

The Celtic Theory of the Origins of Rus' as an Alternative to Normanism and the Concept of the «Old Rus' Ethnicity»

UDC: 94(477):930.85+81'373.21

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15421/172586>**Deshko Petro**Master of Arts in History and Law, Psychologist, <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8476-6021,2020petrodeskho@gmail.com>*Municipal Institution «Mukachevo Vocational Agrarian Lyceum named after Mykhailo Dankanych of the Transcarpathian Regional Council (Mukachevo, Ukraine)*

Abstract.

The aim of this study is to provide a critical analysis of the Normanist theory of the origin of Rus' and the concept of «Old Rus' ethnicity» («davniorus'ka narodnist'») within the context of the Celtic theory. The author questions the prevailing paradigms that link the emergence of Rus' exclusively to Scandinavian influence or to a unified Slavic ethnic foundation. Particular attention is devoted to the hypothesis that the ethnonym «Rus'» derived from the Finnish word «Ruotsi», used to describe Swedish merchants. This assumption is critically re-evaluated based on historical and linguistic evidence.

The novelty of the study lies in its systematic revision of conventional interpretations of the origin of Rus' through the integration of the underexplored Celtic factor – specifically the role of the Celtic Ruthenians. The paper analyses historical evidence and toponymic parallels in Europe and the Dnipro region in general, along with archaeological data from the Przeworsk and Chernyakhiv cultures, which attest to Celtic migration and integration in Eastern Europe between 469 and 562 CE or earlier. A new interpretation of medieval sources and place names is proposed, enabling a rethinking of early Rus' formation within a broader European context.

Conclusions. The concept of «Old Rus' ethnicity» («davniorus'ka narodnist'») is shown to be an ideological construct that does not withstand scholarly scrutiny. The traditional claim of a homogeneous East Slavic community in the 10th–12th centuries is based on artificial generalisations and disregards the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity of Rus'. Unlike the Normanist theory – developed within the framework of imperial historiography and relying largely on late and questionable sources – the Celtic theory presents a more robust and verifiable source base, encompassing linguistic evidence, Celtic toponymy, and material indicators of cultural interaction. The study argues that the formation of Rus' was the result of a complex ethno-cultural synthesis in which the Celtic element played a structurally significant – not peripheral – role.

Keywords: Old Rus' ethnicity, Celtic Ruthenians, Kyivan Rus', proto-Ukrainian tribes, Normanist theory, Celtic origin theory of Rus', Dromites

Кельтська теорія походження Русі як альтернатива норманізму та концепції «давньоруської народності».

Дешко Петро*КЗ «Мукачівський професійний аграрний ліцей імені Михайла Данканича» ЗОР (Мукачеве, Україна)*

Анотація.

Метою даного дослідження є критичний аналіз норманської теорії походження Русі та концепції «давньоруської народності» у контексті кельтської теорії. Автор піддає сумніву усталені парадигми, які пов'язують виникнення Русі виключно зі скандинавським впливом або з ідеєю спільного слов'янського етнічного підґрунтя. Особлива увага приділена гіпотезі про походження етноніма «Русь» від фінського слова «Ruotsi», яким позначали шведських торговців. Це припущення критично переосмислюється на основі історичних і лінгвістичних даних.

Наукова новизна дослідження полягає у спробі системного перегляду традиційних уявлень про походження Русі шляхом інтеграції малодослідженого кельтського чинника – передусім ролі кельтських рутенів. У роботі проаналізовано історичні свідчення, топонімічні паралелі в Європі та Наддніпрянщині загалом, а також археологічні дані з пшеворської й черняхівської культур, які засвідчують міграцію та інтеграцію кельтів у Східну Європу між 469 і 562 роками або й раніше. Запропоновано нове прочитання середньовічних джерел і назв, що дає змогу переосмислити процеси формування Русі в ширшому європейському контексті.

Висновки. Концепція «давньоруської народності» виявляється ідеологічною конструкцією, яка не витримує наукової критики. Традиційна теза про існування однорідної східнослов'янської спільноти у X–XII ст. ґрунтується на штучних узагальненнях і не враховує мовну, культурну й етнічну строкатість Русі. На відміну від норманської теорії, сформованої в межах імперських історіографічних потреб, що спирається переважно на пізні та сумнівні джерела, кельтська теорія має ширшу й верифіковану джерельну базу, що включає лінгвістичні ознаки, кельтську топонімію та матеріальні свідчення культурної взаємодії. У дослідженні доводиться, що формування Русі є результатом складного етнокультурного синтезу, в якому кельтський елемент виконував не периферійну, а структурно важливу роль.

Ключові слова: давньоруська народність, кельти-рутени, Київська Русь, протоукраїнські племена, норманська теорія, кельтська теорія походження Русі, дроміти

Стаття надійшла / Article arrived: 22.07.25

Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 28.08.25

Introduction.

Problem Statement. Contemporary Russian historiography continues to be dominated by the concept of the so-called «Old Rus' ethnicity» – a constructed ethno-cultural unity allegedly serving as the common cradle of the Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian peoples. Equally widespread is the Normanist theory, which posits a Scandinavian origin of Rus', allegedly founded by the mythical figure of Rurik. These ideologically motivated constructs underpin the principal methodological approaches of Russian academic tradition but primarily serve the political paradigm of a specific state and fail to withstand critical scrutiny within the framework of global scholarly discourse.

Over the centuries, numerous Ukrainian and international scholars have consistently refuted these pseudo-scientific theories as instruments of imperial historical narrative. Nevertheless, Russian academic circles continue to endorse them, guided chiefly by the political interests of the Kremlin's ruling elites.

Review of Research and Publications. Among the scholars who have questioned and refuted the concept of the «Old Rus' ethnicity», it is necessary to highlight S. J. Smal-Stockyj (Smal-Stockyj & Gartner, 1913), Yu. V. Shevelov (1994; 2002), H. P. Pivtorak (1988; 1993; 2001), K. M. Tyshchenko (2005; 2023a; 2023b; 2023c), L. L. Zalizniak (1996; 1999; 2023), V. H. Balushok (2011), and other prominent researchers whose works constitute a significant contribution to the critical analysis of this issue.

Purpose of this study is to conduct a critical analysis of the «Old Rus' ethnicity» concept and the Normanist theory in light of the alternative hypothesis concerning the Celtic origin of Rus'. This article challenges the conventional approach, which is grounded in the notion of a shared ethnic root of the Eastern Slavs and the assumption of Norman founders of Rus'. Instead, it substantiates the significant influence of Celtic (Ruthenian) tribes on the formation of the early proto-Ukrainian ethnos.

Results of the Research.

The concept of a unified «Old Rus' ethnicity» presupposes a common territory, culture, ethnic identity, and language (Pivtorak, 2001; Yusova, 2005). Regarding the territory, it is true that a shared geographic space existed; however, the diversity of tribes did not contribute to the formation of a single ethnicity. In the north lived the Balts, in the northeast – the Finno-Ugric peoples, and in the south – Turkic groups, among others. The Slavs themselves were separated by dense, impassable forests and swamps. As for the supposed common language, this issue requires separate consideration. Given these circumstances, the state of Rus' exhibits more of a colonial character than an ethno-national one.

One of the key arguments against the concept of the «Old Rus' ethnicity» is the linguistic heterogeneity of the population of Rus', which made the existence of a unified ethnic community within this state formation impossible.

The languages of various ethnic groups, including that of the proto-Ukrainian ethnos, had begun to develop long before the emergence of Rus', thereby refuting the thesis of their initial ethnic unity. Even Church Slavonic, based on the Old Bulgarian and Macedonian dialects of the South Slavs, could not serve as an integrating factor for the East Slavic tribes, Baltic peoples, and Finno-Ugric groups inhabiting the territory of Kyivan Rus' in the 10th–12th centuries.

An important argument in favor of the antiquity of Ukrainian ethnogenesis lies in linguistic studies. According to the research of K. M. Tyshchenko, the Ukrainian language possesses ten historical attestations that confirm its development and existence:

I. The first witness of the existence of the Proto-Ukrainian language is the Upper Sorbian language.

II. The second witness of the existence of the Proto-Ukrainian language is the Polabian language.

III. The third witness of the existence of the Proto-Ukrainian language is the Lida-Loyev isogloss belt.

IV. The fourth witness of the antiquity of several Ukrainian linguistic features (11th–12th centuries) is the Novgorod birchbark letters.

V. The fifth witness of ancient elements of the Ukrainian language (4th century) is the Gothic language.

VI. The sixth Ukrainian witness (2nd century AD) is the Celtic neighbors, particularly the Celtic origin of the suffix **-yna**.

VII. The seventh Ukrainian witness is the popular Latin future imperfect tense (2nd century AD).

VIII. The eighth Ukrainian witness serving as a «clock» for Proto-Slavic (2nd century AD) is the M. Swadesh list: a comparison of Swadesh wordlists across Slavic languages.

IX. The unexpected ninth Ukrainian witness (5th century BC) is the Scythians, specifically Aristophanes' references to Scythian pronunciation.

X. The tenth Ukrainian witness is the Ukrainian language itself (Tyshchenko, 2023a).

The specific trajectory of the Ukrainian language and the processes of Ukrainian ethnogenesis rule out the possibility of an «Old Rus' ethnicity» having existed in the 10th–12th centuries, as both the Ukrainian language and ethnos had begun to form long before the emergence of this retrospective construct.

According to K. M. Tyshchenko, ancient layers of the Ukrainian language developed under the influence of the languages of archaic peoples. In particular, the phoneme **-h-** [ɦ] is attributed to Scythian influence; the suffix **-yna** derives from Celtic sources; the derivational suffix **-ar** was adopted from the Gothic language; and the forms of the imperfect future tense (e.g., **yistymu**, **zhytymesh**) with endings such as **-mu**, **-mesh**, **-me**, **-memo**, **-mete**, and **-mut'** emerged under the influence of Latin, the language of the Romans (Tyshchenko, 2023b; Tyshchenko, 2023c).

Based on the aforementioned, it is possible to cite examples of words containing the suffixal form **-yna**, borrowed from the Celtic language: **liudyna** (person),

divchyna (girl), khlopchyna (boy), rodyna (family), tvaryna (animal), perlyna (pearl), drabyna (ladder). Words featuring the suffix **-ar**, which originates from the Gothic language, are exemplified by: drukar (printer), pysar (scribe), zhnyvar (reaper), kosar (mower), shkoliar (schoolboy), muliar (mason). The forms of the future tense of the imperfective aspect, which emerged under the influence of the Latin language of the Romans, can be illustrated by the following examples: yistymu (I will eat), yistymesh (you will eat), yistyme (he/she will eat), yistymemo (we will eat), yistymete (you [pl.] will eat), yistymut' (they will eat).

Ukrainian has inherited a significant number of features from Proto-Slavic, which attests to its historical depth and linguistic autonomy on par with other Slavic languages. H. P. Pivtorak identified key characteristics of the Ukrainian language that stem from Proto-Slavic origins, including:

- the genitive singular ending **-u** in masculine nouns with an original *u*-stem, e.g., solodu, medu, domu, verchu, polu;
- the dative singular endings **-ovi**, **-evi**, **-jevi** in the same group of masculine nouns (e.g., solodovi, medovi, domovi), which later extended to all masculine nouns;
- alternation of consonants **h**, **k**, **kh** with the sibilants **z**, **ts**, **s**, in the dative and locative singular (e.g., noha – nozi, ruka – rutsi, vukha – u vusi – examples provided by the author);
- vocative forms of nouns: zheno, družhe, kniazhe, brate, zemle, vladyko, uchyteliu;
- dative singular forms of pronouns: meni, tobi, sobi;
- third-person present and simple future forms of first conjugation verbs: mozhe, ubyvaie, ide, zhyve, pouchaiie;
- the ending **-mo** in the first-person plural of present and future tense verbs: daiemo, postavymo, pytaiemo, pomahaiemo, etc. (Pivtorak, 2001, p. 45).

The prominent Ukrainian linguist Yuri Shevelov identified the following stages in the development of the Ukrainian language: Proto-Ukrainian (7th–11th centuries); Old Ukrainian (11th–14th centuries); Early Middle Ukrainian (15th–16th centuries); Middle Ukrainian (mid-16th century to the early 18th century); Late Middle Ukrainian (18th century); Modern Ukrainian (from the late 18th century to the present) (Khrystenok, 2009, p. 176; Shevelov, 2002).

In his works, Yu. V. Shevelov asserted that the Ukrainian language was formed on the basis of the Halych-Podilskyi and Kyiv-Polissian dialectal areas. He distinguished the following linguistic zones: Halych-Podilskyi, Kyiv-Polissian, Polotsk-Smolensk, Novgorod-Tver, and Murom-Riazan (Shevelov, 1994, pp. 8–11).

In contrast, H. P. Pivtorak proposed a different framework, according to which it is possible to provisionally distinguish the following ethno-linguistic groups: Halych-Volhynian, Polissian-Kyivan, Smolensk-Polotsk, Pskov-Novgorod, and Vladimir-Suzdal (Pivtorak, 1993, p. 179).

According to Pivtorak, each of these ethnolinguistic groups possessed its own political and cultural centers, a clearly defined territory, distinctive cultural traditions, a shared economic life, and a sense of belonging to a specific «small homeland» (Pivtorak, 1993, p. 179).

In his work «Formation and Dialectal Differentiation of the Old Rus' Language» (1988), H. P. Pivtorak proposed the classification of six dialectal macrozones: the Halych-Volhynian, the Carpathian, the Polissian, the Polotsk-Smolensk, the Pskov-Novgorod, and the Rostov-Suzdal (Pivtorak, 1988, p. 236).

It should be noted that the Penkivka culture (5th–8th centuries), often associated with the Slavic Antes, is considered an integral component of the ethnocultural formation of the Slavs. The territory of the Prague-Korchak culture (5th–7th centuries) corresponds to the area inhabited by the Sclaveni, who were mentioned by Jordanes and Procopius in the 6th century. Accordingly, the Sclaveni are regarded as bearers of the Prague culture. The languages of the Sclaveni and Antae tribes later became the foundation for the development of the northern and southwestern dialectal zones of the Ukrainian language (Deshko, 2024a).

Thus, it can be concluded that the Ukrainian language is an ancient language of a fully formed Ukrainian ethnos, which emerged long before the appearance of the concept of the «Old Rus' ethnicity» (10th–12th centuries) or the Russian nation.

However, it should be emphasized that the concept of the «Old Rus' ethnicity» does not withstand critical scrutiny when examined from the perspective of the Celtic theory of the origin of Rus'. The Celtic tribe of the Ruthenians played a pivotal role in the formation of the proto-Ukrainian ethnic group, its identity, endonym, and the establishment of the powerful polity of Rus', long before the emergence of the so-called «Old Rus' ethnicity». This concept was later constructed by Moscow-centered historians in order to artificially legitimize the historical primacy of the Russian (Muscovite) ethnic group. The subsequent section will also address a critique of the Normanist theory of the origin of Rus', which exhibits comparable ideological constructs and methodological shortcomings (to be discussed in Postulate Four, concerning the theory's scholarly relevance and falsifiability).

According to our theory, the Celtic Ruthenians, who penetrated the territory of present-day Ukraine, played a formative role in the emergence of the proto-Ukrainian ethnic group, leaving behind their endonym, which later became the name of a prominent polity-Rus'. In Narbonese Gaul (modern southern France), a Celtic tribe known as the Rutheni inhabited the region; they were mentioned in antiquity by Julius Caesar (Gaius Iulius Caesar, n.d.), Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus, n.d.), Marcus Lucan (Marcus Annaeus Lucanus, n.d.), Gregory of Tours (Gregorius Turonensis, n.d.), among others.

S. P. Shelukhin traced the name Rutheni to the Celtic word Ruthenia, which he interpreted as meaning «road» (cf. route). In contrast, V. H. Sklyarenko proposed that the term derived from the Celtic roudos («red»), citing Marcus Lucan, who referred to the Ruthenians as flavi Rutheni («reddish-blond Ruthenians»).

Our theory is based on four main postulates:

I. The analysis of written sources, which makes it possible to trace references to the Ruthenians in ancient and medieval literature.

II. The study of toponymic material, which confirms the interrelations between place names, particularly the name «Ruthenia».

III. The examination of archaeological data, which aids in reconstructing the cultural and historical context of the Ruthenians' presence on the territory of present-day Ukraine.

IV. The scientific relevance and the verifiability of the theory

The theory corresponds to contemporary scientific paradigms, withstands critical scrutiny, and demonstrates a high level of theoretical substantiation and source-based validation.

I. The First Postulate – The Analysis of Written Sources

The Greeks referred to Ruthenia as «Dromos» («run», «path»), and its people as «Dromites». Symeon the Logothete described the Rus' as Dromites of Frankish origin, who may have been assimilated Celts. He also stated that the name «Dromites» was associated with speed («running»), and that the Rus' received their name from a powerful individual named Ros (Deshko, 2024c).

The same author writes: «In that same year, the Rus', also called Dromites, of the Frankish lineage, came to Constantinople in ten thousand boats» (Hrushevskyi, 1895, p. 70).

Another similar passage in the chronicle of Symeon the Logothete reads:

«The Rus', also known as Dromomites, have their name (Rus') from a certain powerful man named Ros, and they were thus called after being delivered, through some divine counsel or inspiration, from the afflictions imposed by those who had conquered and ruled them. They were named Dromites because of their swiftness in running. And they are of Frankish origin» (Hrushevskyi, 1895, p. 70).

The control of the Black Sea by the Ruthenians is further suggested by the name of the Tendrivska Spit – «Achilles Dromos» («Achilles' Run») – which may indicate the presence and influence of the Ruthenians in the formation of the Black Sea Rus' (Deshko, 2024c).

The Polish chronicler Gallus Anonymus, writing in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, also identifies Rus' with the Celtic ethnos of the Ruthenians in his historical narrative: «Contigit namque uno eodemque tempore Boleslavum regem RUSSIAM, RUTHENORUM vero regem Poloniam», which translates as: «It so happened

that at the same time King Bolesław III invaded Russia, while the king of the Ruthenians invaded Poland» (Pritsak, 1997, p. 50).

A similar terminology is employed by the chronicler Suger, Abbot of the Abbey of Saint-Denis (c. 1081–1151), who identifies the ruler of Rus' with the king of the Ruthenians, using the title Rex Ruthenorum. In his text, he refers to «Atavae Regis Ruthenorum filiae», which translates as «Atava, daughter of the king of the Ruthenians» (Pritsak, 1997, p. 50). This reference concerns Anna of Kyiv, the daughter of Yaroslav the Wise and Queen of France, with the name Atavae interpreted as «Anna» (Pritsak, 1997, p. 50).

Thus, the analysis of medieval sources suggests an association between Rus' and ancient Ruthenia, pointing to a possible connection between Kyivan Rus' and the Celtic ethnos of the Ruthenians, rather than an exclusively Scandinavian origin – though the latter also had a notable influence on the formation of statehood.

One of the proofs of our proposed concept is the migration flow of the Celtic Ruthenians. In the 5th century, some 1,300 km from the Ruthenian capital of Rodez (modern Provence, France), their presence is recorded in the Christian catacombs of Salzburg in the Roman province of Noricum. Notably, the inscription mentions Odoacer, king of the Ruthenians:

«Anno Domini CCCCLXXVII Odoacer Rex Rhutenorum Geppidi Gothi Ungari et Heruli Contra Ecclesiam Dei Servientes Beatum Maximum cum sociis suis Quinquaginta in hoc speleo Latinantibus ob Confessionem Fidei Trucidatos Precipitarunt Noricorum quoque Provinciam ferro et igne Demoliti sunt» (Shelukhin, 1929, p. 22).

This is translated roughly as: «In the year of our Lord 477, Odoacer, king of the Ruthenians – as well as of the Gepids, Goths, Hungarians and Heruls – acting against the Church of God, brutally executed the pious Bishop Maximus and his fifty companions who were praying in this cave, throwing them into an abyss. He also devastated the province of Noricum with fire and sword».

This passage states that Odoacer, king of the Ruthenians, executed Bishop Maximus and his followers. It is likely, however, that Odoacer was of Germanic origin. Importantly, he deposed Romulus Augustulus, the last emperor of the Western Roman Empire, and subsequently became ruler of Italy. This event – occurring in 476 – is conventionally regarded as the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

The mention of Odoacer in Salzburg – 1,300 km from Rodez – suggests significant migratory movements of the Ruthenians. It is plausible they traveled via the Danube River and the Black Sea, possibly reaching present-day Ukraine.

The idea of Odoacer's connection to the ancient Rus receives mention in the Chronicle of Samiilo Velychko. Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky of the Zaporizhzhian Host underscored the lineage of the Ukrainian Cossacks from the Rus of Rugia:

«Even Ancient Rome, which once ruled many kingdoms and monarchies and boasted six hundred and forty-five thousand troops, in ancient times was opposed for fourteen years by the far smaller combined fighting force of the Rus from Rugia – from the Baltic or Germanic seacoast – led at that time by Prince Odonacer. This occurred in the year 470 A.D. Thus, we follow the example of our ancient forebears, those ancient Rus, and who can forbid us to be warriors and diminish our knightly valor!» (Velychko, 1926, p. 51).

Thus, medieval sources reflect a concept of historical continuity linking the Ruthenians, Rus, and the Ukrainian Cossacks – suggesting complex ethno-cultural processes across Europe over the centuries.

S. E. Tsvetkov notes that, according to Julius Caesar, the Rutheni neighbored the Lemoviki in Gaul, while Tacitus indicates that the Baltic Rugii shared borders with the Lemovii. Both peoples reportedly used similar weaponry, including short swords and round shields (Tsvetkov, 2012, pp. 206–207). Based on this, Tsvetkov identified the Rutheni with the Rugii, and the Lemoviki with the Lemovii.

On the other hand, O. J. Pritsak hypothesizes that in the language of the Riparian Franks, there was a consonant shift from t to d and later to g (ruti > rudi > rugi) (Pritsak, 1997, p. 49). As a result, the Rutheni, influenced by the Riparian Franks, became known as the Rugii (Pritsak, 1997, p. 48–49). This is why the monk Otto I and Adalbert referred to the Rus as Rugii (Pritsak, 1997, p. 47).

Therefore, whether the Rugii derived from the Rutheni or were merely under their cultural influence, historical sources record their close interaction – eventually leading to their conflation.

II. The Second Postulate – The Study of Toponymic Material

O. M. Shchodra notes that, according to A. H.

Kuzmin, the Catholic missionaries Ebbo and Herbord used the same term, «Ruthenia», to denote both Kyivan Rus' and the Baltic Rugia (Shchodra, 2021).

According to our hypothesis, this phenomenon may be explained by the migration of certain Ruthenian groups to the Baltic coast, while others settled in the Danubian region. Their presence in the Baltic area is attested by a series of toponyms that have preserved the ethnonym of the Ruthenians: Ruge, Rugenhof, Rugeshus, Rugard, Ruschvitz (Molchanova, 2008), and Rugenwalde (Tsvetkov, 2012, p. 206–207).

At the same time, the Raffelstetten Customs Ordinance (dated between 904 and 906 CE) mentions the territory of «Ruzaramarcha» («the Rus' March»), situated on the right bank of the Danube, in the area formerly known as Rugiland, encompassing parts of Eastern Bavaria, Salzburg, Lower and Upper Austria. The document contains information on trade relations maintained by merchants from various regions, including Rugen (interpreted as Kyivan Rus') and Bohemia (Halenko, 2006, p. 10–11).

However, the toponym «Ruzaramarcha» appears even earlier in a charter of the East Frankish king Louis II the German, dated to 863 CE (Pritsak, 1997, p. 41). This attests to the early cultural, political, and economic influence of Rus' in the region. The presence of numerous toponyms associated with the Ruthenians or Rus' people further confirms their settlement in the Danubian area: Rotularius, Reodarii (Halenko, 2006, p. 11), Rosdorf, Ruzische Mushel (Shchodra, 2021).

Furthermore, a significant number of toponyms that may be associated with the Ruthenians or the Rus' have been recorded across various regions of Europe (see Figure 1). This provides additional support for the hypothesis of their possible migration into the territory of present-day Ukraine.

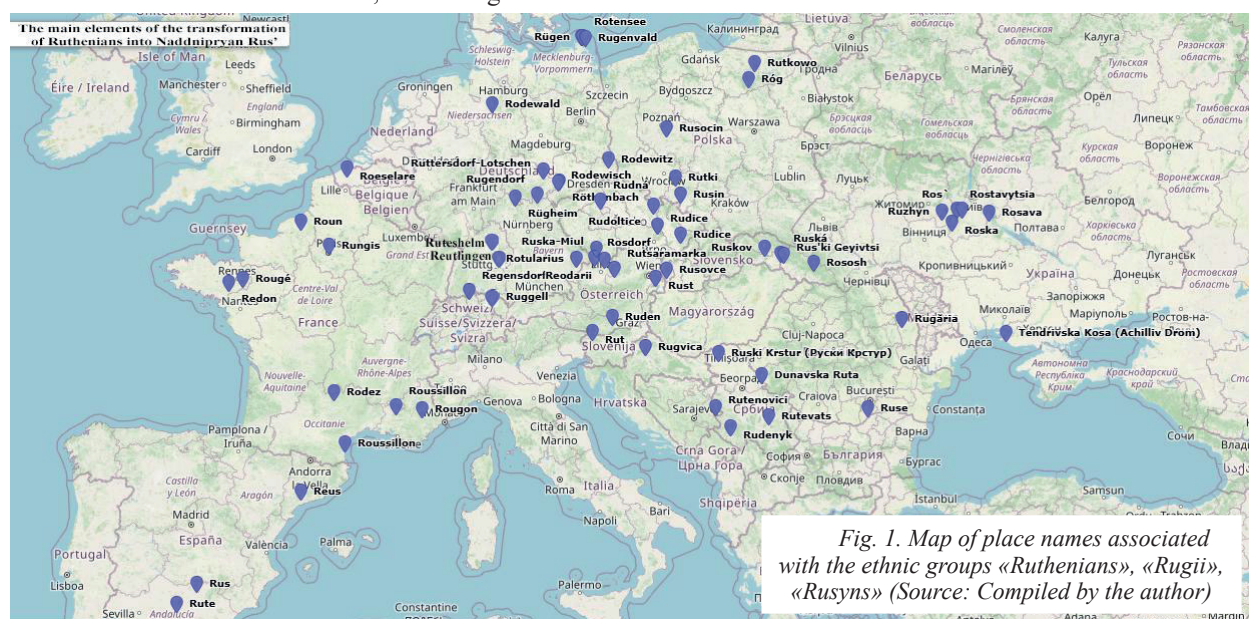


Fig. 1. Map of place names associated with the ethnic groups «Ruthenians», «Rugii», «Rusyns» (Source: Compiled by the author)

III. The Third Postulate – The Examination of Archaeological Data

Archaeological evidence supports our concept regarding the interaction between the population of Transcarpathian Ukraine and the Celts during the 5th–4th centuries BCE. E. O. Symonovych and I. P. Rusanova suggest that such contacts can be traced through distinctive artifacts, including hemispherical bracelets, iron and bronze belts, fibulae, knives, swords, as well as the presence of oppida (*Slavyane i ikh sosedi...*, 1993, p. 62–67).

The influence of Celtic culture can be observed in several archaeological cultures, including the Przeworsk, Zarubyntsi, Oksywie, and Chernyakhiv cultures. The presence of Celtic fibulae, weapons, and ornaments in the burials of these cultures indicates their integration into the La Tène cultural sphere (Idzio, 2015, p. 218). A vivid example of interaction between the Slavs and Celts is the Przeworsk culture, within which a Celtic-Slavic community emerged (Idzio, 2015, p. 227).

Celtic influence is also evident in burial rites, particularly in the tradition of bending swords and spearheads, as confirmed by numerous archaeological findings (Filip, 1961, p. 115). According to V. S. Idzio, in the region of Galicia, this influence manifested not only

bowls, stamped ornaments, double-edged swords, and other elements (Idzio, 2015, p. 232).

The Chernyakhiv archaeological culture, which is dated to the late 2nd–5th century CE, and according to M. Yu. Braichevskiy, to the 2nd–7th century (Braichevskiy, 1957, p. 17), likely reflects the archaeological influence of the Ruthenians. H. M. Kazakevych emphasizes that anthropological data indicate a mixing of the Slavic population of the Upper Dniester region with descendants of the Celts from Central Europe. It is likely that their dialects retained a significant Celtic component even during this period (Kazakevych, 2015, p. 237).

One of the indicators of Celtic-Slavic interaction is the similarity of ornamental motifs in ceramics. In particular, zigzag, circular, and rhomboid patterns were common in both La Tène and Chernyakhiv cultures, although the ways in which they were applied exhibited certain differences. Technological similarities are also observed; according to M. B. Shchukin, the Chernyakhiv culture was based on Celtic pottery traditions, and in the 3rd–4th centuries, the production techniques of the Chernyakhiv population closely corresponded to Celtic traditions of Central and Western Europe. This, according to researchers, may indicate a kind of «Celtic Renaissance» in Eastern Europe (Idzio, 2015, p. 217–218).

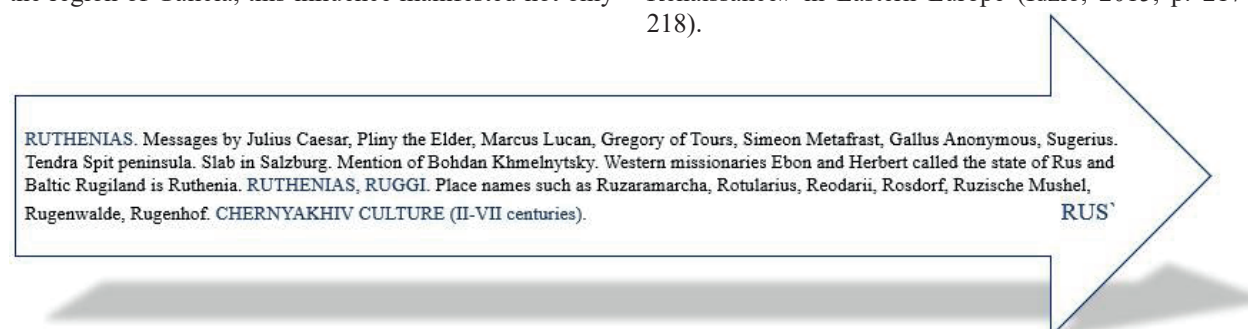


Fig. 2. The main elements of the transformation of ruthenians into Naddniproianshchyna Rus' (Source: Compiled by the author)

Celtic influence is also evident in both cultural and linguistic aspects. According to K. M. Tyshchenko, numerous traces of contact with the Celts can be identified in the Proto-Ukrainian linguistic space. In particular, he highlights the so-called «sixth Ukrainian linguistic witness» (2nd century CE), which reflects the impact of Celtic neighbors, especially through the spread of the suffix *-yna* in Ukrainian words such as *liudyna* (person), *divchyna* (girl), *rodyna* (family), *tvaryna* (animal), *drabyna* (ladder), among others. Moreover, Tyshchenko identifies lexical borrowings from Celtic languages into Ukrainian, including *sluha* (servant), *vlada* (power), *lyky* (medicine), *bevz'* (simpleton), *shchyt* (shield), *molytysia* (to pray), and *salo* (lard) (Tyshchenko, 2005, p. 34).

These linguistic observations align with the conclusions presented in the monograph «Genesis and Formation of Rus (6th–10th centuries)» (Deshko, 2024a) and the article «The Origins of Rus in the Context of the Celtic Theory», published in «Scholarly Notes of

the V. I. Vernadsky Taurida National University. Series: Historical Sciences», 2024, 35(74), №. 3, p. 28–31 (Deshko, 2024c). According to this framework, the likely migration of Celtic Ruthenians occurred between 469 CE (after the collapse of the Hunnic Empire) and 562 CE (the formation of the Avar Khaganate). However, they may have arrived in the Dnieper region even earlier, as suggested by archaeological evidence. Subsequently, the Ruthenians were likely assimilated by the Slavs, who at that time were allied with the Huns.

Historical sources also indicate close interactions between the Celts and the Huns. The first prominent ruler of the European Hunnic Empire, Balamir, defeated the Goths under Ermanaric and later avenged the death of the Antian king Boz by Vitimir. Notably, the son of Uldin, a ruler of the Western Hunnic Khaganate, bore the name Ruga (Rua), who ruled over Pannonia and Gaul. His name likely reflects local traditions, pointing to possible Celtic influence.

Thus, the combined archaeological, linguistic, and historical data affirm a substantial Celtic impact on Slavic cultures, traceable from the Przeworsk to the Chernyakhiv culture, as well as in lexical borrowings and cultural practices of neighboring peoples. These findings suggest deep ethno-cultural interactions that took place over several centuries on the territory of present-day Ukraine.

IV. The Fourth Postulate – The Scientific Relevance and the Verifiability of the Theory

Although these subject merits a separate scholarly investigation, it is appropriate to outline its principal tenets within the framework of the present study. In contemporary academic discourse, the Celtic theory of the origins of Rus is gaining increasing relevance. This theory is characterized by a broader source base, stronger argumentative coherence, and greater resilience to critical scrutiny than the traditional Normanist concept.

The latter was first formulated by Swedish historians as early as the seventeenth century and was later developed by German scholars such as Gottlieb Bayer, Gottfried Müller, and August Ludwig Schlözer. The Normanist theory aimed, among other objectives, to legitimize the political continuity of the new dynastic line on the Russian throne – the Holstein-Gottorp branch of the Romanov family, which began with Peter III – and to emphasize the pivotal role of Germanic tribes in the formation of early Rus statehood.

The primary source relied upon by proponents of the Normanist theory was «The Tale of Bygone Years» («Povest' vremennykh let», hereafter PVL), which has been preserved in later manuscripts dating from the 14th–15th centuries, particularly the Laurentian and Hypatian codices. Given the considerable chronological gap between these manuscripts and the events of the 10th–12th centuries described therein, it is likely that the PVL reflects the political ideologies of its own time and thus cannot be regarded as a fully reliable source for reconstructing the early history of Rus'.

According to the PVL, a number of Slavic and Finnic tribes – such as the Krivichians, the Ilmen Slavs, the Chud', and the Ves' – invited the «Varangians», a people identified as «Rus'», to establish princely authority in their territories. As a result, three brothers – Riurik, Sineus, and Truvor – are said to have arrived and begun their rule (Primary Chronicle, 1989). However, it should be noted that these figures are not corroborated by other sources, and in some passages of the PVL, the «Varangians» and «Rus'» are listed separately: «From the lineage of Japheth are the following: the Varangians, the Swedes, the Normans, the Goths, the Rus', the Angles, the Gauls, the Vlachs, the Romans, the Germans, the Korelians, the Venetians, the Franks, and others» (Primary Chronicle, 1989).

From this enumeration, it becomes evident that the Normans, Swedes, Varangians, and Rus' are presented as distinct ethnonyms and therefore are not synonymous.

This indicates an internal inconsistency within the PVL itself regarding the identification or differentiation between the «Varangians» and «Rus'».

According to a hypothesis supported by several Ukrainian scholars, including Mykhailo Braichevskyi and Serhii Shelukhin, the term «Varangians» («Varyahy») likely denoted not an ethnic group (i.e., Scandinavians), but rather a military-political formation or a mercenary force, which may have been polyethnic in composition (Braichevskyi, 1968, p. 160; Shelukhin, 1929, p. 15).

Particular attention should be paid to the testimonies of Byzantine authors John Skylitzes (11th century) and George Kedrenos (12th century), who explicitly stated the Celtic origin of the Varangians (Shelukhin, 1929, p. 8). This assertion opens new perspectives for reinterpreting the ethnogenesis of Rus' and challenges the foundational premises of the Normanist theory.

The principal arguments of the Normanist school rest on two core assumptions:

1. That the name «Rus'» derives from the Finnish word «Ruotsi», which was used to denote the Swedes.
2. That the names of Rus' princes and the rapids of the Dnipro River (as listed by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus) should be interpreted through a Scandinavian linguistic lens.

However, a deeper examination of these claims reveals their scholarly weakness and the selective use of sources. Both pillars of the Normanist theory must be critically reassessed in order to determine to what extent this interpretation aligns with historical facts.

Let us begin with the first tenet. According to the hypothesis advanced by S. P. Shelukhin, the Finns referred to the Swedes as «Ruotsi» because Swedish merchants traded with the Rus', in the same way that merchants in Kyiv who traded with Byzantium were called «Hrechnyky» («Greekmen») (Shelukhin, 1929, p. 53).

It should also be noted that no Old Rus' or Byzantine source provides evidence that the term «Rus'» was borrowed from the Finnish language. On the contrary, the self-designation «Rus'» appears in historical records prior to the establishment of close contact with the Scandinavians. Moreover, the name «Rus'» encompasses a much broader geographical area than the one directly associated with Finno-Scandinavian interactions. If the Finnish-origin hypothesis were valid, it would be reasonable to expect the term to be confined to the northern territories. However, the ethnonym «Rus'» became firmly associated with the central Dnipro region.

Let us now consider the second tenet – the interpretation of the names of the Dnipro rapids as recorded by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Byzantine authors often transcribed foreign toponyms in forms familiar to the Greek tradition or mediated through other cultures. This does not, in itself, indicate a Scandinavian origin of those names. A major weakness of the second tenet lies in its lack of systematic consistency: not all the

Dnipro rapids were given Scandinavian equivalents, and most of their names possess Slavic or Turkic etymologies. Hence, the attempt to classify these names as exclusively Scandinavian is both selective and ideologically driven.

Nevertheless, the existence of Norse interaction – rather than domination – should not be dismissed. The presence of certain Scandinavian influences in Kyivan Rus' does not preclude a Celtic origin. Scandinavians may have acted as merchants, mercenaries, or even individual princes, but this does not imply that they founded the Rus' state.

The Normanist theory, based on these two assumptions, offers an overly simplified explanation of the complex processes that shaped the formation of Rus'. It neglects the multi-component character of East Slavic ethnogenesis, disregards indigenous factors, and relies on selective interpretations of sources.

Thus, this theory functions more as a political ideologeme than as an objective historical explanation.

Conclusions.

This study has revealed that the concept of the «Old Rus' nationality» («davnoruska narodnist'») represents an ideological construct that does not withstand scholarly scrutiny. The traditional thesis asserting the existence of a unified East Slavic ethnic community in the 10th–12th centuries is based on artificial generalizations and fails to account for the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity of Rus'.

An analysis of written sources indicates that the term Rus', as used in medieval texts, was associated with the Celtic ethnos of the Ruteni, who played a formative role in the early state-building process. Toponymic evidence supports this connection, demonstrating the presence of numerous place names linked to the Ruteni, which in turn suggests their migration and integration into the region. Archaeological data further reveal Celtic cultural influence on the Slavs, observable in material artifacts, burial practices, and lexical borrowings.

Special attention has been given to the scholarly relevance of the proposed hypothesis. Compared to the Normanist theory – which emerged within the framework of imperial political narratives and relies heavily on late and often questionable sources – the Celtic hypothesis offers a broader source base, interdisciplinary argumentation, and greater resistance to critical evaluation. It incorporates evidence from historical linguistics, archaeology, and toponymy, all of which substantiate its verifiability.

Therefore, the formation of Rus' should be interpreted as the result of a complex ethno-cultural synthesis, in which the Celtic component was not peripheral but structurally significant. This perspective not only expands the scholarly understanding of the genesis of Rus' but also transcends the limitations of imperial ideologemes, offering a novel interpretation of the origins of Ukrainian identity.

REFERENCES

- Balushok, V. H. (2011). «Davnoruska narodnist»: Shcho naspravdi khovaietsia za terminom? [«Old Rus' Nationality»: What is Really Hidden Behind the Term?] *Ukraina: kulturna spadshchyna, natsionalna svidomist, derzhavnist*, (20), 72–83.
- Braichevskiy, M. Yu. (1957). Pro etnichnu prynalezhnist cherniakhivskoi kultury [On the Ethnic Affiliation of the Chernyakhiv Culture]. *Arkheolohiia*, (10), 11–24. https://shron1.chtyvo.org.ua/Braichevskiy_Mykhalio/Pro_etnichnu_prynalezhnist_cherniakhivskoi_kultury.pdf.
- Braichevskiy, M. Yu. (1968). *Pokhodzhennia Rusi* [The Origin of Rus']. Kyiv: Naukova dumka.
- Deshko, P. P. (2025c). Pokhodzhennia Rusi: krytyka normanskoi hipotezy [The origin of Rus': A critique of the Normanist hypothesis]. *Aktualni pytannia istorii hromadianoznavstva, heohrafii ta metodyk yikh vykladannia* (c. 21-23). Rivne: Private Higher Educational Institution «Stepan Demyanchuk International University of Economics and Humanities».
- Deshko, P. P. (2020). Stanovlennia ukrainskoi movy X–XVII st. [Formation of the Ukrainian Language in the 10th–17th Centuries]. *Zbirnyk studentskykh naukovykh prats*, (14), 170–177 [in Ukrainian].
- Deshko, P. P. (2024a). *Henezys ta stanovlennia Rusi (VI–X st.)* [Genesis and Formation of Rus' (6th–10th Centuries)]. Unpublished master's thesis. PVNZ «MEHU im. akad. S. Demianchuka». Rivne [in Ukrainian].
- Deshko, P. P. (2024b). Keltska kontseptsiiia pokhodzhennia Rusi v konteksti arkeolohii [Celtic Concept of the Origin of Rus' in the Context of Archaeology]. *Aktualni pytannia ta perspektyvy innovatsiinoho rozvytku nauky ta osvity v umovakh yevrointegratsii: Zbirnyk tez dopovidei uchasnykh mizhnarodnoi naukovo-praktychnoi konferentsii* (Ch. I, pp. 96–97). Rivne [in Ukrainian].
- Deshko, P. P. (2024c). Pokhodzhennia Rusi v konteksti keltskoi teorii [The Origin of Rus' in the Context of the Celtic Theory]. *Vcheni zapysky Tavriiskoho natsionalnoho universytetu imeni V. I. Vernadskoho. Serii: Istorychni nauky*, 35(3), 28–31. DOI: 10.32782/2663-5984.2024/3.5 [in Ukrainian].
- Deshko, P. P. (2025a). Kvaternarna istoriia yak syntezy sotsialnoho, politychnoho, etnichnoho ta relihiinoho vymiriv istorychnoho protsesu [Quaternary history as a synthesis of social, political, ethnic, and religious dimensions of the historical process]. *Aktualni pytannia istorii hromadianoznavstva, heohrafii ta metodyk yikh vykladannia* (p. 59-61). Rivne: Private Higher Educational Institution «Stepan Demyanchuk International University of Economics and Humanities».
- Deshko, P. P. (2025b). Krytyka kontseptsii «davnorusko narodnosti» kriz pryzmu keltskoi hipotezy pokhodzhennia Rusi [A critique of the concept of the «Old Rus' ethnicity» through the lens of the Celtic hypothesis of the origin of Rus']. *Aktualni pytannia istorii hromadianoznavstva, heohrafii ta metodyk yikh vykladannia* (p. 17-20). Rivne: Private Higher Educational Institution «Stepan Demyanchuk International University of Economics and Humanities».
- Fylyp Jan. (1961). *Keltskaya tsivilizatsiya i yee nasledie* [Celtic Civilization and Its Heritage]. Praga: Izdatelstvo Chekhoslovatskoi Akademii Nauk].

- Gaius Iulius Caesar. (n.d.). *Commentarii de Bello Gallico. Liber I: 45; Liber VII: 5, 7, 64, 75, 90*. https://la.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Commentarii_de_bello_Gallico.
- Gaius Plinius Secundus. (n.d.). *Naturalis Historia. Liber III: 37; Liber IV: 109; Liber XIX: II: 8*. https://la.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Naturalis_Historia.
- Gregorius Turonensis. (n.d.). *Historia Francorum. Liber X: 8*. https://la.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Historiarum_Francorum_libri_X_-_Liber_X.
- Halenko, O. I. (2006). Rutenska marka za dzherelamy IX–XII st. [The Ruthenian Mark According to the Sources of the IX–XII Centuries]. *Naukovi zapysky*, (29), 6–16. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Nzipiend_2006_29_3.
- Hrushevskiy, M. S. (1895). *Vymky z zherel do istorii Ukrainy-Rusi* [Excerpts from the Sources on the History of Ukraine-Rus']. Lviv: Naukove tovarystvo im. T. Shevchenka.
- Idzo, V. S. (2015). *Keltska tsyvilizatsiia na terytorii Ukrainy* [Celtic Civilization on the Territory of Ukraine]. Lviv: «Lvivskiy Stavropihion».
- Iordan. (1960). *O proiskhozhdenii i deyaniyakh getov. Getica* [On the Origin and Deeds of the Goths. Getica]. (E. Ch. Skrzhinskaya, Per.). Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura. https://web.archive.org/web/20181011172928/https://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_Buks/History/iordan/02.php.
- Kazakevych, H. M. (2015). *Skhidni kelty: kultury, identychnosti, istoriohrafichni konstruksii* [Eastern Celts: Cultures, Identities, Historiographical Constructions]. Kyiv – Vinnytsia: TOV «Nilan-LTD».
- Khrystenok, V. F. (2009). Kryterii periodyzatsii istorii ukrainskoi literaturnoi movy [Criteria for the Periodization of the History of the Ukrainian Literary Language]. *Naukovyi chasopys Natsionalnoho pedahohichnoho universytetu imeni M. P. Drahomanova*, (2), 172–177.
- Marcus Annaeus Lucanus. (n.d.). *Pharsalia. Liber I: 400*. <https://la.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Pharsalia/I>.
- Molchanova, A. A. (2008). *Baltiiskie slavyane i Severo-Zapadnaya Rus v rannem Srednevekovye* [Baltic Slavs and Northwestern Rus' in the Early Middle Ages]. <http://rodnovery.ucoz.lv/forum/16-42-1>
- Myshanych, O. V. (Eds.). (1989). *Litopys ruskyi*. [Chronicle of Rus']. (L. Ye. Makhnovets, Trans.). Kyiv: Dnipro.
- Pivtorak, H. P. (1988). *Formuvannia i dialektna dyferentsiatsiia davnurskoi movy* [Formation and Dialectal Differentiation of the Old Rus' Language]. Kyiv: Naukova dumka.
- Pivtorak, H. P. (1993). *Ukrainci: zvidky my i nasha mova* [Ukrainians: Where We Are from and Our Language]. Kyiv: Naukova dumka.
- Pivtorak, H. P. (2001). *Pokhodzhennia ukrainciv, rosiian, bilorusiv ta yikhnikh mov: mify i pravda pro trokh brativ slovianskykh zi «spilnoi kolysky»* [The Origin of Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians, and Their Languages: Myths and Truth about the Three Slavic Brothers from the «Common Cradle»]. Kyiv: Akademia.
- Pritsak, O. Y. (1997). *Pokhodzhennia Rusi. Starodavni skandinavski dzherela* [The Origin of Rus'. Ancient Scandinavian Sources] (T. 1). Kyiv: Oberehy.
- Ribakov, B. A. (Eds.). (1993). *Slavyane i ikh sosed v kontse I tis. do n. e. – pervoi pol. I tis. n. e.* [Slavs and Their Neighbors in the Late 1st Millennium B.C. – Early 1st Millennium A.D.]. Nauka.
- Shchodra, O. M. (2021). *Sloviani i Rus v rannomu srednovichchi: peredumovy i pochatky formuvannia imperii rusiv* [Slavs and Rus' in the Early Middle Ages: Preconditions and Beginnings of the Formation of the Rus' Empire]. Lviv: LNU im. I. Franka. https://docs.google.com/file/d/1DQeDDBX14ReqdNh5V3V_Fusi1CV1ovNCK/edit?usp=docslist_api&filetype=msword
- Shelukhin, S. P. (1929). *Zvidkilia pokhodyt Rus. Teoriia keltskoho pokhodzhennia Kyivskoi Rusi z Frantsii* [Where Did Rus' Come From? The Theory of the Celtic Origin of Kievan Rus' from France]. Praha: A. Fišer, Strašnice.
- Shevelov, Yu. V. (1994). *Chomu obshcherusskyi yazyk, a ne vibchoruska mova? Z probl. skhidnoslov. hlotohonii: Dvi st. pro postannia ukr. Movy* [Why the Common Russian Language, and Not the Old Belarusian Language? Issues of East Slavic Glottogony: Two Centuries about the Origin of the Ukrainian Language]. Kyiv: Vyd. dim KM Academia.
- Shevelov, Yu. V. (2002). *Istorychna fonolohiia ukrainskoi movy* [Historical Phonology of the Ukrainian Language] (S. V. Vakulenko, Per.). Kharkiv: Akta.
- Skliarenko, V. H. (2006). *Rus i variaty: Istoryko-etymolohichne doslidzhennia* [Rus' and the Varangians: A Historical-Etymological Study]. Kyiv: Dovira.
- Skliarenko, V. H. (2011). *Pokhodzhennia etnonima «Rusyny»* [The Origin of the Ethnonym «Rusyns»]. *Zhyttia u slovi: Zbirnyk naukovykh prats na poshanu akad. V. M. Rusanivskoho*, 96–104.
- Smal-Stockyj, S., & Gartner, T. (1913). *Grammatik der Ruthenischen (Ukrainischen) Sprache*. Wien: Buchhandlung der Szewcenko-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften in Lemberg.
- Tsvetkov, S. E. (2012). *Nachalo russkoi istorii. S drevneishikh vremen do knyazheniya Olega* [The Beginning of Russian History. From Ancient Times to the Reign of Oleg]. ZAO Tsentrpoligraf. https://www.phantastike.com/history/nachalo_russkoj_istorii_s_drevn_vremen/djvu/view/
- Tyshchenko, K. M. (2005). Kontury leksyko-toponimichnoi stratyhrafii Ukrainy i etnogenezy ukrainciv [Contours of Lexico-Toponymic Stratigraphy of Ukraine and the Ethnogenesis of Ukrainians] *Narodna tvorchist ta etnohrafii*, (4), 31–44.
- Tyshchenko, K. M. (2023a). Desiat istorychnykh svidkiv pradavnosti ukrainskoi movy [Ten Historical Witnesses of the Antiquity of the Ukrainian Language]. *Visnyk NTSh*, (67), 64–76.
- Tyshchenko, K. M. (2023b). Pradavnist ukrainskoi movy, viddzermalena v movakh susidiv. 1 [Antiquity of the Ukrainian Language Reflected in the Languages of Neighbors. 1]. *Movoznavstvo*, (1), 14–28. <https://doi.org/10.33190/0027-2833-328-2023-1-002>
- Tyshchenko, K. M. (2023c). Pradavnist ukrainskoi movy, viddzermalena v movakh susidiv. 2 [Antiquity of the Ukrainian Language Reflected in the Languages of Neighbors. 2]. *Movoznavstvo*, (2), 18–43. <https://doi.org/10.33190/0027-2833-329-2023-2-002>

- Velychko, S. V. (1926). *Skazanye o voine kozatskoi s poliakamy. Arkheohrafichna komisiia UAN* [The Tale of the Cossack War with the Poles. Archaeographic Commission of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences]. Kyiv: Drukarnia UAN.
- Yusova, N. M. (2005). *Henezys kontseptsii davnoruskoi narodnosti v istorychnii nauksi SRSR (1930-ti — persha polovyna 1940-kh rr.)* [Genesis of the Concept of the Ancient Rus' Ethnos in the Historical Science of the USSR (1930s – Early 1940s)]. Vinnytsia: Konsol..
- Zalizniak, L. L. (1996). Davnoruska narodnist: imperskyi mif chy istorychna realnist [Ancient Rus' Nationality: Imperial Myth or Historical Reality]. *Pamiat stolit*, (2), 2-14.
- Zalizniak, L. L. (1999). *Pervisna istoriia Ukrainy* [Prehistoric History of Ukraine]. Kyiv: Vyshcha shkola.
- Zalizniak, L. L. (2023). Kyievoruska versiia ukrainohenezu. Arhumenty «za» i «proty» [The Kyivan Rus' Version of the Ukrainian Genesis. Arguments «For» and «Against»]. *Ukrainoznavstvo*, (86), 93-107. [https://doi.org/10.30840/2413-7065.1\(86\).2023.275329](https://doi.org/10.30840/2413-7065.1(86).2023.275329)