁰⁸ James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, 50.

¹⁰⁹ James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, 134.

¹¹⁰ James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, 50.

¹¹¹ Justin Willson, "On the Aesthetic of Diagrams in Byzantine Art," *Speculum* 98, no. 3 (2023): 778.

¹¹² Raffaele D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," in *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Marek Lech, 69–96 (Wrocław: University of Wrocław Institute of Archaeology, 2013), 69.

military figures of their own time, allowing scholars to trace changes in equipment and military appearance across centuries.¹¹³ During the Byzantine period, these depictions evolved notably after the arrival of the Varangian Guard.

This military group, known for their unwavering loyalty to the Emperor, excelled in more delicate and dangerous tasks, such as the arrest of nobles and high-ranking clergy. Since their sole commander was the Emperor himself, unlike other military units, they did not develop any sympathy toward local leaders or religious officials.¹¹⁴ Therefore, while their primary role was to serve as the imperial bodyguard, the Varangian Guard are also reported to have been involved in policing duties within the capital, especially for sensitive and politically charged arrests.¹¹⁵ Due to their assignment to guard certain prisoners in the *Noumera* prison, which was affiliated with the Great Palace in Constantinople, they gained a notorious reputation in this regard.¹¹⁶ This infamous reputation, stemming from their role as enforcers, led to their depiction as Roman soldiers in the *Betrayal* frescoes and mosaics of their own period. In fact, a poem written by Michael Glykas in the 12th century while he was imprisoned in the *Noumera* prison reflects the literary representation of the contemporary societal perception of the Varangians.

Hades I call the Numera, and even worse than Hades,

For in its horror it surpasses even Hades.

In this murky and most deep dungeon

¹¹³ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 69–70.

¹¹⁴ D'Amato, *The Varangian Guard, 988-1453*, 7.

¹¹⁵ Mark C Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army: Arms and Society, 124-1453* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 274–75; D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 73.

¹¹⁶ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 74.

*There is no light to the eyes, nor any conversation,
For the constant smoke, and the thickness of the darkness
Suffer us not to see or recognise each other.
But bonds and tortures, and guards and towers
And the shouting Varangoi; and terror keeps you awake...*¹¹⁷

In this sense, the existing notorious reputation of the Varangian military unit, perceived as foreign and ruthless, along with their duty of carrying out arrests, makes them a perfect representation of Roman soldiers of the *Betrayal* iconography.

3.2 Fresco

From Antiquity to the Italian Renaissance, the term *fresco* is commonly used to describe wall paintings in Roman and Byzantine works. However, *fresco*, meaning "fresh" in Italian, specifically refers to a technique in which pigments are mixed with water and applied onto wet lime-based plaster.¹¹⁸ This allows the pigments to chemically bond with the surface during the carbonation process, making the painting highly durable.¹¹⁹

Fresco painting requires skill and speed, as the plaster must be applied in layers and painted while still wet. The first layer, *Trusilar*, smooths the wall surface; the second, *Arricciato*, prepares it for the final layer; and the top layer, *Intonaco*, provides the painting surface. These layers must be applied in succession, and only the portion

¹¹⁷ Michael Glykas, *Verses While Held Imprisoned*, ed. E. Tsolakes (Thessaloniki, 1959), 163–70; P. Beatson, "Relics of Varangians III," *Varangian Voice* 57 (2001): 16–20.

¹¹⁸ Fuat Yılmaz, "Antik Dönem Fresk Yapım Teknikleri," *Trakya Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 2, no. 4 (2012): 96.

¹¹⁹ John Canaday, *Metropolitan Seminars in Art. Portfolio 1-12* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1959), 7–9.

that can be completed in a single day is prepared—this unit of work is known as *giornata*.¹²⁰

The materials used are crucial: plaster must be free of moisture and impurities like niter, which can shorten the artwork's life. River sand and slaked lime are preferred to ensure a clean, strong surface.¹²¹

Despite these efforts, frescoes inevitably deteriorate over time due to natural wear, environmental factors like moisture, and human interference, such as vandalism or poor restoration attempts.¹²² Frescoes are at risk of being lost altogether due to potential damage to the original structure caused by inappropriate restoration. This is particularly important when examining depictions such as the 'Varangian' frescoes, as damage or loss can obscure critical visual evidence important for historical interpretation.

3.2.1 Fresco in Byzantine Art

In Byzantine art, pictorial depictions often appeared in the form of frescoes. These frescoes typically depicted religious events from the Bible and were closely tied to the Christian faith. In this sense, their importance and respect increased, leading to them being perceived as sacred. The earliest depictions of religious frescoes date back to the 4th century. The reason for this was that illiterate lower-class Christians could comprehend biblical events through images rather than scripts.¹²³ Thus, frescoes became a visual medium that could communicate directly with the people rather than

¹²⁰ Rebecca Piovesan et al., "Characterising the Unique Polychrome Sinopia under the Lod Mosaic, Israel: Pigments and Painting Technique," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 46 (June 2014): 68.

¹²¹ Norman Davey, *A History of Building Materials* (London: Phoenix House, 1965), 172–80.

¹²² Fazlı Açıkgöz and Gülseren Dikilitaş, "Duvar Resimleri ve Konservasyon Evreleri," in *23. Müze Çalışmaları ve Kurtarma Kazıları Sempozyumu*, ed. Adil Özme (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü, 2014), 361–64.

¹²³ Tülin Çoruhlu and Aslı Erdoğan, "On the Garments of Virgin Mary in the Byzantine Wall Paintings," *Antakiyat* 3, no. 1 (2020): 45.

relying on Latin and Greek texts. By the 6th century, the reverence for frescoes was officially recognized by the Church. A hierarchical and liturgical system was followed in the creation of church art.¹²⁴ Frescoes placed within the church were arranged according to the hierarchy established in church doctrine. The central dome represented Heaven and was therefore adorned with a depiction of Jesus Christ.¹²⁵ The halo of God the Father was triangular. Below Him, other figures were depicted according to their level of importance. The pendentives featured the Gospel writers, believed to connect Heaven and Earth, while the smaller domes contained representations of the twelve apostles. The half-dome of the apse typically depicted the Mother of God. Scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary were painted in the narthex, while the Church Fathers were placed on the lower walls of the apse.¹²⁶ In this way, the hierarchy within the Church was visually represented in a descending vertical order from the most sacred to the ordinary. Within the liturgical system, the saints depicted were generally local saints and religiously significant figures. Additionally, it was quite common in Byzantine Art to include portrayals of those who commissioned the church or made substantial contributions to religious structures. A notable example is Despot Stefan Dušan, who held the title Emperor of the Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Albanians. He had himself and his family portrayed in the Lesnovo Monastery, as well as in other religious buildings he commissioned, which reflects the strong Byzantine influence in his lands. These depictions were not simply about personal allegiance or authority; they were part of a visual tradition shaped by Byzantine artistic norms. Later, this symbolic and hierarchical language served as a benchmark for the representation of military figures such as the Varangians in Byzantine frescoes. The inclusion of these

¹²⁴ Charles Delvoye and Yener Boran, "Bizans Resim Sanatının Ana Temayülleri," *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 22, nos. 3–4 (1964): 303–18.

¹²⁵ Delvoye and Boran, "Bizans Resim Sanatının Ana Temayülleri," 305.

¹²⁶ Delvoye and Boran, "Bizans Resim Sanatının Ana Temayülleri," 303–18.

figures in untouchable narratives such as the *Betrayal* was not an arbitrary decision, but a deliberate artistic choice rooted in deep iconographic tradition.

3.2.1.1 Cappadocia – Church of Saint John Chrysostom in Arabissos Fresco Depicting the *Betrayal*

One of the significant frescoes proving the Scandinavian presence in the Empire is the *Betrayal* iconography in the Church of Saint John Chrysostom in Arabissos (St. Jean Kilisesi). In examining the fresco, Jesus and Judas occupy the center of the composition, surrounded by around 30 soldiers carrying various long-handled weapons (fig. 9). The fresco, according to D'amato, is dated to 1212 A.D., and the soldiers depicted are those of the Empire of Nicaea.¹²⁷ The frescoes and decorations in the church were likely created to commemorate the victory of Emperor Theodore I Laskaris of Nicaea in the Battle of Antioch against the Seljuks. The fresco prominently features multi-pointed and round-star maces, axes, and long-handled weapons. These depicted weapons bear a resemblance to the 13th-century archaeological remains at the Kazanlak Museum in Bulgaria.¹²⁸ D'Amato suggested that the soldiers in this fresco are Varangian Guards of Emperor Theodore I Laskaris of Nicaea, owing to their red clothing, the weapons they wield, their general appearance, and their hair color.¹²⁹ In addition, in the narrative of Raffaele D'Amato, the Varangians would have worn highly ornamented and luxurious attire that would have broadcast their extremely high status in the Byzantine imperial hierarchy, and red tunics would have featured prominently as a part of their uniform. D'Amato remarks that this taste was consistent both with Byzantium's sumptuous textile tradition and de règlement ceremony

¹²⁷ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 83–86.

¹²⁸ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 83–86.

¹²⁹ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 83.

grandeur at court.¹³⁰ In the *Laxdæla Saga*, also, Bolli Bollason, a varangian leader, and his men are described all in scarlet clothing studded and embroidered in gold, emphasizing the use of this sort of attire as a marker of prestige and superiority.¹³¹ In light of this information, if this interpretation is accurate, it is noteworthy that, despite being one of the most vulnerable periods for the Empire, the Varangians remained loyally by the Emperor's side.

3.2.1.2 Cappadocia – Elmalı Kilise's Fresco

Due to the damage to the fresco in the Elmalı Church, (fig. 10) the silhouettes around Jesus are not clearly distinguishable. However, when examining the long-handled weapons remaining in the background – similar to found in field of Battle of Dristra (fig. 11) - it is evident that the number of Varangians has decreased. The Battle of Dristra was a major conflict between the Byzantine army and the Pechenegs in 1087 AD, in which the Varangian Guard played a central role. Despite the Byzantine defeat, contemporary accounts emphasize the Varangian participation and heavy losses.¹³² Therefore, the presence of Varangian finds in the region reflects the historical memory of this battle and also strengthens the possibility that the soldiers depicted in the fresco were identified with the Varangian Guard. It is therefore noticeable that more local military forces are depicted as the ones coming to arrest Jesus. The fresco, according to D'amato, is dated to the second half of the 11th century.¹³³

3.2.1.3 Cappadocia – Çarıklı Kilise's Fresco

The same situation and wear are found in the fresco of the Çarıklı Church. Although the silhouettes of those coming to arrest Jesus are not entirely clear, spears (δοράτα),

¹³⁰ Raffaele D'Amato, *The Varangian Guard, 988-1453* (Osprey, 2010), 39-40

¹³¹ Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium*, ed. Benedikt S. Benediktz. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 207.

¹³² Yoto Yotov, "The Dristra Battle (1087)," *Cultură Şi Civilizaţie La Dunărea de Jos*, 2008, 263.

¹³³ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 77–79.

axes, and maces (τζικουρία and σαλιβα) mounted on pole shafts can still be seen (fig. 12).¹³⁴ According to D'Amato, the fresco is dated to the second half of the 11th century, and when examining the spears, it is evident that the spearheads are consistent with those found on the Dristra battlefield. Thus, even though the number of axes has decreased compared to the earlier depictions from the beginning of the century, the presence of Varangian soldiers in the Byzantine army is still evident.

3.2.1.4 Crete - Panaghia Myriokephala, Fresco depicting the *Betrayal*

The fresco, as per D'amato, is dated to late 11th century; the most striking feature of the fresco is the soldiers - dressed in red and purple garments and wielding long axes and maces - coming to arrest Jesus (fig. 13). The mace depicted in the fresco bears a strong resemblance to a mace found on the battlefield of Dristra (fig. 14), located within a Roman camp that previously contained Varangian artifacts, and to the mace depicted in the Monastery of Panaghia Myriokephala.¹³⁵ According to D'Amato, this resemblance suggests that the mace likely belongs to an elite unit of the Empire, most probably the Varangian Guard. Additionally, the axe held by a man in red uniform bears a striking resemblance to an axe found on the Dristra battlefield (fig. 15).¹³⁶ These weapons, dated to the 11th century and found at the Dristra battlefield in 1087 AD, support the idea that the Varangian Guard is represented in this fresco.

3.3 Mosaic

Mosaic is a surface decoration technique created by placing small materials called *tesserae* such as stone, glass, ceramic, marble, metal and seashells on mortar. First, a *rudus* layer consisting of coarse stone and broken bricks is laid on the ground; then, a

¹³⁴ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 77.

¹³⁵ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 74–75.

¹³⁶ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 75.

nucleus mixture of finer stone and sand is added on top of it; finally, a *setting bed* made of fine sand and lime is prepared and on top of that the tessellatum layer itself, which is the mosaic formed by the *tesserae*, follows.¹³⁷ Mosaic is applied to both floors and surfaces such as walls, domes and ceilings.¹³⁸ The first mosaics appeared in the 5th-4th century BC as simple floor decorations made with pebbles; over time, colored stone and glass were added to tesserae, and they began to be used as the new main materials for mosaics.¹³⁹ In the 3rd century BC, *tesserae* cut from stone, ceramic and glass became standard. During the Roman Empire; with expansion, the technique spread beyond the Mediterranean, adorning Roman baths, public buildings, temples, and homes.¹⁴⁰ Mosaic art reached its peak in Byzantine Empire. Backgrounds, particularly those made with glass *tesserae* and gold leaf, freed figures from their secular meaning and placed them in a sacred atmosphere. The *Deesis* in Hagia Sophia, portraits of the Emperors, and scenes of the Virgin Mary are among the most striking works of this period.¹⁴¹

3.3.1 Mosaic in Byzantine Art

In Byzantium, mosaic was one of the most important artistic techniques, conveying religious and political messages and decorating the walls, domes, and apses of churches. Mosaics are distinguished by several characteristics in Byzantine art. The use of gold backgrounds is one of the most prominent; flat gold surfaces were preferred as backgrounds in mosaics in Byzantine art. As mentioned earlier, these figures were detached from their earthly meaning, depicting them in a celestial

¹³⁷ Khaled Al-Bashaireh and Ivan Stepanov, "The Pavement Layers of the Southwest Church of Umm el-Jimal, Jordan: Stratigraphy and Archaeometric Characterization," *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* 16, no. 5 (2024): 62–63.

¹³⁸ Ayşegül Karakelle and Feryal Söylemezoğlu, "The Art of Mosaic in Hatay," *Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 15, no. 42 (2018): 26–29.

¹³⁹ Ruth Westgate, "Greek and Roman Mosaics," *Oxford Bibliographies: Classics*, 2014, 72–89.

¹⁴⁰ Westgate, "Greek and Roman Mosaics," 72–89.

¹⁴¹ Charles Rufus Morey, "The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 2, no. 7 (1944): 201–10.

setting and portraying them in a divine light.¹⁴² Furthermore, by rejecting three dimensions, compositions were created from a single perspective—a single plane—parallel to the surface. This resulted in a depiction that was more divine and beyond human perception. With the decline of iconoclasm in the 8th and 9th centuries, mosaics returned, particularly in Hagia Sophia, with powerful scenes reflecting the power of both the Emperor and the Church.¹⁴³ While mosaics in Byzantine art generally depicted religious events like frescoes, these depictions also included individuals who served, repaired, they also included individuals who served, repaired, or commissioned the construction of sacred spaces. Thus, while mosaic art followed a religious theme, it also had a political dimension.¹⁴⁴ Portraits of emperors within religious themes—such as Justinian and Constantine offering Hagia Sophia and Constantinople to Mary—thus emphasized their political legitimacy and their divine power to the people. Mosaic works, also, often featured various scenes from the Bible. For instance, the *Deesis* in Hagia Sophia—the scene of Jesus praying for humanity through Mary and John the Baptist—was one of the most important Byzantine iconographic subjects.¹⁴⁵ The mosaics' depiction of biblical scenes, like the fresco, may provide visual evidence for the Scandinavian presence in the region through the *Betrayal* iconography. The following section of the thesis, in this sense, analyzes the relatively unique the *Betrayal* mosaic from the Neo Mani monastery in Chios, which is thought to depict Scandinavian guards.

¹⁴² Emerson H. Swift, “Byzantine Gold Mosaic,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 38, no. 1 (1934): 81.

¹⁴³ Ellen C. Schwartz, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 31–46,

¹⁴⁴ Natalia B. Teteriatnikov, “Pseudo-Dionysius and the Post-Iconoclastic Mosaic Programme of Hagia Sophia,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius and Christian Visual Culture, c.500–900*, ed. Francesca Dell’Acqua and Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi (Springer International Publishing, 2020), 283–319.

¹⁴⁵ Konstantinos M. Vapheides, “Reassessing a Late Byzantine Masterpiece: The Deesis Mosaic in the Hagia Sophia of Constantinople,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 45, no. 2 (2021): 166–83, Cambridge Core.

3.3.1.1 Chios, Nea Moni Imperial Monastery, Mosaic depicting the *Betrayal*

The betrayal scene is depicted in the inner narthex of the Imperial Monastery of Nea Moni on the island of Chios (fig. 16). The mosaic depicts warriors dressed in elaborate clothing, fair-skinned with blond hair and powerful physiques. The figures are armed with elaborately equipped staff weapons including double- and single-edged axes, curved blades, and maces.¹⁴⁶ One warrior wears a shield decorated with pearls. Although the soldiers are not depicted in armor, they are depicted with a military presence. The lavishness of their equipment suggests that these soldiers were members of the Imperial Guard, according to D'amato, because the mosaic dates to the reign of Constantine Monomachos (1042-1055), these warriors are thought to be members of the Varangian Guard—typically blond and with long beards.¹⁴⁷ As noted in *De Cerimoniis*, a book of ceremonial protocols at the courts of Byzantine emperors, Varangian guards wore their ornate *scaramangia* (long robe) or the *allaximata* (uniform) of their respective units, along with their decorated *pektoraris*. The warriors in the mosaic are dressed in exactly the same way, with *scaramangia* of various colors—blue, yellow, orange, violet, and green—adorned with an extravagant *pektoraris*. *Pektoraris* were square ornaments of silk or embroidery applied over the main garment; these ornaments, shaped like small mantles, descended from the neck, tied at the back, and draped over the chest, sometimes extending over the entire body.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the military equipment carried by the men in the mosaic, based on the Historian Psellos' description of the Varangians as carrying an axe or *pelekys* on their right shoulders (VI, 87; VII, 24), provides some

¹⁴⁶ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 71.

¹⁴⁷ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 71.

¹⁴⁸ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 71.

insight into their identity. The weapon of Malchus—the blond figure having his ear cut off—has a handle painted with a row of brown (fig. 17), a row of gold, and a row of green. The imperial guard's practice of painting, according to D'amato, the handles of spears and polearms with three different color bands is also evident in the mosaic depicting Justinian and his retinue, preserved in the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna since the 6th century; thus, the Nea Moni mosaic provides evidence of a military uniform copied from reality and still in vogue centuries later.¹⁴⁹ Another significant feature is Malchus's round shield (fig. 17), the surface of which is decorated with precious stones and pearls. The Imperial guards depicted in the 11th-century frescoes of Hagia Sophia in Kiev, fighting animals at the Hippodrome of Constantinople, wear the same shields as Malchus (fig. 18).¹⁵⁰ In light of these, it is highly probable that the individuals depicted in the mosaic were members of the Varangian guard, whose core was Norse at the time.

3.4 Discussion

The mosaics and frescoes examined in this section reveal that depictions of the Betrayal scene in Byzantine art do more than depict a single, incidental event; they possess a contemporary depiction and actively integrate their time into the biblical narrative. The depiction of Roman soldiers as Varangian guards—through their weaponry, distinctive attire such as *scaramangia* and *pectoralis*, and physiognomic features often associated with Scandinavian origins—indicates the Empire's need for these guards, and the Scandinavians, as a result of this interaction, integrated into Byzantium, becoming a part of its art and even its religious narrative.

¹⁴⁹ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 72.

¹⁵⁰ D'Amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord," 73.

Furthermore, Byzantine artists addressed contemporary societal perceptions of the Guard as loyal but intimidating instruments of the imperial will by depicting the Varangian guards during the arrest of Jesus. Their loyalty to the Emperor and their foreign origins made them both impartial enforcers of the imperial will and the feared hammers of imperial justice. Literary sources such as Michael Glykas's prison poetry showed that the role of the Norse was not only reflected in visual art but also in literature.

3.5 Conclusion

To conclude, Byzantine Frescoes and Mosaics offer a new perspective on the nature of Byzantine-Scandinavian relations through the iconography of the *Betrayal*. Byzantine art, which added Varangian figures into sacred narratives, not only reflected the military situation of the period but also used foreign soldiers as a metaphor for imperial authority, loyalty, and fear. These images demonstrate the existence of Norse warriors and preserve their memory; they also project a political message of the Empire's influence and the Empire's power and might, with foreign northerners subordinated to the Emperor.

This chapter places the Varangian guard within the Byzantine cultural and symbolic framework. It demonstrates that their presence in art was neither incidental nor merely decorative. Instead, the depiction of the Varangians was a deliberate act of political communication and cultural integration. Archaeological parallels, iconographic consistency, and historical records demonstrate that Norse warriors were not only present in the Byzantine world, but also integrated into its ideologic and artistic view.

Future research could contribute to a clear understanding of the representation of Scandinavians in Byzantine art. New discoveries, particularly through the

restoration and repair of damaged frescoes and mosaics featuring unnoticed probable Scandinavians figures, will be crucial for understanding the symbolism, social perception, and perception of Scandinavians at different times. This will allow for a deeper and more comprehensive exploration of Scandinavian-Byzantine interaction and cultural influence.



CHAPTER 4: SCANDINAVIAN WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

In addition to the material evidence discussed in previous chapters, such as Byzantine art and inscriptions, weaponry attributed to Scandinavian users provides substantial archaeological evidence for their presence in Byzantine territories. During the 10th through 12th centuries in particular, the use of weapons typically associated with the Northmen - following as Yumuktepe Sword, Patara Sword, Opaka Sword, Sliven Sword, Gradeshnitsa Sword, Barzina Axe, and Stana Axe – is a proof of the presence of Scandinavians in the military in the region. This chapter examines the military equipment attributed to Scandinavians in Byzantine-influenced areas in Anatolia and the Balkans. Based on typological examination and contextual analysis of selected items, this chapter intends to provide insight into the military function and integration of Scandinavian populations in the Byzantine sphere.

4.1 Typology and Characteristics of Varangian Weapons

Scandinavian weapons such as particular swords and axes tended to be the kind of weapon found or favored in areas under Scandinavian influence. The Petersen's Typology, categorizing Viking swords into 26 types (A–Z) based on hilt design and decoration, is one of the key sources employed for Viking Age sword classification.¹⁵¹ Besides, Petersen's classification is still the essential, but later work, like Kirpichnikov's typology of Viking weapons in Eastern Europe and Wheeler's analysis of British finds in *London and the Vikings* (1927), adds regional details that help us understand the Anatolian discoveries. Especially, the weapons represented in Byzantine art and found in excavated materials are analyzed with the assistance of the typology in reaching conclusions about the time and locality to which

¹⁵¹ Petersen, *De Norske Vikingesverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*.

Scandinavian weapons pertain. Beyond detailed typological classification, Scandinavian weaponry broadly encompassed axes, seaxes, swords, and maces. Whether these found arms were made in the North or under local Byzantine manufacture remains unknown.

4.2 Scandinavian Equipment Finds

Along with the two swords found in Türkiye—the Yumuktepe Sword and the Patara Sword—the Bulgarian region is particularly rich in Scandinavian swords, axes, and military equipment. These finds—the Opaka Sword, Sliven Sword, Gradeshnitsa Sword, Barzina Axe, and Stana Axe—are important for identifying Scandinavian origins within Byzantine territory and sphere of influence, or at least for illuminating a Byzantine-Scandinavian interaction at a level where these Scandinavian-origin materials could have spread within Byzantium. Since research on Scandinavian artifacts and typologies in Türkiye is limited, it is possible that the Scandinavian artifacts found are incorrectly categorized. Therefore, the fact that only two artifacts of Scandinavian origin have been recorded in Türkiye, despite the abundance of Scandinavian artifacts found in Bulgaria, demonstrates the region's relative untouchedness in terms of Scandinavian studies and material culture. Future research on this topic will help uncover more artifacts found in Türkiye.

4.2.1 Mersin, Türkiye – Yumuktepe Sword

In excavations at Yumuktepe in Mersin, where a storage complex dating from the middle of the 11th century, an iron sword was found (fig. 19). The sword was discovered in a storage room containing glazed and plain ceramics, alongside a bronze coin of Constantine X Doukas and Eudokia.¹⁵² The presence of this coin,

¹⁵² F. Androshchuk and G. Köroğlu, “A Viking Sword-Bearing Resident of Southern-Asia Minor?,” in *Byzantium and the Viking World* (2016), 225; I. Caneva and Gülgün. Köroğlu, *Yumuktepe: dokuzbin yıllık yolculuk* (İzmir: Ege Yayınları, 2010), 84.

datable to the mid-11th century, provides a *terminus post quem* for the assemblage. The domestic nature of the context can suggest that the sword was not part of a battlefield deposit, but perhaps a personal belonging stored in a residential or military provisioning structure. Another important artifact found is a bronze belt buckle.¹⁵³ These types of buckles are seen in remains in graves in areas like Kyiv and Corinth.¹⁵⁴ The same type of buckle is found in a grave in Corinth, datable to the 10th century.¹⁵⁵ In Viking Age burials in Eastern Europe, such buckles are datable in the middle of or the second half of the 10th century. These small belt buckles are commonly in retainer graves in Russian regions.¹⁵⁶

The sword belongs to Petersen's Type H.¹⁵⁷ (fig. 20) The total weight of Petersen's Type H swords ranges from 604 grams to 1652 grams. They are typically 90 cm in length. While the grip length is 95 mm, swords of other sizes can also be found. The hilts of swords of this type tend to be ornamented with silver and copper. The pommels of such swords tend to be attached to the upper guards through a ring or through two rivets.¹⁵⁸ Copper or brass plates were occasionally used on the hilt surface. While swords of the type tend to have double-edged blades, single-edged varieties have also surfaced, especially in Norway.¹⁵⁹ Wooden grips and scabbards can occasionally be found in an intact condition. Furthermore, swords with fabric

¹⁵³ Caneva and Köroğlu, *Yumuktepe*, 92–93; Fedir Androshchuk and Gülgün Köroğlu, "A Viking Sword-Bearing Resident of Southern Asia Minor?" in *Byzantium and the Viking World*, ed. Fedir Androshchuk, Jonathan Shepard, and Monica White (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2016), 226.

¹⁵⁴ Gladys Davidson Weinberg, *The Minor Objects* (Princeton, NJ: American school of classical studies at Athens, 1952), 273; I. I. Movchan, "A 10th-Century Warrior's Grave from Kiev," in *Kiev–Cherson–Constantinople*, ed. A. Aibabin and H. Ivakin (Ukrainian National Committee for Byzantine Studies, 2007), 221–23.

¹⁵⁵ Weinberg, *The Minor Objects*, 273.

¹⁵⁶ Androshchuk and Köroğlu, "A Viking Sword-Bearing Resident of Southern-Asia Minor?," 226.

¹⁵⁷ Petersen, *De Norske Vikingsverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*, 89–101; Androshchuk and Köroğlu, "A Viking Sword-Bearing Resident of Southern-Asia Minor?," 229.

¹⁵⁸ Androshchuk and Köroğlu, "A Viking Sword-Bearing Resident of Southern-Asia Minor?," 231.

¹⁵⁹ Androshchuk and Köroğlu, "A Viking Sword-Bearing Resident of Southern-Asia Minor?," 231.

wrapping, which is thought to be used in ceremonies, have also been found. Type H is one of the most common models of the Viking Age. It has been documented across a wide geography, including Scandinavia, the British Isles, France, and Central Europe. Consequently, its occurrence extends from Greenland in the west to Kievan Rus' in the east. This sword tended to be used in the 9th and 10th centuries, according to Petersen typology.¹⁶⁰

4.2.2 Antalya, Türkiye – Patara Sword

The Patara sword (fig. 21) was uncovered within Harbour Bath in Patara, Antalya excavations.¹⁶¹ The sword, which had been broken from the blade section and heavily corroded, measures 43.2 cm in length in its current condition.¹⁶² The section of the guard between the hilt and blade is in the shape of an oval, while the tang narrows from the pommel toward the guard; there is a horizontal guard at the upper section of the hilt, above which is a single-layer pommel.¹⁶³ There is evidence of remains on the section of the sword that existed as the sword blade, whereby the sword must have been sheathed in a wooden scabbard. Although the inlays could not be distinguished due to corrosion, the shape of the pommel—with its vertical rise and uniform lobes¹⁶⁴—closely resembles Types K and O in Petersen's typology.¹⁶⁵ (fig. 22) Such forms were in Scandinavian weapons of the 9th and 10th centuries, having examples in the British Isles and Eastern Europe, suggesting the attribution of this

¹⁶⁰ Petersen, *De Norske Vikingsverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*, 89–101.

¹⁶¹ Feyzullah Şahin, *Patara Metal Buluntulari*, Patara Kazıları Yayın Serisi, 5 2 (İzmir: Ege Yayınları, 2018), 50.

¹⁶² Şahin, *Patara Metal Buluntulari*, 50.

¹⁶³ Şahin, *Patara Metal Buluntulari*, 50.

¹⁶⁴ A lobe refers to the protruding sections of the pommel, often used for stylistic and typological classification.

¹⁶⁵ Petersen, *De Norske Vikingsverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*, 105-112, 126-134.

sword to a scandinavian or Norse-influenced context.¹⁶⁶ However, even when the ornaments could not be used, some clues could be derived from the structure of the pommel. The vertical rise of the pommel as well as the roughly uniform height of its upper line, and five or seven lobes with rises similar to those found in swords classified as Type K or Type O in Petersen's typology, yield an important clue in determining the sword's type. Moreover, the Patara sword is in line with Type IV Scandinavian sword according to the typology of Viking swords developed in order of British archaeologist Sir Robert Eric Mortimer Wheeler - who created another typology based on Scandinavian weapons found in the British Isles- in his 1927 work *London and the Vikings*.¹⁶⁷ In the light of all these inferences, the Patara sword is dated to the 9th or in the first half of the 10th century.

4.2.3 Opaka, Bulgaria – Opaka Sword

The sword excavated in the Opaka, Bulgaria is of Type K sword (fig. 22a), according to Petersen's typology, albeit different from the classical structure as having five lobes.¹⁶⁸ While Petersen puts the date of this type in the 9th century,¹⁶⁹ we know that the sword had remained in use in some localities, including Birka, until the 10th

¹⁶⁶ See for examples Oliver J.T. Harris et al., "Assembling Places and Persons: A Tenth-Century Viking Boat Burial from Swordle Bay on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, Western Scotland," *Antiquity* 91, no. 355 (2017): 191–206, Cambridge Core; Angela Z. Redmond, *Viking Burial in the North of England: A Study of Contact, Interaction and Reaction between Scandinavian Migrants and Resident Groups, and the Effect of Immigration on Aspects of Cultural Continuity*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 429 (Oxford: 2007), 89; Arthur MacGregor et al., *Craft, Industry and Everyday Life: Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn from Anglo-Scandinavian York*, The Archaeology of York 12 (the Council for British archaeology for the York archaeological trust, 1999), 1945; M. Wheeler and London Museum, *London and the Vikings* (London: The Museum, 1927), 34–35.

¹⁶⁷ Wheeler and Museum, *London and the Vikings*, 29–36.

¹⁶⁸ Petersen, *De Norske Vikingesverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*, 105–12; Valeri Yotov, "The Vikings in the Balkans (Tenth to 11th Centuries) Strategic and Tactical Changes. New Archeological Data on Weaponry," *Archaeologia Baltica*, no. 8 (November 2007): 324, Central & Eastern European Academic Source.

¹⁶⁹ Konstantin Kolev Jr., "Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans," *Hiperboreea. Journal of History* 2, no. 1 (2015): 58; Petersen, *De Norske Vikingesverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*, 105–12.

century.¹⁷⁰ The identifying feature of Petersen's Type K is that the central lobe of the pommel is generally taller than the other lobes. The hilt cap is formed of either single or dual components. The crossguard is always straight with rounded tips. The grooves between the lobes on the pommel may usually be filled with silver, and exceedingly rarely with wire of copper. Though not so in the Opaka sword (fig 23.1), the pommel and grip arm are typically ornamented with inlaid decoration, and the trace of inscription is observed on the blade section. The trace in the Opaka sword is ornamented with a gold cross motif in the shape of a circle, inlaid in the inlay technique.¹⁷¹ The sword measures an overall length of 895 mm, with the blade length being 775 mm; blade breadth at the base being 55 mm; blade thickness at the base being 12 mm; length of the fuller being 720 mm and the breadth of the fuller located at the base is 18 mm; length of the crossguard is 100 mm, height is 8 mm, and breadth is 19 mm; the pommel measures 49 mm in length, 25 mm in height, and 14 mm in breadth; the sword weighs 864 grams.¹⁷² Androshchuk classified Type K of swords into three types: K1, K2, and K3, placing the Opaka sword in the K3 type.¹⁷³ Type K swords are usually attributed as being produced in Carolingian times; nevertheless, according to Androshchuk, the Opaka sword could be of Norwegian provenance, as 14 specimens of the same type have so far been found in Norway.¹⁷⁴ Comparable specimens are also known from other areas in Europe. This type, on the other hand, has not been found in the lands of the Kievan Rus', nor is it included in

¹⁷⁰ See Björn Ambrosiani and Fedir Androshchuk, "Vooruzhenie i Vostochnye Kontakty Birki," *Rus' Na Perekhrestii Svitiv (Mizhnarodni Vplyvy Na Formuvannya Davn'o-Rus'koyi Derzhavy) IX–XI St. (Chernihiv–Shestovytsya, 20–23 Lypnya 2006 r.)*, 2006, 3–16; Valeri Yotov, "Traces of the Presence of Scandinavian Warriors in the Balkans," *Byzantium and the Viking World* 16 (2016): 242.

¹⁷¹ Samuil Kamburov, "Early Medieval Weapons for Close Combat of North European Origin Found within Present-Day Bulgarian Territory," *Bulgarian E-Journal of Archaeology Supplements* 8 (2021): 107–8.

¹⁷² Michal Viskupič, "Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100)," *Project Forløg - Reenactment and Science*, 2023, 20.

¹⁷³ Androshchuk, *Viking Swords: Swords and Social Aspects of Weaponry in Viking Age Societies*, 64.

¹⁷⁴ Androshchuk, *Viking Swords: Swords and Social Aspects of Weaponry in Viking Age Societies*, 66.

Kirpichnikov's typology of swords from the Russian geographical area—a systematized classification of Viking and early medieval swords in Eastern Europe, based on morphological features and aimed at tracing their chronological and regional development.

4.2.4 Sliven, Bulgaria – Sliven Sword

The sword from an unidentified area of Sliven (fig. 24) is an important find because of its structure. The sword that is nearly fully preserved corresponds to Type H in Petersen's typology (fig. 20) and belongs to the 10th century based on this typology.¹⁷⁵ Typical features of swords of these types are the crossguard and the upper guard with an oval section.¹⁷⁶ The pommel cap of swords of Type H is triangular in shape with a broad base. The height of the pommel cap is in the 2.5 - 4.5 cm range. The crossguard as well as the upper guard is slightly curved in an outward direction. Typically, as in other examples, the pommel cap is held on the base with the help of two rivets. The length of the sword is 760 mm in total, with the blade being 610 mm in length. The crossguard is 91 mm in length, 11.5 mm in height, with 19.3 mm in width. The thickness of the blade in the base is 5 mm, with 3.3 mm in thickness in the breaking point with 23 mm in width. The measurements of the upper guard as well as the pommel cap are 71 mm in length, with 45 mm in height, with 22 mm in width. The weight of the sword in total is 922 grams.¹⁷⁷ On analyzing the pommel as well as grip areas of the sword, it is found that even though the sword is of Petersen Type H, it is quite similar in features with Type V as well. (fig. 25)

Another nearly identical example is present with the sword found in Albești village,

¹⁷⁵ Petersen, *De Norske Vikingsverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*, 89–101; Yotov, "Traces of the Presence of Scandinavian Warriors in the Balkans," 243.

¹⁷⁶ Viskupič, "Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100)," 6.

¹⁷⁷ Viskupič, "Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100)," 6–7.

Romania (fig. 23.3). The Albești sword, having the same features as the Sliven sword, belongs to the Petersen Type V.¹⁷⁸ The only difference between them is the presence of the *Ulfberth* inscription on the Albești sword, which is not found on the Sliven sword.

4.2.5 Gradeshnitsa, Bulgaria – Gradeshnitsa Sword

The broken double-edged sword discovered near the village of Gradeshnitsa (fig. 23.2) within the Vraca district of Northwestern Bulgaria can be classified as Type Z according to Petersen's typology.¹⁷⁹ Type Z swords have an inclined crossguard and also the structure of a two-piece pommel. (fig. 26) The uppermost guard is made of an upward-curving guard, in the opposite direction of the crossguard, bending towards the pommel cap. The pommel is trilobed, with in some instances being divided from its base through silver wire bent from its base. The lateral lobes in some swords are of the shape of animal heads.¹⁸⁰ Some Type Z swords have pommels as well as crossguards with the addition of decoration in silver inlays.¹⁸¹ These swords are found usually in the period of the late 10th century through early 11th century, yet their provenance is uncertain. Although the precise provenance of Type Z swords remains debated—some attributing them to Scandinavia, others to Kievan Rus'¹⁸²—their wide distribution across Europe suggests a hybrid typological form adopted by various groups.¹⁸³ The presence of a similar specimen in Sweden (Dalarna) (fig. 27) lends support to the hypothesis of cross-cultural transmission, potentially facilitated

¹⁷⁸ Valeri Yotov, "Byzantine Time Swords (10th–11th Centuries) in Romania," *Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica*, Supplementum No. 1 (2011): 39–45.

¹⁷⁹ Petersen, *De Norske Vikingesverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*, 175–78; Kolev Jr., "Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans," 58.

¹⁸⁰ Viskupič, "Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100)," 5.
¹⁸¹ Androshchuk, *Viking Swords: Swords and Social Aspects of Weaponry in Viking Age Societies*, 84–85.

¹⁸² A. N. Kirpichnikov, *Древнерусское Оружие. Мечи и Сабли IX-XIII Вв.*, Наука, 1966, 34.

¹⁸³ Viskupič, "Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100)," 5–6.

by Varangian trade routes or mercenary engagements, though additional evidence is necessary to confirm this. The geographical spread of these swords is extensive, with their use ranging from Western Europe through Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁴ The sword from Gradeshnitsa, labeled as Type Z, is placed in the period from the second half of the 10th century through the first half of the 11th century.¹⁸⁵ When discovered, the sword existed in the structure of a small section of the blade, a crossguard, touch of tang, as well as the structure of a two-piece pommel.¹⁸⁶ The sword was corroded when found, and therefore both edges and the overall structure, including the crossguard, had suffered damage. The fuller is wide and prominent. The sword's crossguard is heavy and dense, with the curve in the direction of the blade, together with widening in the direction of the termini.¹⁸⁷ There is a small projection in direction of the blade. The tang is thin, tapering slightly toward the pommel.¹⁸⁸ The pommel is composed of the upper guard and the heavy pommel cap; the upper guard is elliptical in shape, curving toward the pommel cap.¹⁸⁹ The pommel cap is convex with five lobes, with damage on both termini of its lower section.

4.2.6. Axes

One of the first weapons that come to mind when the Scandinavians are thought of are the axes used on the battlefield. The axe was an oft-used weapon of the Scandinavians, and this was due to its accessibility and relatively cheaper cost than that of the sword.¹⁹⁰ The Scandinavian axes generally had a long shaft with a edge.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁴ Kamburov, "Early Medieval Weapons for Close Combat of North European Origin Found within Present-Day Bulgarian Territory," 109.

¹⁸⁵ Petersen, *De Norske Vikingesverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*, 175–78.

¹⁸⁶ Viskupič, "Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100)," 19.

¹⁸⁷ Viskupič, "Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100)," 19.

¹⁸⁸ Viskupič, "Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100)," 19.

¹⁸⁹ Viskupič, "Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100)," 19.

¹⁹⁰ Anne Pedersen, "Viking Weaponry," in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price, 204–211 (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 204–206.

¹⁹¹ Kolev Jr., "Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans," 57.

They were simple in structure and inexpensive in manufacture, which made them well-liked with everybody, from *hilmir* -chieftain- to *bóndi* –farmer-. There were variations that were used with one hand and with the use of both hands -Danish axe- that could weigh as much as 5 kg.¹⁹² This presented various options for using axes. It also permitted longer axes with shafts as long as 180 cm to be used as defense like a spear in some cases.¹⁹³ These weapons, within the reach of the majority of the Scandinavians for low costs, were also often used by Varangians, residents of *Rus*’, either for the purpose of plunder or for mercenary purposes on Byzantine territories. Axes of the same description have been found in Bulgaria, but two of them are notable for their decoration signaling their northern character. These are the axe found in the vicinity of Stana village and the axe found in the vicinity of Barzina village (fig. 28).

4.2.6.1 Stana, Bulgaria – Stana Axe

Stana axe's incrustations were created with silver and copper wire and adorned with various patterns.¹⁹⁴ The artistic themes were intrinsically close to the so-called "four-legged beast", that is, the North Germanic animal style with the menacing animal stance.¹⁹⁵ The Stana axe is adorned with images of two birds. The employment of such animal motifs like serpents and birds is consistent with the Mammen and Ringerike styles common in 10th-century Scandinavian art. These styles typically conveyed symbolic significance—serpents for protection or threat,¹⁹⁶ whereas birds,

¹⁹² Kolev Jr., “Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans,” 57; Valeri Yotov, *Въоръжението и Снаряжението От Българското Средновековие (VII-XI)* (Зорграф, 2004), 37.

¹⁹³ Matthew Bennett, Jim Bradbury, Kelly DeVries, Iain Dickie ve Phyllis Jestice, *Fighting Techniques of the Medieval World: Equipment, Combat Skills and Tactics* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2005), 3-21.

¹⁹⁴ Yotov, *Въоръжението и Снаряжението От Българското Средновековие (VII-XI)*, 39.

¹⁹⁵ Kolev Jr., “Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans,” 58.

¹⁹⁶ Kornelia Lasota, “The Holy Serpent: Snakes in the Old Norse Worldview,” *Zoophilologica*, no. 2 (8) (2021): 1–10.

specifically ravens, could have implied Odinic or warriors' cult connotations.¹⁹⁷ Their presence on the axe suggests a symbolic as well as martial function, possibly marking elite ownership or Varangian identity. The axe weighs approximately 300 grams and is about 25 cm in length,¹⁹⁸ placing it in the light axes category; it was probably one-handed axe due to its light weight according to Kolev, and the axe is estimated to be from the 10th - 11th century.¹⁹⁹

4.2.6.2 Barzina, Bulgaria – Barzina Axe

The Barzina axe is inlaid with silver and copper wire and decorated with various patterns. The artistic themes, resembling the Stana axe, are similar to the North Germanic animal style with its menacing animal stance, that is, "four-legged beast". The Barzina axe is adorned with images of two snakes. The axe weighs approximately 300 grams and is about 25 cm in length, like Stana axe,²⁰⁰ which places it in the light axes category; similar to Stana Axe, it was probably a one-handed axe due to its light weight according to Kolev, and the axe is estimated to be from the 10th - 11th century.²⁰¹

4.2.7 Tips for Sword Sheaths

Following the inlays associated with Scandinavian weapons like swords and axes, the sword sheath tip (chape) is amongst the most striking decorations of weapons. The ones that I am concentrating on, some possible Scandinavian origin chapes found in Bulgaria (fig. 29), have similarities with chapes from Birka (fig. 30).

¹⁹⁷ William Sayers, "The Mythological Norse Ravens Huginn and Muninn: Interrogators of the Newly Slain," *Studia Linguistica Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis* 139, no. 2 (2022): 143–55.

¹⁹⁸ Yotov, *Въоръжението и Снаряжението От Българското Средновековие (VII-XI)*, 40.

¹⁹⁹ Kolev Jr., "Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans," 58.

²⁰⁰ Yotov, *Въоръжението и Снаряжението От Българското Средновековие (VII-XI)*, 40.

²⁰¹ Kolev Jr., "Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans," 58.

4.2.7.1 Northern Bulgaria - Tips for Sword Sheaths

A chape excavated in Northern Bulgaria not only looks similar to those in Birka but is also similar in appearance to examples from Gnezdovo, Ladoga, Pskov, and Kiev. The chape is demonstrative of the Borre style, which is composed of interlaced curved and geometric lines typical of Scandinavian style.²⁰² One side of the chape depicts a bird with spreading wings, whereas the other side depicts interwoven serpents in preparation for battle. This theme is common in early Scandinavian art; impacted specifically by Danish motives, the chape is recognized as being of the Jellinge style, actively used in 9th-10th century.²⁰³ In the light of these, the chape is presumed to have had its origins in the 10th to 11th century.

4.2.7.2 Milodinovtsi, Bulgaria – Tips for Sword Sheaths

Another notable chape is the one in the vicinity of the village of Milodinovtsi. The interwoven serpentine-shaped geometry indicates the Germanic Four-Legged Animal Style, featuring interlaced animal motifs in combat or tension, reminiscent of the imagery found on the Barzina axe. It is believed to belong to the 10th century.²⁰⁴

4.2.7.3 Pavlikeni, Bulgaria - Tips for Sword Sheaths

A more individual chape found in the Pavlikeni region. This specimen, seemingly decorative in nature with multiple openings, is adorned with a fishbone-shaped motif made of small incised cuts on its body. With edges gilded in some regions, the item would have been a luxury, leading historians to believe that the owner of the item or its user must have been an individual of great wealth. According to Hedenstierna, sword chapes with gilded edges existed in Scandinavia (Norway, Denmark) and

²⁰² Kolev Jr., “Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans,” 60.

²⁰³ Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen, *Vikingetidens Kunst: En Udstilling Om Kunsten i Vikingernes Verden og Efterverden ca. 800–1250*, 1. oplag (Jelling: Kongernes Jelling, 2002), 4-6.; Kolev Jr., “Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans,” 60.

²⁰⁴ Kolev Jr., “Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans,” 60.

these sword chapes must have represented elite status and political power.²⁰⁵ Other sword chapes in the region take the form of examples ornamented with interwoven, circular, and parallel-structured four-legged beast motifs.²⁰⁶

4.2.7.3 Preslav, Bulgaria - Tips for Sword Sheaths

One unusual chape found in the Preslav region is also ornamented with rare elements like palmettes, heart-shaped leaves, clear-cut ribbons, and enormous buds.²⁰⁷ To comprehend the context of these chapes fully, the contexts of their discoveries, their associated artifacts, and the historical sources are of paramount importance. The uncertainty in their precise findspots makes them difficult to work with, though. Otherwise, based on their inlays and motifs, we can say with reasonable certainty that these chapes are of Scandinavian provenance—or at least markedly Scandinavian in inspiration.

4.3 Discussion

The material remains documented in this chapter emphasize the physical presence of Scandinavian warriors within Byzantine territory, especially Anatolia and the Balkans. The weapons and equipment analyzed here are not just detritus of military purpose but also have larger implications regarding cultural integration, mercenary presence, as well as trans-regional mobility between Eastern Europe and Northern Europe.

The diversity of the swords from Petersen's Type H, K, V through Z allows not just for the presence of individual incursions or short-term presence of disparate groupings, but for the presence of several generations of Scandinavian military actors

²⁰⁵ Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, "A Group of Viking Age Sword Chapes Reflecting the Political Geography of the Time," *Journal of Nordic Archaeological Science* 13 (2002): 103–12.

²⁰⁶ Kolev Jr., "Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans," 61.

²⁰⁷ Kolev Jr., "Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans," 61.

with multiple origins in the region. The presence of Type K swords, represented by the Opaka example, normally of Carolingian or Norwegian manufacture, is proof enough that Varangian presence extended beyond eastern routes, to an interface with larger European martial traditions. The local presence of such weapons within elite Byzantine settings, including Patara and Yumuktepe, adds additional reinforcement that Varangian warriors were not peripheral players, but embedded within Byzantine military as well as socio-political realities.

Moreover, the appearance of Scandinavian-style hilts and buckles in these sites highlights the preservation of northern markers of identity, albeit in service of Byzantine command. The deposition of these objects in elite or funerary contexts suggests that the Varangians preserved distinct martial identities, which were nonetheless shaped by their service within the Byzantine military framework. This crossbreeding of martial material culture is an reminiscent signal of cultural negotiation between the Byzantine empire and its northern auxiliaries. The technological and artistic characteristics of the arms—with particular emphasis on the inlays of silver and copper, inscriptions, and pommel work—are indicative of symbolic capital together with advanced craftsmanship. The swords were not just used as weapons but functioned as status markers, commonly being passed down or ritually buried. The presence of swords within Byzantine domains is not only an indicator of military purpose, therefore, but of the extensive exchange of Scandinavian prestige items. With that in mind, the use of the Varangian Guard by the Byzantine court can be seen not just as an efficient military solution, but also, as an intentional adoption of northern martial values as an image of imperial power and devotion.

4.4 Conclusion

To conclude, the Scandinavian warfare implements studied in this chapter demonstrate an intense and long-lasting Scandinavian presence in Byzantine warfare culture. The objects are proof of mutual exchange: whereas Scandinavians imposed their own warfare traditions on the empire, the Byzantine environment transformed and secured these traditions in novel manners. The Varangian material culture thus may reflect not only the mobility of Viking Age warriors, but also the complex dynamics at the margins of the Byzantine world, in military, cultural, and symbolic dimensions.



CHAPTER 5: KÜÇÜKÇEKMECE - BATHONEA FINDS

Bathonea archaeological site is located on the western shores of Küçükçekmece Lake in modern-day Istanbul. Excavations in the region began in 2007 with a surface survey and continued in 2009 with the re-identification of Bathonea as a Hellenistic-Roman city. The excavations are currently being conducted under the direction of Prof. Dr. Şengül Aydıngün. Material finds thought to be Scandinavian, including a pendant, an amber cross, a Hnefatafl game piece, an allegedly pendant Scandinavian cross, and possible earrings, along with the Hellenistic-Byzantine cultural layer found in the region, offer a fascinating glimpse into the cultural relations between the Byzantine world and the Scandinavian peoples between the 9th and 11th centuries. In contrast to the mentioned material finds in previous chapters, Küçükçekmece finds are close to the capital of the Empire – known as the natural residence of the Emperor, thus also of the Varangian guards. Corroborating this, Byzantine records mention a Rus' settlement near Constantinople established through an agreement; however, this settlement location is still unknown. Therefore, Küçükçekmece Lake Basin is an important location to focus. Thus, this chapter examines the Küçükçekmece finds possibly attributed to Scandinavians. Based on contextual analysis and comparison of selected items with specimens found in Rus' and the Baltics, this chapter aims to provide insight into the presence and integration of Scandinavian peoples in the Byzantine world.

5.1 Bathonea and Finds

5.1.1 Location

Bathonea is located in the northern part of Lake Küçükçekmece, 16 km west of İstanbul (fig. 31). The first research in the Bathonea area was conducted by Swiss archaeologist Ernest Mumbay, who named the ancient city as the town of Rhegion.

Two documents typed by Mumbray, "Les Fouilles de Rhegium, Octobre-Novembre 1938" and "Topographie Suburbaine Ancienne d'Istanbul. Rhegium," contain topographical drawings and original photographs of the region.²⁰⁸ Excavations that began in 2009 have yielded significant finds belonging to Hellenistic and Byzantine cultures in the region, and, of interest, two Hittite pottery artifacts have been unearthed.²⁰⁹ Excavations and geophysical analyses conducted in the first two years have revealed two ancient harbors and an ancient lighthouse in the lake; this marks the second ancient lighthouse discovered after Patara, highlighting the region's maritime importance.²¹⁰ The city generally expanded along the coast and became prominent as a coastal city (fig. 32). Although no definitive evidence exists for the city's name, it is believed to derive from the Bathynias, an ancient river in Thrace. In his *Geography*, the Greek geographer Strabo (1st century BC) describes Thrace by sequentially mentioning the region's cities and geographical features. Thus, the Bathynias River lies east of modern Silivri and west of *Byzantion*. This river is believed to be Sazlıdere, which flows into modern Küçükçekmece. The Roman author Pliny the Elder (1st century AD) provides a description of Thrace similar to Strabo's in his *Natural History*, mentioning this river. In addition, Bathonea is found in the part of the inscription of a sarcophagus excavated in the Golden Horn and currently exhibited in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum (IK Byzantion 315); Δαμᾶς Πούφου Βαθωνήας - Damas, son of Rufus Bathoneas/from Bathonea. It is considered that Damas is a name and Rufus is a Roman cognomen, but there is no clear

²⁰⁸ A. Ricci, "Ernest Mamboury ve Küçükçekmece'deki Rhegion Yerleşmesinde Bulunan Geç Antik Dönem Konut Kompleksi ile Mimarisi," paper presented at Roma, Geç Antik, Bizans ve Erken İslam Dönemi Yaşam Kalıplarını Yeniden Değerlendirmek, İstanbul, 2023, 244.

²⁰⁹ Węglarz, Olga, "Bathynias". *Uluslararası Avcılar sempozyumu: Bütün yollar Avcılar'dan geçer 15 - 16 Mart 2018 = International symposium on Avcılar: All roads pass through Avcılar, 15 - 16 March 2018*, Uluslararası Avcılar Sempozyumu, İstanbul (Alev Yayınları, 2018), 202.

²¹⁰ Węglarz, Olga, "Bathynias". *Uluslararası Avcılar sempozyumu*, 202.

information for *Bathenoas*. It most likely corresponds to either being from a region or a cognomen of an unknown-forgotten region.²¹¹ Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* also refers to this region as the Bathys Rhyax and mentions a church built in the region in honor of the martyr Theodora.²¹² Semavi Eyice, Turkish Byzantinologist and art historian, emphasizes that the genitive form of Bathys Rhyax is - Βαθέος ῥύακος- which is an incorrect usage, and the nominative form is Βαθύς ῥύαξ should be preferred.²¹³ With the start of excavations in 2009, Aydingün gave the name Bathonea to the area in the light of Eyice's work, and since that day the region has been known as Bathonea.

5.1.2 Overview of the Bathonea Finds

Recent excavations at Bathonea provide significant evidence for a Norse presence or Scandinavian material presence in the region. These objects—including a bronze pendant with an Ourobos motif, an amber cross, a Hnefatafl bone game piece, a stone cross pendant found in a burial setting, and several small metal objects interpreted as Russian-style boot ornaments—provide a valuable window into the Norse material culture of the region. These items were mostly discovered near the lake's former shoreline, associated with burial or domestic sites. While these objects will be examined in detail in future sections the presence of these objects, particularly so close to the city center, could indicate the presence of Varangian guards or, given the region's importance for maritime trade, that of Scandinavian traders. The previously mentioned Norse sword found at Patara, another important maritime city, and the Scandinavian material artifacts unearthed at Bathonea may indicate Scandinavian

²¹¹ Olga Węglarz, “Bathynias - About Identification and Localisation of the Ancient River,” paper presented at İstanbul Küçükçekmece Göl Havzası Kazıları / Excavations of Küçükçekmece Lake Basin (Bathonea), İstanbul, 2023, 447.

²¹² Anna Komnene, *The Alexiad*, rev. ed., ed. Peter Frankopan (London: Penguin, 2009), 204.

²¹³ Węglarz, Olga, “Bathynias”. *Uluslararası Avcılar sempozyumu*, 207.

maritime activity and trade in the region. This suggests a significant cultural layer in the region that can be associated with Scandinavian-Byzantine.

5.2 What is Bathonea

The path referred to as “The Way from the Varangians to the Greeks” provided a crucial link between Scandinavia and Constantinople and served as a profitable trade conduit for a considerable time. Apart from the exchange of commodities, the path further enabled the exchange of cultural concepts and religious beliefs between the North and Byzantium. The Rus’, who put military pressure on the Byzantine state and were successful in imposing their terms through raids, desired proximity to the imperial wealth of Constantinople and hoped to benefit from its prosperity.²¹⁴ A few of them succeeded, leaving material traces of their presence on leading monuments like the Hagia Sophia. Still, new excavations at the site of Bathonea might yield further traces of the northern presence. By the terms of a 908 AD agreement, according to *Russian Primary Chronicle*, Varangians coming from the North—called Rus’—were allowed to settle in a region referred to as St. Mamas.²¹⁵ RPC states these newcomers could approach the region by sea, though they were not allowed to venture into Constantinople proper until entrusted to an imperial supervisor located at the place.²¹⁶ The lack of references to “neighborhood” or “church” in designating St. Mamas has led to the current uncertainty regarding its exact location. However, several dedications to St. Mamas are testified to exist around Constantinople.²¹⁷ Scholars have made a series of attempts to establish the toponymic pinpoint of St.

²¹⁴ Jonathan Shepard, “The Viking Rus and Byzantium,” in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price, 496–516 (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 498–502.

²¹⁵ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 64–65.

²¹⁶ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 65.

²¹⁷ Église catholique, *Martyrologe universel, contenant le texte du martyrologe romain traduit en français; et deux additions à chaque jour des saints qui ne s’y trouvent point; l’une, des saints de France; L’autre, des Saints des Autres Nations; avec un Catalogue des Saints dont on ne Trouve point le jour* (chez Frederic Leonard, imprimeur ordinaire du Roy, 1709), 862.

Mamas, but a final conclusion has yet to be made. However, based on new archaeological results, Bathonea offers a likely contender for this obscure region. This theory rests on the linguistic and geographic congruence of St. Mamas and the contemporary Ayamama Stream, which is only 5 km away from Küçükçekmece — the Greek derivative of Ἅγιος Μάμας.²¹⁸ This site corresponds to a coastal port settlement outside the city walls and opening directly to the sea.²¹⁹ Küçükçekmece Lake served as a gulf of the Sea of Marmara during the period.²²⁰ Terrestrial as well as underwater remnants confirm that the port could have been larger and of greater strategic importance than others of the period in the region.²²¹ The existence of stone roads proves that the settlement was an integral part of wider terrestrial and maritime transport networks.²²² Plenty of Byzantine material culture and architectural ruins have been found at the site. The site of the port—far enough away from the city for defensive reasons, yet close enough to remain in communication with the imperial center²²³— suggests that it could have served as a logistical gateway to Constantinople as well as a staging point for arrivals from the north out of Scandinavia.

5.3 The Finds

The finds unearthed in the region appear to point to a Scandinavian presence, but it is difficult to be certain. This is because the information gathered during fieldwork and

²¹⁸ The name Ayamama Deresi is believed to originate from the geographical area associated with St. Mamas during the Byzantine era. The Greek phrase "Ἅγιος Μάμας" is thought to have transformed into the Turkish term *Ayamama* via phonetic alteration in time.

²¹⁹ Blazej Stanisławski, "Constantinople İstanbul Küçükçekmece: The Destination Port of the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks – A Centre of Byzantinization of the Rus Community: Aims, Sources and Objectives," paper presented at SOMA 2014, Wrocław, 2014, 487–88.

²²⁰ Şengül Aydingün, et al., eds., *Uluslararası Avcılar Sempozyumu: Bütün Yollar Avcılar'dan Geçer = International Symposium on Avcılar: All Roads Pass Through Avcılar, 15–16 March 2018* (İstanbul: Alev Yayınları, 2018), 180.

²²¹ Aydingün et al., *Uluslararası Avcılar sempozyumu*, 180–81; Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, *Bizans'tan Osmanlı'ya İstanbul Limanı*, trans. Erol Özbek (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998), 6–30.

²²² Andreas Kuelzer, "The Byzantine Road System in Eastern Thrace: Some Remarks," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 30 (2011): 193–94.

²²³ Aydingün et al., *Uluslararası Avcılar sempozyumu*, 181.

the precise location of the materials have proven difficult. Only information has been obtained that the *Hnefatafl* game piece and amber cross were recovered together from a single grave. Information regarding the Bathonea finds, which may be of Scandinavian origin, is very limited and uncertain in Aydingün's contribution to “Nordic Tales Byzantine Paths” project, a joint project of Koç University and the Swedish Research Institute. Knowing the exact locations and conditions of these materials would have provided much clearer results for correlation and provenance research. Prof. Dr. Aydingün was contacted via email for more information, but she stated that these materials had been published in various publications, and that she could not directly recall them. However, unfortunately these finds, namely a pendant, an amber cross, a Hnefatafl game piece, a pendant Scandinavian cross and possible earrings or boot ornaments, were not found in the publications with the exception of a few. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to draw direct conclusions; the possibility of a Scandinavian origin of these materials should be discussed.

5.3.1 Bathonea Finds - Ouroboros Pendant

A bronze pendant, dated by archaeologists to between the 9th and 11th centuries according to Blazej, found in Bathonea excavations is an important artifact since it could be evidence of a possible Norse presence (fig. 33).²²⁴ This cast object, produced from a single mold, measures 26 mm in diameter with a cross-sectional thickness of 3 mm and weighs 3.01 grams. According to Blazej, it features the *Ouroboros* motif²²⁵—an iconographic depiction of two serpents devouring one

²²⁴ Stanisławski, “Constantinople İstanbul Küçükçekmece: The Destination Port of the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks – A Centre of Byzantinization of the Rus Community: Aims, Sources and Objectives,” 488.

²²⁵ Stanisławski, “Constantinople İstanbul Küçükçekmece: The Destination Port of the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks – A Centre of Byzantinization of the Rus Community: Aims, Sources and Objectives,” 488.

another—symbolizing the concept of cyclicity and eternal return.²²⁶ The pendant closely matches the artistic style employed on the rune stone U 808 discovered in Sweden (fig. 34). Furthermore, the pendant discovered at the Karacahisar Castle excavations in Eskişehir (fig. 35), on plate dated to the 13th century AD, exhibits typological similarities with the example found at Bathonea.²²⁷ The only notable difference is that the specimen unearthed in Eskişehir was made of iron rather than bronze. The *Ouroboros* evokes the world serpent known as *Jörmungandr* in Norse mythology.²²⁸ This raises, according to Palalı and Blazej, the possibility that the pendant was produced by someone with northern pagan roots or thoughts.²²⁹

5.3.2 Bathonea Finds - Amber Cross

The amber cross discovered during the Bathonea excavations was unearthed on the western shore of Lake Küçükçekmece (fig. 36).²³⁰ The cross exhibits a form with short arms cut in two stages, bearing a resemblance to a patriarchal cross. Similar crosses found at fragmented around Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (fig. 37). Amber was widely processed in Scandinavia and along the Baltic coasts during the period known as the Viking Age and subsequently disseminated across Europe.²³¹ The Scandinavians crafted various types of jewelry and pendants out of this amber, which

²²⁶ Dana Michael Reemes, *The Egyptian Ouroboros: An Iconological and Theological Study* (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2015), 1.

²²⁷ Meydan Palalı, *Eskişehir Karacahisar Kalesi 2011-2014 Yılları Kazı Buluntuları*, (Master's thesis, Anadolu University, Institute of Social Sciences, 2015), 44.

²²⁸ Selahattin Özkan, "Viking Mitolojisinin Temelleri ve Tarihsel Kaynakları," *Ortaçağ Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2018): 67–84.

²²⁹ Although the find is called Norse in origin, it has been stated that similar rings were previously found on the banks of the Dnieper River and that these were Celtic money rings. In an auction held by Tauler & Fau Subastas in 2024, 3 rings almost identical to this ring were found, and the collection, which included a total of 16 rings, was classified as "Pre-coins from the Danube region and Gaul". However, there is no complete definitive information about the origin of the rings.

²³⁰ Stanisławski, "Constantinople İstanbul Küçükçekmece: The Destination Port of the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks – A Centre of Byzantinization of the Rus Community: Aims, Sources and Objectives," 488.

²³¹ C.S. Briggs et al., "A Neglected Viking Burial with Beads from Kilmainham, Dublin, Discovered in 1847," *Medieval Archaeology* 29, no. 1 (1985): 103.

is believed to have been worked by the Rus'.²³² Notably, Bathonea-located amber cross bears a close resemblance to Slavic-Scandinavian crosses already found at Nufăru, Volkovysk and Polock (fig. 38), and nearly same one at Chornivka (fig. 39).²³³ Herein it can be surmised that these types of crosses were utilized by the Scandinavians—especially the converted Scandinavians—on a personal devotional basis, carved out of traded amber coming from routes stretching from Scandinavia into the lands of the Rus' and further along the Dnieper River.²³⁴ In light of this evidence, the possibility that the amber cross found at Bathonea arrived via Rus' lands should not be overlooked. Amber was a product generally imported by the Byzantine Empire, sometimes raw and sometimes processed; FTIR analyses of amber samples discovered at Byzantine archaeological sites in Romania have shown that these ambers were of Baltic origin.²³⁵ In some samples, amber from both the local region and the Baltic region was used together. Tacitus's *Germania* states that the Aestii, a Baltic tribe, collected amber and used it in trade; thus, it is known that amber's presence in the Baltic region and its foreign trade have been active since the 1st century.²³⁶ Analyses and studies confirm the Baltic origin of amber objects found in the Artemision excavations at Ephesus and that these materials reached Byzantium from Southern Italy.²³⁷ In Eastern Europe, amber also was a status symbol and a gift

²³² Audronė Bliujienė, *Northern Gold: Amber in Lithuania, c. 100 to c. 1200* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 324.

²³³ Iuliia Mysko, "The Religious Beliefs of Slav Population in the Upper Prut and the Middle Dniester Region," in *Rome, Constantinople and Newly-Converted Europe: Archaeological and Historical Evidence*, ed. Maciej Salamon, Matthias Hardt, Mirosław Piotr Kruk, and Aleksandra Sulikowska-Gaska, 545–561 (Kraków-Leipzig-Rzeszów-Warszawa: Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2012), 552–556.

²³⁴ Bliujienė, "Chapter Four: Amber in Medieval Lithuania," 324–25.

²³⁵ G.I. Truică et al., "FTIR and Statistical Studies on Amber Artefacts from Three Romanian Archaeological Sites," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39, no. 12 (2012): 3533.

²³⁶ Audronė Bliujienė, "Lithuanian Amber Artifacts in the Middle of the First Millennium and Their Provenance within the Limits of Eastern Baltic Region," *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* 22 (2001): 171–86.

²³⁷ Alessandro Naso, ed., *Amber for Artemis* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2024), 82–83, <https://doi.org/10.1553/978OEAW92824>.

item among the elite.²³⁸ The possibility that it was used by the Byzantine nobility in Byzantium for the same purpose, or that it was used as a result of the Scandinavian-Slavic elites living in Byzantium continuing their traditions in this way in Byzantine lands, should not be ignored.

5.3.3 Bathonea Finds - Hnefatafl Game Piece

During the Bathonea excavations, especially an interesting piece was found, a piece of the Hnefatafl game piece carved from bone (fig. 40).²³⁹ Hnefatafl is a Scandinavian game similar to chess, dating back to the 4th century and played during and after the Iron Age.²⁴⁰ In the game, one side's task is to defend, while the other side's task is to attack and surround the opponent's *hnefi*.²⁴¹ The pieces in the game move vertically and horizontally, like the rook in chess; the defender's goal is to get *hnefi* to one of the corners, while the attacker's goal is to surround the *hnefi* from all sides.²⁴² The shape of the *hnefi* piece is more distinct in terms of color, size and shape than the other pieces. The rules of the game reflect a logic based on leadership and defense. The king (*hnefi*) needs the warriors (*hunn*) around him to survive, but he can also make strategic moves on his own.²⁴³ This situation is parallel to the belief in Scandinavian culture that the leader joins the war and shares the same fate as his people. This game has therefore become a part of Scandinavian culture and has

²³⁸ Florin Curta, "The Amber Trail in Early Medieval Eastern Europe," in *Paradigms and Methods in Early Medieval Studies*, ed. Celia Chazelle and Felice Lifshitz (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), 61–79, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-12305-3_4.

²³⁹ Koç University, "Game Pieces (ORB05)," Nordic Tales Byzantine Paths, Nordic Tales: Byzantine Paths, Koç University, 2025, <https://nordictalesbyzantinepaths.ku.edu.tr/en/object/game-pieces-orb05>.

²⁴⁰ Justin Kimball, "From Drottinn to King: The Role of Hnefatafl as a Descriptor of Late Iron Age Scandinavian Culture," *Lund Archaeological Review* 19 (2013): 61–62.

²⁴¹ Kimball, "From Drottinn to King: The Role of Hnefatafl as a Descriptor of Late Iron Age Scandinavian Culture," 61–62.

²⁴² Kimball, "From Drottinn to King: The Role of Hnefatafl as a Descriptor of Late Iron Age Scandinavian Culture," 64.

²⁴³ Kimball, "From Drottinn to King: The Role of Hnefatafl as a Descriptor of Late Iron Age Scandinavian Culture," 68–70.

become integrated into life.²⁴⁴ However, the end of life does not end this integration, on the contrary, it continues to be a part of the person and the game pieces are added to the grave of the deceased so that they accompany him even after death. It shows the status and identity of the person to whose grave it is added, and since the game requires strategy and combat skills, it accompanies a warrior, leader or elite even after death. Therefore, it demonstrates the military aspect of the deceased. Therefore, next to weapons and valuables, Hnefatafl game pieces have been found in graves – such as Timerevo burials- and in ship graves (fig. 41).²⁴⁵ Another symbolic interpretation of placing the game piece within the grave is that it served to preserve the individual's social status in the afterlife. In certain burials, the game board is discovered arranged for play, suggesting that the game was intended to appear as ongoing—such as in the case of *Valsgårde 8 ship burial*.²⁴⁶ This possible implies that death itself was ritualistically performed or staged. In some instances, *Hnefatafl* game pieces were positioned in direct interaction with the deceased; for example, a *hnefi* piece was found placed in the mouth of the dead in the *Saalme* grave in Estonia.²⁴⁷ This may signify that the individual was either a member of the king's retinue or a captured leader.

5.3.4 Bathonea Finds - Stone Cross

A stone cross pendant, understood to represent a characteristically Scandinavian-type object, was found around the neck of a buried person within Bathonea excavations, (fig. 42) near Küçükçekmece Lake, Istanbul.²⁴⁸ Morphologically, the object has a

²⁴⁴ Kimball, "From Drottinn to King: The Role of Hnefatafl as a Descriptor of Late Iron Age Scandinavian Culture," 65–69.

²⁴⁵ Mark A Hall, "Board Games in Boat Burials: Play in the Performance of Migration and Viking Age Mortuary Practice," *European Journal of Archaeology* 19, no. 3 (2016): 441–45.

²⁴⁶ Hall, "Board Games in Boat Burials," 445–46.

²⁴⁷ Hall, "Board Games in Boat Burials," 446.

²⁴⁸ Koç University, "Pendant (ORB03)," Nordic Tales Byzantine Paths, Nordic Tales: Byzantine Paths, Koç University, 2025, <https://nordictalesbyzantinepaths.ku.edu.tr/en/object/pendant-orb03>.

symmetrical cruciform shape with rounded terminations and a central roundel motif, stylistically in keeping with 9th to 11th-century Varangian or Kievan Rus' cross pendants.²⁴⁹ Its finding in a burial context, specifically around the neck, implies a dual nature of function as a symbol of religiosity—potentially indicative of early Christian influence—and a personal apotropaic charm. The object remains formally unpublished.

5.3.5 Bathonea Finds - Boot Ornaments

Small metal objects unearthed during the Bathonea excavations conducted in the Küçükçekmece Lake Basin, which may initially be perceived as earrings or pendants, have been identified through detailed analyses as – allegedly – boot ornaments belonging to the Rus' people (fig. 43).²⁵⁰ Comparable examples of such decorations have been found in Varangian settlements dating from the 9th to 11th centuries (fig. 44), particularly in Eastern European centers such as Kiev and Novgorod.²⁵¹

5.4 Discussion

Bathonea brings a more robust, diverse and local dimension to this story, while previous studies have largely confined the narrative of Scandinavian-Byzantine interaction to select contexts – such as the Varangian Guard in Constantinople or the runic graffiti in Hagia Sophia. The necklace bearing the Ouroboros motif is particularly telling. It suggests that the northerners, even when they left Scandinavia, were not completely cut off from their faith or culture, and that they carried it as part of their identity –if the wearer was a Scandinavian– while remaining integrated into

²⁴⁹ Błażej M. Stanisławski, Şengül Aydıngün, and Hakan Öviz, *Stambul/Konstantinopol–Küçükçekmece – The Destination Port of the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks, a Centre of 'Byzantinization' of the Rus' Community* (Wrocław: Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2015), 35.

²⁵⁰ Koç University, "Pendant (ORB04)," Nordic Tales Byzantine Paths, Nordic Tales: Byzantine Paths, Koç University, 2025, <https://nordictalesbyzantinepaths.ku.edu.tr/en/object/pendant-orb04>.

²⁵¹ Koç University, "Pendant (ORB04)."

the empire. The parallels with the similar find in Eskişehir may suggest that Scandinavian influence probably spread to other parts of the Empire, along with merchants or mobile military units carrying Scandinavian symbols to the south. The fact that the amber cross and the *Hnefatafl* game piece were found in the same grave strengthens the possibility that this grave belonged to someone of Scandinavian origin,²⁵² thus indicating that not only Scandinavian materials were present in the region, but also Scandinavians. The discovery of Baltic amber in archaeological excavations in the vicinity of Constantinople highlights the connection of the north and south, while the carving of amber into a cross by Slavic-Scandinavians also highlights cultural interaction and the influence of Byzantium on the Scandinavians. On the other hand, the *Hnefatafl* game piece may suggest that the Scandinavian individual, belonging to the previously mentioned grave, remained culturally connected to his Scandinavian roots despite the Byzantine influence on him. Collectively, these objects point to an identity complex in which pagan culture and iconography and Christian symbols coexisted. The burial context of the stone cross necklace supports this interpretation. Its positioning around the neck may have contributed to both religious affiliation and social appearance, as did the boot ornaments, where Eastern European parallels confirm a shared aesthetic or status expression between the Rus' and Varangian elites. Indeed, this Russian colony, located next to the Byzantine capital, may even emerge in this context as a place where Russians attempting to trade in the Byzantine Empire were ghettoized by the Emperor. Moreover, the potential identification of Bathonea with the undiscovered settlement of St. Mamas deepens the historical resonance. Should the site indeed correspond to the Rus' settlement mentioned in the tenth-century treaties, the finds

²⁵² Stanisławski et al., *Koncepcja Projektu Badawczego*, 35.

at Bathonea are not simply trade goods or lost property, but traces of a semi-permanent settlement, community, and integration. The combination of the vernacular – *Ayamama*, as St. Mamas –, the historical record –*De Ceremoniis* by Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos and *De Administrando Imperio* – and archaeology strongly positions Küçükçekmece as a gateway through which northern migrants interacted with the Byzantine state, whether as mercenaries, merchants, or settlers.

5.5 Conclusion

To conclude, Bathonea not only contributes to the idea of Scandinavian presence in Byzantium, but also challenges us to reframe it. Instead of isolated instances such as the transformation of Scandinavian warriors into imperial bodyguards, it helps to reveal a layered story of intercultural life on the borders of Constantinople.

Strategically positioned along the maritime corridor that connected the Baltic Sea to Constantinople—popularly known as the "Way from the Varangians to the Greeks"—Bathonea likely served as a transient hub for merchants, mercenaries, and possibly settlers of Scandinavian origin. Scandinavian materials mentioned in the previous chapter, such as; swords, axes, graffiti etc., were a possible indicator of Scandinavian presence in their areas. In addition to these material finds, Küçükçekmece excavation unearthed new possible Byzantine-Scandinavian items. These items opened a new perspective for academics to explore Scandinavian-Byzantine cultural presence and influence in the area in the future.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the material, cultural, and symbolic traces left on Byzantine soil by Scandinavian (especially Varangian) communities, long viewed as a solely military entity in Byzantine historiography. Methodologically, it attempts to research each object per se, considering its individual context, production, epigraphy, iconography, typology, and cultural implications, rather than researching it just in the tradition of textual culture of Byzantium. In this manner, the study attempts to examine the Scandinavian presence in Byzantium through the narrative of the materials rather than through the narrative of the written sources. While some objects and inscriptions can be identified as Norse in origin, it is not always possible to determine whether they belonged to a visiting Scandinavian, a member of the Varangian Guard, an individual from the Rus', or someone who traded with Scandinavians. To remedy this, the finds were put on equal footing through comparison through a variety of comparative methodological approaches. While absolute certainty is out of reach, this process opens up a richer and more dynamic panorama of the Scandinavian footprint within the Byzantine world.

It is also considered the nature of the source material through the thesis. Like written documents, mosaics and frescoes are products of Byzantine thought and ideology, and so they framed the Norse through their military function in the political and religious narratives of the Empire. In contrast, the finds -swords, axes, runic inscriptions, military equipment decorations, graffiti, artifacts- were all materials produced under the Scandinavian ideology. These materials, by their origin, were free from Byzantine ideological influence and therefore have the potential to reveal

Scandinavian identity, craftsmanship, and cultural presence without being focused solely on military service.

In light of all these findings, graffiti, runic inscriptions, iconographic representations, and archaeological weapon finds are examined in detail, demonstrating the significance of these elements as indicators for understanding the Scandinavian position in the Byzantine world. One of the main focuses of this study is to demonstrate, through iconographic and material evidence, that the Scandinavians, generally associated with a military elite in the Byzantine Empire, exhibited their own identity and Scandinavian traditions and thought rather than merely exhibiting a military presence. Creating inscriptions with their own runic letters inside one of the most religiously and politically significant structures of the period, such as Hagia Sophia, and drawing various ship graffiti in various areas—the exact creators of the ship graffiti are unknown, but even in this case, it is clear that they were inspired by a Scandinavian ship—are Scandinavian attempts to remind their own society and future generations of their existence, or at least to perpetuate their individual existence at key points. A statement such as "I carved these runes" is not only a physical manifestation of presence but also a spatial inscription of self and memory. Similarly, the analysis of Scandinavian-origin weapons and equipment—such as those recovered from Sliven, Patara, and Yumuktepe—provides important testimony of their activity within the Byzantine sphere. Since these weapons and equipment were not utilized simply for warfare activity, but were indicators for social position and identity as well, these must be valued within this context. The various decorations, ornaments, and runic inscriptions within the weapons signify the prevalence of Scandinavian customs within the region, at other points intermingled with the Byzantine border. This could mean that Byzantium did not view the

Scandinavians simply as military auxiliaries, but included them as an esteemed constituent within the region, particularly the Balkans.

The analysis resulting from combining all this data reveals that Byzantine-Scandinavian relations were much more intense, layered, and reciprocal than previously considered. The Scandinavians were not merely a society that performed mercenary duties on Byzantine lands when needed; they were actors who transferred their identity, beliefs, and cultural values to this geography through various means. These transfers were not limited to material traces but extended to Byzantine art, religion, and collective memory.

Larger, more accurate studies could potentially allow us in the future to comprehend more about these footprints. I believe that significant contributions to this field could be made through the numerous graffiti still undiscovered in Hagia Sophia, or through the study of less thoroughly studied sites like Bathonea. In my doctoral dissertation, I aim to continue exploring possible Norse traces in Türkiye, exploring runic inscriptions and graffiti in areas like Hagia Sophia to uncover previously undiscovered Norse traces, thus shedding light on the Norse presence in Türkiye. As Melnikova notes in her article, there are thirty four recognized inscriptions and graffiti in Hagia Sophia.²⁵³ I plan to contribute to academia with new research on this topic and uncover possible Norse traces within the borders of modern-day Türkiye. More such studies could help overcome the perception of Scandinavians as mere mercenaries in Byzantine lands and contribute to the Scandinavian cultural and cognitive presence within the borders of modern-day Türkiye. But even with our available sources, we comprehend sufficiently well that

²⁵³ Mel'nikova, "A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul," 101–2.

the Scandinavians who reached Byzantium were not merely soldiers who were incidentally serving under Byzantine territories; they were a significant community for the Byzantine Empire, integrating their earlier identity and existence into the region, and whose footprints shall remain enduring in their inscriptions and history.



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APPENDIX



Figure 1: Halfdan inscription in Hagia Sophia, South Gallery (Photograph by Hermann Junghans, 2014)



Figure 2: ARI:K or ARNI Inscription. (Photograph and its drawing by Mats G. Larrson, “Nyfunna runor i Hagia Sofia”, 1989, 13.)

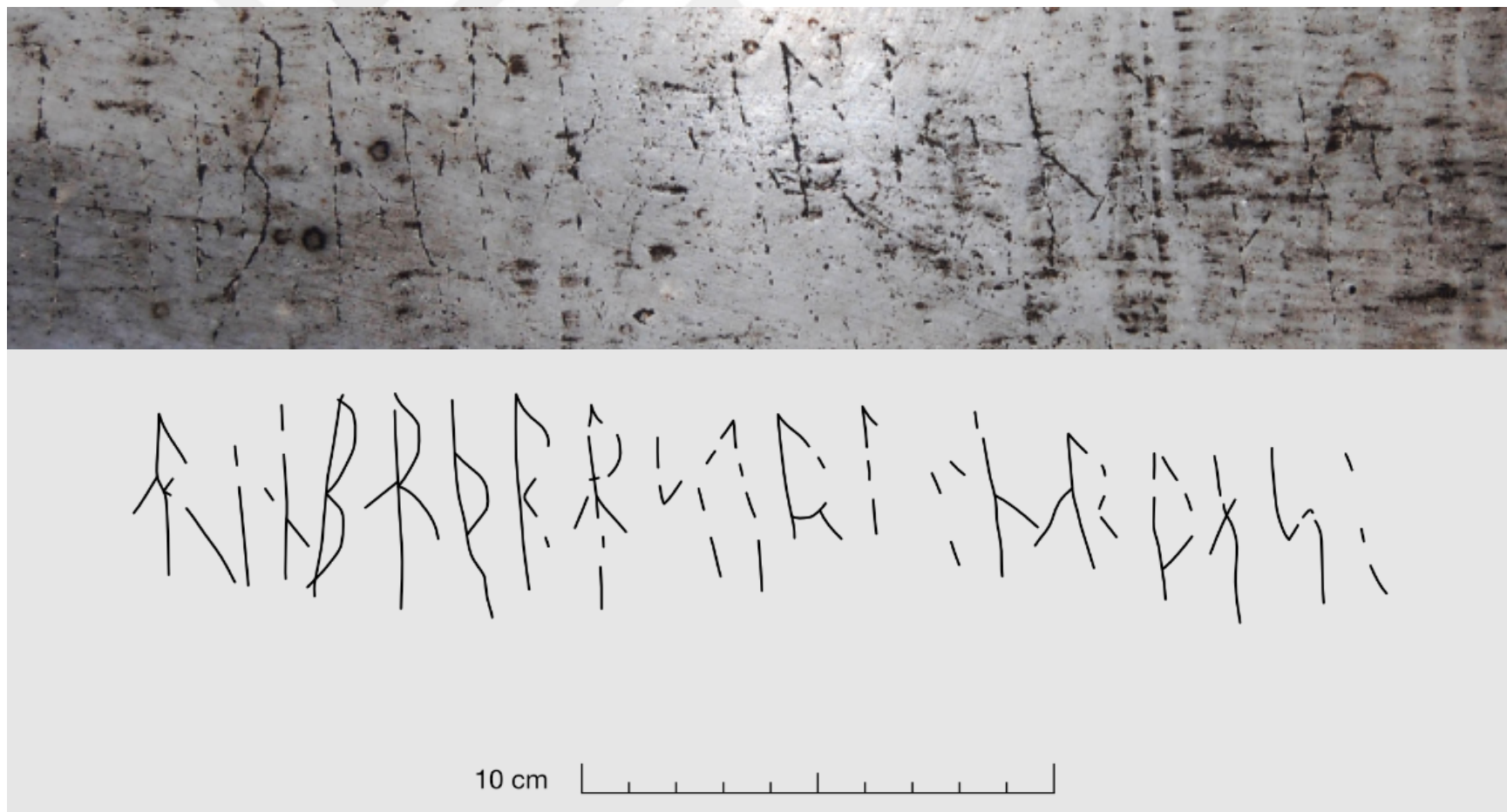


Figure 3: The Arinbárðr Inscription (Photograph and its drawing by Alexej Gippius and Ju. Artamonov, in Elena A Mel'nikova, “A New Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul”, *Futhark: international Journal of Runic Studies*, 2016, 104.)

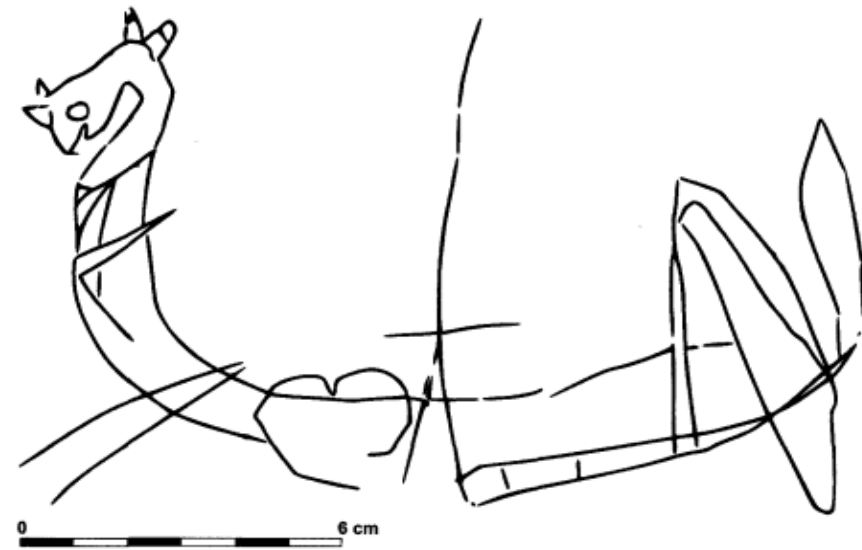


Figure 4: The First Ship Graffiti of Four. (Photograph and its drawing by Thomas Tomov, “Four Scandinavian ship graffiti from Hagia Sophia”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 2 [2014], 173-175.)

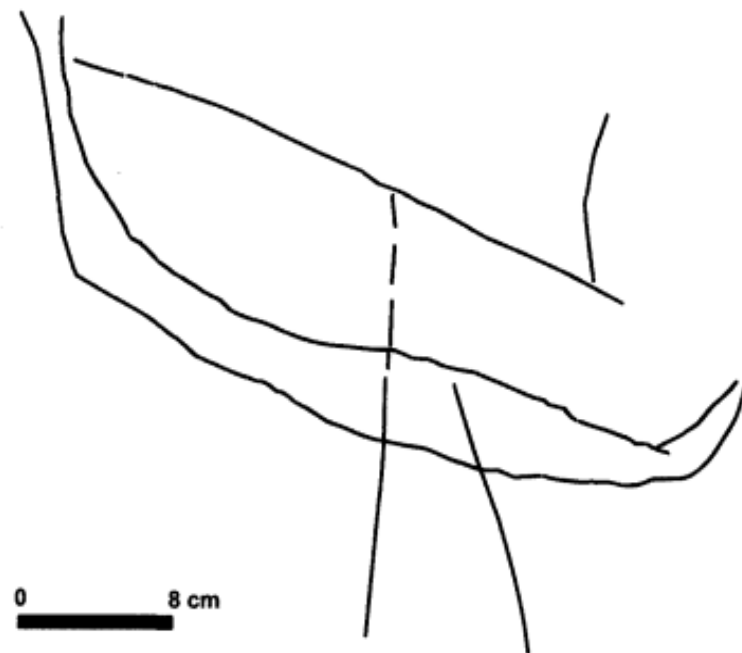


Figure 5: Second Graffiti of Four. (Photograph and its drawing by Thomas Tomov, “Four Scandinavian ship graffiti from Hagia Sophia”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 2 [2014], 179.)



Figure 6: Third Graffiti of Four. (Photograph and its drawing by Thomas Tomov, “Four Scandinavian ship graffiti from Hagia Sophia”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 2 [2014], 180-181.)



Figure 7: Fourth Graffito of Four (Photograph and its drawing by Thomas Tomov, “Four Scandinavian ship graffiti from Hagia Sophia”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 2 [2014], 181-182.)

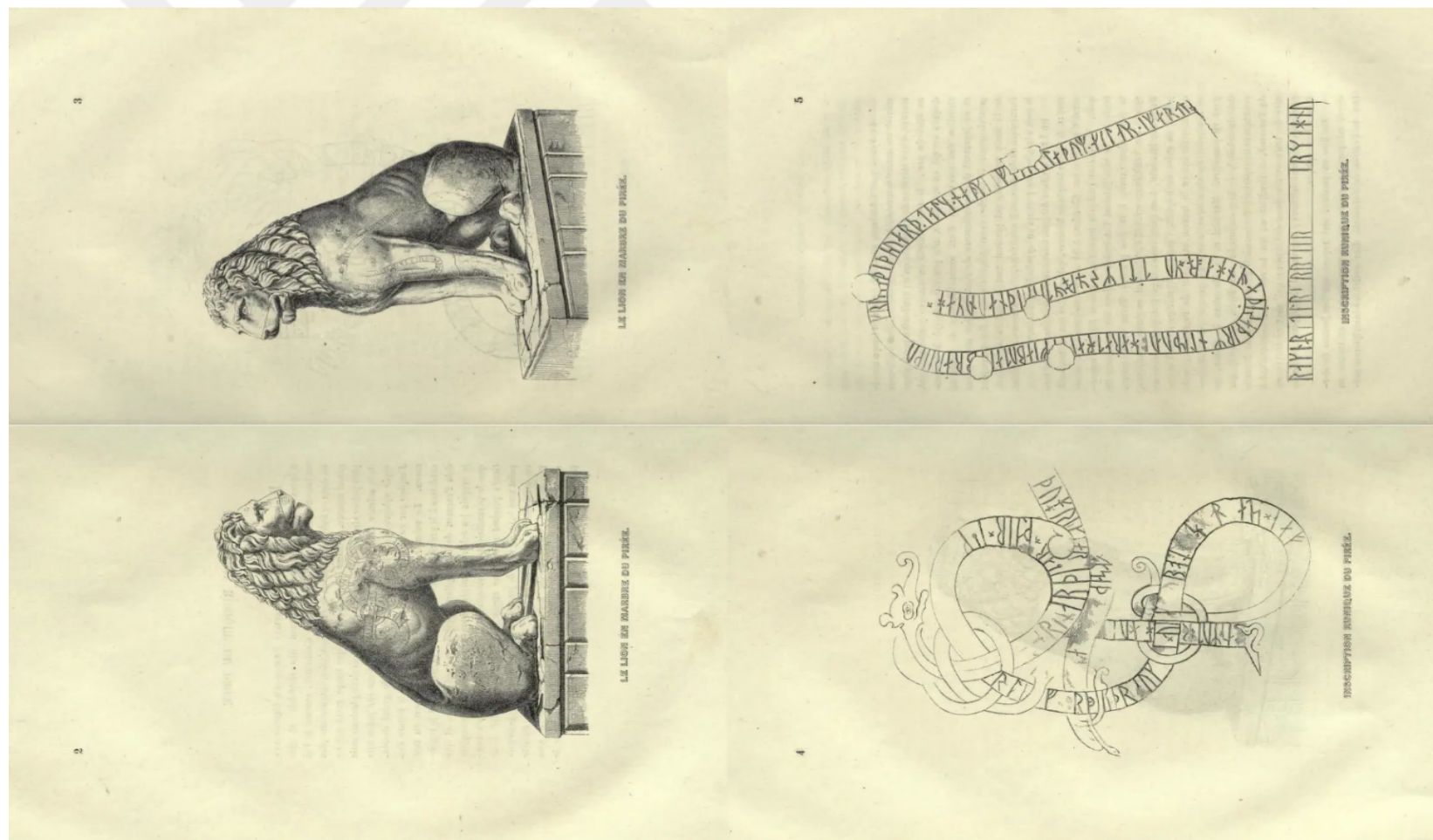


Figure 8: The Pireaus Lion and Runic Inscriptions (Photograph and its drawing by Carl Christian Rafn, *Inscription runique du Pirée*. Copenhagen: Thiele, 1856, 181-182.)



Figure 9: The Betrayal, Church of Saint John Chrysostomos in Arabissos (Karsi Kilise). (Photograph by Raffaele D'amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord." *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by Marek Lech, 2013, 84, fig. 28."



Figure 10: The Betrayal, Elmalı Church, Cappadocia. (Photograph by Dick Osseman, accessed February 19, 2025, <https://pbase.com/dosseman/image/41536872>).



Figure 11: Spearheads from the Dristra battlefield, 1087 AD, Bulgaria. (Photograph by Raffaele D'amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord." *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 2013, 78, fig. 18.



Figure 12: The *Betrayal*, Çarıklı Church, Cappadocia. (Photograph by Raffaele D'amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord." *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 2013, 77, fig. 15.



Figure 13: The Betrayal, Panaghia Myriokephala, Crete, detail, late 11th c. (Photograph by Raffaele D'amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord." *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 2013, 73, fig. 7.)

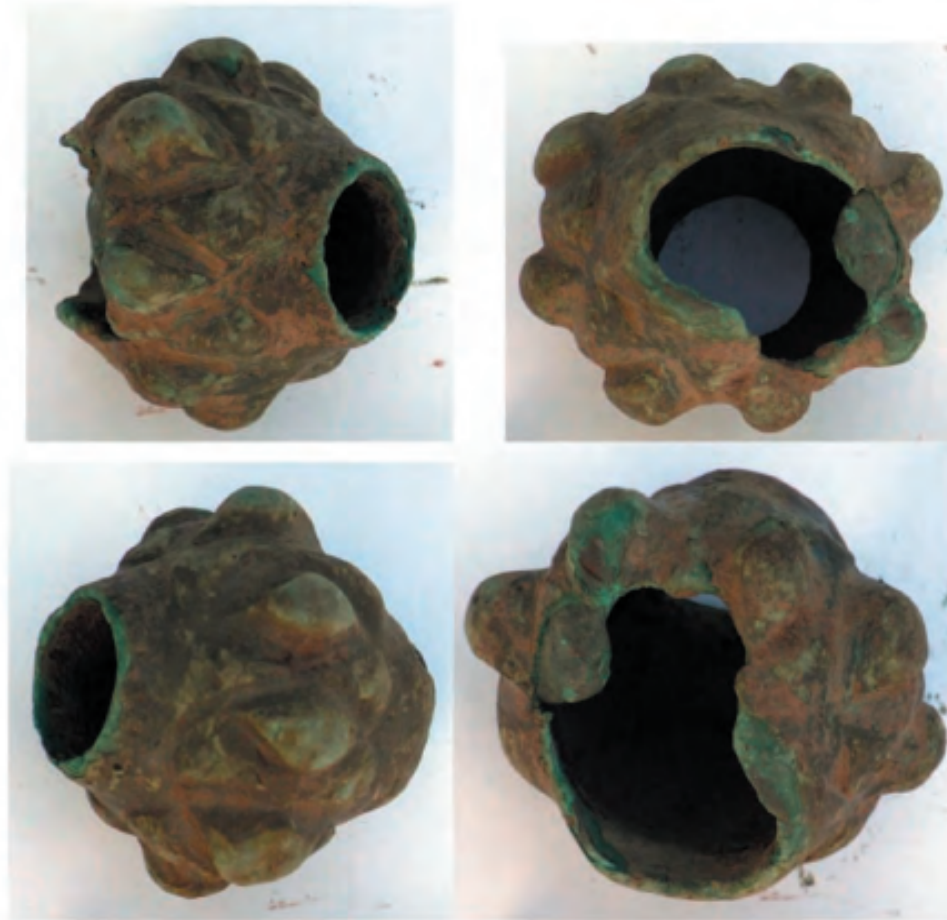


Figure 14: War-mace, late 11th c., from the Dristra battlefield. (Photograph by Raffaele D'amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord." *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 2013, 73, fig. 8.)



Figure 15: Axe-head from the Dristra battlefield, 1087 AD, Bulgaria. (Photograph by Raffaele D'amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord." *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 2013, 75, fig. 11.)



Figure 16: The *Betrayal*, Nea Moni, Chios, mosaic of the inner Narthex. (Photograph by Raffaele D'amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord." *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 2013, 70, fig. 1.)



Figure 17: The *Betrayal*, Nea Moni, Chios, Malchus. The *Betrayal*, Nea Moni, Chios, mosaic of the inner Narthex. (Photograph by Raffaele D'amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord." *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 2013, 70, fig. 2.)



Figure 18: Imperial Guardsman, detail from the frescoes of the tower of Saint Sofia, Kiev, first half of the 11th c. The *Betrayal*, Nea Moni, Chios, mosaic of the inner Narthex. (Photograph by Raffaele D'amato, "The Betrayal: Military Iconography and Archaeology in the Byzantine Paintings of XI–XV Centuries AD Representing the Arrest of Our Lord." *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 2013, 70, fig. 3.)



Figure 19: Mersin – Yumuktepe Sword is unearthed. (Photograph by Fedir Androshchuk and Gülgün Köroğlu, “A Viking Sword-Bearing Resident of Southern-Asia Minor?” in *Byzantium and the Viking World*, 2016, 226, fig. 9.10)

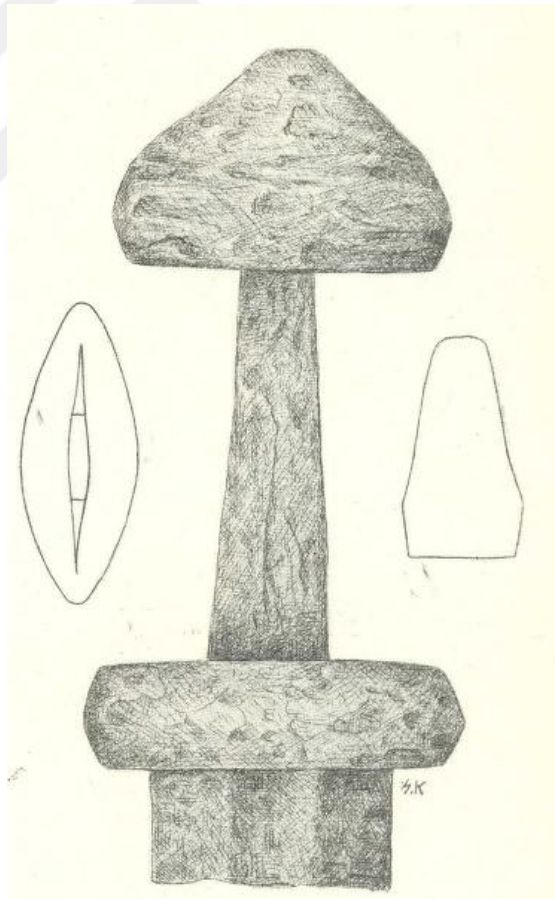


Figure 20: Petersen Type H Sword, (Drawing by Jan Petersen, *De Norske Vikingsverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*. Oslo: Dybwad, 1919, fig. 83.)



Figure 21: Patara Sword. Photograph by Daily Sabah, “**Viking sword found in Türkiye’s ancient Mediterranean city of Patara**”, *Daily Sabah*, 2025, <https://www.dailysabah.com/history/2018/11/19/viking-sword-found-in-Türkiyes-ancient-mediterranean-city-of-patara>

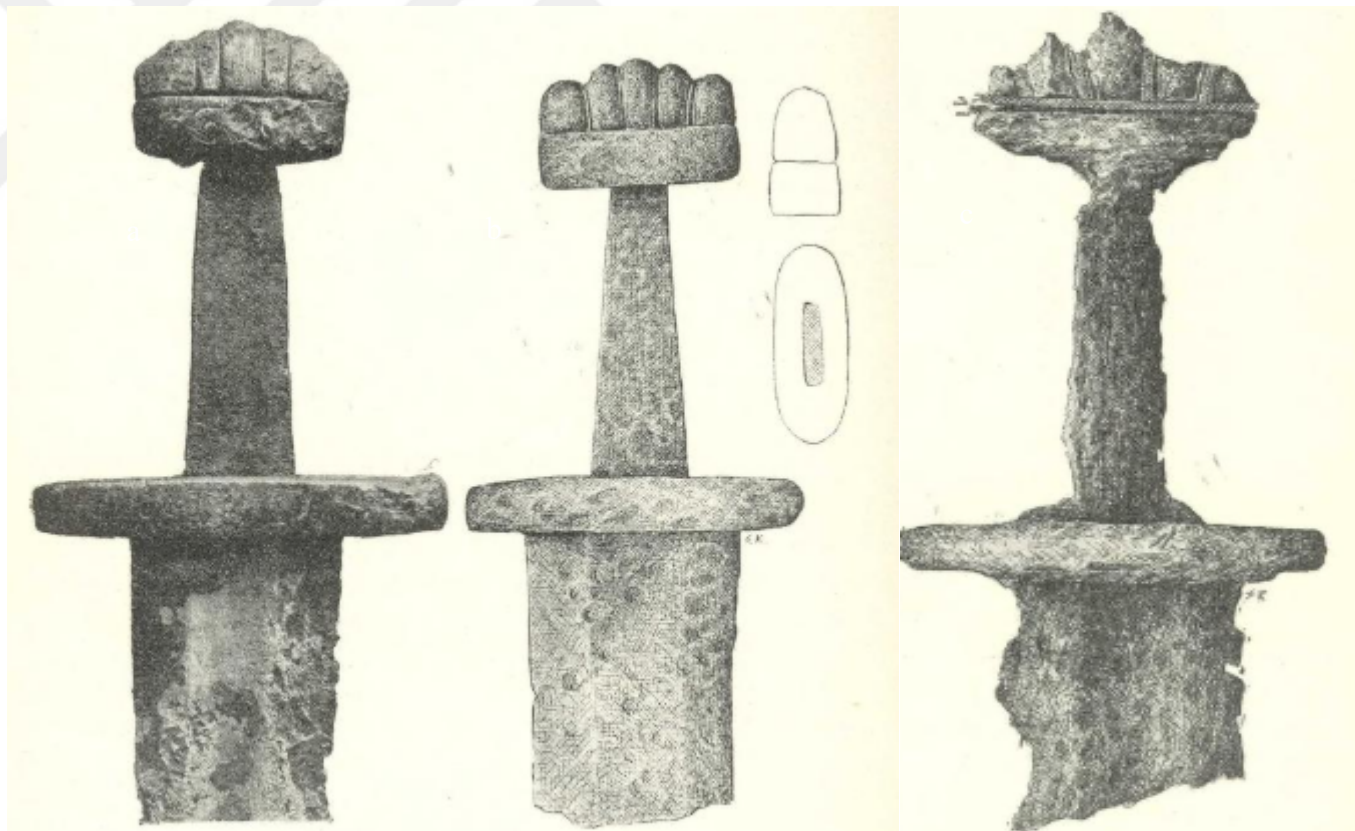


Figure 22: Type K and Type O Swords, (Drawings by Jan Petersen. *De Norske Vikingsverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*. Oslo: Dybwad, 1919, fig. 89 - fig. 90. – fig. 106.)

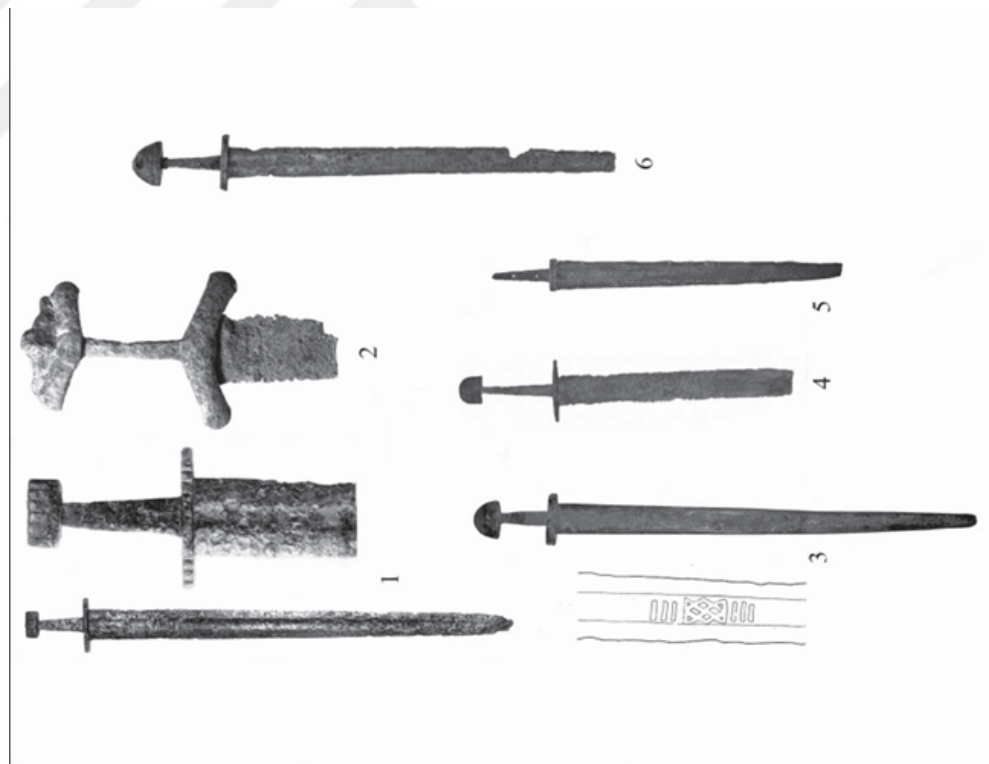


Figure 23: Swords found near the village of Opaka, Popovo region (1); from Gradeshnitsa, Vratsa region (2); from Albești, west of Mangalia (3); found in North Dobrudja (4–5); and in the province of Sliven (6). (Photograph by Valeri Yotov, “Traces of the presence of Scandinavian warriors in the Balkans” in *Byzantium and the Viking World*, 2016, 241, fig. 10.1)



Figure 24: Sword of Sliven, Photograph by Metodi Zlatkov, in Viskupič, Michal. “Early Medieval Double-Edged Swords from the Territory of Bulgaria (800 – 1100).” *Project Forløg - Reenactment and Science*, 2023, 21.

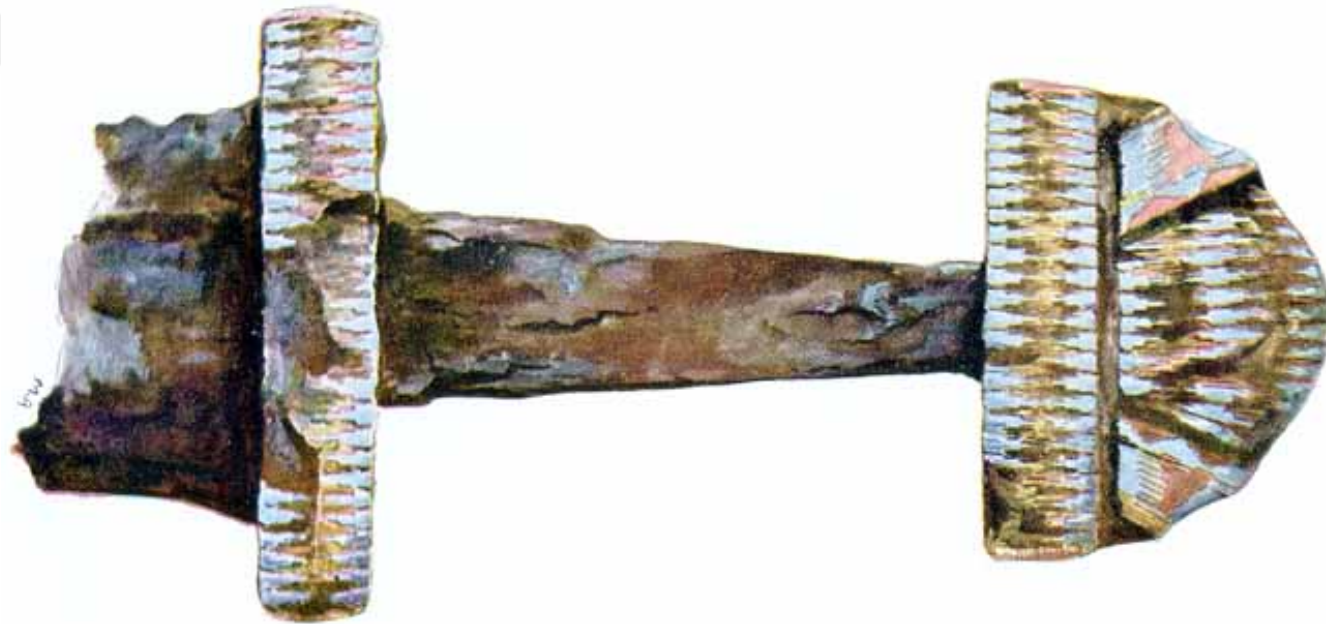


Figure 25: Petersen Type V Sword, (Photograph by Ian G Peirce, *Swords of the Viking Age*. Repr. in paperback. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007, 114.)

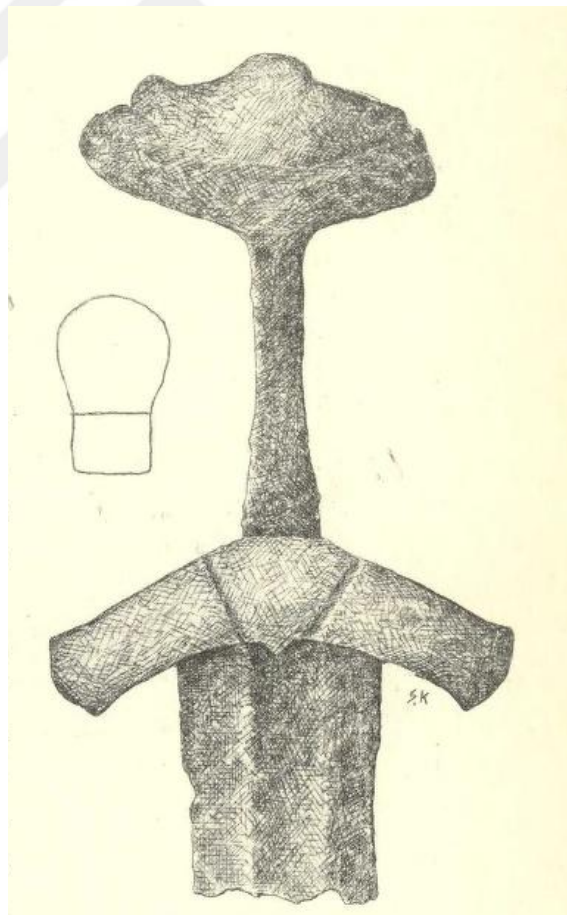


Figure 26: Petersen Type Z Sword. (Drawings by Jan Petersen, *De Norske Vikingesverd: En Typologisk-Kronologisk Studie over Vikingetidens Vaaben*. Dybwad, 1919, 177, fig. 137.)



Figure 27: Dalarna Sword with rich silver-plated upper and lower hilt and sword pommel, from “**Sword Petersen Z**”, *Statens Historiska Museer*, 2025, <https://samlingar.shm.se/object/EAF5EAC7-31A1-42F8-BB50-C885BC2442E2>

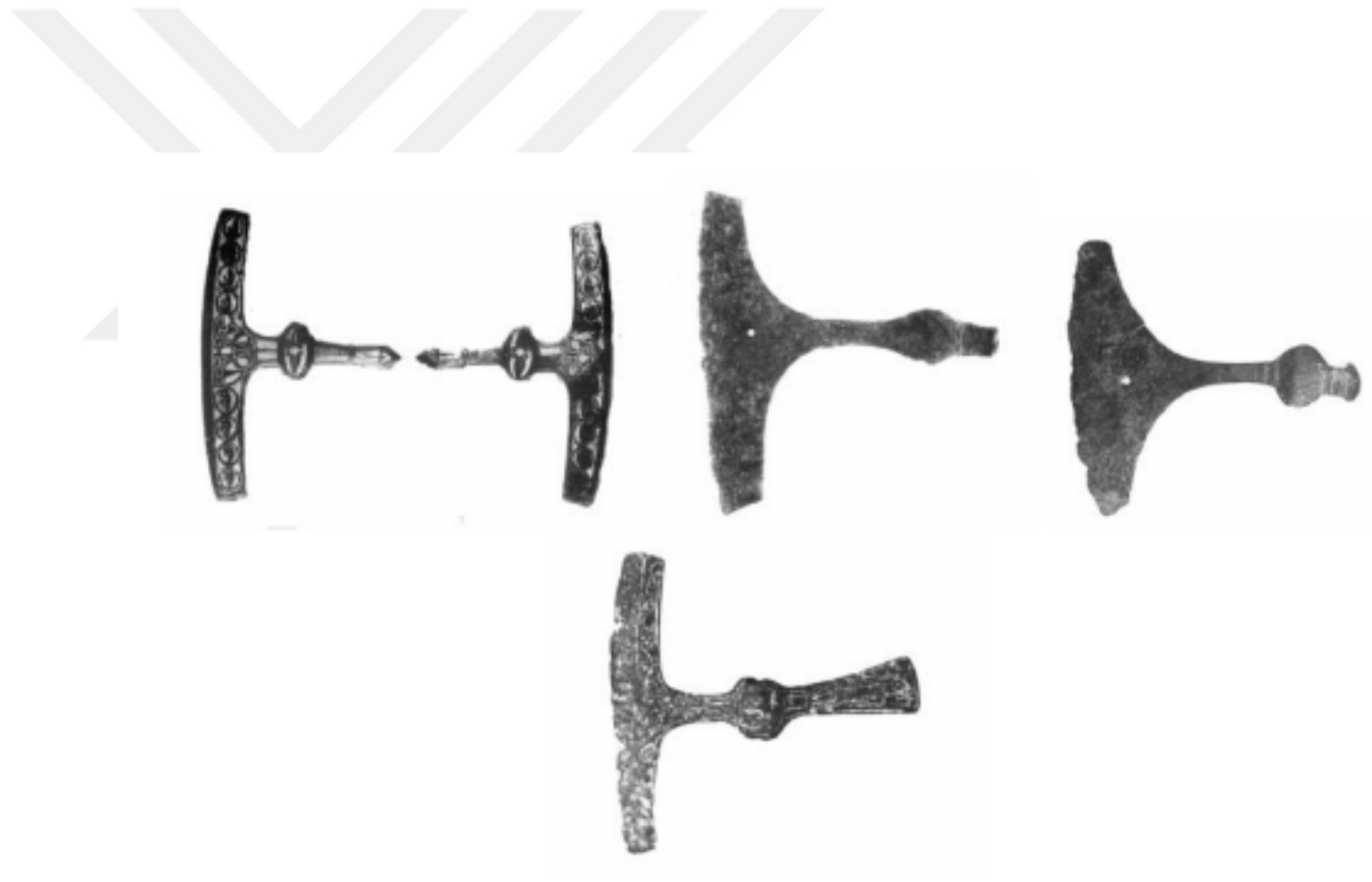


Figure 28: Battle axes from northwestern Bulgaria (Vrachansko region, Barzina village, Liutibrod village) and northeastern Bulgaria (Razgradsko region, Stana village, Provadia city). (Photographs by Konstantin Kolev Jr, “Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans.” *Hiperboreea. Journal of History* 2, no. 1 [2015]: 68, fig. 2.)



Figure 29: Sword sheaths tips from northeastern Bulgaria (Razgradsko region, the villages Stana, Zavet, Miladinovtsi, Madara city), Northern Bulgaria (Pavlikeni city, Gigen village). (Photographs by Konstantin Kolev Jr. “Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans.” *Hiperboreea. Journal of History* 2, no. 1 [2015]: 70, fig. 4)



Figure 30: Sword Sheaths tips from Birka, Sweden, (Photographs by Konstantin Kolev Jr. “Visual material evidence of viking presence in the Balkans.” *Hiperboreea. Journal of History* 2, no. 1 [2015]: 70.)

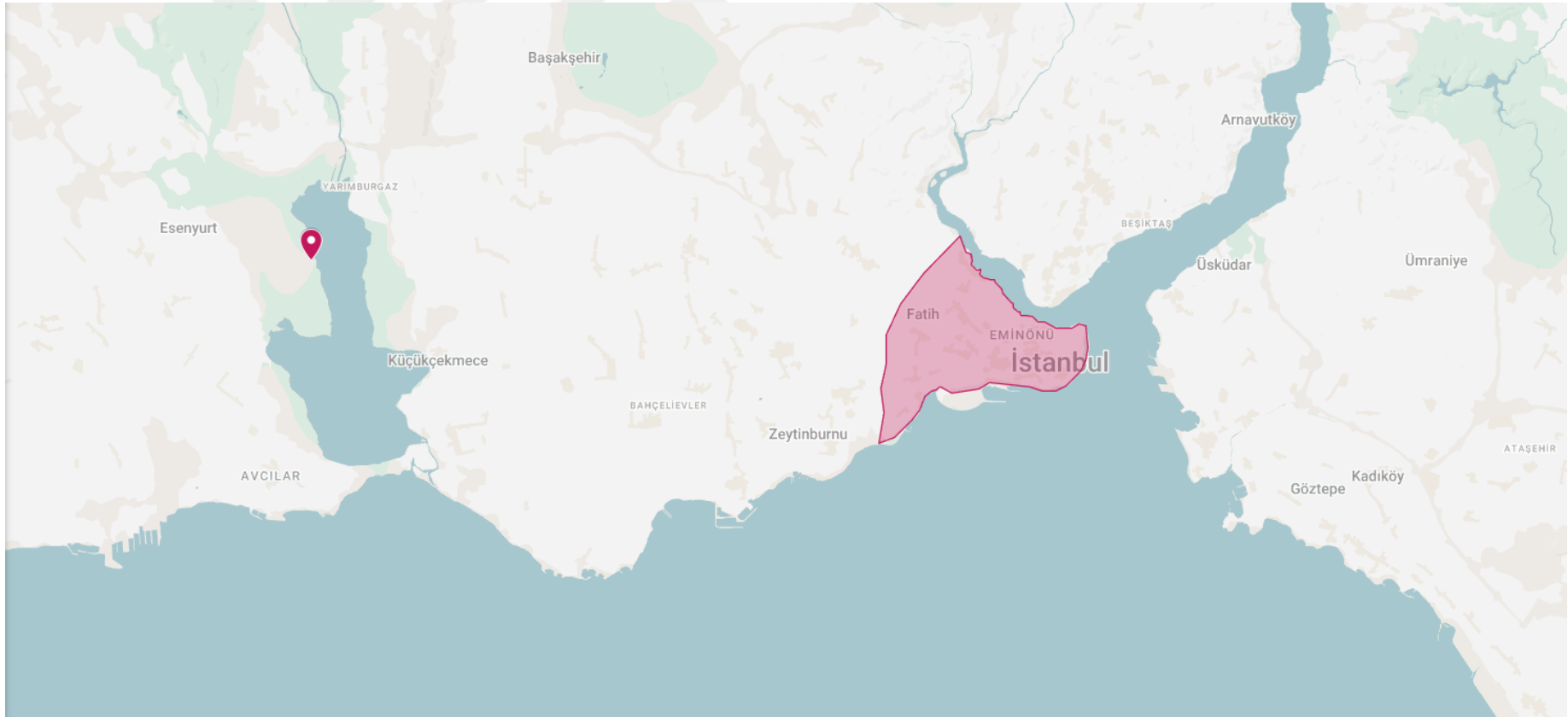


Figure 31: Red dotted zone is Bathonea, Red area is Constantinople. (Map created by the author)

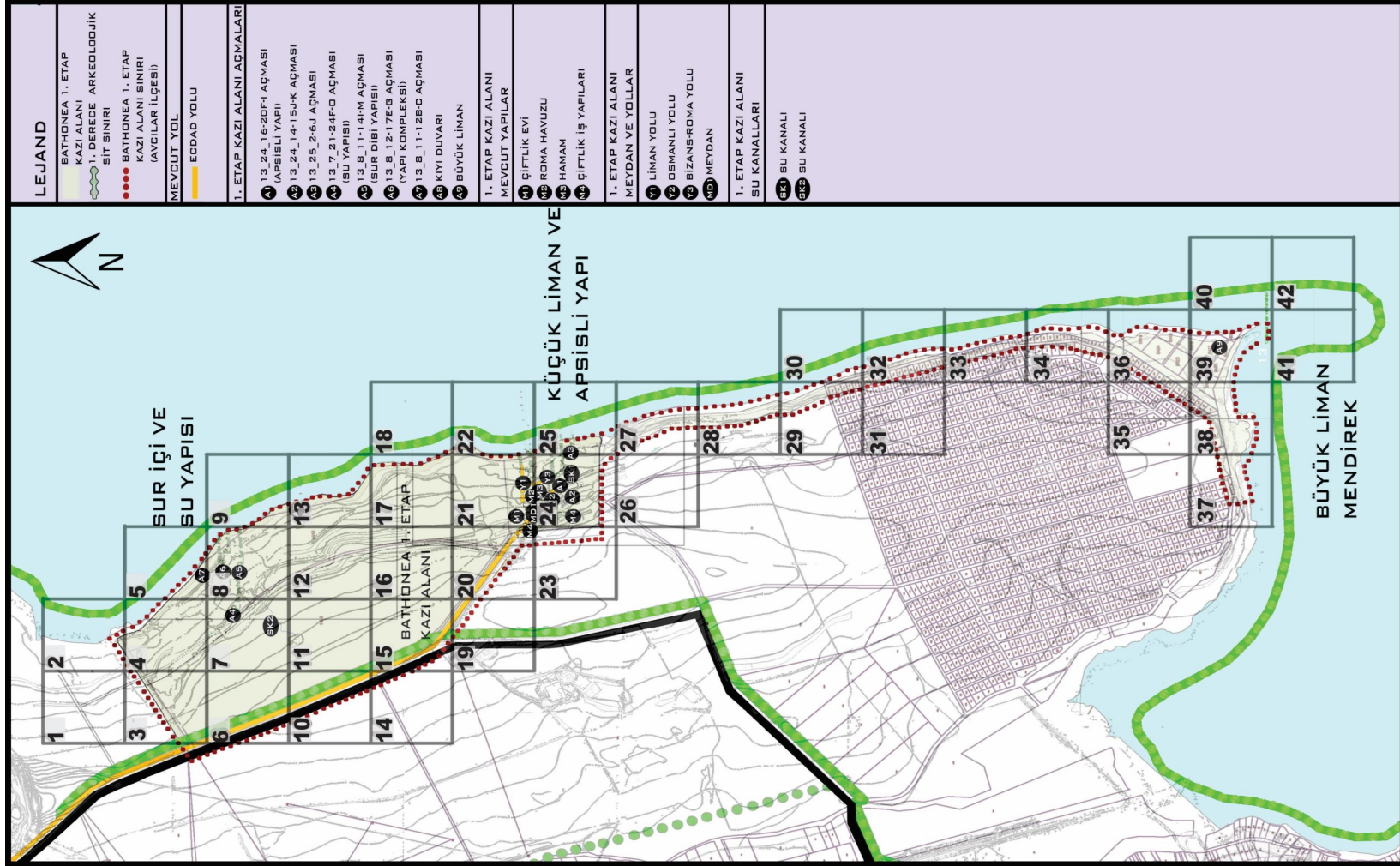


Figure 32: Bathonea project image, including excavation areas, from www.bathonea.org



Figure 33: A circular pendant illustrating either two snakes consuming one another or a singular snake ingesting its tail (*Ouroboros*).

(Photograph by Blazej Stanisławski. “Constantinople İstanbul Küçükçekmece: The Destination Port of the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks – A Centre of Byzantinization of the Rus Community: Aims, Sources and Objectives.” Wrocław, 2014.)

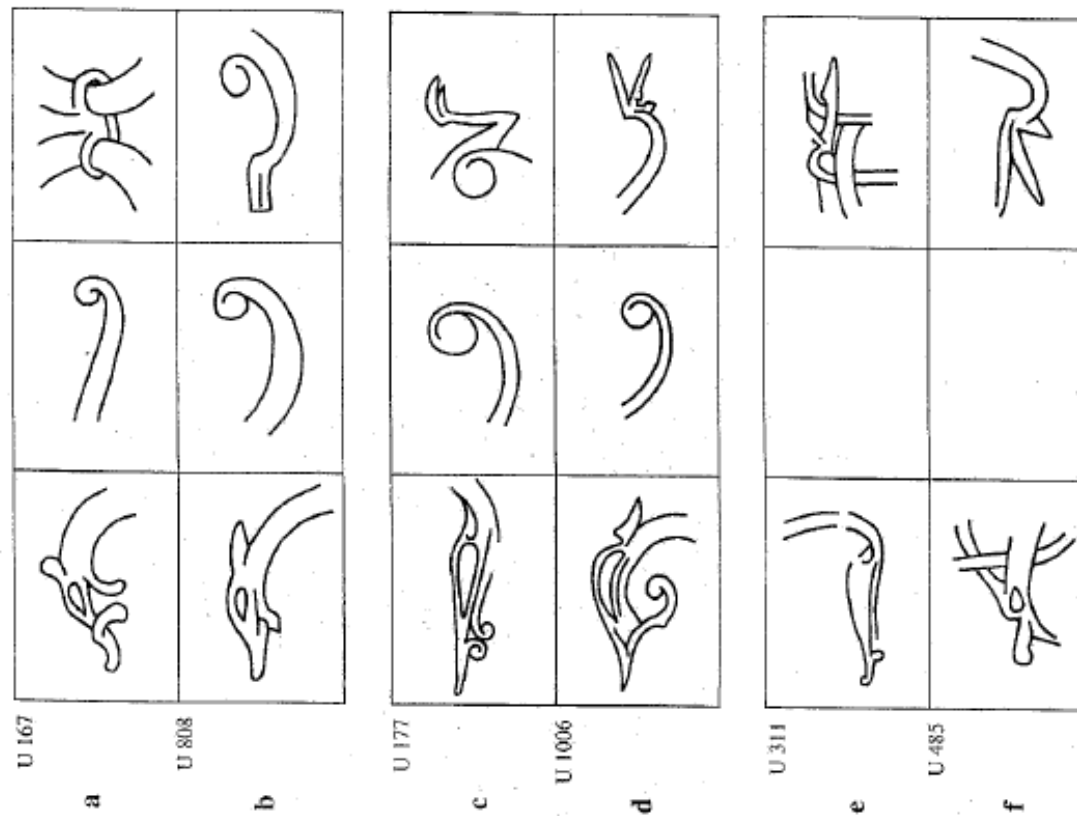


Figure 34: The pendant's style mostly matches with runestone's style, that also categorized as style b in Sofie Gräslund's runic animal styles. (Drawings by Anne-Sofie Gräslund and Linn Lager, "Runestones and the Christian Missions". *The Viking World*. eds. Stefan Brink and Neil Price. London: Routledge, 2008, 629–638.)



Figure 35: Ring diameter 5 cm, ring width 0.5 cm, Strong and slightly corroded. On both sides of the circular section ring there are two repeating plant decorations resembling palmettes, (Photograph by Meydan Palalı, “Eskişehir Karacahisar Kalesi 2011-2014 Yılları Kazı Buluntuları,” 2015, a.g.e., lev.17 kat.)



Figure 36: Similar to a patriarchal cross, the amber cross's short arms are carved in two layers, (Photograph by Blazej Stanisławski.

“Constantinople İstanbul Küçükçekmece: The Destination Port of the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks – A Centre of Byzantinization of the Rus Community: Aims, Sources and Objectives.” Wrocław, 2014.)

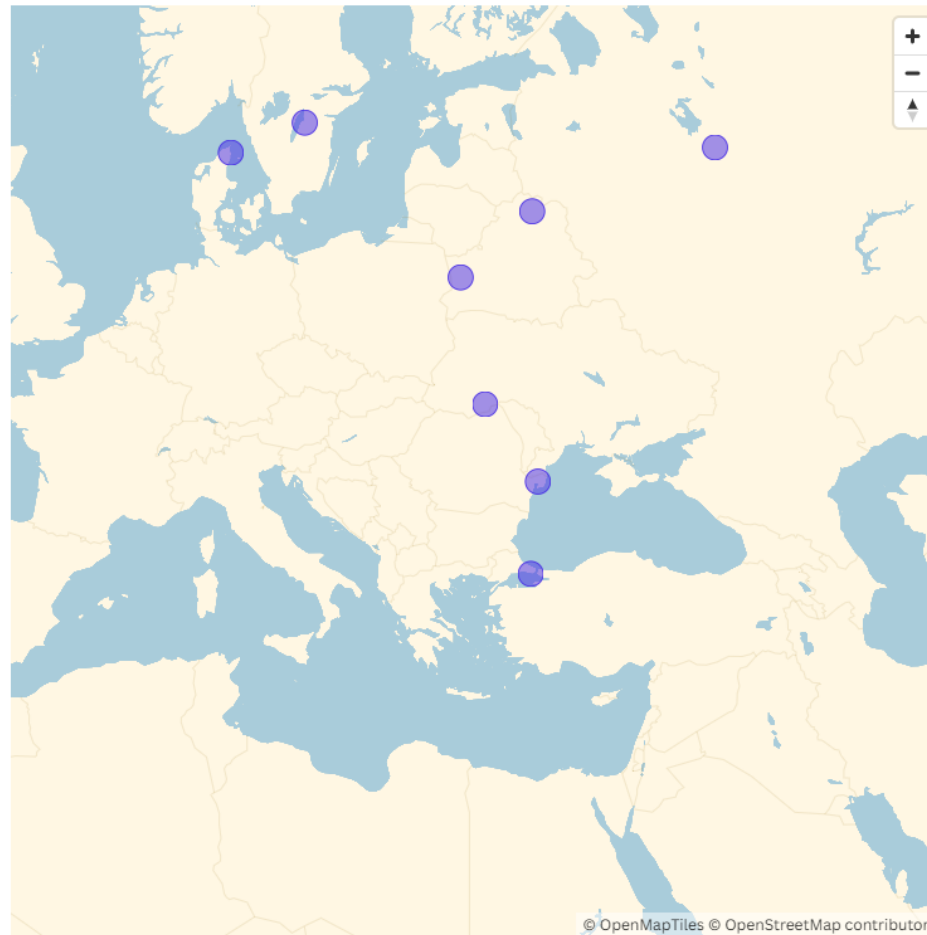


Figure 37: Amber crosses were found around Scandinavia and Easter Europe, in Nufāru, Volkovysk, Polotsk, Chornivka, Timerevo, Skamby, Understed, Bathonea. (Map created by the author)

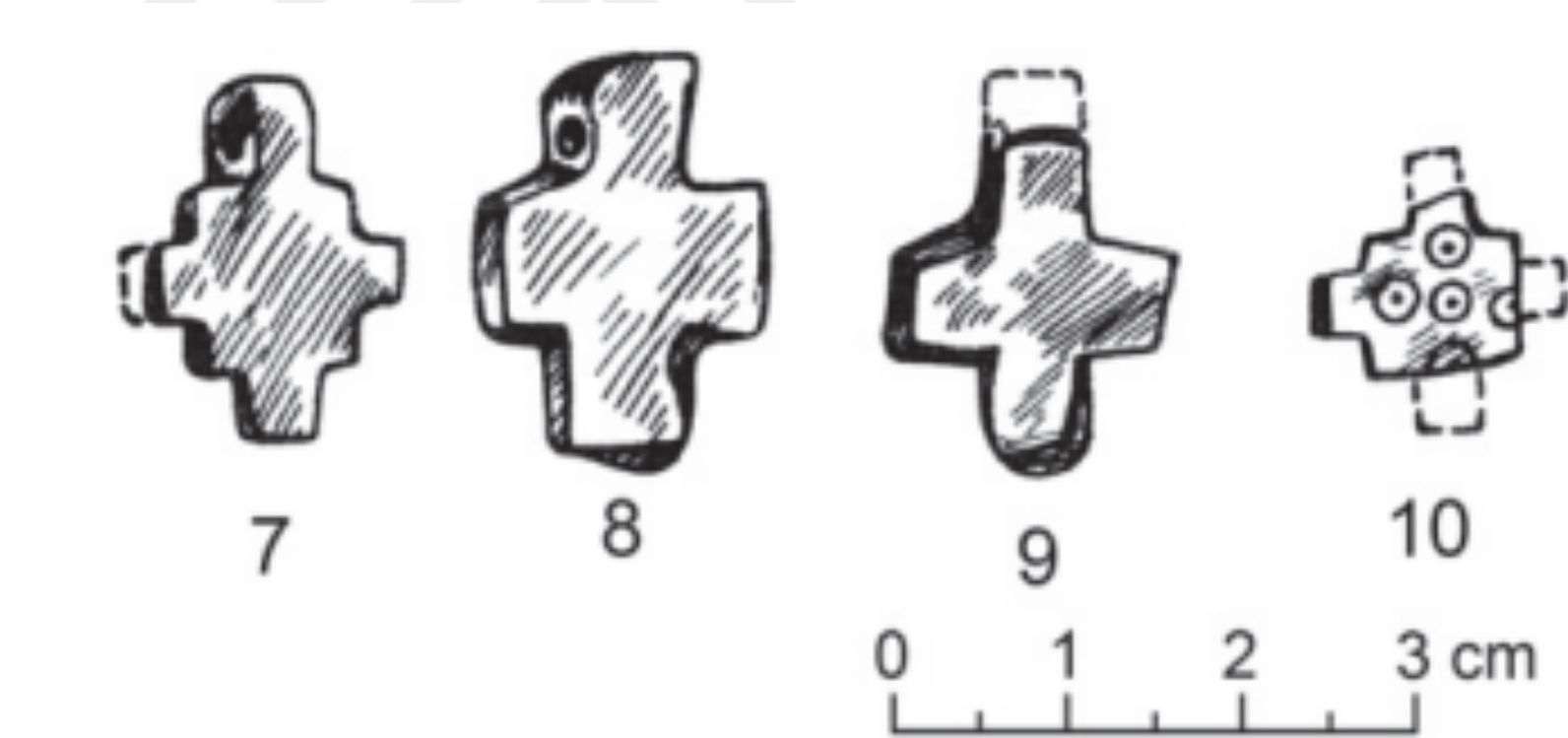


Figure 38: Slavic-Scandinavian amber crosses already found at Volkovysk and Polock; 7,8,9. (Drawings by Audronė Bliujienė. *Northern Gold: Amber in Lithuania (c. 100 to c. 1200)*. Leiden: BRILL, 2011, 325.)

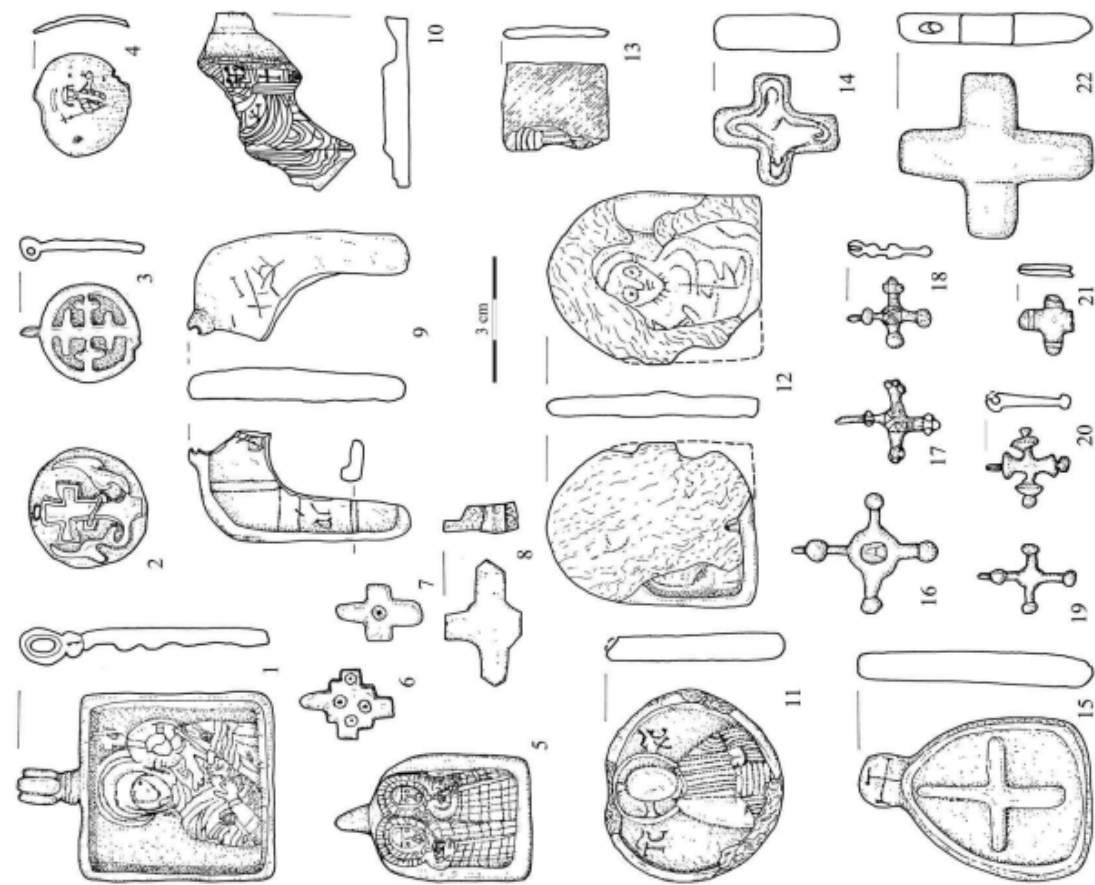


Figure 39: Chornivka Hillfort Amber Cross; 6. (Drawings by Julya Mysko, “The Religious Beliefs of Slav Population in the Upper Prut and the Middle Dniester Region,” *Rome, Constantinople and Newly-Converted Europe. Archaeological and Historical Evidence*, 2012, 554.)



Figure 40: A game piece belonging to *Hnefatafl* discovered in a grave during the Bathonea excavations. (Photograph by Blazej Stanisławski.
“Constantinople İstanbul Küçükçekmece: The Destination Port of the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks – A Centre of Byzantinization of
the Rus Community: Aims, Sources and Objectives.” Wrocław, 2014.

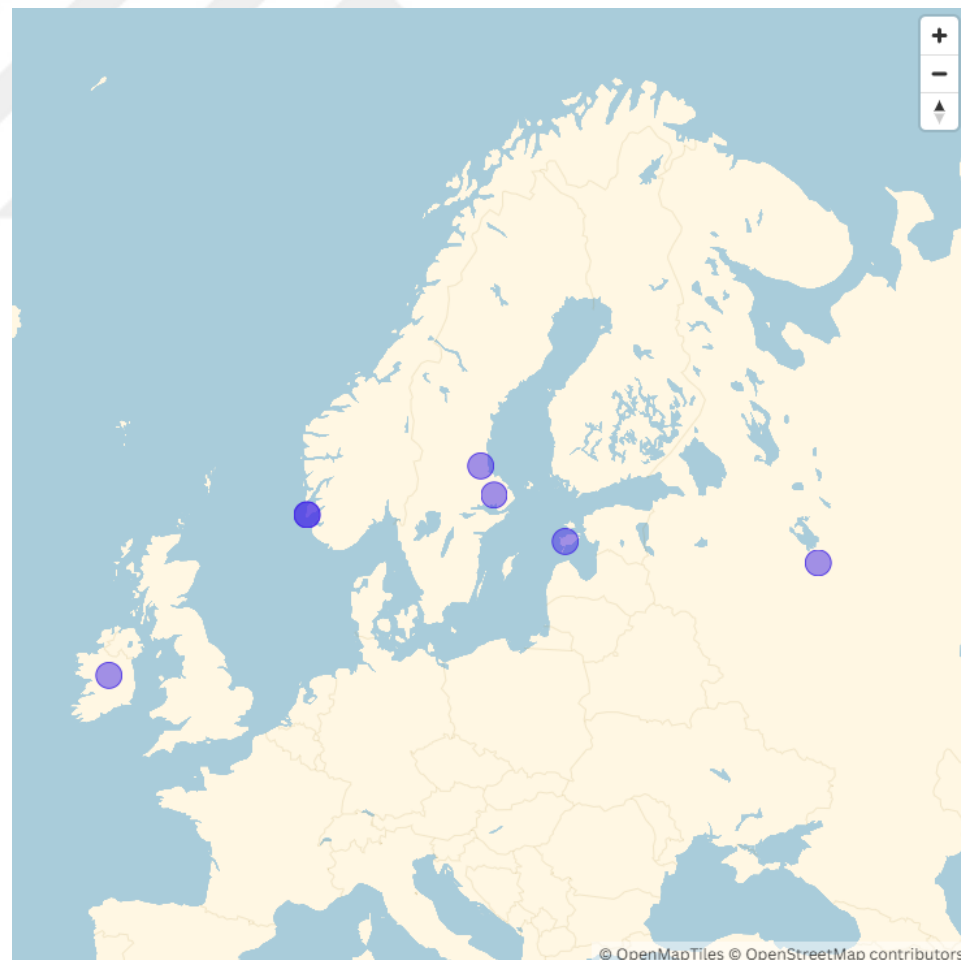


Figure 41: *Hnefatafl* game pieces were found, in Saaremaa, Timerevo, Ballinderry, Ockelbo, Grønhaug, Valsgärde. (Map created by the author)



Figure 42: Possible Scandinavian cross was found around the neck of the deceased in a grave at the Bathonea excavation site, from Koç University. “Pendant (ORB03).” Nordic Tales Byzantine Paths. Istanbul, Türkiye: Nordic Tales: Byzantine Paths, Koç University, 2025. <https://nordictalesbyzantinepaths.ku.edu.tr/en/object/pendant-orb03>.



Figure 43: Small metal objects –allegedly boot ornaments- discovered at the excavation site in the Küçükçekmece Lake Basin, from Koç University. “Pendant (ORB04).” Nordic Tales Byzantine Paths. Istanbul, Türkiye: Nordic Tales: Byzantine Paths, Koç University, 2025.
<https://nordictalesbyzantinepaths.ku.edu.tr/en/object/pendant-orb04>.

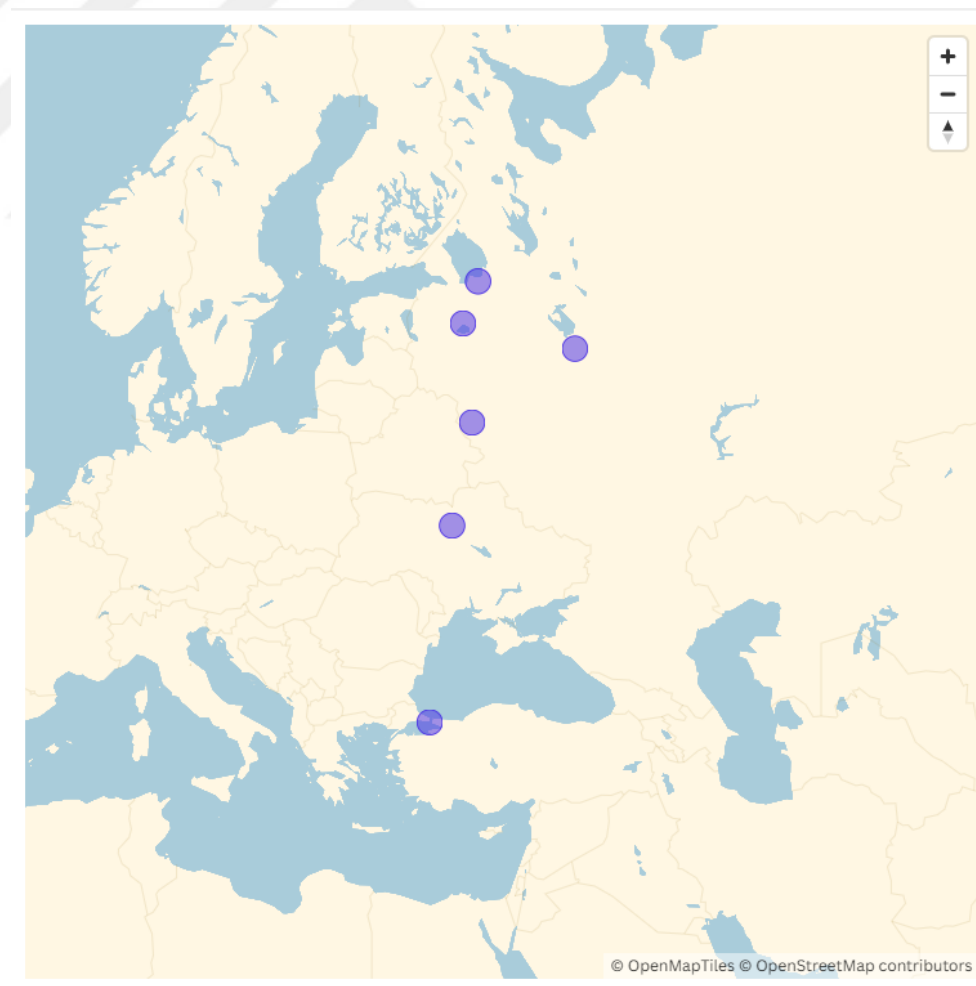


Figure 44: Boot ornaments were discovered around Eastern Europe, in Ladoga, Gnezdovo, Novgorod, Timerevo, Istanbul, Kiev. (Map created by the author)