

A. KALMYKOW,
New York City

IRANIANS AND SLAVS IN SOUTH RUSSIA

One of the most remarkable and least remarked achievements of oriental science during the present generation was the discovery that the Scythian and Sarmatian tribes, who are the first historically identified inhabitants of South Russia, belong to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family and form the Western part of the Iranians. The full consequence of this discovery and the light it throws on the history of South Russia and Russia as a whole are yet to be investigated. We limit ourselves to a few remarks.

First, the supposition that in the Fourth Century A. D. the Scyths and Sarmatians were fully destroyed and dislodged from South Russia by the inroads of the Goths and the Huns is not confirmed by the facts.

The chief authority on this period, Jordanes (misspelt Iornandes), was an Iranian himself from the Alan tribe¹, one of the chief divisions of the Sarmatae. He lived in the Sixth Century A. D. and he testifies that in his time the Alans occupied the shores of the Black Sea north of the Danube, the present Bessarabia, and partly south of the Danube (Dobrudja).

Then comes the testimony of the Russian chronicle of Nestor (Eleventh Century) mentioning for the Ninth Century three nations from the Danube to the Dniester, which seem to be Iranian.

One of them, the Douliebs, is Iranian by name. The word Doulieb is akin to the Indian Dhouleep, the Persian Sohreb, (*d*: *s*, as Dahaka: Zohak; *r*: *l*, as Parthian: Pehlevi), the Caucasian Galoub; the Slav version gives four spellings: Douleb, Oulieb, Oleb, and Glieb, which shows that the name is not Slavonic.

Then the Oulichy, or Ouglichy, on the Bug, which reminds of Olvia, or Olbia, *chi* being the suffix.

Finally the Tivertsi on the Tyras, the present river Dniester.

¹ Jordan is an Iranian name. The name of his father, corrupted in the manuscripts, led to various suggestions (Minns, Mierow, Mommsen).

In the Tenth Century, the chronicle mentions among the Russian *representatives* who signed the treaty with Byzantium the names: Froutan (Feridoun, Thraetaona), Sfendr or *Sfaindr* (*Asfendiar*), *Istr*, Prasten, Frasten, or Fursten (Roustem) and other Iranian names¹.

Among the idols erected in Kiev by the Prince Vladimir, before his conversion to Christianity, we find Simarg². Simarg is the Simourg of the Persians, the Shaena Marega of Avesta, the Phoenix, a divine bird, or more exactly a winged griffon, as it is explicitly stated by the Bundeshesh. It is interesting to note that the Russian chronicle does not give the Persian form Simourg, but the Sarmatian Simarg; *marg* means bird in modern Ossetic, which is the last remnant of the Sarmatian language.

But the richest evidence is given by the Russian legends (Byliny), the sculptures on the exterior of the churches of Vladimir-Souzdal (*Eleventh* Century), and the Scythian legends and sculptured ornaments in gold and silver from the Scythian tumuli. The chief deity is the goddess who is half-woman, but the lower part of whose body is that of a snake.

She is mentioned by Herodotus as the mother of the whole Scythian race. Her husband was Heracles. Russian legend mentions a divine snake with twelve trunks. Undoubtedly Herodotus knew it, but was afraid to mention it, because of its association with the Greek national hero Heracles. The Russian legend and the Scythian monuments give an identical representation. Russian art continued to represent the twelve-snake deity on gold and silver amulets as late as the Eighteenth and possibly the Nineteenth Century (Kondakov and Tolstoi, *Russian Antiquities in Monuments of Art*, Fasc. Y, pp. 161, 162).

¹ *Lavrentievskaia Lietopis*, 1897, p. 46.

² *Idem.*, p. 77.



Конский золотой налобник
из кургана Большая Цимбалка,
IV в. до н. э.



Черниговский змеєвик (из Императорского Эрмитажа)

Ossetic folklore in the Nineteenth Century knows women who can change themselves partly or entirely into snakes, and in South Russia there is still the belief that witches have tails, the last remnant of the snake.

The chief fantastic deities of Scythians, the snake woman, the Griffon Simarg, the winged horse, with wings concealed under the skin and projected during flight, and the cat woman (possibly panther woman) are represented in the Vladimir sculptures and described by Russian folklore.

Iranian influence was prominent in Russian popular belief and pictorial representations and, along with Christian Byzantine influence, contributed to create Russian art and civilization. I may mention only the slave trade and later the serfdom and feudal landowning which are also derived from Iranian institutions.

We know that the Slavs in the Eighth Century A. D. were a primitive agricultural people with patriarchal organization on democratic lines. It is doubtful whether they had hereditary princes. Generally they were ruled by a popular assembly and elected chiefs.

On the contrary the Scythians and Sarmatians had royal dynasties (Rostovzev, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*, pp. 72 and 120), and a powerful feudal nobility, who owned large estates, and carried on extensive trade in slaves and cereals. Most of the common people were serfs or slaves. The social distinction of classes was very sharp and so was the economic. In the Ninth Century, when prince Oleg took possession of Kiev and brought there the infant prince Igor, a sudden change came. In the course of the single lifetime of prince Igor

Russia, or at least the southern part of it, was turned into a strong monarchy, with nobles bearing Norman, Iranian and other foreign names (the Slavonic names were very few), with an important class of merchants, who affixed their names to diplomatic treaties, with slavery in full bloom and a growing serfdom. Evidently the Normans, who composed a small armed minority among the Slavs, found the Scythian political organization extremely convenient for the consolidation of their dominion and readily adopted it. It was fully applied in South Russia. As we advance to the North, away from Iranian influence, and enter the regions that were purely Slavonic or mixed with Finns, we find the new organization weaker and weaker. Moscow never had regular slaves and serfdom developed slowly and with great difficulty. Novgorod maintained its full political freedom till it was overthrown in the Fifteenth Century by the Grand Duke of Moscow. Normans created the Russian state by introducing Iranisation into its political and economic life. This explains the rapid growth of Kiev and its quick decay. The Nineteenth Century brought the emancipation of serfs, the Twentieth has seen the destruction of the remnants of Norman and Iranian traditions, the sudden disappearance of which shattered completely the Russian state.

The article was first published in Journal of the American
Oriental Society. Vol. 45 (1925), pp. 68-71.
Printed by the authority of the American Oriental Society.

Статья была впервые опубликована в журнале
«American Oriental Society» в 1925 г. Т. 45.
Печатается с разрешения Американского
Восточного Общества.