

= Oleg of Novgorod =

Oleg of Novgorod ( Old East Slavic : ????? , Old Norse : Helgi ) was a Varangian prince ( or konung ) who ruled all or part of the Rus ' people during the early 10th century .

He is credited with moving the capital of Rus ' from Novgorod the Great to Kiev and , in doing so , he laid the foundation of the powerful state of Kievan Rus ' . He also launched at least one attack on Constantinople , capital of the Byzantine Empire . According to East Slavic chronicles , Oleg was supreme ruler of the Rus ' from 882 to 912 .

This traditional dating has been challenged by some historians , who point out that it is inconsistent with such other sources as the Schechter Letter , which mentions the activities of certain khagan HLGW of Rus ' as late the 940s , during the reign of Byzantine Emperor Romanus I. The nature of Oleg 's relationship with the Rurikid ruling family of the Rus ' , and specifically with his successor Igor of Kiev , is a matter of much controversy among historians .

= = Oleg of the Russian chronicles = =

According to the Primary Chronicle , Oleg was a relative ( likely brother @-@ in @-@ law ) of the first ruler , Rurik , and was entrusted by Rurik to take care of both his kingdom and his young son Igor . Oleg gradually took control of the Dnieper cities , captured Kiev ( previously held by the Varangian warlords , Askold and Dir ) and finally moved his capital from Novgorod there . The new capital was a convenient place to launch a raid against Tsargrad ( Constantinople ) in 907 .

According to the chronicle , the Byzantines attempted to poison Oleg , but the Rus ' leader demonstrated his oracular powers by refusing to drink the cup of poisoned wine . Having fixed his shield to the gate of the imperial capital , Oleg won a favourable trade treaty , which eventually was of great benefit to both nations . Although Byzantine sources did not record these hostilities , the text of the treaty survives in the Chronicle .

The Primary Chronicle 's brief account of Oleg 's life contrasts with other early sources , specifically the Novgorod First Chronicle , which states that Oleg was not related to Rurik , and was rather a Scandinavian client @-@ prince who served as Igor 's army commander . The Novgorod First Chronicle does not give the date of the commencement of Oleg 's reign , but dates his death to 922 rather than 912 .

Scholars have contrasted this dating scheme with the " epic " reigns of roughly thirty @-@ three years for both Oleg and Igor in the Primary Chronicle . The Primary Chronicle and other Kievan sources place Oleg 's grave in Kiev , while Novgorodian sources identify a funerary barrow in Ladoga as Oleg 's final resting place .

= = Legend of the death of Oleg the Prophet = =

In the Primary Chronicle , Oleg is known as the Prophet ( ????? ) , an epithet alluding to the sacred meaning of his Norse name ( " priest " ) . According to the legend , romanticised by Alexander Pushkin in his ballad " The Song of the Wise Oleg , " it was prophesied by the pagan priests ( volkhvs ) that Oleg would take death from his stallion .

To defy the prophecies , Oleg sent the horse away . Many years later he asked where his horse was , and was told it had died . He asked to see the remains and was taken to the place where the bones lay . When he touched the horse 's skull with his boot a snake slithered from the skull and bit him . Oleg died , thus fulfilling the prophecy .

Oleg 's death has been interpreted as a distorted variant of the threefold death theme in Indo @-@ European myth and legend , with prophecy , the snake and the horse representing the three functions : the prophecy is associated with sovereignty , the horse with warriors , and the serpent with reproduction .

In Scandinavian traditions , this legend lived on in the saga of Orvar @-@ Odd .

= = Oleg of the Schechter Letter = =

According to the Primary Chronicle , Oleg died in 912 and his successor , Igor of Kiev , ruled from then until his assassination in 945 . The Schechter Letter , a document written by a Jewish Khazar , a contemporary of Romanus I Lecapenus , describes the activities of a Rus ' warlord named HLGW ( Hebrew : ????? ) , usually transcribed as " Helgu " . For years many scholars disregarded or discounted the Schechter Letter account , which referred to Helgu ( often interpreted as Oleg ) as late as the 940s .

Recently , however , scholars such as David Christian and Constantine Zuckerman have suggested that the Schechter Letter 's account is corroborated by various other Russian chronicles , and suggests a struggle within the early Rus ' polity between factions loyal to Oleg and to the Rurikid Igor , a struggle that Oleg ultimately lost . Zuckerman posited that the early chronology of the Rus ' had to be re-determined in light of these sources . Among Zuckerman 's beliefs and those of others who have analyzed these sources are that the Khazars did not lose Kiev until the early 10th century ( rather than 882 , the traditional date ) , that Igor was not Rurik 's son but rather a more distant descendant , and that Oleg did not immediately follow Rurik , but rather that there is a lost generation between the legendary Varangian lord and his documented successors .

Of particular interest is the fact that the Schechter Letter account of Oleg 's death ( namely , that he fled to and raided FRS , tentatively identified with Persia , and was slain there ) bears remarkable parallels to the account of Arab historians such as Ibn Miskawayh , who described a similar Rus ' attack on the Muslim state of Arran in the year 944 / 5 .

= = Attempts to reconcile the accounts = =

In contrast to Zuckerman 's version , the Primary Chronicle and the later Kiev Chronicle place Oleg 's grave in Kiev , where it could be seen at the time of the compilation of these documents . Furthermore , scholars have pointed out that if Oleg succeeded Rurik in 879 ( as the East Slavic chronicles assert ) , he could hardly have been active almost 70 years later , unless he had a life-span otherwise unheard of in medieval annals . To solve these difficulties , it has been proposed that the pagan monarch and priests of Rus ' used the hereditary title of helgu , standing for " holy " in the Norse language , and that Igor and others held this title .

It has also been suggested that Helgu and Oleg who waged war in the 940s was distinct from both of Rurik 's successors . He could have been one of the " fair and great princes " recorded in the Russo-Byzantine treaties of 911 and 944 or one of the " archons of Rus " mentioned in *De administrando imperio* . Regrettably , the Primary Chronicle does not specify the relations between minor Rurikid princes active during the period , although the names Rurik , Oleg and Igor were recorded among the late 10th and 11th century Rurikids .

Georgy Vernadsky even identified the Oleg of the Schechter Letter with Igor 's otherwise anonymous eldest son , whose widow Predslava is mentioned in the Russo-Byzantine treaty of 944 . Alternatively , V. Ya . Petrukhin speculated that Helgu and Oleg of the 940s was one of the vernacular princes of Chernigov , whose ruling dynasty maintained especially close contacts with Khazaria , as the findings at the Black Grave , a large royal kurgan excavated near Chernigov , seem to testify . However , the academic mainstream has not endorsed either of these theories .