

Rune Edberg: Vägen till Palteskiuborg

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English Summary

(The summary covers two papers *I Rogvolods kölvatten*, pp. 7–26 and *Expedition Daugava 2001*, pp. 31–35):

According to an entry in the Russian Primary Chronicle in AD 980, a man named Rogvolod was prince of Polotsk (*Palteskia* or *Palteskiuborg* in Old Norse sources). He is said to have arrived from overseas, which is often interpreted as Sweden. The origin of Rogvolod's name and that of his daughter, Rogned, are evidently Scandinavian.

Polotsk is on the river Daugava. It has played an important role in the links between the principality and other Rus principalities to the east e. g. Smolensk, and to the Baltic Sea area including Sweden, as well as to the Latvian lands in between.

Sources state that stretches of limestone bedrock in the riverbed have always constituted difficulties and dangers for navigation. Very long stretches have in fact not been navigable at all, except during the spring, but then travellers had to overcome very fast currents. Nevertheless, the river carried heavy long-distance bulk freights downstream until the mid-20th century. Floats and heavy-duty float-like barges were used.

The subsequent construction of dams completely changed the environment of the lower river and put an end to long-range navigation. The upper and middle reaches remained untouched by hydropower, but dredging and blasting to improve navigation were carried out all along the river during both the Czarist days and the Soviet era.

Written sources, as well as archaeological finds from various sites along the Daugava valley, indicate the occurrence of connections, conflicts and trade with the West and East. A chain of hill-forts underlines the river's political importance since pre-historic times. Scandinavians seem to have been especially involved, probably both as looters and traders, in Curonia and the lower Daugava area between the 8th and 11th centuries.

As a part of archaeology by experiment, a Swedish expedition attempted during the summer of 2001 to sail along the Daugava with the Aifur, a replica of a small Viking ship. The purpose was to compile general impressions about the conditions for travelling along the river and investigate how a traditional Scandinavian vessel would prove itself in these waters. The ship had previously been used for a similar expedition to Russia and on the rivers Volkhov, Lovat and Dnepr.

The ship was transported by road to Surazh, Belarus, 681 kilometres from the Baltic, where the expedition set sail on June 14th. After reaching Riga, the expedition continued up the Baltic arriving on July 23rd at the final destination, Haapsalu, Estonia.

The expedition immediately encountered problems with the Daugava's rocky riverbed, and the ship's hull was slightly damaged at a spot 40 kilometres from the start. Emergency repairs were carried out.

Due to the risk of further damage, and also because of some problems within the expedition itself, less than a third of the distance originally planned on the river was actually navigated. The longest section was between Piedruja and Livani, a distance of 150 kilometres. The open sea sailing from Riga was successful, the ship performed well even in rather rough weather.

The rocky rapids, noted in written sources, presented the Aifur and its crew serious difficulties. However, it was gradually realised that it was often possible to proceed with caution if the river was scouted first. It is safe to conclude that mariners' thorough knowledge of the river always must have been essential for a safe passage. It also became evident that a flat-bottomed ship would have been much more suitable. Ethnological sources show that all traditional Daugava vessels of some size were flat-bottomed.

Sources and the experimental results concur that river navigation on the Daugava, even downstream, was never easy. (Popular stereotyped views e. g. about Vikings easily penetrating into the Rus lands with their ships on the Daugava, can hardly be accepted). Instead, the river's waterway, also when frozen in winter, and its valley and the paths and roads along it, existing from time immemorial, may be regarded as an axis, channelling many kinds of long-distance traffic and connections, including new ideas. In this manner, "the Daugava Way" can be put into a wider context.

(NB. The river Daugava (its Latvian name) was in Old Norse known as Dúna, in older Swedish sources as Düna or Dyna, in German as Düna; in Russian as Zapadnya /Western/ Dvina or simply Dvina.)

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