

= Kylfings =

The Kylfings (Old Norse *Kylfingar* ; Finnic *Kylfingid* ; Hungarian *Kölpények* ; Old East Slavic *kolbiagi* ; Byzantine Greek *koulpingoi* ; Arabic *al Kilabiyya*) were a people of uncertain origin active in Northern Europe during the Viking Age , roughly from the late ninth century to the early twelfth century . They could be found in areas of Lapland , Russia , and the Byzantine Empire that were frequented by Scandinavian traders , raiders and mercenaries . Scholars differ on whether the Kylfings were ethnically Finnic or Norse . Also disputed is their geographic origin , with Denmark , Sweden and the Eastern Baltic all put forward as candidates . Whether the name *Kylfing* denotes a particular tribal , socio-political , or economic grouping is also a matter of much debate .

They are mentioned in Old Norse runestone inscriptions , sagas (most notably in *Egil's Saga*) , and poetry (such as *Thorbjorn Hornklofi's* poem *Haraldskvæði*) , as well as Byzantine records and Rus' law codes . According to the sagas , the Kylfings opposed the consolidation of Norway under Harald Fairhair and participated in the pivotal late ninth century Battle of Hafrsfjord . After Harald's victory in that battle , they are described in the sagas as having raided in Finnmark and elsewhere in northern Norway and having fought against Harald's lieutenants such as Thorolf Kveldulfsson .

= = Etymology = =

The exact etymology of the word *kylfing* is disputed and many different theories have been put forward as to its ultimate origin . The general trend has been to trace *kylfing* to the Old Norse words *kylfa* and *kolfr* , but scholars disagree as to the meaning of these words as well . Cleasby notes that in Old Norse , *kylfa* can mean a club or cudgel . Thus the national Icelandic antiquarian Barði Guðmundsson translated *Kylfing* to mean " club wielders " . As Foote points out , it can also mean a smaller stick , such as a tally stick or wooden token used by merchants , and , according to Jesch , it can also mean the " highest and narrowest part " of a ship's stem . Holm discussed the term *kylfa* in connection with the word *hjúkolfr* which means " meeting " or " guild " ; according to Holm , the second element *kolfr* could refer to a symbolic arrow traditionally used as a device to summon people for a meeting .

These varied derivations have led to a number of interpretations . Holm offers two meanings : " archer " and " man armed with a cudgel " . A number of historians have asserted that *Kylfing* referred to a member of a " club in the social or Anglo-American sense " , a " brotherhood " or a member of a Norse *félag* . In a number of minor Icelandic manuscripts on mathematics and geography , *Kylfingaland* is identified as *Garðaríki* , i.e. Kievan Rus' , but the sources are unclear as to whether *Kylfingaland* is named for the Kylfings or vice versa , or whether , indeed , there is any connection at all .

The Russian cognate of *Kylfing* is *Kolbjag* , following the pattern of development * *kol?ing* (* *kul?ing*) > * *kol??g* > *kolbjag* . The *Kolbiagi* were a group of foreign merchant venturers and mercenaries mentioned in a number of Old Russian sources . They are often mentioned together with the Varangians , a term used in Eastern Europe to describe traders and pirates of the Baltic sea . In Byzantine Greek , they were named *koulpingoi* and they served as a unit of the Byzantine army listed alongside the Varangian Guard , which was of Scandinavian origin .

A very different derivation was put forward by the Russian scholar B. Briems . He hypothesised that *Kylfingr* was a direct Norse translation of the Votic self-designation *Vatjalaiset* and *Vatja* (or *Vadjalaiset* and *Vadja*) used by the Votes , a Finnic tribe residing in Ingria , Russia . A non-Norse origin was also proposed by Julius Brutzkus , who argued that both Varangian and *Kylfing* derived from the Turkic languages , particularly the Bulgar and Khazar languages . Brutzkus asserted that Varangian came from the Turkic root *varmak* (" to walk , travel ") while *Kylfing* was a Norse pronunciation of the Slavic *kolbiagi* , itself deriving from the Turkic phrase *köl-beg* (" sea-king ") ; under this interpretation the word *Kylfing* would be more or less synonymous with " Viking " .

= = Identity = =

According to Egil 's Saga , the Kylfings were trading and plundering in Finnmark around the year 900 . Thorolf Kveldulfsson , King Harald 's tax agent in northern Norway , engaged Saami scouts to monitor the Kylfings ' movements and report back to him . Countering their raids , he is reported to have killed over a hundred Kylfing marauders .

Some scholars see them as Scandinavians while others consider them to have been a Finnic tribe , and assert a connection between the word Kylfing and the Finnish , Saami , and Karelian myths of Kaleva . Elsewhere they are described as a mixture of Norse and Finnish people who were employed as mercenaries and tax @-@ agents by Scandinavian rulers ; in this context Ravndal interpreted the kylfa element to refer to a " club " in the sense of organization . Arbman argues that the Kolbiagi were a separate fur @-@ trading guild . Postan et al . , on the other hand , hypothesize that Kolbiagi denoted a junior participant in a Varangian trade guild , rather than a separate group .

= = = Finnic peoples = = =

Holm (1992) considers Egil 's saga to equate the Kylfings with the Finnic Karelians . In the 14th century , when the Swedish kings began to direct their attention northwards and encourage Swedish colonization in Norrbotten , there were regulations that the Birkarls and the Saami peoples were not to be interrupted in their traditional activities . A large part of the Karelians were under Novgorod which was included in what Icelandic sources called Kylfingaland , and thus the Kylfings could have been Baltic Finnish tribes under Novgorod .

Both East Slavs and Byzantines consistently made a clear distinction between Varangians and Kylfings , and Byzantines distinguished between them in the same manner as they separated Franks from Saracens . According to Holm such separations are indicative of clear ethnic differences between the two groups . Additionally , both East Slavic and Byzantine sources explicitly associate the Varangians with Baltic region , which they called Varangia , and in Arabic , the Baltic Sea was called Bahr Varank , i.e. the " Varangian Sea " . There are no comparable connections when they mention the Kylfings . Another difference is the fact that the Byzantine sources connect the word varangoi with rh?s in order to make it clear that the rh?s @-@ varangoi and the varangoi originate in Baltic just like the rh?s , but do not establish the same associations for the koulpingoi .

The Kylfings have also been identified with the Votic people . Carl Christian Rafn , Edgar V. Saks , B. Briem and Sigurður Nordal have proposed Kylfings to have been the Norse name for the Votes . The reason is that the ethnonym Vadja (laiset) can be associated with the word vadja (modern Estonian vai ') which means " stake " , " wedge " or " staff " , which corresponds to Old Norse kolfr . Vadjalaiset would consequently be translated into Old East Norse as kolfingar , which in Old West Norse (Old Icelandic) would be umlauted as kylfingar . Whereas some native names were Scandinavized , as Rostov into Ráðstofa , the Norse learned of the meaning of other names and translated them , which they did at Volkhov , and in the case of some of the Dniepr rapids . The theory that the Kylfings were Votes has been opposed by Max Vasmer and Stender @-@ Petersen , whereas Holm finds it likely . Holm considers it apparent that the Varangians and the Finnic tribes were able to cooperate well , and he points to the relative ease and stability with which Finland was later integrated as a part of the Swedish kingdom . Jorma Koivulehto , a Finnish linguist , disagrees with the Vote theory and maintains that the Votic name or any other Finnic ethnonym is not etymologically connected with the name Kylfingar .

Estonians have also been identified as Kylfings .

= = = Scandinavians = = =

Barði Guðmundsson identified the Kylfings as an East Scandinavian , possibly Swedish , tribe that infiltrated northern Norway during the late ninth century . Guðmundsson connects the Kylfings with the Germanic Heruli who were active throughout northern Europe and in Italy during the fifth and

sixth centuries . According to Guðmundsson , many of these Kylfings may ultimately have emigrated to Iceland during the ninth and tenth centuries . Other scholars have assigned a Danish origin to this tribe .

Some scholars have considered the Kylfings of Egil 's Saga to be a " conquering Germanic people " , or the Swedish king 's tax collectors . Holm (1992) considers such suggestions to be anachronistic because the Swedish kings lacked any interest in northern Fenno @@ Scandia during the ninth and tenth centuries , and not even the later law of Hälsingland mentions any Swedish settlement north of Bygdeå in southern Västerbotten .

Pritsak identified the Kylfings as a " professional trading and mercenary organization " that organized expeditions northward , into the Saami lands , as distinct from other Varangian and viking groups whose expeditions focussed on lands to the west and east of Scandinavia . This interpretation is supported by such historians as Stender @@ Petersen .

A number of runestones in Sweden contain the personal name Kyolfingr , which may or may not be connected to the Kylfings as a group .

= = = Other suggestions = = =

A few historians have hypothesized that the Kylfings were a West Slavic people related to the Pomeranians . Under this interpretation , the Slavic term Kolbiag may share common origins with such place @@ names as Ko?obrzeg (formerly Kolberg) , a town on the Pomeranian Baltic coast , and Kolpino , a settlement near modern St. Petersburg .

= = Status = =

= = = Byzantine Empire = = =

Eleventh @@ century Byzantine sources refer to Kylfings (?????????? , Koulpingoi ; often attested in the genitive plural ?????????? , Koulpingon) as being among the foreigners serving as mercenaries in Constantinople , but appear to distinguish between them and the Varangians . For instance , an imperial chrysobull , an edict bearing a golden seal , issued in 1073 exempts certain monasteries from being forced to billet soldiers of specific ethne : Varangians , Rus ' , Saracens , Franks and Koulpingoi . In previous edicts issued in 1060 and 1068 the Koulpingoi had not been separately delineated . Similar edicts were issued in 1082 , 1086 , and 1088 . The edict issued by Alexios I Komnenos 1088 , for instance , reads :

The whole of the above @@ mentioned island [of Patmos] , as well as the monastery with all its properties , is granted exkousseia [exemption] from the billeting [mitata] of all commanders , both Roman [Rhomaioi] and foreign allies , that is the Rus , Varangians , Koulpingoi , Inglinoi , Frangoi , Nemitsoi , Bulgarians , Saracens , Alans , Abasgoi , the Immortals , and all other Romans and foreigners .

= = = Russia and the eastern Baltic = = =

The Kylfings were also active in the eastern Baltic and northern Russia . Kyolfingaland may have been used to refer to Karelia ; on some runestones it has been interpreted as a synonym for Garðariki , the Old Norse name for Russia . The eleventh @@ century Ruskaya Pravda , the law code of the Kievan Rus ' , grants certain privileges to Kylfings (??????? or " Kolbiagi ") in addition to Varangians (" Varyagi ") . For instance , Varangians and Kylfings were entitled to press charges with an oath without relying on any witnesses . In addition , in order to swear innocence , they needed only two witnesses , whereas a native Slav needed as many as seven . Moreover , the Varangians and the Kylfings were entitled to give shelter to a fugitive for as many as three days , whereas Slavs and others had to hand him over directly .

== Hungary ==

A military organization called *Kölpények* is reported to have existed in Medieval Hungary during the tenth , eleventh and twelfth centuries . Hungarian scholars have proposed that the *Kölpények* were identical with the *Kylfings* / *Kolbiagi* . Hungarian sources regard the *Kölpények* as being of Scandinavian origin . They were hired by the early rulers of the House of Arpad , particularly Taksony of Hungary in the 950s , to serve as frontier guards . They fought with their Magyar employers alongside Sviatoslav I of Kiev against Bulgaria and the Byzantine Empire . Alternatively , the *Kölpények* may have been of Pecheneg origin , as there was a Pecheneg tribal group called *Külbej* during roughly the same period .

== Austkylfur ==

The skaldic poet Thorbjorn Hornklofi wrote about Austkylfur , or " East @-@ Kylfings " , in his epic poem *Haraldskvæði* . In some manuscripts the name was , probably erroneously , rendered *auðkylfur* or " rich men " . Some philologists , using the nautical meaning of the word *kylfa* , interpret the phrase as " eastern ships " . Others , such as F. Jonsson , interpreted Austkylfur to mean " eastern logs " , while Vigfusson believed that the phrase properly meant simply " men of the east " . Another interpretation of the term used in *Haraldskvæði* is the derogatory " eastern oafs " .

Guðmundsson specifically identified the Austkylfur of Hornklofi 's poem with the *Kylfings* mentioned elsewhere in Scandinavian and Eastern European sources , and interpreted the phrase Austkylfur to mean " eastern club @-@ wielding men " .

In *Haraldskvæði* as recorded by Snorri Sturluson in the *Heimskringla* , the *Austrkylfur* were described as being opponents of Harald Fairhair at the Battle of Hafrsfjord . As such they formed part of the force , led by Kjetve the Rich of Agder and the kings and jarls of Hordaland , Rogaland , and Telemark , that came to Hafrsfjord to fight Harald 's encroaching hegemony . The exact relationship between the Austkylfur and the anti @-@ Harald coalition is unknown . Nora Chadwick identifies the Austkylfur as the part of the force opposing Harald that came from Agder and Telemark . These districts lie further east than the other kingdoms opposing Harald 's rule . After their defeat by Harald and his army , the *Kylfings* ' property was plundered and their womenfolk , described as " eastern maidens " , were distributed by the victorious king among his warriors .

== Timeline ==