The present paper continues the publication in Vol. 2, No. 3, 2016¹, exploring how the Smolensk events of 1609-1611 could be seen from female perspective and what social roles could be assumed by women under such circumstances. Now the author’s attention turns to social strata other than nobility. The cases include: an unidentified ‘maid with letters’ (possibly a spy) who came to the Polish camp and got a bullet wound there; two townswomen trialled for an attempt of escape from the besieged city and giving obscene answers to the investigator; a failed case of illegal prostitution (while brothels were kept openly in Novgorod of that period, they were outlawed in Smolensk). The overall impression is that, despite the need to be bold and ingenious under the conditions like that, women would hardly ever transgress the conventional social roles.

Keywords: everyday life; gender studies; prostitution; Siege of Smolensk 1609-1611; women

The subject of money lending in Old Rus’ has been rarely tackled, and, as the author argues, still not understood in many aspects. Most notably, the interest rate в трет ’ (‘at one third’) has been assumed to mean 50% (which would make exactly one third of the loan and interest in total), since a modern historian takes it for granted that splitting any given money sum into thirds (if you only have cash in silver) is improbably difficult. However, as Bykov argues, in the early Rus’ coins were not the only (nor the prevalent) form of cash money, it was acceptable to cut them into pieces, and for a large part of Old Russian history weight of the silver rather that its shape mattered. So it makes a perfectly good sense to believe that ‘at one third’ meant literally one third of the sum.

This, however, only applied to long-term loans (over a year). The legally allowed interest rates for short-term loans were lower, and practices of interest-taking were controlled by legislation. Russkaya Pravda and Pskov Judicial Charter give much attention to the issues how much interest could be legally taken and how soon the loans are to be returned. A system of debt re-structuring also existed.

Keywords: banking; loans; money; Old Rus’; Novgorod the Great; Pskov

The article deals with two kinds of sources for early Irish economic history: sagas and law-tracts. The author compares data on food-rent provided by free and unfree clients from the sagas Bricriu’s Feast (FB) and Bricriu’s Feast and the Exile of the sons of Duil Diarmaid (LMDD) with the lists of food-rents from a number of law-tracts. Unlike the FB, the list in LMDD is quite realistic and may even reflect the custom of preparing feasts for a lord for every season of the year.

Keywords: circuit; clients; feasting; food; dairy; garlic; lords

The paper reconsiders the meaning of the ethnic name Saqaliba in Arabic sources, whose meaning is widely assumed to be ‘Slavs’. The usage of this word by Arabian geographers is sometimes taken as evidence that this or that specific territory was inhabited by Slavs in the early Middle Ages. However, the word Saqaliba would not necessarily apply to peoples speaking Slavonic languages. Pilipchuk demonstrates that at least in some cases it clearly meant Finnic peoples and even Turkic peoples if the latter had hair lighter than Arabs. Apparently, not all Arabian geographer cared to distinguish between various fair-haired peoples from the North.

Keywords: Arabic sources; saqaliba
The widely accepted idea that berserkers formed an all-male semi-religious society (Männerbund) somehow linked to initiation rites was first proposed by Lily Weiser in 1927. Since that time, it has been subject to much criticism. Yet many scholars even of those who do not directly accept the Männerbund theory still perpetuate the dubious claims of early German students of folklore (that berserkers believed themselves to be shape-shifters; that they wore animal skins or masks; that they were specifically linked to the cult of Odin etc.). Moreover, the scholars openly critical of the Männerbund theory, as of presently, have not performed the task of re-analyzing the sagas to see what the texts actually say about berserkers.

The present paper seeks to fill this gap. About 50 stories about berserkers from Old Norse prose texts are regarded. The overview shows that actually some of the texts are versions of the same story (even when placed within different sagas), that the perception of berserkers in sagas is overwhelmingly negative (about ¾ of all cases) and that, outside Snorri’s Ynglingasaga, there are no mentions of any special links between berserkers and Odin. Moreover, even the claim that berserkers wore animal skins does not seem to be adequately substantiated by the sources: the sole unambiguous statement that they wore vargstakka (‘wolf coats’) in Vatnsdæla saga almost certainly comes from a gloss in Fagrskinna commenting the famous poem about the Battle of Hafsfjord, and there are no references to berserkers as to ‘wolfskins’ outside the Haraldian legend at all. There is also not a single instance of the use of the word óðr interchangeably with berserksgangr, and the positive word for ‘fury’ is mainly ákafa, unrelated to either Odin or berserkers.

*Keywords*: berserkers; sagas; textual criticism; Viking Age