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### COLOUR PLATES

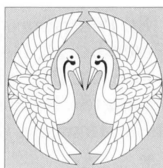
#### Front cover:

**Kim Jungyn (Kisan)**, “[Band of musicians] playing”, the drawing No. 24 from the album preserved in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (call number B-35), China ink and water-colours, the second half of the 19th century, 14.0 × 21.5 cm.

#### Back cover:

- Plate 1. Kim Jungyn (Kisan)**, “That is how officials (= eunuchs?) in charge of security and palace's tidiness look like (?)”, the drawing No. 37 from the same album, China ink and water-colours, 14.0 × 21.5 cm.
- Plate 2. Kim Jungyn (Kisan)**, “This is how the officials clad in formal red garments and hats decorated with gold (for a morning audience) look like”, the drawing No. 54 from the same album, China ink and water-colours, 14.0 × 21.5 cm.
- Plate 3. Kim Jungyn (Kisan)**, “The uniform of the official in charge of the sovereign's safety and responsible for passing his orders”, the drawing No. 28 from the same album, China ink and water-colours, 14.0 × 21.5 cm.
- Plate 4. Kim Jungyn (Kisan)**, “Officials attached to the sovereign”, the drawing No. 35 from the same album, China ink and water-colours, 14.0 × 21.5 cm.

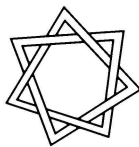
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# TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

A. S. Matveev

## ARABIC SOURCES ON RUSSES AND SLAVS: PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT

Oriental sources provide some of the most important evidence when it comes to the early period of Slavonic and Scandinavian history. The information they contain does not, however, lie on the surface: it is hidden under a thick cover of "cultural layers", through which it is not so easy to penetrate. Even if we put aside the complicated composition of these sources, problems connected with the origin, transition and dating of information, which could be solved by the traditional methods of textual analysis, these sources still possess much of what is determined by the cultural and literary tradition and by the general characteristics of their authors' mentality. Problems of this kind usually do not attract special attention of scholars, partly because they appear too evident, partly because of a lack of interest to such questions. However, if we ignore the specific features of Arabic literary works and of the tradition they follow, we shall never be able to comprehend adequately the information they contain.

The inadequacy of our understanding of the Muslim evidence on Eastern Europe is aggravated when scholars have to use out-of-date translations of the sources and commentaries made in the late 19th—early 20th century [1]. Besides, there are still traces of the positivist attitude to interpretation of the texts, when all textual information is accepted as some sort of "reality" only to be "explained" and "identified" with something which is already known. (This tendency is especially evident when some place-names are mentioned in the texts.)

Most often the evidence presented by the sources has little to do with "reality". It is more like some subjective "virtual reality" which develops according to its own laws, where facts filtered through the medieval consciousness of the author become amalgamated with the standard patterns inherent in the Muslim culture. It is possible to distinguish, conventionally, several levels of such interaction.

1. First of all, the author, and later his audience, are affected by established stereotypes of perceiving events and phenomena. Particularly, it concerns the perception of "alien" and "foreign", which is never taken "as it is" but always interacts with the already existing cultural stereotypes. In this way any new information received by the

culture is transformed — sometimes beyond recognition — according to the rules of already existing patterns.

Thus, for example, "Russes" (al-Rūs), *i. e.* Normans, who appeared in the Muslim West, in Spain, became known under the name of "al-Majūs", *i. e.* "Magi", "fire-worshippers". The use of this term, due to its obvious irrelevancy, gave rise to many scholarly controversies. Actually, the Russes were pagans at the time when they first appeared, and in the system of concepts established among the Spanish Muslims all pagans were associated, first of all, with the Persian "Magi", Zoroastrians [2]. When a new unknown people, non-Christian and non-Judaic, so, consequently, pagan (nothing else could have been imagined), came into view, one of the inherent cultural models was put into action, which associated Russes with fire-worshippers. The very fact that they cremated their perished comrades served to confirm this identification. The standard ideas existing in the Arab culture about "Magi" were applied to the real Russes, and the practice of cremation was taken for some element of the Zoroastrian cult. As a result, the stories about Russes practicing fire-worship as their principle — even their only — religion came into being. Later, other "pseudo-information" from the traditional stock of ideas about Zoroastrians was added: for example, that Russes used to marry their sisters and mothers. It is obvious that there is no use to look for the background of these stories in actual Scandinavian history — their origin is connected not with real facts, but only with stereotypes existing within the environment where the work in question was created. However, even these stories may contain some real information, namely, that "al-Majūs" were cremating their dead. Even if we knew nothing about this custom from other sources, this evidence of the Muslim authors still could be believed (or, at least, accepted as possible), because there is nothing like this in the accounts of the real Zoroastrians. Thus, the existing stereotype makes the authors, on the one hand, supplement new evidence with facts from the established tradition, and, on the other hand, adjust the reality to the existing pattern, "seeing" what did not actually take place at all (in this case — the fire-worshipping of the Russes).

This attitude is characteristic not only of Muslim authors. A similar phenomenon can be found in the reports of Western authors on Muslim faith and mosques. Stories about Saracens worshipping the idol of Muḥammad in their "mahumerias" wander from one 12th–13th century work to another. They are told even by those authors who lived or stayed for a long time in the Latin Orient [3]. The latter obviously could not have failed to notice that there were no idols at all in the mosques, though the traditional cultural stereotype of viewing the "infidel" Saracens as pagans made them see something absolutely different from the reality. Moreover, this is not an exception, but a very common phenomenon, however, often not easily recognisable. This kind of "mistake" may not be evident at all, if we do not know some different point of view.

2. The next level of interference — closely connected with the former one — is the influence of the literary tradition on the way of perceiving, understanding and describing the events and phenomena interesting from the point of view of a Muslim author. It makes him accept — and keep citing in his works — what he knows as "real", even if he never saw it himself. The medieval author was basing his opinion on the postulate: "it is known, consequently it must be so in reality", — even if his personal experience was — or rather "could be" — suggesting something quite different. His way of thinking was as follows: "I have met no dog-headed people, but I read about them, I know about them, so, perhaps, I just failed to notice them there". Any personal experience in this case becomes useless, if it is not confirmed by the tradition. This specific feature of medieval mentality is more evident — and well-known — in the field of Natural Sciences [4], though it is no less characteristic of other spheres of culture. It manifests itself in Arabic literature, including works on history and geography.

A typical example of such influence of the literary tradition we find in the book of one of the most impartial and truthful "eyewitness" authors — Ibn Faḍlān. He is citing a well-known standard description of how short the summer nights are in the northern lands: the interval between sunset and sunrise is so little that there is hardly enough time for a pot of water to start boiling, if you put it on the fire at sunset [5]. This metaphor is potentially apt, but it can in no way be applied to the latitude of Volga Bulghār, especially in the middle of May (Ibn Faḍlān arrived at Bulghār on the 12th of May). Surely, this piece of information was included in his work under the influence of the literary tradition — because the reader was waiting for this story. If it was missing, it could have been taken as a sign of the author's ignorance. The medieval author had to follow the established rules of compiling of a literary work, and it was required of him to produce a standard set of facts on the subject in question, even if his personal experience did not coincide with them. Moreover, any attempt to dispute — let alone deny — traditional knowledge would give to the author the reputation of a "liar".

On the other hand, the issue is not only that the author is creating his story in conformity with the established tradition. He often "sees" in conformity with it, which makes things even more difficult. Thus, Ibn Faḍlān writes about his meeting the muezzin of the Bulghār mosque, who excused himself for missing the night prayer [6]. After the famous story of the "boiling pot" the muezzin explained, that the time between the last but one prayer (at sunset) and the first (at sunrise) was so short that there was physically

no possibility for him to make one more prayer. He said that he had been staying awake at night for a whole month in fear of missing the sunrise. The muezzin claimed, moreover, that before that there had been even shorter nights than the one when his misbehaviour was discovered by Ibn Faḍlān — an even more obvious lie, because in the months before May nights are longer, not shorter. In spite of his personal experience, however, Ibn Faḍlān tends to believe all that, since this story corresponds to the established tradition. For the medieval author and his reader (or listener) the "seeing" of the external world was replaced by its "recognition": the recognition in real objects — or events — of an "archetype" existing in culture and, through it, in individual consciousness.

3. The third level affecting the real information provided by Muslim authors is connected with the rules of the given literary genre. To some extent it is related to the second level, though its character is more specific and secondary. If the first two concern the object represented, the third one affects the way of representation and dictates the style of the work, standard techniques and patterns, obligatory elements of the narrative, etc. Each genre develops its specific ways (1) of selecting materials and (2) of narrating them. If we pay no attention to the genre, it becomes impossible to establish what kind of information the source in question may contain and how authentic it could be. Thus, it is still possible to believe the records — rather rare ones — left by eyewitnesses, such as Ibn Faḍlān, — though even in this case not without some reservations. Often, when the observer is not able to understand what he sees, either he perceives something corresponding not to reality but to the "cultural model" which has something in common with what he is observing, or he does not notice the thing at all — takes no account of it or omits it in his narrative as "doubtful" or "unimportant". Moreover, this kind of information can be easily lost afterwards, in the process of recounting, because it is not easy to relate what is not properly understood. The interpretation of the texts belonging to other genres is even more difficult.

Turning to the evidence about Russes and Slavs in Muslim chronicles, one should recognise that, in general, it is quite reliable. But the scope of information given by these historical works is rather limited — they are concerned mainly with the raids of the Russes into Muslim territories. The familiarity of the authors with the "scene of events" to some extent guarantees the authenticity of this information. But even there the "level of the adequacy of perception" should be taken into account — such as standard corrections of the number of invaders or of their victims. The exaggeration of the number of enemies — which was quite normal for the eyewitnesses — is also one of the characteristic features of Muslim works. It was done to stress the importance of a victory over the enemy or to explain a defeat. These exaggerations quickly turn into literary cliché. However, this phenomenon was unnoticed for a long time by the 19th century scholars who accepted fantastic figures brought forward by medieval authors.

The geographical works contain the greater part of information on Russes and Slavs, though the level of their authenticity is quite different. More reliable is the evidence presented in the works of the Muslim geographers of the "Classical School" and of some of their predecessors, such as Ibn Khurdadbah. However, their information is more or

less precise only for the territory of the Arab Caliphate, because for its description they could use materials from the state offices (*diwāns*), numerous stories told by merchants and travelers, — as well as their own observations. But even this is not fully accurate. It was an obligatory feature of all medieval Arabic literature, including geographical works in particular, to reproduce any information collected by predecessors — without any criticism, even without any corrections basing upon personal experience, — as it made the work more “fundamental”. Thus, it is possible to come across a description of some city which had long ceased to exist by the time the work was written [7]. New information penetrated into these works with great difficulty, interwoven with old accounts. As a result it is often difficult to distinguish between different layers of information included in one narrative. Innovations based upon personal experience were still not considered to be of self-sufficient value, the significance of authorities in the field of literary work was much more important.

This is the reason why, when we are dealing with Islamic geographical works, we encounter serious chronological problems: it is difficult to assign the evidence to an exact period since it often wanders from one work to another. The earliest version, of course, can be taken for the *terminus ad quem*, but the *terminus a quo* still remains unknown — the original work, the source, could still be older than the earliest surviving record by several centuries.

These characteristic features of the works of medieval Arab authors become even more evident when they deal with alien materials. While more or less reliable information is provided for neighbouring lands, such as the Byzantine Empire, the Caucasus or South Italy, their ideas of Central Europe, Bulghār and the Khazars are rather vague. The “corpus of facts” concerning Central Europe owes its origin mainly to the Byzantine Empire, so it becomes less and less accurate as we going further away from its borders. The most adequate information was on Bulgaria and the Bulgarians, for whom there was a special term — “Burjān”.

The Arabs knew even less about Eastern Europe; the little information they had mainly concerned the Eastern Slavs. It is no wonder if we take into account that the main source of this information was Russes — and Muslim merchants dealing with them. The former appeared in the Bulghār on the Volga and in the Caspian zone already in the mid-9th century, as the trade road “from Varangians to Arabs”, generally, is older than the famous one “from Varangians to Greeks”. The most characteristic non-Scandinavian element of their bands were Slavs, most probably the so-called “Ilmen Slavs” (“Slovene”). In consequence, we have even more evidence on the Novgorod zone than on the Kiev one. Besides — as the Arabic sources rather often mix together information from the “Caspian corpus” on Slavs and the “Byzantine” one — we should also keep in mind that information on pagan Slavs, especially on the Slavs in connection with the Russes, refers, as a rule, to the Eastern Slavs (mainly, “Slovene”). As for the information on Christian Slavs, it concerns Southern and, to some extent, Western Slavs in Central Europe included in the Byzantine sphere.

As for Western and Northern Europe, their knowledge does not go beyond isolated facts, which often have little to

do with reality. Frequent references by modern scholars to the work by al-Idrīsī creates an illusion that Western Europe was relatively well known to the Arabs. This part of al-Idrīsī’s work, however, — unlike the rest of his book — is non-traditional, based upon his own knowledge as a person belonging to the court of the Norman prince of the 12th century Sicily.

The Arab authors constantly reproduce several traditional groups of facts, which practically do not allow one to trace any changes taking place in Eastern Europe. Modern interpretations of this information are nothing but hypothetical. In general, the notions about the Russes, which predominate in the Muslim geographical literature, were formed at the time of their first appearance — from the middle of the 9th to the middle of the 10th century, when all East European trade routes came under their control and when they, as an independent power, penetrated as far as Bulghār, the Caspian sea and the Byzantine Empire. The same pattern of making a cultural stereotype on the basis of first contacts, we have encountered in Muslim Spain. In the East the situation was less tense — there Russes first appeared as more or less peaceful traders, not as terrible conquerors. It made possible a closer acquaintance with them, so the stereotype which developed after the first contacts turned out to be closer to reality. The foundation of the Russian state in Kiev, and gradual assimilation of the Russes-Normans by the Slavs, however, remained almost unnoticed — or rather neglected — by the Arab authors, who still relied mainly on the evidence and stereotypes of the 9th—early 10th centuries: the transmission of any new information was much hindered by the established tradition. Consequently, it is hardly possible to distinguish any more recent data in the Arabic sources.

In connection with the subject of the present article it is important to take into account one special genre of Islamic literature — a description of the wonders of the world, *‘ajā’ib* (“marvels”). It is closely connected with the geographical works and with the so-called *adab* genre [8]. The main function of the *‘ajā’ib* stories was to entertain the reader or the listener — though providing him, simultaneously, with some “scholarly” information [9], which is characteristic of Arabic literature in general, with its main goal “to instruct while distracting”. Consequently, the *‘ajā’ib* literature paid little attention to authenticity of the information, being concerned mainly with something extraordinary, odd or curious, like ancient edifices (basically, those of antiquity) and other “marvels of the world”. Precise details were often omitted, as they were thought to be too boring for the reader. Works of the *‘ajā’ib* genre actually stand closer to “fiction”. Descriptions were adjusted to the existing literary cliché, function of which was to stir the imagination of the audience. Hence numerous stories about gold and precious stones appeared, presenting everything hyperbolically: speaking about an idol they say that it was made of pure gold; if a mountain is mentioned, it appears as the highest one, etc. Thus, they do not contain any precise details, only information of the most general character.

To demonstrate what kind of analysis should be applied to the evidence preserved in the works of this kind, let us take one of the passages from *Murūj al-dhahab* by al-Mas‘ūdī as follows:

### “On the sanctuaries (“sacred houses”) of the Slavs” [10]

§ 1386. There were “houses” in Slavonic lands, which they glorified. Among them was a “house” they had on the mountain, which was said by the philosophers to be one of the highest mountains of the world. There is information about this “house” concerning the method of its construction, arrangement of the types of its stones, and their different colours; about holes made there on its top, how the sun rises in these holes; about gems installed in it and marks drawn there, which indicate future events, about how those gems warn of events before they occurred; and about the appearance of sounds from its top for them (*i. e.* for the Slavs), and what happens to them when they hear those [sounds].

§ 1387. And a “house”, which some king of theirs established on the black mountain, [and] which was surrounded with marvellous waters of different colours and tastes, useful in all [ways]. They had there a great idol representing a man [11] who bent forward, looking like an old man with a stick in hand, who is moving with it the bones of the dead laid in “boxes” [12]; there were drawings of

different types of ants under the right foot, and of the very black ravens of the *ghudāf* variety and other kinds under another [foot]; and marvellous drawings of different types of Ethiopians and Negroes.

§ 1388. Another “house” is on a mountain of theirs, surrounded by a gulf (or a strait) of the sea. It was built of red coral and green emeralds, with a great dome in the middle, under which there is an idol, the members of whom are of four stones: green chrysolite, ruby, yellow carnelian, and white crystal; his head is of red gold. Against him [stands] another idol, like a maid, as if she is offering [animal] sacrifices and millet [13]. This “house” is said to be founded by a wise man they had in ancient times. We have already mentioned in our books [14] his story, and what he had done in the land of Slavs, and what he had made as regards ruses, tricks and cunning machinations [15] by which he attracted their hearts, bound their souls, and dragged their minds despite the vicious nature and inconstant character of the Slavs [16].

This story is characteristic both as a narrative and as an object for interpretation. Usually, the sanctuaries described by al-Mas’ūdī are identified with the West Slavonic temples, especially the one located in Arcona. The only foundation for this identification, however, is that Arcona is known to modern scholars, because the text itself — very vague and fantastic in details — gives no ground for such interpretation. The scholars who studied this account usually chose between two approaches: a complete denial of its historical value or an absolutely free and random explanation without taking into account the nature of the source and its peculiarities. As a result, a Russian scholar A. Y. Garkavi thought, for instance, that al-Mas’ūdī had given a description of the Buddhist temples in the Himalayas [17], while F. Westberg decided that this passage was dealing with the Northern Caucasus and that “al-Ṣaḳāliba” means “Osetins” in the context. As for the detailed work of A. P. Kovalevsky, he supposes that al-Mas’ūdī was describing the Western Slavic temples on the Baltic seaside and the Black Mountain on the upper stream of the River Cheremosh in the Carpathians [18].

The above examples of scholarly interpretation demonstrate that, on one hand, this account was studied outside the context of al-Mas’ūdī’s work; and that, on the other hand, it was accepted *a priori* that if some object or place-name is mentioned, it should exist in reality and could be identified with something. When the source is understood and interpreted in this way, the information it contains turns into a “set of bricks”, from which everyone may construct whatever he wants. Meanwhile the facts reported by Muslim authors can be used only in the context of the source in question together with the entire corpus of Muslim data on Eastern Europe, on one hand, and in the context of Arabic literature and culture as a whole, on the other.

Let us go back now to the analysis of the passage from al-Mas’ūdī. The first thing to be taken into account is the genre of this work. *Murūj al-dhahab* is a complicated historical and geographical composition, and its genre is not so easily definable. It contains an authentic and detailed de-

scription of real events, of which the author himself was the eyewitness or which he wrote down from first-hand witnesses (such as an account of the Caspian expedition of the Russes [19]). However, the story about Slavonic sanctuaries is a typical example of the *‘ajā’ib* genre. It contains generalised information processed by the author according to the rules of this genre. So, the most of descriptive details — such as the careful description of different types of precious stones, gold, and the like — should be interpreted as the attributes of the *‘ajā’ib* genre, not as relevant information.

Then, if we take into account the context and the way of presenting the information, any identification of the described phenomena with some particular object is basically senseless, because the text describes a typical notion of Slavonic sanctuaries present in Arab culture, not some singular object. The non-specified, general character of the description is confirmed by the structure of the whole section dealing with this matter. Al-Mas’ūdī starts with a general notion of the “sanctuaries”, then considers similar “honoured houses” among different peoples: Zoroastrians (fire-temples), Romans, Greeks, Slavs, etc. The descriptive pattern, a sort of abstraction, is the same in all cases: several “concrete” sanctuaries are selected, embodying what is typical of the culture described. The narrative about Greek temples, for example, is given as a description of three monuments; as for others, they are not even mentioned, though the author obviously knew that their number — even within the Caliphate territory — was much greater.

On the other hand, the very suggestion that it is possible to find in the text some information about a remote Western Slavonic object looks quite fantastic. Such a concept can be explained only by the absence of any true understanding of the scope of the Arabic geographical literature in general. The majority of European capitals and big cities are not mentioned there [20] — even the evidence on Kiev and Novgorod, which were comparatively nearer, is very uncertain, — let alone a description of these places. Moreover, there is no other evidence that Arabic authors knew Baltic Slavs at all. As for Kovalevsky’s attempt to

place these “temples” in the Carpathian mountains, it is still quite unlikely, as the Arabs had only a vague idea about those lands relatively far from the Byzantine Empire which “provided” the Muslim geographers with the information on adjoining territories (for this zone there is only seriously garbled lists of Slavonic tribes, such as that of al-Mas’ūdī [21]).

Besides all that is mentioned above, the information of al-Mas’ūdī was permeated with characteristic Arabic astrological ideas and conceptions of the fire- and idol-worshippers’ temples. On the one hand, these concepts were based on Qur’ānic and early Muslim traditional descriptions of the Harranian “Sabians” and Zoroastrians. On the other hand, it was strictly connected to the later philosophical tradition which interpreted Paganism in an astrological way. Of the more important philosophers of this type was Abū Ma’shar, known in Europe as Albumasar, and his followers. In the end of the section on the “temples” al-Mas’ūdī mentions the work of Abū Ma’shar *Kitāb al-ulūf* (“The Book of the Thousands”) as one of the sources of information on the “temples and the great structure, which was constructed in the world every thousand years. Besides, Ibn Māziyyār (Bāziyyār – the conjecture of Pellat), the disciple of Abū Ma’shar, has told about that... And other authors besides them — who lived before them and afterwards — had narrated a lot about what was built and about marvels of the Earth” [22].

Thus, some part of the information of this section was derived from the works of Abū Ma’shar and his followers, though it is not clear to what extent: obviously, it is true about specific kinds of “millennium temples”, as for other information it could be borrowed from other authors as well. The basic notion of this astrological school — that the stars and planets rule the world, and that the religions of all ancient people were a kind of star-worship — seems to be not accepted by al-Mas’ūdī himself who more likely followed the traditional idea of the pagans as fire- and idol-worshippers [23]. However, the more common astrological ideas widespread in that period can be found in *Murūj al-dhahab*. Consequently, it is important to take into account that the new information on the alien peoples and territories which appeared in Muslim East in the 9th—10th centuries, was permeated not only with traditional patterns concerning fire-worshippers and pagans in general, but with relatively new astrological ideas as well.

Thus, it is possible to trace a series of traditional astrological concepts in the chapter in question. First of all, there is the standard notion that the parts (“quarters”) of the world are under influence of the corresponding planets, which could be supported by Abū Ma’shar’s ideas about planet-worshipping by the pagans. Consequently, all the attributes of these astrological deities could be applied to “their” lands. The North — al-Jarbī, the fourth quarter of the world, — was connected, according to al-Mas’ūdī, with Saturn (*zuḥal*) [24]. As for Saturn, he was the lord of all the black, as it is possible to derive from the verses mentioned by al-Mas’ūdī:

Their elder is heavenly Saturn, great chief, strong king.  
His nature is blackness and coldness, the black colour  
of the soul in grief.  
His influence [affects] the Negroes (*al-zindj*) and black slaves  
(*al-‘abid*), then lead and iron [25].

Correspondingly, the North — and their peoples — were considered to be comprehensively connected with the “black”, and this pattern, duly, was applied to the Slavs. As a result, the chapter in question includes Negroes — an absolutely fantastic and otherwise unexplainable idea — and, subsequently, the other black creatures like ravens and ants (the latter, however, owe their origin, as well, to another literary tale concerning the gigantic ants who dwell the coasts of the “Sea of Darkness” (*i. e.* Atlantic Ocean) and devour travelers [26]). Therefore all this information of al-Mas’ūdī is due to the Muslim astrological tradition and has nothing to do with real Slavs, so any attempt to consider this data as evidence, *e. g.* of traces of Slavic totemism, would be senseless.

It is also worth mention that the general ideas concerning the symbolic and magical meaning of the gems and precious metals can be easily found in the given passage. Besides all above, it seems to be very likely that the holes in the top of the first described “house” were considered by al-Mas’ūdī as a “tool” for the astronomical/astrological observation of the sky. Mention of such “windows” can be found in other chapters of the book as well (*e. g.* in the description of the Antioch temple where it was noticed that once a year the newly born Moon appeared in one of the special upper “doors” of the building [27]).

Thus, the only sort of information which we can extract from the passage in question is some general idea of Slavonic sanctuaries as it existed in Muslim culture. To some extent, however, this culture could correctly reflect certain realities of the alien culture it described, as its source was, usually, a rendering of an eyewitness’ narration about something quite typical of the described culture. The place of receiving the information could be the zone of intensive trade contacts — probably, Bulghār on Volga or Khazarian Itil, — where a Muslim merchant could hear a story about Slovenian “sanctuaries”. The story-teller himself seems more likely not to have been one of the worshippers in these “sanctuaries”, but an eyewitness-foreigner — a Rus or some non-local Slav.

What, in this case, is the positive information present in the story? It is as follows:

(1) In Slavonic lands there are (2) sanctuaries (3) located on mountains [in all three cases], in which (4) human-shaped idols were installed [in two cases]. In two cases the mountains (5) are surrounded by water. There are also (6) “precious” stones in those sanctuaries which are arranged in a special way [in two accounts]. Besides that, (7) by the feet of one idol there are special boxes containing bones of the dead [the second story]. All the rest should be considered as an influence of the standard patterns of Arabic literature and specific features of medieval Muslim mentality.

1) The first fact leaves no reason for doubt. There was a clear distinction between the Slavs and, *e. g.*, the Russes in Arabic literature, especially in the works of al-Mas’ūdī. Besides, as it was mentioned, in such a context, usually, Arab authors meant the Eastern Slavs (more often the “Slovene” of the Novgorod area).

2) “Sanctuaries” (lit. “honoured houses”) — is a common definition applied to all pagan shrines described by al-Mas’ūdī, be they real “temples” or just “holy places”. There is no reason to assume that they were actual “houses” [28] (*i. e.* buildings with walls and a roof). The author simply

could not imagine a sanctuary without any walls, so he calls them all “houses”. As for the description of “marvellous holes” in the roof of the first “house” it is no less fantastic than the “foretelling” of its magic precious stones and drawings. It can be, very likely, an influence of the Arabic astrological ideas which associated those sanctuaries with “star”-worshipping. Thus, the story itself gives no foundation for looking for temples constructed of stone or wood in Slavonic lands. However, the very connection of the sanctuaries in question with some “astronomical” elements of the cult may be — to some extent — relevant, but this question is quite uncertain and requires further analysis.

3) The story about mountains also can be accepted without reservations. In other stories about “sanctuaries” mountains are normally not mentioned, *i. e.* it can not be explained as some literary stereotype. Meanwhile the height of these mountains can be no more than an exaggeration — one of the elements of the ‘*ujā’ib*’ genre. On the other hand, this is an example of the interference of the standard literary geographical notion derived from the works of Ptolemaeus about some “high mountains” in the “land of al-Ṣaqāliba”, which replaced the Ptolemeian “Germany” in the Arabic geographical tradition. A usual scholarly identification of those mountains with the Carpathians is no more than a purely conventional thing, because the notion of them was already quite vague and uncertain in the works of Ptolemaeus; as for the Arabic tradition, it became nothing but literary cliché without any relation to reality. So, they could equally be either mountains or high hills. The latter is more probable, taking into account the typical character of the phenomenon described, which implies the absence of other “sanctuaries” in Slavonic lands (otherwise they would have been mentioned). Therefore there is no reason to locate the object described by al-Mas’ūdī in the Carpathians, about which the Arabs knew practically nothing, — let alone the attempt to identify it with some concrete place, as Kovalevsky suggested [29].

Besides that, a purely linguistic misunderstanding could take place when an Arab was listening to the tale of the primary informer; the Slavonic(?) term used in the original story, which may have had a wider range of meanings, could have been understood as a “mountain” (*jabal*), though actually it could have been used to indicate a high “hill”.

4) The presence of “human-shaped” idols raises no doubts, as it is one of the specific features of the narrative. As for the concrete details of the description of the “bent old man” with a stick and the idol representing a maidservant, they look like pure literary “decoration”. Perhaps, the latter may be considered as an indication of the possibility that there could be a main idol and a secondary one (or ones).

5) The water surrounding the sanctuaries, along with its miraculous nature, is most probably also a literary borrowing, though this evidence should not be completely ignored. But if there was really some water behind this story (in the second case these are simply “waters”, in the third — a gulf or a strait), it could mean only that the sanctuaries were located near some “water” — a river or a lake, — less probably by the “sea”. We have to take into account that, according to Arabs’ views, the Slavs, as well as all other Northerners, were living on the shore of the “exterior sea” surrounding the dry land. It affected the interpretation of

new information, turning any “water”, wherever it was mentioned in the original story, into “sea”. Besides, the waters, marvellous and “useful in all ways,” can be a reflection of some real “sacred waters” (spring, pool, etc.) near the described sanctuaries.

6) The presence of the stones in the sanctuaries is quite possible, as it is not a necessary traditional element of temple description, though their “preciousness” — all those gems and gold — obviously belongs to the peculiarities of the genre. Besides, the author and his readers could not, basically, imagine a probability of installing quite ordinary stones in such a sacred place. As for their relation with “foretelling the future”, “sorcery” and some astronomical observation, it can be relevant to some extent, but it is impossible to tell anything precise on the basis of the source itself, as this information may be no more than a reflection of traditional Muslim ideas on the relation of pagans — and Slavs in particular — with “astrological” worship.

7) There is no doubt about the presence of burials in a sanctuary — possibly in some kind of “boxes”, — by the feet of the idol or, at least, on the top of the hill. Judging by the context, not everyone was buried there, but only some, rather small part of the population. It is probable also that cremation was meant, as it would hardly be possible to “move the bones of the dead with a stick” if they were from ordinary inhumations. The practice of cremation, moreover, was, in Muslims’ view — according to the traditional pattern — characteristic of that region, so, perhaps, there was even no need to put stress on what was already evident. This information in general is trustworthy, as it is too unusual to be a literary cliché or some traditional idea. Nor is this produced by an astrological tradition. The suggestion of Kovalevsky that the “dead” are mentioned as “gloomy attributes” because of the above connection of the North with all of its blackness is nothing but overstatement not supported by the text [30]. And it obviously could not have been invented by al-Mas’ūdī himself; medieval authors could repeat absolutely fantastic stories, but they were not expected “to invent” them.

Thus, the analysis of the evidence given by Muslim authors, in view of their specific cultural environment and the way they accepted the facts told by their predecessors, allows us to distinguish some corpus of reliable information about the Slavs who worship idols set on the top of the “mountains”-“hills”, perhaps with some stones installed there, that these are their only shrines, and that at least some of these “hills” are used at the same time as burial places.

In my opinion, it is possible to locate this description. The only cultural phenomenon which may correspond to it is the so-called *sopka* borrows of North-western Russia (the “Slovene” lands of the “Novgorod area”), which are high mounds that look like natural hills. According to al-Mas’ūdī, on the top of some of these mounds idols were supposed to stand. Besides that, some people could be buried there, probably members of the “local élite”. This last feature, however, requires a more detailed historical and archaeological investigation: it could also be interpreted, for example, as a sacrifice; besides, the members of quite different social groups could be buried on different levels of such *sopkas* [31]. Anyway, it must have been a typical phenomenon of the 9th—first half of the 10th century in order to have been evident to the primary informer of al-Mas’ūdī.



به مياه عجيبة ذات ألوان وطعوم مختلفة عامة المنافع وكان اسم خيولهم عظيم  
 على صورة رجل فذاخذ على هيئة شيخ بيده عصي يركب بها عظام الموتي من النواويس  
 وتحت رجله اليمنى صور لا نوع من الرمل وتحت الأخر خرابيب سود من صور الغداف  
 وغيرها وصور عجيبه لارتفاع الأحابيش والترخ وسيت آخر لهم على خيل يحميها به  
 خليج من البحر قديني بأحجار المرجان الأحمر وأحجار من الزمرد الأخضر وفي وسطه  
 فيه تخها صمغ أعضاؤه من جواهر رقيقة من زبرجد أخضر وياقوت أحمر وعقيق  
 أصفر وبلور أبيض ورأسه من الذهب الأحمر وياقوت أصفر على صورة جارية  
 وكان يقرب له فرايين ودخن وكان ينسب هذا البيت إلى حكيم كان لهم في قديم  
 الزمان فذاتنا على خيولهم وما كان من أمره بارض المتعاقبة وما أحدث فهم من  
 الكوكب والحيل والمخاريق المصطنعة التي اجتذب بها قلوبهم ومكان بها نفوسهم  
 واسترق بها عقولهم مع شراسة الصنافية واختلاف طباعهم فمما سلف من  
 كتبنا

### البار الحاس والتوفي ذكرينوت معظمة وهياكل مشرفة

للصنافية وغيرها وغير ذلك مما لحق بهذا الباب للصنافية هياكل على سماء الجواهر  
 العنقية وهو هيكल العنق ولا يرى أشار إلى العنق الأول أو الثاني وقد ذكر  
 صاحب المنطق في المنطق في المقالة الثالثة من كتاب النفس العنق الأول والعنق له  
 والعنق الثاني وذكر ذلك باسطنوس في كتاب النفس في شرحه لكتاب النفس الذي  
 عمله صاحب المنطق وذكر العنق الأول والثاني في الإسكندر الأكبر وروسي في المقالة  
 أفردتها في ذلك قد ترجمها النحاش بن حنين ومن هياكل الصنافية هيكل اتسلسل  
 وهيكل الصورة وهيكل النفس وهذه مدورات الشكل وهيكل رجل مسدس وهيكل  
 الزهرة مثله في جوف مربع مستطيل وهيكل القمر مثل الشكل وللصنافية فيما ذكرنا  
 رموز وأسرار يخفونها وقد حكى رجل من ملكية النصارى من أهل طران يعرف  
 بالحمارك بن سباطه للصنافية الحارثيين أشياء ذكرها من قرايين يتربو بها من الحوان  
 ودخن للكوكب يجرون بها وتغيره لك مما استغنى عن ذكره من حافة التطويل  
 والذي بقي من هياكلهم المعظمة حاران إلى هذا الوقت وهو سنة اثنين وثمانين  
 وثمانية بيت له يعرف بمدينة حران بباب الرقة طلع بيتا وهو هيكل أزراي الأهم  
 عليه السلام وللقوم في أزراي عليه السلام كثير ليس كتابنا هذا موضع له ولا بن عيشون  
 القاضي الحارثي وكان ذاهمهم ومعرفة وكان وفاته بعد الثلاث مائة قصيدة طويلة  
 يذكر فيها مذاهب الحارثيين المعروفين بالصنافية ويذكر فيه البيت وما تحته من  
 السرايب الأربعة المتخذة لأنواع صور الأجسام التي جعلت مثلا للأجسام السماوية

فجعل المسلمون موضعه سوتيا بنذرهم من قد وثب فيه من الرجال الروم  
 اذا ورد ومن البر والبحر وكانوا يعظمونه ويقربون فيه الغزاليين فخرت عند مجي الاسلام  
 وقيل ان قسطنطين الابن من هيلابني الملكة الظهيرة ادى النصرانية هو الخرب ه  
 لجد البيت وكان فيه الاصنام من الذهب والفضة وانواع الجواهر وقيل ان هذا  
 البيت هوبيت عدينة انطاكية على مسيرة الجامع وكان هيكلا عظيما والعمامة  
 تزعم ان الذي بناه سقلايوس وهو في هذا الوقت سنة اثنين وثلاثين وبلايئة  
 سوف يعرف بسوق الجزارين واليزارين وقد كان ثابت بن قدة بن كرايا الصابي  
 الحارثي حين وافا المعتضد في سنة تسع ومائتين ومائتين في طلب وصيف الخادم  
 راي ثابت هذا الهيكل فالبره وعظه على ما وصفنا والبيت الثاني من بيوت  
 اليونانيين هو بعض تلك الاهرام التي سبلا مصر وهو يري من انسطاط علي  
 اميال منها والبيت الثالث هوبيت المقدس على ما زعم القوم والسبعة  
 انما تخبر ان داود عليه السلام بناه وتمه سليمان بن داود بعد وفاة ابيد صلي  
 الله عليه ولم والجوس تزعم ان الذي بناه الضحان وله سيكون في المستقبل  
 من الزمان خطب طويل ويقعد فيه ملك عظيم وذلك عند ظهور شوتيز على نرة  
 صفتها كذا وكذا وعنده من الناس عدد كثير واقاصيص تدعيها المجوس في هذا  
 المعنى واختلاط طين بل تنزهه كتابنا عن ذكره

### الباب الثالث والستون في ذكر البيوت العظيمة عند اول الروم

كانت البيوت العظيمة عند اول الروم قبل ظهور من النصرانية بيت بيلاد المعروف  
 بمدينة برطاجية وذلك اسم بلاد القيرقون وهي ارض الاقريجة وبنائه بانواع  
 الرخام وبني على اسم الزهرة والبيت الثاني باقريجة وهوبيت عظيم عند هم  
 والبيت الثالث بقند ونية وامر مشهور في التشيد وما كان من امره عند ونية  
 وقد اتينا على اخباره واجار غيره من البيوت فيما سلف من كتبنا

### الباب الرابع والستون في ذكر البيوت العظيمة عند الصفا لينة

كان في ديار الصفا لينة بيوتنا تعظمها منها بيت كان لهم في الجبل وهو الجبل الذي  
 ذكرته الفلاسفة انه احد حياض العالم العالمة وهو البيت الذي له خبر في كنيئة  
 بنايه وترتيب انواع الحجارة واختلاف الوانها فيه الهائلة والحجارة المتسوعة  
 وما اورد في من الجواهر والاداء المرسومة فيه الدالة على الكليات المستقلة  
 وما تفرد به تلك الجواهر من الحوارك فبكونها وقابور اصوات من احوالهم وما  
 كان يلجئهم عند سماع ذلك وبيت اتخذ بعض ملوكهم على الجبل الاسود تحيط

Fig. 1 (continuation)

Besides that, the 9th century *sopkas* are mainly huge mounds standing on the high bank of the Volhov River. It was difficult not to notice them from the river — furthermore it was virtually impossible to by-pass this area when moving from the north to the south (*i. e.* from the Baltic Sea to the Volga or to the Black Sea). They made the impression of real “mountains” standing upwards amidst the surrounding flat plain. (Besides, there are some “sacred springs” not far from the complex of the *sopkas* of the Staraya Ladoga on the River Volhov).

It is virtually impossible to distinguish more precisely the period, when this information was received, and this is quite common problem for this kind of source. The work itself was written by al-Mas'ūdi in 332/943, and revised in 336/947 and 345/956, but the original account could be much earlier. If this description has indeed its origin in the works of Abū Ma'shar, as was supposed by Kovalevsky [32], the data in question would reflect the realities of the middle and the third quarter of the 9th century [33]. In such a case the above *sopkas* of the River Volhov were probably indicated, as the greater part of these huge mounds was constructed in the 9th century. If al-Mas'ūdi's narrative was based on the information derived by the author from his conversations with Muslim merchants, when he was traveling in the Southern Caspian area, the description reflects the notion of all the *sopkas* of the Novgorod zone. In any case, neither variant contradicts the proposed interpretation.

In this way the evidence of Muslim authors, if correctly interpreted in the light of archaeological facts, may give us valuable information on the functions of East Slavonic *sopkas* in the early Slavonic culture, in which they served as sanctuaries and places of burial. There is no place here to bring forward all available archaeological evidence to confirm it. It is enough to mention that recently obtained archaeological data correspond with the evidence of al-Mas'ūdi. The archaeological investigations during last dozen years seem to confirm this interpretation. Several excavated mounds of *sopka* type revealed traces of post-hole and “surface burials” (*i. e.* bones remnants from cremations) — such as that on the top of the mound in Dubo-

viki [34] or on some *sopkas* of the Rivers Oredej [35] and Lovat [36]. An oak “box” with cremated bones — a parallel to al-Mas'ūdi's description — was found on a *sopka* by the village of Skovorodka (Strugokrasnenskiy region of the Pskov district) [37]. Besides that, if we regard the *sopkas* as cult centres, it is possible to suggest that the “traces of funeral feast” often mentioned by archaeologists should be interpreted as traces of animal sacrifices, as described in the third account of al-Mas'ūdi. It does not exclude, however, the possibility of a funeral feast as well, but even in such a case its religion function was similar to the sacrifice mentioned by al-Mas'ūdi.

Anyhow, it is clear, that the *sopkas* could not be exclusively burial places, as their number is obviously insufficient for this. The commoners were most probably buried in some other way, such as, for example, the “cremation on the surface of the earth” [38]; as for the *sopkas*, they could be reserved for a higher social stratum, possibly, for local — or, *e. g.*, supra-tribal, “central”, — aristocracy. There is no wonder, therefore, that the Arab authors report on the cult functions of the *sopkas* [39].

In this way, based upon the evidence of al-Mas'ūdi confirmed by archaeological data, we may suggest that in the system of the East Slavonic culture the *sopkas* functioned, first of all, as cult centres, not only as burrows. (The latter idea, considering the *sopkas* as almost the only burial places of the Novgorod Slavs, was current in archaeological literature about ten years ago, when I first suggested my present explanation of the relevant passage from al-Mas'ūdi.)

Thus, the example brought forward here demonstrates that the evidence of Muslim authors can be used to expand the database on the history of Eastern Europe and its population. However, the process of extracting this information implies, on the one hand, a very special attitude to the sources in question; it can be successful only if we take into account the cultural patterns and mental stereotypes of the environment in which they were created. On the other hand, being rather vague and uncertain, the derived information requires some other archaeological or historical confirmation to be safely used for historical reconstruction.

## Notes

1. For example, the only Russian translation which can be “safely” used by non-orientalists, with no risk of misunderstanding its context, is the works by A. P. Kovalevsky, see his *Puteshestvie Ibn Fadlana na Volgu* (The Voyage of Ibn Faḍlān to the Volga (Moscow—Leningrad, 1939) and *Kniga Akhmeda Ibn Fadlana o ego puteshestvii na Volgu v 921—922 gg.* (The Book of Ahmed Ibn Faḍlān on his Voyage to the Volga in 921—922) (Kharkov, 1956)). Also see B. N. Zakhoder, *Kaspiiskii svod svedenii o Vostochnoi Evrope* (The Caspian Corpus of Evidence on Eastern Europe), Pt. 1—2 (Moscow, 1962—1967).

2. That was practically the only type of “pagans” — except the almost fabulous and, anyhow, less important Harranian “Sabians” — encountered by Muslims in the course of their conquests.

3. S. I. Luchitskaia, “Arab glazami franka. Konfessional'nyi aspekt vospriiatiia musul'manskoĭ kul'tury” (“Arab by the eyes of the Frank. The Confessional Aspect of Perceiving Muslim Culture”), *Odysseus* (Moscow, 1993), pp. 26—31.

4. For example, constant reproduction of certain erroneous views of ancient authors on animals and plants, endless copying of hand-craft “recipes”, etc.

5. *Puteshestvie Ibn Fadlana na Volgu*, p. 71. A similar account is included, for example, in the work of al-Mas'ūdi *Murūj al-dhahab. Les prairies d'or*, ed. Pellat (Beirut, 1965—1979), § 457 (henceforth cited as Pellat), who, evidently, did not know the book of Ibn Faḍlān.

6. The main task set before Ibn Faḍlān, a secretary of the diplomatic mission, was to control how the prescriptions of Islam were followed in recently converted Bulghārs and to give advice on religious matters. His power, as a Muslim authority, was quite considerable, naturally, the muezzin was in fear of being punished for his negligence.

7. A perfect example of this kind is the Geographical Dictionary of al-Yāqūt, which contains the description of a number of cities and villages that ceased to exist in the 13th century. The author included in his book passages from the earlier authors alongside the contemporary information. Al-Yāqūt traveled a lot and, thus, could know that those places did not exist anymore — or were in decline, — though he often did not point it out, as he considered it unimportant (he mentioned occasionally that some towns were destroyed by the Mongols, however, that is not a rule, but rather an exception).

8. The rich *adab* literary tradition included information on Arabic poetry, genealogies, history, geography, etc. Its aim was to provide the reader with all the knowledge necessary for a cultured person.

9. Its purely entertaining function became prevalent only in the period of the decline of medieval Arabic literature, *i. e.* from the 14th century.

10. Pellat, ii, chapter 66 (§§ 1386—1388), pp. 389—90. I give here my literal translation of this chapter.

11. Some St. Petersburg manuscripts, for example, the manuscripts in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (under call number D-157 (see *fig. 1*) and D-175) contain a variant *ziḥal*, *i. e.* “Saturn”, instead of *rajal* (“man”), though none of printed editions accessible to me gives this form. Some Russian scholars (A. Y. Garkavi, *Skazaniia musul'manskikh pisatelei o slavianakh i russkikh* (Muslim Authors Account on Slavs and Russes) (St. Petersburg, 1870), p. 139 and A. P. Kovalevskii, “Al-Masudi o slavianskikh iazycheskikh khramakh”, *Voprosy istoriografii i istochnikovedeniia slaviano-germanskikh otnoshenii* (Moscow, 1973), p. 80) accepted this variant. It seems to be virtually impossible, however, to establish at which stage this variant appeared: it is a common mistake from the point of view of Arabic script and the copyist could do it quite easily. We cannot reject this interpretation of the text, however, it is very unlikely that we will ever be able to establish with assurance the original word used by al-Mas'ūdī. Anyhow, we would be able to suggest which variant is more probably right only after comparing most of surviving variants of this text.

12. This word was used to indicate Christian coffins, Egyptian sarcophagi, etc. Here it means probably some “reservoir” or “box”, where the bones of the dead were placed.

13. That is the interpretation of the editor, but — in case of another vocalisation — it could mean “the smoke” (of the sacrifice).

14. Al-Mas'ūdī meant his longer books which have not survived.

15. This is the same word as in the § 1386 (*al-makhāriq*), but its meaning seems to be different in this place (“machinations, ruse”, not “holes”).

16. The last sentence reflects a typical “scientific” idea on the origins of idol-worship. A more detailed explanation was given by al-Mas'ūdī at the beginning of the chapter on sanctuaries (for example, Pellat, § 1371).

17. A. Y. Garkavi, *Skazaniia musul'manskikh pisatelei*, p. 171.

18. Kovalevskii, “Al-Mas'ūdī o slavianskikh iazycheskikh khramakh”, pp. 84, 86.

19. Pellat, §§ 459—461.

20. Except some information about Italy and Rome, the only evidence on Western European cities at that time was a vague reference in *Murāj al-dhahab* by al-Mas'ūdī (Pellat, §§ 910—911) to 150 cities and the capital of all Franks (*i. e.* Europeans) — Bawīra, which, possibly, corresponds to Paris (conjuncture “Barīza”, see *EI*<sup>2</sup>, III, p. 1044, is quite probable). As for the account of Ibrāhīm b. Ya`qūb (of 354/956) on Western Europe, it was preserved only in relatively late Western Muslim, tradition and merely partially, as a quotation in the work of al-Bakrī (the second half of the 11th century), but in the East it was not even known (the “Cosmography” of al-Qazwīnī cited by al-Bakrī is a much later work which dates to the end of the 13th century).

21. Pellat, §§ 905—909.

22. Pellat, §§ 1419.

23. Though, for example, Kovalevsky, who studied this narrative, considered that al-Mas'ūdī followed Abū Ma'shar in this respect (see A. P. Kovalevskii, “Al-Mas'ūdī o slavianskikh iazycheskikh khramakh”, p. 83).

24. Pellat, § 1330.

25. Pellat, § 172.

26. Kovalevskii, “Al-Mas'ūdī o slavianskikh iazycheskikh khramakh”, p. 83.

27. Pellat, § 418.

28. Initially the word *bayt* meant “tent”; later it was applied to “house, dwelling, structure” in general.

29. Kovalevskii, “Al-Mas'ūdī o slavianskikh iazycheskikh khramakh”, pp. 84, 86.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

31. The *sopkas* were rather complicated structures, composed of several levels of stone constructions covered by soil.

32. Kovalevskii, “Al-Mas'ūdī o slavianskikh iazycheskikh khramakh”, p. 82.

33. Abū Ma'shar died in 272/886 when he was about one hundred years old (*EI*<sup>2</sup>, I, p. 139.)

34. Excavated by Sergey Kuzmin in 1990—1991, see Sergeĭ Kuzmin, “Sopka okolo derevni Novye Duboviki” (“*Sopka* by the village Novye Duboviki”), *Arkheologiya i istoriia Pskova i Pskovskoi zemli* (Pskov, 1992), pp. 52—5.

35. Sergeĭ Kuzmin, “Oredezhskie sopki” (“The Oredezh *sopkas*”), *Naselenie Leningradskoi oblasti: Materialy i issledovaniia po istorii i traditsionnoi kul'ture* (Leningrad, 1992), pp. 16—26.

36. Excavated by Konetsky, see S. Y. Konetskiĭ, “Novye issledovaniia v urochishche Gubenskaia Luka” (“New investigation in the Gubenskaya Luka *urochishche*”), *Novgorod i Novgorodskaiia zemlia: Istoriia i arkheologiya* (Novgorod, 1992), pp. 20—4.

37. Excavated by Sergey Kuzmin in 1988, see Sergeĭ Kuzmin, “K voprosu o pogrebal'noi obriadovosti kul'tury sopok” (“On the problem of burial rites in the archaeological culture of *sopkas*”), *Arkheologiya i istoriia Pskova i Pskovskoi zemli* (Pskov, 1989), pp. 48—50.

38. Corresponding "superficial burials" were found recently, see, for example, Sergeĭ Kuzmin and Elena Mikhaĭlova, "'Gruntovyĭ" mogil'nik u derevni Kotorsk'" ("Ground" burial place by the village of Kotorsk"), *Drevnĭ Pskov: Issledovaniia srednevekovogo goroda* (St. Petersburg, 1994), pp. 50—2.

39. Similarly, for example, the principal function of the Egyptian pyramids was not "burial" but "cult". The very existence and the size of the pyramids and the cult ceremonies connected with them ensured the prosperity of Egypt.

### Illustrations

**Fig. 1.** Al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj al-dhahab*, a manuscript from the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (call number D-157), A.H. 1148/A.D. 1735—1736, fols. 155b—156a, 22.0 × 32.5 cm.

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