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DESCRIPTION OF OMENS IN THE CHRONICLE OF NOVGOROD

The author of the article is interested in the attitude of the medieval person towards various astronomical phenomena, their aspiration to characterize these phenomena, to point out their connection with the historical events of the Novgorod Republic. The relevance of the study of our subject is that the analysis of the descriptions of omens in medieval literature, including chronicles, is poorly researched by well-known historians and mediaevalists. The purpose of the work is to find, examine, and analyse what omens the medieval person drew attention to, how they reacted to them, and how these are recorded in the chronicles. Methods such as descriptive, comparative, and comparative and collation were used in the article. Fragments of the Chronicle of Novgorod describing various celestial omens were collected and analysed in the article. The novelty of the research is that the analysis of celestial omens recorded in the Chronicle of Novgorod has not been performed before, and they have not been given much importance upon the interpretation of ancient records.

Keywords: celestial omens, astronomical phenomena, writing of chronicles, history of Kievan Rus', worldview of the medieval person.

INTRODUCTION

The outstanding phenomenon of cultural life not only of Kievan Rus', but also of medieval Europe, was the writing of chronicles. Chron-

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icles are historical works in Kievan Rus' and later in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, in which the history was recorded over the years. In the chronicles, the story of the events of each year began with the words: "в *лѣтѣ*" ("in the year"); hence the name "*лѣтѣпис*" ("chronicles").

Chronicles are the main source for studying the political, economic, cultural and partially social history of Kievan Rus', as well as the history of Rus' lands during the period of feudal disunity. Using the official annual records of events, foreign sources, primarily Byzantine, folk legends and retellings, the writers of chronicles told about events related to the life of secular and spiritual feudal lords. Chroniclers aspired to show the history of Rus' in connection with the history of neighbouring tribes and peoples of non-Slavic origin. Information on the urban life was given only upon references to changing knyazes, feudal wars, and urban uprisings.

Chroniclers shed very little light on the details of rural life, agriculture and social relations in Kievan Rus'. The chronicles were also largely affected by the fact that they were written by the monks, which explained the causes of events by divine intervention. They believed that when something unknown, unusual appears in the sky, it is of higher power, and has a certain message. The chroniclers strived to learn to decipher them. But in reality, they only connected them to the closest events that took place after such an omen occurred. Therefore, to understand the worldview, the thought process, and the way the medieval person reacted to unusual things in nature, the analysis of the descriptions of the omens from the chronicles, which hide the truth of the life of our ancestors, will be of help.

The relevance of the study of our subject is that the analysis of the descriptions of omens in medieval literature, including chronicles, is poorly researched by well-known historians and mediaevalists. Therefore, the study and analysis of the descriptions of the omens in the Kievan Rus' chronicles will help to expand the knowledge of life, worldview of the medieval person. The purpose of the work is to find, examine, and analyse what omens the medieval person paid attention to, how they reacted to them, and how these are recorded in the chronicles. To achieve this purpose, the following research objectives were set:

- to characterize the concept of "chronicles" and the development of this genre;
- to study the phenomenon of descriptions of omens in ancient Ukrainian literature;
- to analyse descriptions of omens in the Chronicle of Novgorod.

CHRONICLES AS THE LEADING GENRE OF KIEVAN RUS'

Chronicles are “the entire archive of our historiography” – this is how this genre was characterized by Mykhailo Hrushevsky¹. According to Petro Bilous: “Chronicles are a literary, ideologically determined form of presentation of historical events whose artistic core is a chronotope (time-space) that unfolds in the pattern of medieval worldview, ancient communities. In the context of chronicles, an event is a symbol, a sign of a particular myth. The historical figure has a significant character in it and is modelled as a literary character, formed as an “annalistic biography.”²

Yuri Khoptiar proposed the following definition: “Chronicles are a category of narrative sources, a characteristic feature of which is the presentation of historical events in chronological order by years.”³ Dmytro Chyzhevsky emphasizes that “the chronicles only partially provide yearly records. For the most part, we have a solid story that is only occasionally detailed and arranged by the years.”⁴

Glossary edited by Mykola Yatsiuk, gives the following definition of the concept: “Chronicles are a historical and literary work in which the story of events was arranged by years and began with words “*В лѣто...*”⁵ Hence the chronicles, the writing of chronicles – the record of different events by the years in the order in which they took place. Annalistic entries were often (especially at the beginning of the chronicles) very short, then became more detailed, including many historical narratives, short stories, legends, retellings made by the people, hagiographies, scrolls, teachings written by different authors, and therefore chronicles became important historical and literary artefacts.”⁶ Thus, the chronicles are a distinctive genre of Kievan Rus', which is a form of recording historical events chronologically.

Contemporary literary studies interpret chronicles as historical prose, or as a synthetic unifying, ensemble, integrative, multifunctional work characterized by features of different genres and styles. These definitions are an attempt to delineate the genre nature of the

¹ С. О. Ефремов, *Історія українського письменства*, Femina, Київ 1995.

² П. Білоус, *Історія української літератури XI–XVIII ст.*, Академія, Київ 2009, р. 58.

³ Ю. Хоптяр, *Історична термінологія*, Аксіома, Кам'янець-Подільський 2008.

⁴ Д. Чижевський, *Історія української літератури*, Джура, Тернопіль 1994.

⁵ “In the year....”

⁶ М. Яцюк и др., *Історія України: словник-довідник*. Харківська Національна Академія Міського Господарства, Харків 2010.

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chronicle in the context of contemporary notions of genres and styles, since it is a coherent genre unit belonging to the medieval system.

The main feature of the chronicles is the yearly nature of records. Scientists remain ambiguous in this regard. The chronological principle of presentation, according to Petro Bilous⁷, enabled the chroniclers to use material that is diverse in character, content and genre. This principle has to some extent influenced the peculiarities of the style of the artefact, which is defined by two main types: a) epic (narrative) that imitated an oral poetical tradition (heroic epic); b) historical and documentary (factual), which prevails in the description of specific events and facts. The epic style is characterized by narrative tone, meaningfulness, imagery; historical and documentary is informative, concise, reserved, emotionless.

The artistic colouring of the chronicles is provided by ancient poetic ideas. Mykola Kostomarov drew attention to this, noting that the chroniclers turned to folk art because of the lack of sources, but as Christians they were forced to “purify” this material accordingly. This causes fragmentary nature and simplicity in its use⁸. Ihor Isichenko points out that researchers distinguish between annual records and chronicles. “In chronicles, stories are larger in scope, and their storylines often use the annalist’s personal experience as a participant, eyewitness, or contemporary of the events. Dialogues and monologues are more extensive, though the monologue is often transformed into an etiquetrical, into an emotional declaration of the character.”⁹ Chronicles include specific story details, imagery, character descriptions.

Petr Bilous points that “the writing of chronicles came at the stage of completion of the formation of the early feudal monarchical state, when Knyaz Volodymyr came to power and introduced Christianity as the state religion. Since then, there has been a need for the written legitimization of this state, the revelation of its formation, the creation of a dynastic line of rulers of the Rus’ Land, its inclusion into the world historical process, fixation of its state borders.¹⁰ Thus began the creation of the historiosophic myth of the Rus’ Land as a state. With that, schemes and models known at the time were bor-

⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ И. Исиченко, *Історія української літератури X–XVIII ст.*, 2014, <http://www.bishop.kharkov.ua/kursi-lekcij/istoria-istoria-ukraienskoie-literaturi-h-xvi-st/-pov-st-vremennyh-l-t> (accessed 10.12.2021).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

rowed from Byzantine historiography: Chronicles of Amartol, Malala and others. Although Volodymyr Poliek contradicts this assertion that “the chronicles, by the nature of the presentation of historical events and facts, very little resembles Byzantine or Western European chronicles. The genesis of the writing of chronicles has not yet been fully resolved, but there are different hypotheses, because the chronicles did not reach our times.”¹¹ Bilous says that the writing of chronicles, initiated at the behest of the authority of that time (kn-yaz), became the official reflection of the past and present, the official version of Rus’ history. Thus, records were kept on record annually, although fragmentarily and not all years were recorded by the annalists. The events were recorded clearly and concisely, and sometimes more extensively.

DESCRIPTIONS OF OMENS IN ANCIENT UKRAINIAN CHRONICLES: THE DEGREE OF MASTERY OF THE TOPIC

In ancient Rus’, the sky was seen as a parchment with God’s records, and from time to time prophetic signs actually appeared on it, foreshadowing fateful events: blood-red stars, solar and lunar eclipse, fiery pillars, tailed comets and celestial glow. As Vadym Dolgov points out, despite the stated constant readiness for a miracle, the perception of miracles by the ancient person was not immediate and spontaneous. An analysis of ancient Rus’ literature shows that to see miracles, to single out the miracle from the flow of phenomena of life, to give it an assessment, it took some intellectual training.¹²

This ability was an integral part of ancient Rus’ literary scholarship, the basis of which was the acquisition of the ability to grasp the hidden meaning of things and the development of the ability to interpret the surrounding reality through the lens of Christian ideology. Representatives of the educated elite zealously maintained the exclusive right to comprehend, interpret, and even perform miracles, omens, and prophecies. It was important that the representative of the church or secular government draw the attention of the population to some phenomenon and explain that they are witnessing a miracle or an omen, which also has a corresponding interpretation.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹² В. Долгов, *Быт и нравы Древней Руси*, <http://www.e-reading.club/chapter.php/143254/24/Dolgov_-_Byt_i_nravy_Drevnei_Rusi.html>.

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All sorts of competitors in the fight for the minds of ordinary people were mercilessly destroyed. The perception of the world by the medieval man had many features. One of them (perhaps one of the fundamental ones) was the absence of a rigorous juxtaposition of the divine and earthly worlds. These spheres were in direct contact with each other. The supernatural literally pervaded everyday life and penetrated all spheres of life. It was believed in, remembered, and actions were performed with the understanding that in everyday life, at any moment, something wonderful, beyond the laws of daily existence, could occur.

Wonders are an integral part of the worldview of the person in the early Rus' Middle Ages. The public consciousness of the population of Ancient Rus' was characterized by a psychological openness to the perception of the supernatural, a constant disposition to wonder, a willingness to believe. This phenomenon can also be defined as reduced (compared to a modern person) criticality regarding the supernatural explanation of the phenomena of the world around. A miracle — great, wonderful, terrible, awful — must appear or happen. The miracle can be a voice, a sign, an object possessing phenomenal natural properties or an unusual event caused by the evil spirit. The miracles are called deeds or omens.¹³ To distinguish miracles from the general flow of events in everyday life, a certain intellectual skill was required, which, as a rule, was the result of special training that gave ideological leaders of society (first to the pagan priests, and then to the Orthodox clergy) a powerful weapon of ideological influence on society.

As a “theoretical base” for the interpretation of miracles, ancient writers have widely used the translated works of Byzantine authors. In the ancient Ukrainian literature, the appeal to “miracle”, “omen” had the meaning of the marker of non-randomness, mystical conditionality, certainty associated with the miracle or omen of the event. If certain events, a person or an object showed connection with the higher mystical reality, they, thus, were included in the category of phenomena of the first order, the nodal elements of the universe. It is important to highlight that the notion of the miracle was mainly associated with a saint or the impure force having phenomenal properties. The literature clearly defines the aspiration to link the most

¹³ E. Berezovich, “On some aspects of the concept of a miracle in the linguistic and folklore tradition of the Russian North,” *The concept of a miracle in the Slavic and Jewish cultural tradition*, Sefer, Moscow 2001, p. 95–115.

important facts of “earthly” (political, cultural, etc.) life with the action of higher powers, to build the relationship between the divine and human world. The use of supernatural motives as an ideological weapon in political struggle did not affect, however, the ideologists’ own belief in the miracle. For the needs of the “ideological front” miracles were not invented, but rather were properly interpreted. The advantageous interpretation became the correct interpretation.

The need of a person to know his/her future is one of the considerable fragments of the folk culture. Omens were an important aspect of forecasting the future for a person of the medieval Rus. They are external signs which indicate the future. The current level of knowledge on the folk culture allows to assert that virtually any fragment of culture is two-way mystic communication of a person and the world of spirits with the help of encoded signs (Vinogradova, 2000). These signs could be connected with voices (the rustling of leaves, crows cawing), seasons (late autumn, early spring, warm winter), behaviour of animals, and celestial phenomena.

The topic of celestial phenomena in Ukrainian chronicles, which are perceived by our ancestors as an omen, has not been sufficiently developed, although a number of researches may form the basis for its further study. The works of Danylo Svyatsky, “Astronomical phenomena in the Rus’ chronicles from a scientifically critical point of view,”¹⁴ as well as the “Essays on the History of Astronomy of Ancient Rus’,” have not lost their significance to the present day. Danylo Svyatsky, with the help of scientific and critical analysis of the annalistic notes on solar and lunar eclipses, comets, falling stars, sunspots, northern lights, and other astronomical phenomena compiled a guide that is useful in clarifying calendar dates, matters of chronology, territories in which this phenomenon could be observed, and finally – the level of credibility of the astronomical texts of the chronicles.¹⁵ According to Svyatsky, our chronicles contain rich, true and often very important astronomical material. Our annalists, in the true sense of the word, were the first Rus’ astronomers. Compared to Western chronicles, they contain more new and interesting information. The Western chronicles paid more attention to earthly events rather than describing the appearance of celestial omens. But while, for example, the Western chroniclers’ evidence of solar eclipses was carefully collected and processed by

¹⁴ Д. О. Свяцкий, *Астрономия Древней Руси*, Русская панорама, Москва 2007.

¹⁵ Ibid.

scientists for the Moon theory, the records of our chroniclers have been so far ignored. The same should be said about comets, which, however, has already been addressed.¹⁶

Adnrey Laushkin¹⁷ devoted his thorough and quite exhaustive work to omens in the Rus' chronicles. In the article "Natural disasters and natural omens in the representations of ancient chroniclers of the XI–XII centuries," the researcher made a number of interesting observations. In particular, Laushkin drew attention to the Christian interpretation of natural phenomena and omens by the annalist. According to the researcher, "the chroniclers considered the emphasized express openness to the observation for a large number of people (this is neither a dream, nor a vision) as the criterion of the truthfulness of the omens."

Laushkin came to the conclusion that omens for the annalists, and thus for our ancestors in general, were not fatal in nature, but were "merely tools in the hands of God, who with their help wants to bring people to reason and bring them to correction, and depending on the reaction of the latter can either vent the wrath promised in the omen, or stop it." The historian also pointed at a great deal of caution in the interpretation of unknown phenomena by the annalist: it was always performed "post factum, when the meaning of the sign had already been clarified" and, as a rule, came down to the definition of occurred phenomenon as "for good" or "for evil." However, Laushkin tried to illustrate the dependence of a certain type of omens (solar and lunar eclipse, optical phenomena (halo and northern lights), the fall of comets, meteorites, stellar rains, roses, earthquakes, etc.) on its interpretation. The researcher also assigned a significant role in the "decoding" of the omens to eschatological expectations. In general, the work of Laushkin covers a significant layer of phenomena that were interpreted by the chronicler as an omen, revealing their general patterns.¹⁸

Aleksey Pautkin¹⁹ devoted one of the sections of his doctoral thesis "Ancient Rus' chronicles of the XI–XIII Centuries: The Matter of Po-

¹⁶ В. В. Долгов, *Чудеса и знамения в Древней Руси X–XIII вв.*, 2001, <http://medievalrus.narod.ru/dolgov.htm> (accessed 17.12.2021).

¹⁷ А. В. Лаушкин, *Стихийные бедствия и природные знамения в представлениях древнерусских летописцев XI–XIII вв.*, "Русское Средневековье" 1998, vol 1, p. 26–58.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ А. А. Пауткин, *Древнерусские летописи XI–XIII вв.: вопросы поэтики*, Московский государственный университет имени М. В. Ломоносова, Москва 2003.

etics” to the consideration of the annalistic material on natural phenomena. Pautkin notes that the chronicles have brought to us much information about natural phenomena. The ancient authors were interested mainly in exceptional natural manifestations, which carried a symbolic meaning and were perceived as a harbinger. Among the possible features reflected in the chronicles are the celestial and the earthly. The author concludes that the scholars predominantly focused on the images of the visible sky. Eclipses, comets, unusual coloration of clouds and luminaries, optical phenomena of atmospheric origin were recorded by chroniclers of different centuries.²⁰

Thus, the constant readiness to perceive the miracle had a very definite function in the public consciousness: it was a niche for “fitting in” those facts in the general worldview, that were unexplained from the standpoint of mundane life experience. An important role in the perception of a phenomenon as a miracle or an omen played an important role in the social mood, which created more or less favourable conditions for this in each particular situation.

ANALYSIS OF DESCRIPTIONS OF OMENS IN THE CHRONICLE OF NOVGOROD

The topic of our report is understudied and relevant to the medieval studies. Thanks to the descriptions of the omens, you can learn a lot about the ideas of the Slavs, their relation to astronomical phenomena, their attitude towards historical events, and whether the Slavs believed that the omen had any influence on their lives. Namely, in the Chronicle of Novgorod, descriptions of omens are most common. The Chronicle of Novgorod, as Alexander Grigorievich Bobrov writes, are annalistic artefacts that are united by the place of their creation in Veliky Novgorod. There are five Chronicles of Novgorod in total.²¹

According to research performed by Boris Mikhailovich Kloss, the oldest chronicles are the Novgorod First Chronicle. They consist of a senior and a junior recension. The senior includes only one scroll – the Synodal, which in turn is divided into the older part (up to 1234 and dating back to the 2nd half of the 13th century) and the younger

²⁰ О. Е. Еремкина, *Небесные знамения в Новгородской первой летописи старшего извода*, “Язык и текст» 2014, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 6–16.

²¹ А. Бобров, *Новгородские летописи XV века*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25518832> (17.12.2021).

part (up to 1330; The junior recension contains four scrolls: Commission (mid 15th century), Academy (40-ies of the 15th century.), Tolstoy (20-ies of the 18th century), and Trinity (60-ies of the 16th century)²². The Novgorod Second Chronicle, as Volodymyr Ziborov writes, is also called the Archive, or the Malinov. This is an artefact of annalistic writing of the 16th-century Novgorod, which came to us in two scrolls: the first is the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th, and the second is the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 19th. The text of the chronicles can be divided into 2 parts: before and after the 16th century.²³ The Novgorod Third Chronicle, as Sergey Azbelev writes, has the largest number of scrolls. It was published twice by six scrolls: Kolobov (18th century), Synodal (18th century), Rumyantsev First (18th century), Kyiv (18th century), Stroev (late 17th-early 18th century), Tolstoy (18 century). Sergiy Shambinago introduced two more scrolls into the circulation: Rumyantsev Second (18th century), Borsov (18th century). Azbelev revealed six more lists: Titov, Commission, Shchedrin, Belyayev, Academy, Rulin – all of which date back to the 18th century.

Available lists allow to establish the presence of two editions. Azbelev called these editions the extensive (the original version – no later than 1679, the final – 1682) and the brief one (the original version – not earlier than 1682, the final – no later than 1720). And the scrolls of the brief editions can be subdivided into two types: full and shortened. Nine scrolls are included in the full type: Kolobov, Synodal, Titov, Commission, Barsov, Rumyantsev First, Shchedrin, Kyiv, Belyayev. All scrolls of this type end with the news of Metropolitan Joachim of Novgorod in 1674 (except the Belyayev, which stops at the events of 1454). The shortened form is represented by the following scrolls: Academy, Stroev, Tolstoy, Rulin.

The Academy scroll, in addition to the latest news of the scrolls of the full type, contains the news of 1674 on the consecration of Joachim by Metropolitan Cornelius. In the Stroev scroll, the annalistic text is extended to 1699, in the Tolstoy – to 1716. The Rulin scroll stops at the events of 1375.

In total, the Novgorod Third Chronicle has two editions. The Chronicle was first published under the editorship of Yakov Ivanovich Berednikov in the third volume of the Complete Collection of

²² *Новгородские летописи*, 1841, http://psrl.csu.ru/toms/Tom_03.shtml (9.02.2022).

²³ Ibid.

Russian Chronicles in 1841, together with the Novgorod First and Second Chronicles. The second time the Chronicle was published under the editorship of Afanasii Bychkov in 1879 and contained the Novgorod Second and Third Chronicle (Azbelev, 1956). The Novgorod Fourth Chronicle dates from the 15th century by Y. S. Lourie. There are two editions: the elder (brought to 1437) and the younger (mostly brought to 1447, and then continued differently in various scrolls)

The elder edition has two scrolls:

- the Novorossiysk Scroll. Stops at 1437. Rewritten around 1477. The manuscript also includes lists of bishops and clerks of Novgorod;
- the Golitsyn Scroll. Stops at 1518. Rewritten in the same year. The manuscript also includes “The Short Chronicle” by Patriarch Nicephorus;

The younger edition includes a number of lists:

- the Frolov Scroll. The manuscript of the 1470–80’s. Stops at 1448;
- the Stroev Scroll. The manuscript of the last quarter of the 15th century. Stops at September 6985 (1476);
- the Tolstoy Scroll. Manuscript of the end of the 15th century. Contains a fragment of text for 1382–1418 years;
- the Synodal Scroll. Manuscript of 1544. Stops at September 6985 (1476);
- the Academy Scroll. Manuscript of the first third of the 16th century. Stops at 1515;
- the Muzeum Scroll. Manuscript of the middle of the 16th century. Stops at 1535;
- the Dubrov Scroll. Upon publishing as part of Volume IV of the Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles, was considered as one of the variants of the Novgorod Fourth Chronicle;
- the Brief Chronicle of Novgorod according to the scroll of Nikolay Nikolsky, stops at 1556, the manuscript of the second half of the 16th century.

The final, Novgorod Fifth Chronicle, also known as the Chronographic, dates from the late 15th century. We know the least about it. The chronicles lived to this day only in one full list. It is a special edition of the Novgorod Fourth Chronicle, in which the news of Novgorod is greatly expanded.²⁴ Apart from the fact that they clearly and concisely describe the events of each year, the Chronicle of Novgorod stand out

²⁴ С. Н. Азбелев, *Новгородская третья летопись*, 1956, <http://feb-web.ru/feb/todrl/t12/t12-236.htm> (9.02.2022).

from other chronicles of the Middle Ages due to the frequent mention of omens. In other chronicles of the times of Kievan Rus', some omens are often not recorded, or, if recorded, under another year.

Also, as Dolgov writes, the Novgorod chronicler fixes the phenomenon of nature phlegmatically, for example: *“Въ лѣто 6615. Трясило земля Въ 5 лютого”* (“In the year 6615. The ground shook on February, 5”). This ends the entry. Surprisingly, the chronicler did not consider it necessary to comment on this, perhaps, extraordinary event. The Novgorod First Chronicle does not provide us neither with supernatural, nor with any domestic interpretation. Stereotypical mentions of some omens *“Въ солнци”* (“In the sun”), but what exactly these “omens” meant is unclear from the following text. There are many similar passages in the Chronicle of Novgorod. In addition to the solar, there were omens *“Въ місяці”* (“In the moon”), or the thunder would strike the sexton singing in the choir part of Hagia Sofia, so much so, that *“клѣросъ вѣсь зѣ людѣми падоша ниці”* (“the choir part of the church completely collapsed together with the people”) – this is also an “omen,” the content of which is not explained by the chronicler to the reader. What the event participants were experiencing, how did the author himself interpret the described events, remains unknown. The Northern annalist, at best, rises to the interpretation of the unusual phenomenon of nature as an omen, but its meaning remains either unclear or uninteresting, or so obvious that it makes no sense to write about it. One way or another, the opportunity to include a mystical component into the story, which so apparently seems to suggest itself, is used very poorly.²⁵

Here are some more examples of omens from The Chronicle of Novgorod:

The Novgorod First Chronicle (senior recension)

*“Въ лѣто 6536. Знамение явися на небеси змиевъ видѣ.”*²⁶

In the year 6623, the chronicler describes a total solar eclipse on 23 July 1115. *“Въ лѣто 6623. Въ то же лѣто бысть знамение въ солнци, якоже погыбе. А на осень прѣставися Ольгъ, сынъ Святославль, августа въ 1. А Новѣгородѣ измъроша коня вся у Мѣстислава и у дружины его.”*²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁶ “In the year 6536. There was an omen in the sky in the form of a serpent.”

²⁷ “In the year 6623. In the same year, there was an omen in the sun deathwards. And in autumn, Oleg, son of Svyatoslav, died on the 1st of August. And in Novgorod, all horses of Mstyslav and his družhina.”

In this message the Novgorod chronicler not only describes “знамение въ солнци” (“an omen in the sun”), but also connects this omen with the death of Knyaz Oleg Sviatoslavovich and an epizootic.

In the year 6632, a total solar eclipse on the 11th of August 1124 is described. “Въ лѣто 6632. Мѣсяця августа въ 11 день, передъ вечернею, почя убывати солнця, и погыбе всѣ; о, великъ страхъ, и тъма бысть, и звѣзды быша и мѣсяць; и паки начя прибывати, и въбързѣ напълнися; и ради быша вси по граду.”²⁸

The chronicler gives an exact date and describes the event in detail: “и тъма бысть, и звѣзды быша и мѣсяць” (“there was darkness, there were stars and the moon”). As it can be observed, such omens cause “великъ страхъ” (“great fear”).

The Novgorod First Chronicle (junior recension)

*“Въ лѣто 6536. Знаменіе змиево на небеси явися.”*²⁹

The Novgorod Fourth Chronicle

*“Въ лѣто 6535. Знаменіе змиево явися на небеси, яко видѣти всеи земли.”*³⁰

These records mention a comet, and as we can see, the chronicler has no comment on the description of the omen. The last entry also mentions a comet. It is possible that upon recording, the chroniclers made a mistake, and that was the same comet, which was mentioned a year later in the Novgorod First Chronicle. These descriptions of the omens are interesting because the comets looked like a serpent to the ancient Slavs, which is why they considered this celestial phenomenon a bad omen. Nobody knows exactly why the chroniclers described the comet as a snake. But several versions can be suggested. The comet looks very much like a serpent, but no one really knew what they had noticed, so the chroniclers wrote down these omens based on what they looked like. But this theory does not answer the question why then the Slavs considered the omen to be evil. It

²⁸ “In the year 6632. In the month of august, on the 11th day, before Vespers, the sun began to get smaller, and everyone died; oh, there was great fear and darkness, there were stars and the moon; and (the sun) began to emerge and became full; and everyone in the city was happy.”

²⁹ “In the year 6536. A serpent’s omen appeared in the sky.”

³⁰ “In the year 6535. A serpent’s omen appeared in the sky, which was visible all over the earth.”

is possibly due to the fact that, as Christians, the people of Kievan Rus', knew the Holy Scripture, wherein the serpent was the cleverest and the feeblest, evil-doing creature that persuaded others to do the same. An example of this is the well-known episode in Genesis, when the serpent persuades Eve to eat the forbidden fruit and share it with Adam. The second hypothesis is more likely, but this depends on how one approaches the question.

The Novgorod Third Chronicle

Въ льто 6586 ... Поставленъ бысть Великому Новуграду епископъ Германъ. При семъ епископе бысть знаменіе в солнце, яко погибнути ему, и мало его осяся, и аки мѣсяць бысть, во 2-мъ часу дни, маіа въ 21 день.³¹

Bishop Herman of Novgorod is mentioned here in that year, that is, in 1078, when he was introduced to the Novgorod bishop's throne, most likely by Metropolitan John II, and in this case the solar eclipse did not foreshadow any evil, though the chronicler believed that it was an omen of his death.

In fact, according to the Chronicle of Novgorod of the 15th century, Herman remained a bishop until 1095 and died in Kyiv, according to later sources, in 1096. In the 15th century, under Archbishop Euthymius II of Novgorod, he was canonized by the Church (locally). He was buried in St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod, in the M. Parvis, but, according to A. Karpov's evidence, his burial is currently absent in the cathedral. Thus, it can be said that this omen did not foreshadow the any evil for the bishop, since he had lived 18 more years after that. And from this we can say that not always the chroniclers interpreted the omens correctly.

The Novgorod Fourth Chronicle

Въ льто 6622. Бысть знаменіе въ солнци тако же: погибъ въ 1 часъ дні, бысть видѣти всѣмъ людемъ, осяся его мало, аки мѣсяць долоу рогама, марта въ 19. Того же льта преставися благовѣрныи князь Михаилъ, зовемыи Свтополкъ; и внидъ Володимерь в Киевѣ на столъ. Бысть солнце аки мѣсяць. Преставися Михаилъ, зовемы Святополкъ, Изяславичъ, апрѣля 16, княжи в Киевѣ льтъ 21. Володимере. Того же мѣсяца апрѣля 20

³¹ "In the year 6586. Bishop Herman was to die in Veliky Novgorod soon. Because this bishop had an omen in the sun that he would die soon, he had little left to live, the moon completely covered it (the sun), this happened at two o'clock in the afternoon, on the 21st day of May."

съде Володимерь Маномахъ на великомъ княженіи на столъ отца своего Всеволода и оустрой мостъ чрес Днѣпръ.³²

The chronicler mentions Knyaz Sviatopolk Iziaslavich under his baptismal name Mikhail, namely his death a month after the solar eclipse. Sviatopolk Iziaslavich was the cousin of Volodymyr Monomakh, who is also mentioned in this record, who, as a result of Knyaz Mikhail's death, ascended the Kyiv throne. Knyaz Sviatopolk belongs to the Sviatoslavich kin, he is the grandson of Yaroslav the Wise. Namely, all knyazes of this kin died or perished before or after the solar eclipse. As for the very cause of death, it is not exactly certain. According to one hypothesis, he was poisoned, and according to another – he died of the disease.

The Lavrentian, the Hypatian, the Novgorod First (Senior Recension), the Novgorod Fourth, the Sofian First, the Tver, the Voskresenye Chronicles

В лето 6573 (1065). ... В си же времена бысть знаменье на западъ, звезда превелика, лучъ имущи акы кровавы, въсходящи с вечера по заходъ солнечнымъ и пребысть за 7 дний. Се же проявляше не на добро, посемь бо быша усобиць многы и нашествие поганыхъ на Русьскую землю, си бо звезда бѣ акы кровава, проявляющи крови пролитье. В си же времена дѣтиць ввержень в Сѣтомль; сего же дѣтища выволокоша рыболове въ нѣводе, его же позоровахомъ до вечера, и пакы ввергоша и в воду. Бяшетъ бо сиць: на лице его срамнии удове, иного нелзь казати срама ради. Пред симъ же временемъ и солнце премънися, и не бысть свѣтло, но акы мѣсяць бысть, его же невѣлаши глаголють снѣдаему сицю. Се же бывають сица знаменья не на добро. Мы бо по сему разумѣемъ, яко же древле, при Антиосѣ, въ Иерусалимѣ случися внезапно по всему граду за 40 дний являтися на въздухъ на конихъ ризиющимъ, въ оружьи, златы имущемъ одежда, и полкы обоя являемы, и оружьемъ двизающимся; се же проявляше нахоженье Антиохово на Иерусалимѣ. Посемъ же при Неронѣ цесари в том же Иерусалимѣ восия звезда, на образъ копийный, надъ градомъ: се же проявляше нахоженье рати от римлянъ. И паки сице же бысть при Устиньянѣ цесари, звезда восия на западъ, испущающи луча, юже прозываху блистаницю, и бысть блистающи дний 20; посемъ же бысть звездамъ теченье, с вечера до заутрѣя, яко мнѣти всъмъ, яко падаютъ звѣзды, и пакы солнце

³² “In the year 6622. There was an omen in the sun: it disappeared in the morning, it was visible to all people that it (the sun) remained small, and the moon covered it, this happened on the 19th day of March. In the same year, Knyaz Mikhail, named Sviatopolk, died; and Volodymyr came to Kyiv to take the throne. The sun was covered by the moon. Mikhail, who was called Sviatopolk Iziaslavich, died on the 16th day of April in Kyiv, at the age of 21. On the same month, on the 20th day of April, Volodymyr Monomakh, son of Vsevolod, took the throne and built a bridge across the Dnipro.”

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без лучь съяше: се же проявляше крамолы, недужи чельовкомъ умертвие бяше. Паки же при Маврикии кесари бысть сице: жена дѣтищъ безъ очью и безъ руку, в чересла бѣ ему рыбій хвостъ прирослъ; и песь родися шестногъ; въ Африкии же 2 дѣтища родистася, единъ о 4-хъ ногахъ, а другій о двою главу. Знаменья бо въ небеси, или звѣздахъ, ли солнци не на благо бываютъ; но знаменья сица на зло бываютъ, ли проявленье рати, ли гладу, ли смерть проявляютъ.³³

As it can be seen, in the Novgorod First Chronicle (Senior Recension) as well as in the Tale of Bygone Years, the story about an omen is given in detail. Therefore, the reduction occurred at the time of compiling the Synodal Scroll. The author of the Initial Scroll also speaks of the negative meaning of these omens: “Се же проявляше не на добро” (“This phenomenon did not mean any good”), and explains to the reader why he reached such a conclusion: “посемь бо быша усобиць многы и нашествие поганыхъ на Русьскую землю, си бо звѣзда бѣ акы кровава, проявляющи крови пролитье” (“after that there were feuds, evil tribes attacked the Rus’ land, because this star was like the color of blood, which meant bloodshed”). In other words, in the Initial Scroll, the chronicler does not only attempt to assess this phenomenon, but also associates it with specific events. In his article “These omens are not good”, A.A. Shaikin links the omens of that year and back flow of the river in 6571, studied in the first chapter, to the beginning of knyazes’ struggle in the 60s of the 11th century [9, p. 105]. Thus, in 6572, Rostislav Vladimirovich, one of the destitute grandchil-

³³ “In the year 6573 (1065) [...] In those times, there was an omen in the west, a huge star that had a bright red light, appeared in the evening in the west and disappeared after 7 days. This phenomenon did not mean any good, after that there were feuds, evil tribes attacked the Rus’ land, because this star was like the color of blood, which meant bloodshed. At the same time, the child drowned in the river Setoml, which was then taken out by fishermen, examined it until the evening and thrown it back into the water. Because its face was so ugly that no one wanted to talk about him. Before that the sun had just changed, the moon had covered it. Such omens are not good events. It was a long time ago, during the rule of Antos, in Jerusalem, suddenly there were horses all over the city for 40 days, the horses rebelled, and the war regiments rose up; this was before the appearance of Antos in Jerusalem. After that, a spear-like star appeared in Jerusalem and was seen all over the city. It appeared in the west, for 20 days it did not descend from the sky, the stars were falling at this time, many died of illness at this time. At this time, in Mauritius, a woman gave birth to a baby without an eye and a hand, its legs resembling a fish tail; and a six-legged dog was born; in Africa, two children were born, one had four legs and the other had two heads. Signs in the sky, or in the stars, or in the sun, do not appear for the good, they foreshadow only evil events, whether it be war, or famine, or death.”

dren of Yaroslav the Wise, with prominent Novgorod people, Porei and Vyshata, escapes to Tmutarakan and expels Gleb, son of Chernigov's knyaz Sviatoslav. Sviatoslav tries to restore his son's rights. Rostislav, not willing to fight against his uncle, leaves the city temporarily. Having waited for Sviatoslav to leave, Rostislav expels Gleb again. In 6574, the Greeks, fearing Rostislav to gain strength, poison him treacherously in Tmutarakan. In the same period of time, Vseslav launched military actions against the Yaroslavich kin; and in 6575, a notorious bloody battle Battle on the Nemiga River, after which the Yaroslavich lured Vseslav and imprisoned him with his children. In 6576 (1068), the Rus' people were defeated by the cumans in the Battle of Alta River, causing a range of internal turmoils.

Svyatsky wrote that this record can be considered as a set-out for various astronomical omens, and therefore it connected the astronomical events of the previous and next years (April 1064 and April 1066). One can also see that here, instead of the usual annalistic records beginning with "in the same year," the chronicler uses vaguer expressions, such as "in the same time" and "before this time." This post most likely describes the Halley comet of 1066, which appeared in the evening according to Chinese and European chronicles and according to an astronomical calculation from April 24, and dreaded the entire Europe, and tells about the past solar eclipse on April 19, 1064. Ancient phenomena are given in accordance to the Byzantine chronicle of George Amartol and his continuer. Three comets known from different sources are described: the first (according to the book of Maccabees) during the rule of Antiochus; the second – during the rule of Nero, described by Josephus Flavius; and the third – during the rule of Justinian, on August 28, 532, also known from the Chinese chronicles.

As we have seen from the examples above, solar eclipses caused great fear among people. For example, in the year 6632, describing the eclipse, the chronicler adds: "*о, великъ страхъ, и тьма бысть, и звѣзды быша и мѣсяць*" ("oh, there was great fear and darkness, there were stars and the moon"). After the eclipse finished, according to Novgorod chroniclers, people felt relieved. Thus, almost after every message, we can read: "*и ради быша вси но зраду*" ("and everyone in the city was happy"). Moreover, out of 12 eclipses described, one (6623) is associated with a specific event, that is, the death of knyaz Oleg Sviatoslavovich and the epizootic:

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Въ то же лѣто бысть знамение въ солнци, якоже погыбе. А на осень прѣставися Ольгъ, сынъ Святославль, августа въ 1. А Новъгородъ измъроша коня вся у Мъстислава и у дружины его³⁴.

Aleksey Laushkin draws attention to the fact that in almost all cases, when chroniclers are looking for a specific consequence of a solar eclipse, they indicate someone's death. It is also interesting that after mentioning solar eclipses, the reports about the deaths of knyazes or lords are especially frequent, although the chroniclers do not make a formal connection between these events. Of course, given the complex history of chronicles, contextual convergences cannot be strong evidence, but it is worth paying attention to these convergences. However, it is not only the death of knyazes that the Novgorod chronicler associates with these omens. Thus, in the year 6639, after the solar eclipse, the campaign of the Novgorodians against the Chudes, during which “многo добрыхъ мужъ избѣша,”³⁵ while in the year 6745, there is a report about a major defeat suffered by the Novgorodians and their allies during the campaign against Lithuania.

Lunar eclipses are reported far fewer than solar ones. In a report dated 6625, it is likely that a total lunar eclipse in 1117 was mentioned:

Въ лѣто 6625. Въ то же лѣто бысть знамение Новъгородъ въ святѣи Софиѣ от грома, мѣсяця мая въ 14, въ час 10: вечерню поющимъ, единъ от дѣякъ зараженъ бысть от грома, а клиросъ вѣсь съ людьми падоша ници, нѣ живи быша. А на вечеръ бысть знамение въ лунь. Въ то же лѣто игумень Антонъ заложѣ церковь камяну святѣя Богородиця монастырь. Въ се же лѣто прѣставися Добрыня, посадникъ новгородскыи, декабря въ 6.³⁶

However, the very event was described a month after the event happened – on the 16th of June. Therefore, it might be some other atmospheric phenomenon.

It is difficult to say whether the chronicler connected the omen in the moon with the *posadnik*'s death. After all, the report about the Dobrynia's death is not given immediately after the report of the

³⁴ “In the year 6623. In the same year, there was an omen in the sun deathwards. And in autumn, Oleg, son of Svyatoslav, died on the 1st of August. And in Novgorod, all horses of Mstyslav and his *druzhina*.”

³⁵ “Many good men were killed.”

³⁶ “In the year 6625. In the same year, there was an omen from a thunder in Novgorod in St. Sophia, on the 14th of the month of May, at 10: singing Vespers, a sacristan was stroke by a thunder, while the choir and people fell down as if they were dead. And in the evening, there was an omen in the moon. In the same year, hegumen Anton founded the Mother of God Church in the monastery. In the same year, on the 6th day of December, Dobrynia, the *posadnik* of Novgorod, died.”

omen. And the chronicler himself does not make any remarks about it. I believe that in this case, the chronicler refrained from analyzing the meaning of this omen. Judging by the exact timing, the report is simultaneous with the event. So, the chronicler might have thought that its meaning was yet to be known in the future. The report of the lunar eclipse in 6657 “*Въ льто 6657... Той же ноци бысть знамение въ лунь: вся погыбе, въ заутрънюю паки напълнися, феурап*”³⁷ is present in the Novgorod First Chronicle (senior recension), while absent in the Novgorod First Chronicle (junior recension). D.O. Svyatsky notes that in February there were no total lunar eclipses in the coming years. The eclipse on the 26th of March was not total; the eclipse on the 15th of March 1150 was total, but it entered its full phase after the sunrise. It is most likely that this phrase appeared in the Synodal Scroll from another year by chance. The most likely candidate is the eclipse on the 12th of February 1161, described by many chronicles and omitted in the Novgorod one. However, the temporal error in this case seems too big. N.G. Berezhevskiy’s opinion is much more convincing. He believes that there was an error in the month, and that is the eclipse on the 15th of 1151.

A.V. Laushkin notes that lunar eclipses were perceived by chroniclers in about the same way as solar ones, that is, as bad omens, one of the meanings of which may be an indication of someone’s death. Thus, in 6625, after the report of the lunar eclipse, there is news about the death of Novgorod *posadnik* Dobrynia. However, as mentioned above, the relationship between the two events is questionable.

CONCLUSION

The author considered the peculiarities of the annalistic genre, which is distinctive primarily for the Middle Ages, but lasted on the lands of Ukraine for a longer period of time, with the annalistic artefacts being created here even at the beginning of the 19th century. At the same time, the chronicles have evolved, changing their form and manner of presentation. In his days, Shakhmatov imagined the ancient Rus’ annalistic writing as a single ancient tree, the separate arches of which, based on the Kyiv annalistic basis of the 11th – early 12th centuries, consistently continued each other. Today it is known that the availa-

³⁷ “In the year 6657... In the same night, there was an omen in the moon: everyone died, but at Orthros, it reappeared.”

ble annalistic material does not adequately reflect the diversity of the ancient Rus' annalistic tradition of the 10th–12th centuries, and yet the Shakhmatov's image remains the most successful definition of the essence of this historical and literary phenomenon.

Having considered the concepts of “omen” and “miraculous,” the author concluded that the constant readiness to perceive the miracle had a very definite function in the public consciousness: it was a niche for “fitting in” those facts in the general worldview, that were unexplained from the standpoint of mundane life experience. An important role in the perception of a phenomenon as a miracle or an omen played an important role in the social mood, which created more or less favourable conditions for this in each particular situation

The author showed that there are five Chronicles of Novgorod in total. The first consists of the senior and the junior recensions, the senior has one scrolls – the Synodal, and the junior one – four scrolls: Commission, Academy, Tolstoy and Trinity. The Novgorod Second Chronicles are presented in two parts – before and after the 16th century. The Novgorod Third Chronicles has the largest number of scrolls – fourteen: Kolobov, Synodal, Rumyantsev First, Kyiv, Stroev, Tolstoy, Rumyantsev Second, Borsov, Titov, Commission, Shchedrin, Belyayev, Academy. The Novgorod Fourth Chronicle have two editions: the senior (the Novorossiysk and the Golitsyn scrolls) and the junior (the Frolov, Stroev, Tolstoy, Synodal, Academy, Muzeum, Dubrov and Nikolsk scrolls). The Novgorod Fifth Chronicle lived to this day only in one full scroll.

The peculiarity of recording the descriptions of the omens in the Chronicle of Novgorod was that the chronicler only recorded miracles without commenting on them. That means that it remains unknown how the event participants were experiencing, how did the author himself interpret the described events. Therefore, scientists have to guess and hypothesize themselves on the attitude of Novgorod citizens to the omens in their times.

Whatever the associations the omens evoked, the signs for the coming events they contained were always mysterious and unclear to the chroniclers. Through the omens, God testifies to himself and his intentions, but the mystery of this sign can only be solved partially and in time by people. Chroniclers were far from predicting the future with omens. In the best case, they left their judgments on the pages of the chronicles whether various signs are “на добро” (“good”) or “на зло” (“for evil”), while most frequently, they limited to a sim-

ple recording of what was seen or heard. In the rare cases when the authors of chronicles did decide to tell the reader their own assumptions about what exactly a particular phenomenon in the sky meant, they did it after the meaning of the omen had already been clarified.

Such a cautious attitude of chroniclers towards providential omens was quite natural. After all, to judge unequivocally the meaning of the omen, it was necessary to attempt to solve the mystery of Providence, “неисповедимых путей Господних” (“the mysterious ways of the Lord”), or even to get on the road leading to serious ecclesiastical crimes such as “вльхвованию” (“wizardry”) and “ведовьству” (“witchcraft”). There was another circumstance that made it impossible for an educated Christian scribe to predict the future unequivocally by omens. According to an ancient tradition dating back to the Old Testament, the omens are not fatal signs, which must inevitably be followed by what they point to, but only instruments in the hands of God, who with their help wants to reason people and lead them to correction. So, depending on the reaction of people, the God can either vent his anger promised in the omens, or stop it.

Therefore, it is impossible to answer unequivocally how medieval people treated the appearance of omens, since not all the chroniclers recorded people’s impressions of what they witnessed, and sometimes did not even comprehensively describe or ignored them at all. Yet, in consideration of all the foregoing and knowing how religious the medieval people were, they feared anything beyond their comprehension; the sky was considered as means of communion with God; they believed that it was his way of warning of future good or bad events, and took it very seriously. Therefore, the analysis of the descriptions of the omens in the Chronicle of Novgorod assisted in deeper understanding of the medieval person.

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