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a cura di

MARCO MERLO, FABIO ROMANONI e PETER SPOSATO



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Stamp of the Teutonic Knights from the 14th century. (“Visitatorum Magister in Allemaniae”). Material: brass Deutschordens-Zentralarchiv, Singerstraße 7, 1010 Vienna, Austria Foto Frank Bayard 2012 Wikimedia Commons CC SA 3.0

“*Riuzen Stürm*” in the Epic Tradition of the 13th–14th-Century Holy Roman Empire

by KHRYSTYNA MERENIUK

ABSTRACT: This study examines the phenomenon of the “*Riuzen Stürm*” in German epic literature of the Middle Ages. Comparison with Rus’ian chronicles suggests that the motif may be understood as part of the image of Rus’ circulating among the military elites of the Holy Roman Empire. This diffusion can be attributed to the active participation of Rus’ian princes in 13th-century military campaigns, an involvement that left a durable mark on the historical and cultural memory of German knighthood. Most notably, this relates to the Hungarian campaigns into Central Europe, where Rus’ian contingents under King Danylo or Prince Rostyslav fought alongside King Béla IV. The presence of Rus’ian warriors in the struggle for the Austrian inheritance of the Babenbergs and their participation in the battle near the Leitha River in 1246 could have had a significant impact on the emergence of ideas about the “*Riuzen Stürm*,” an unusual method of warfare that was remembered by the European nobility of the time. German poets mentioned the existence of individual songs dedicated to the “*Riuzen Stürm*,” but none of them, as far as I know, have survived. Detailed descriptions are unavailable in Rus’ian chronicles, although the closest thing to this concept is the mention of “*Роскыи бои*” (“Rus’ian battle”, or “Rus’ian attack”), also cited in the context of the words of the Polish prince. Therefore, information about the peculiarities of Rus’ian medieval attacks could have spread far beyond Rus’ itself.

KEYWORDS: RUS’, GERMAN EPIC SOURCES, MINNESÄNGER, GALICIAN-VOLHYNIAN STATE, “RIUZEN STÜRM”.

The perception of Rus’ in medieval Western European culture is an essential component of research into inter-civilizational contacts. One of the least explored aspects of this topic remains the image of Rus’ (*Reuzen*, *Riuzen*, *Reussen*, *Rüßen*, *Rüzen*, *Rüezzen*) in the military-epic tradition of the German-speaking world, particularly in 13th-14th century poetic texts created within the Holy Roman Empire. Even though in the 19th century scholars paid considerable attention to critical editions of poems and biographies of the minnesingers (*Minnesänger*), the “Rus’ian theme” itself remained a marginal subject. It

did not emerge as a distinct field of medieval studies¹.

A more detailed acquaintance with German poems of the 13th century testifies that the “Rus’ian theme” was much more popular than previously thought. This secular poetry has preserved unique accounts of the Rus’ troops’ participation in real battles and has creatively elaborated on the literary motifs derived from these events. The primary consumers of the poems were the secular nobility, who were

1 The foundations for studying this topic were laid in the second half of the 19th century, when the renewed interest in medieval literature – at first inspired by Romantic enthusiasm – led to the systematic republication and scholarly editing of Middle High German texts. The corpus of German poetry deserved a new assessment, and the reissue of the greatest works was accompanied by thorough commentaries, introductory papers, and attempts to separate purely literary material from the historical realities of the era. The key scholarship on this issue includes: Arthur Amelung, Oskar Jänicke, *Ortnit und die Wolf-dietriche*, Bd. 1., Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1871; Oskar Jänicke, Franz Roth (Eds.), *Biterolf und Dietlieb*. Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1866; Gustav Ehrismann (Hrsg.), *Hugo von Trimberg. Der Renner*, Bd. 1, Tübingen, 1909; Heinrich Rückert (hrsg.), *Lohengrin*. Quedlinburg und Leipzig, 1858; Ludwig Tieck (Hrsg.), *Frauendienst oder: Geschiebte und Liebe des Ritters und Sängers Ulrich von Lichtenstein, von ihm selbst beschrieben*. Stuttgart und Tübingen, 1812; Karl Lachmann, *Ulrich von Lichtenstein*. Berlin, 1841. However, scholarly literature has long overlooked German–Rus’ian contacts in the study of medieval poetic heritage. Only in the late 19th - early 20th centuries did the first attempts at a systematic understanding of the image of Rus’ in German Middle Ages literature appear. Further development was evidenced by the studies of Arnošt Kraus, who turned to Slavic characters in the German folk tradition (Arnošt Kraus, «Slováne v národní pověsti německé». *Slovánský sborník*, 8 (1887), pp. 371–389). However, the turning point was the research of Pavel Berkov, who was one of the first to raise the question of the specifics of the reception of “Riuzen” in courtly and heroic poetry of the 12th–14th centuries (Pavel Berkov, «Das “russische Thema” in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur». *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, 21 (1976), pp. 297–310). Besides, Mechthild Keller, devoted to the conceptualization of “Riuzen” in German medieval literature (Mechthild Keller, «Perspektiven: Vorstellungen von ‘Riuzen’ in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters». *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht: 9.–17. Jahrhundert*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1988, pp. 84–109). In current medieval studies, German literary sources have only been fragmentarily attracted to the attention of scholars (Alexei Martyniuk, Do Herbershteina). *Avstryia i Vostochnaia Evropa v sisteme personalnykh svyazei (XIII – nachalo XVI veka)*, Kvadriga, 2019; Oleh Odnorozhenko, *Rus’ian royal, economic and princely seals of the 13th–16th centuries*, Kharkiv, 2009; Vladyslav Kiorsak, «Eastern European Elements of Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana through the Prism of Greco-Roman and Germanic Myths». *Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies*, 5 (2022), pp. 6–27; Kiorsak, Vladyslav. «Rus’ in the Concept of Ragnar Lodbrok’s Empire: Scandinavian Sources through the Prism of Politics of Memory». *Siverianskyi litopys. [Siverian Chronicle]*, 6 (2021), pp. 4–14; Khrystyna Mereniuk, «“Riuzen” and “Polen” in the Dietrich cycle of German heroic epic». *Kniazha doba: istoriia i kultura [Princely era: history and culture]*, 17 (2025), pp. 103–126).

interested in the details of the main characters’ adventures, descriptions of military scenes, and the exploits of heroes from different countries. A distinctive feature of these sources is that a significant part of their authors were minnesingers, or persons closely associated with the “bellatores”. Their participation in campaigns and battles, knowledge of knightly customs and combat techniques, influenced the artistic structure of the texts. The authors recreated details of weaponry tactics and elements that could only be noticed by people familiar with military culture. Therefore, accounts of battles and assaults involving Rus’ are of considerable historical value, as they allow scholars to reconstruct key elements of the medieval military landscape in Central and Eastern Europe. Amid the diversity of literary heritage, I would like to draw attention to several essential poems that echo military campaigns and their participants.

The poem “Lohengrin”, written by an unknown author (attributed to an epigone of Wolfram von Eschenbach, 1160/80 – 1220), explains the battles that took place between European warriors and Hungarians in the 10th century. Considering the poem’s dating to the late 13th – early 14th centuries, the text describes knightly armies that did not yet exist. When describing the struggle of the German king Henry I the Fowler (876–936) with the Hungarians, an unknown king of Rus’ (“der Riuzen künece”) (verse 2715), whose troops managed to prepare for battle during the decisive clash but suffered a mighty blow from the German knights².

In the text of “Lohengrin”, the ruler of Rus’ is mentioned only once, without any further details: his figure is not recorded during the gathering of the Hungarian army. It is not even known on whose side he fought, since the interpretation of the Upper German text allows for different readings of the brief note about him. However, I can assume that it would be natural for the king of Rus’ to be part of the Hungarian army, and that the events described in “Lohengrin” have a double meaning.

On the one hand, Henry I the Fowler did indeed fight the Hungarians and won several important battles. After his triumph at Riade in 933, the Hungarians temporarily ceased their devastating raids deep into East Frankish territory³. Considering that the anonymous author of the text relied on numerous historical sources

2 Heinrich Rückert (hrsg.), *Lohengrin*. Quedlinburg und Leipzig, 1858, p. 73.

3 Laslo Veszprémy, «The Military history of Hungary from the first contacts with Europe to Mohács 862–1526», *Illustrated Military History of Hungary*, Zrínyi, 2012, p. 8.

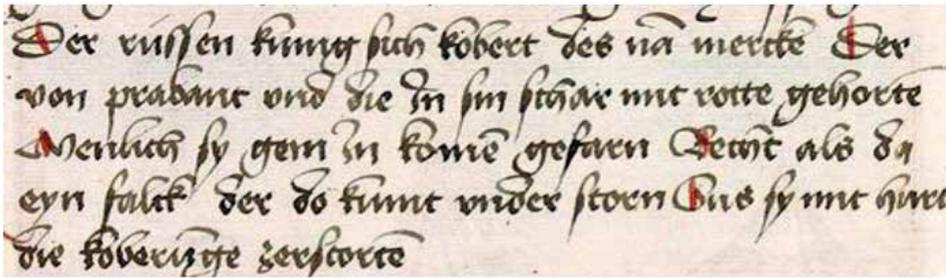


Fig. 1. Folio 67r of the Lohengrin handwriting, referring to the King of Rus'. Lohengrin; Friedrich von Schwaben. Stuttgart: Werkstatt Ludwig Henfflin, 1470. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 345.

(the “Repkau Chronicle”, the “Swabian Mirror”, and other German records), the course of the battles and their participants are described in considerable detail. The list of figures creates a mosaic picture of rulers of the 10th–11th centuries. Among those mentioned are Henry II (973–1024), his wife Cunigunde (approx. 975–1033), his sister Gisela (Gyfel) (approx. 985–1065), married to Stephen I of Hungary (Steffan) (approx. 975–1038), Mieszko II Lambert (“des küneges Steffens swester sun der Pôlân künec”) (990–1034), Pope Benedict VIII (980–1024), and others. However, all these figures are mentioned at the end of the text and relate to a separate passage. Besides, the King of Rus’ is named in the description of a war between the Holy Roman Empire, which did not yet exist in the time of Henry I the Fowler, and the Hungarians. Moreover, no other known sources confirm Rus’ participation in the German-Hungarian conflicts of the 10th–11th centuries.

On the other hand, the description of the Hungarian invasion of Europe also corresponds to the realities of the 13th century. Although the figures of the 10th–11th centuries are mentioned in the text with precise genealogical details, the descriptions of the campaigns include a different set of principal protagonists. For instance, the Hungarian king “Pêlân” (verse 2830) – evidently King Béla (most likely Béla IV, 1206–1270) – appears alongside Duke Ludewin, the German Duke Henry, the Polish Duke Pomyzla (probably Duke Przemysł, i.e., Przemysł II, 1257–1296), and the Duke of Brabant (likely one of the Brabantine rulers such as Henry III, 1231–1261, or John I, 1252–1294)⁴. These figures indicate a shift in

⁴ Heinrich Rückert, *cit.*, pp. 73–76.



Fig. 2. Fol. 66v–67v. Attack on the Camp of the Hungarian Army. Heidelberg, University Library, Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 345. Lohengrin; Friedrich von Schwaben. Stuttgart, Workshop of Ludwig Henfflin, 1470.

the narrative of the battle and its connection to the 13th century.

King Béla IV of Hungary organized several large-scale campaigns against the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Austrian and German duchies. For the period, his active ally was Prince – and later King of Rus’ – Danylo Romanovych (1201–1264). Accordingly, the Hungarian incursions into Central European lands and the active participation of Rus’, as described in “Lohengrin”, could be seen as a kind of reminiscence of the events of the 1250s–1260s. Moreover, considering the date of composition of the poem between 1276 and 1289, this interpretation appears even more plausible⁵. It may be assumed that its author either drew inspiration from relatively recent events or relied on well-established notions of the Hungarians and the Rus’ as active participants in European conflicts. Ultimately, such a dating is also supported by several specific episodes included in the text. For example, the Duke of Bavaria is mentioned as one of the electors of the Holy

5 Heinrich Rückert, cit., pp.258

Roman Empire – he received this right at the Reichstag in Augsburg in 1275. In addition, the poem is associated with Duke Henry of Lower Bavaria (Heinrich von Niederbayern, 1253–1290)⁶. Together with his brother Ludwig (Count Palatine), he was one of the most influential princes of his time.

The depiction of a Rus' king participating in warfare together with the Hungarians may allude to the 13th-century alliance linking Rus', Poland, and the Kingdom of Hungary. General ideas about Rus' as a force that exerted significant influence on the political map of Central Europe at that time are evident. The anonymous author of the medieval poem used this plot to demonstrate the power of German warriors, who, together with the hero Lohengrin, overcame the resistance of the Hungarians and the Rus'. Clearly, this image corresponds to the perception of the Christian Hungarian ruler as understood in contemporary German historical narratives. Moreover, unlike descriptions of the North, descriptions of the East of Europe are completely devoid of fantastic details⁷.

Similar concepts are also found in the “Nibelungenlied”. Considering the date of creation of the original version (1205), the hymns of the event in later versions of the text contain insertions of other elaborations made in the middle and second half of the 13th century. In versions B and C, the army of Etzel (the Hungarian king) includes representatives from different parts of his multinational empire: Rus', Greeks, Poles, Wallachians, and other peoples (verses 1339-40)⁸. The image of Etzel can be interpreted in different ways. According to some historians, the figure represents King Géza I, the last pagan ruler of Hungary⁹; however, others argue that it depicts King Béla IV¹⁰. The poem clearly emphasizes that Etzel united both Christians and non-Christians in the army: “von kristen und von heiden” (verse 1338)¹¹.

6 Heinrich Rückert, *cit.*, pp. 259.

7 Alexander Sager, «Hungarians as fremde in Medieval Germany», *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, Routledge, p. 107.

8 Helmut de Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur im späten Mittelalter. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, vol. 3/1, Beck, 1962, p. 216; Alexander Sager, «Hungarians as fremde in Medieval Germany», p. 107.

9 Alexander Sager, *cit.*, p. 107–108.

10 Pál Gyulai (Ed.), *Budapesti Szemle. Negyvenharmadik kötet (103. 104. 105. szám)*, Franklin-Társulat, 1885.

11 Helmut de Boor, *cit.*, p. 216.

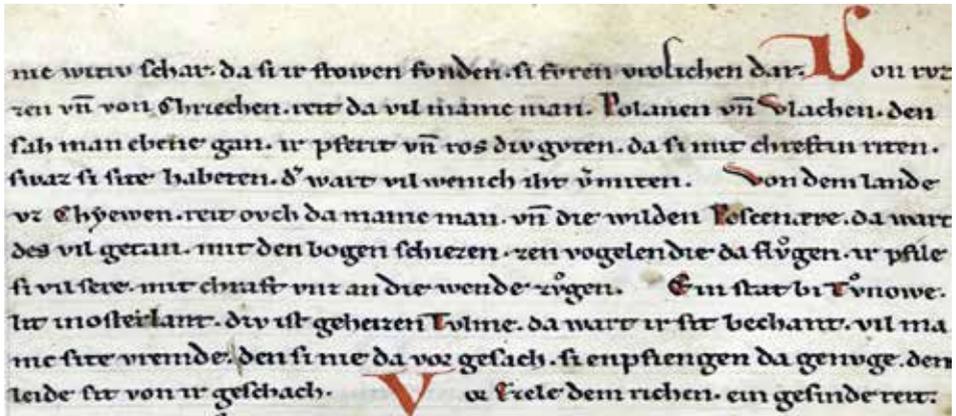


Fig. 3. Fol. 52v. Mentioning Riuzen (Rus') and Kiewen/Chyewen (Kyiv) in the German epic. Das Nibelungenlied (Handwriting C). Karlsruhe. Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Donaueschingen 63, Nibelungenlied.

The Slavic groups listed above, and the religious distinctions associated with them, are well attested in 13th-century historical sources. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the Hungarian army of King Béla IV near Kressenbrunn in 1260, with which he fought against the Czech king and Austrian duke Ottokar II Přemysl (1233–1278). The list of military contingents was outlined in a letter to Pope Alexander IV by the Bohemian ruler: “Grais belli, quod adversus Belam et natum eiusdem Stephannum, Ungarie Reges Illustres, et Danielem Regem Russie et eius filios eius et certos Ruthenos et Thartaros, qui eidem in auxilium venerant et Boleslaum Cracoviensem et Laczkonem iuvenem Lansacie Duces et innumeram multitudinem inhumanorum hominum Cumanorum, Ungarorum, et diuersorum Sclauorum, Sicularum quoque et Valachorum ... etiam utpote Grecorum, Bulgarorum, Rasniensium et Bosniensium hereticorum...”¹². Thus, the army of the Hungarian ruler is similar to the forces gathered by Etzel in the “Nibelungenlied”.

12 “The great war fought against Béla and his son Stephen, the renowned kings of Hungary, together with Danylo, King of Rus’, his sons, and certain Ruthenians and Tartars who had come to his aid, and against Boleslav of Kraków and Leszek the Young, Dukes of Lesser Poland, and an innumerable multitude of inhuman peoples – Cumans, Hungarians, and various Slavs, as well as Szeklers and Vlachs... and likewise also Greeks, Bulgarians, Rascians, and Bosnian heretics”. Antonii Boczek (Ed.), *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris Moraviae*, vol. 3 (1241–1267), Ex Typographia Aloysii Sharnitel, 1841, pp. 285–286.



Fig. 4. Fol. i09r. Battle near Kressenbrunn (July 12, 1260) between King Béla IV of Hungary and King Ottokar II of Bohemia. Johannes Thuróczy. *Chronica Hungarorum*, 15 saeculi. Bibliotheca Corviniana Virtualis, inc. 1143, fol. i09r.

King Danylo Romanovych's participation in the military campaign of 1260 is indirectly confirmed in the chronicle. Under pressure from the Mongols, who appeared within the borders of the Galician-Volhynian state and forced the Rus'ian rulers to participate in campaigns against Poland, King Danylo "fled to the Hungarians"¹³. As a result, he could well have been part of the army of Béla IV, who sought to capture the Austrian possessions of Ottokar II. The King of Rus' may have been accompanied by his sons – probably Mstyslav (d. after 1292) and Shvarno (d. after 1269), who were old enough to be distinguished alongside their father.

The battle near Kressenbrunn did not go well for the Hungarians – in fact, their main Cuman forces were defeated even before the royal troops entered the combat. The memory of these events was still fresh, and the writers of the "Nibelungenlied" could draw on such images in their work. Scholars drew attention to the "multinational" army of Béla IV to explain the hostility between the two

¹³ Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej, Ipatievskaya letopisej. Izdavaemoe Arheograficheskoy komissieju, Sankt-Peterburg, 1908, col. 850.

Christian rulers¹⁴. It seemed that Ottokar II deliberately exaggerated the “barbarian” contingents in his opponent’s army to justify himself before the Pope¹⁵. However, King Danylo’s presence belongs to the Christian part of the Hungarian ruler’s army (just as Rus’ was among Etzel’s Christian allies).

A striking example of the military power of Rus’ is the text from the German epic poem “Ortnit” (1230). King Ilias (Ellias) of Rus’, who was the uncle of the protagonist, offered him his help: five thousand horsemen who were to support Ortnit in the fight against the Syrian king. This is the first and not the only demonstration of Ilias’s power and influence in the poem. The text emphasizes the peculiarity of Rus’ians, who had steel armor “white as snow”¹⁶. This indicates their excellent equipment from the perspective of a European knight:

Da sprach der kunig von Reussen
 Jch fuer dir vber See
 Fünfftausent schneller helde
 leucht als der schnee.
 in liechtem stahel ringen....
 nidert man Sy plecken sicht
 wohin ich meinen Fanen naige
 dauon so komend sy nicht

Then the king of Rus’ said:
 I will take you across the sea
 5 thousand swift heroes, who
 shine like snow,
 in light steel mail
 If they try to overcome
 They hold their line firmly,
 and wherever I raise my
 flag, from there they will not flee
 (verse: 46).

The literary mention has several original details that require analysis. Comparing it with the text of the Galician-Volhynian Chronicle reveals several parallels. The chronicler also used “shining” epithets to describe the Rus’ army when describing battle scenes. When the Hungarian king Andrew II (1175 – 1235) marched with his knights to Volodymyr (Volhynia), he supposedly spoke respectfully of the city, while the defenders were on the walls, whose shields and

14 Illia Parshyn, *Dyplomatiia Halıtsko-Volynskoi derzhavy: yevropeiski naratyvni dzherela XIII–XV stolit.* Instytut ukrainoznavstva im. I. Krypıakevycha NAN Ukrainy, 2018, pp. 183.

15 Mariusz Bartnicki, *Polityka zagraniczna księcia Daniela Halickiego w latach 1217–1264*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2005, pp. 199–200.

16 Mario Klarer (Hrsg.), *Ortnit, Wolfdietrich A*, De Gruyter, 2022, T. 10, p. 19.

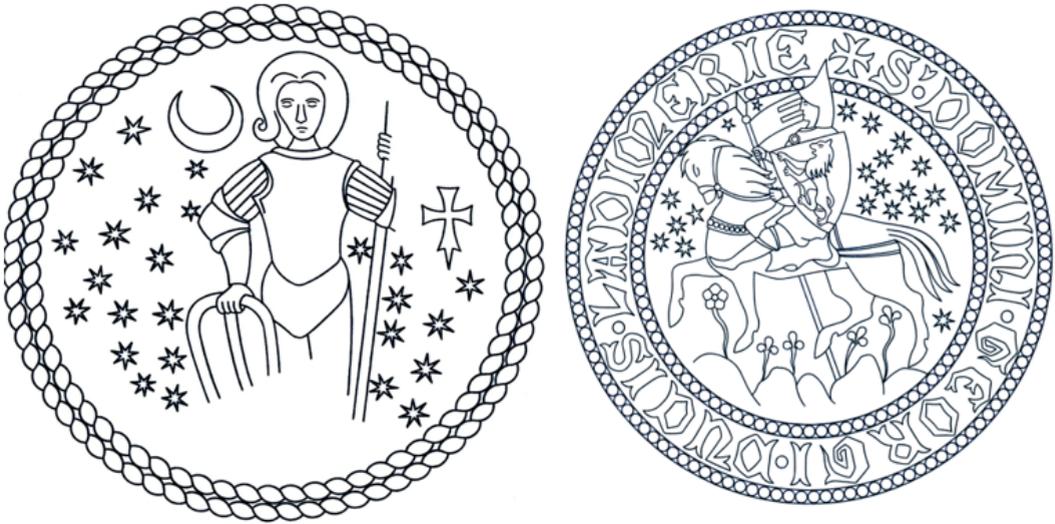


Fig. 5. Shields on the seals of Rus' rulers: Lev Danylovych (left) and his son Yuriy (right). Draw by O. Odnorozhenko.

Oleh Odnorozhenko, The seal of Lev I Danylovych <https://sigillum.com.ua/stamp/lev-i-danylovych/> ; Idem, The seal of Yuriy I Lvovych. <https://sigillum.com.ua/stamp/yurij-i-lvovych/> About Yuriy Lvovych see: Illia Parshyn, «King Yuriy Lvovych on pages of West European chronicles». *Rusin*, 30 (2012), pp. 73–85.

armor shone like the Sun («такo соуцоу вроужьникомъ стоаещимъ на немъ блистахоуца щити и вроужници подобни солнцю»)¹⁷. Similarly, during the campaign against the Jatvyags, a Rus'ian chronicler colorfully described the armor of Danylo Romanovych's warriors, whose helmets and shields “sparkled like the morning Sun” («щитѣ же ихъ аѣко зарѣ бѣ шоломъ же ихъ аѣко слнцю восходащоу»)¹⁸.

When the prince Danylo himself arrived in Pressburg (Bratislava) to attend the assembly with the Hungarian ruler Béla IV, he astonished the Germans present with his striking appearance («...и бѣ полковъ его свѣтлость велика»)¹⁹. How-

17 Literally: “Around him stood warriors; they had shields and weapons shone, like the Sun”. *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej*, *Ipatevskaya letopis*, col. 765.

18 Literally: “Their shields were like the dawn, and their helmets were like the sun rising”. *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej*, *Ipatevskaya letopis*, col. 813.

19 Literally: “...and great was the brightness of his troops”. *Ibidem*, col. 814. Kozak, Mykola. “How the Germans Marvelled at the Tatar Arms”: What Weapon Was the Chronicle



Fig. 6. Gilded fragments of a shield from a burial mound at Halychyna Mohyla (Krylos). Ivano-Frankivsk Museum of Local History, collections. (photo by M. Kozak)

Mykola Kozak, *Ozbroiennia viisk Halytskoi ta Volynskoi zemel u XIII–XIV st. (to-rhivlia, trofei, vlasne vyrobnytstvo)* [Armament of the armies of the Galician-Volhynian lands of the XII – XIV centuries (trade, trophies, production)], PhD Thesis, Lviv, 2024, pp. 321–322.

ever, the weapons of Danylo Romanovych’s warriors metaphorically sparkled with brilliance. This emphasized their distinctiveness and readiness for battle.

Undoubtedly, some literary exaggerations were inherent in the chronicle’s narrative. Scholars interpret the episode in Pressburg as a literal borrowing from Greek translated literature²⁰. However, the comparison with “Ortnit” suggests the possibility of a genuine surprise among the German nobility (the potential readers of the poem were precisely representatives of the “bellatores”) at the appearance and armor of the Rus’ian army. This can also be supported by Ilias’s remark about light chain mail. The peculiarity of the army of Rus’ also lay in the use of chain mail rather than plate armor²¹. Archaeological excavations have revealed the widespread use of this type of protective equipment, which has been in use for

Describing in the Episode of the Meet in Pozsony and What Is Its Origin?” *Ethnic History of European Nations*, vol. 67, 2022, pp. 7–16. See also: Kozak, Mykola, «Protective Equipment of the Old Ukrainian Warrior of the Princely Era». *The Prince’s Era: History and Culture*, 70 (2025), pp. 17–70; Parshyn, Illia, «Poiedynok kniazia Rostyslava Mykhailovycha ta lytsaria Vorsha – preliudiia do Yaroslavskoi bytvy 1245 roku», *Problemy istorii viin i viiskovoho mystetstva*, 2 (2019), pp. 147–156.

20 Tolochko O. (Ed.), *Halytsko-Volynskiy litopys: tekstolohiia* [Galician-Volhynian litopys: textology], Akadempriodyka, 2020, pp. 428–441.

21 Ihor Voznyi, Andrii Fedoruk, «Viyskovyy obladunok i sporiadzhennia vershnyka X–XIV st. na terytorii mizh Verkhnim Siretom i Serednim Dnistrom» [Military armor and equipment of a horseman of the 10th–14th centuries in the territory between the Upper Siret and the Middle Dniester]. *Archaeology*, 4 (2012), pp. 62–65.

several centuries²². Although “Ortnit” is an epic poem, it is not impossible that its creators drew on practical experience and were acquainted with members of the Rus’ian military not only through legends or literary tradition, but also through direct personal encounter.

Subsequently, in the figure of the King of Rus’, Ilias provided Ortnit with substantial military support. Courage, determination, and at times ferocity and cruelty are traits characteristic of the Rus’ warrior’s image. His decisiveness becomes especially clear in the figure who initiates the first battle against the pagan forces (referred to in the epic as the Syrians). Ilias carried a banner bearing the image of a golden lion and took his stand in battle²³:

Das wayss got sprach der Reusse
 nu gib mir jn an die hannt
 einen swären fanen
 Er do angepannt
 daraus ein Lewe leuchtet
 von schönem golde rot
 die zwen künige fuerten
 vil manigen in den todt.

“God knows this,” said the Rus’ian
 [king], “so hand it over to me.”
 He pulled up a heavy banner.
 From it shone a lion of
 shining red gold.
 The two kings led many people
 to their deaths (verse: 299)

The last phrase, “die zwen künige fuerten / vil manigen in den todt” (“the two kings led many people to their deaths”), demonstrates the equal participation of kings Ortnit and Ilias in the depicted battle²⁴. At the same time, the author of the poem uses the epithet “starche” (strong) when describing the Rus’ian ruler: “Es nam der starche Reusse...”²⁵. Among other emblematic details, the mention of a lion as the main heraldic figure on Ilias’s banner is particularly noteworthy. From the context, it is difficult to determine unequivocally whether the coat of arms described belongs to the King of Rus’ or to Ortnit himself. However, O. Odnorozhenko argues that the heraldic image refers explicitly to the Rus’ rul-

²² Ibidem.

²³ Mario Klarer, *Ortnit. Wolfdietrich A*, p. 119. See also version C: Arthur Amelung, Oskar Jänicke, *Ortnit und die Wolfdietriche*, Bd. 1., Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1871, p. 8 (verse 312–13).

²⁴ Mario Klarer, *Ortnit. Wolfdietrich A*, p. 119.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 143.

er²⁶. In the later heraldic tradition, represented in European heraldry from the 15th century, the lion is associated with the Ruthenian lands, primarily the Principality of Galicia²⁷. In the armorial of Conrad Grünenberg (1480), a similar Rus’ coat of arms is depicted: a golden lion with red claws on a black shield²⁸. The Rus’ lion emerging from flames is also recorded on the Babenberg family tapestry (15th century) – on the heraldic shield of Gertrude of Babenberg, whose third and last husband was Roman, the younger son of king Danylo.

Ilias acted as an ally of the main character and, at crucial moments, gave Ortnit a sword – a symbolic act of trust and military support²⁹. At the same time, Ilias’ ferocity in the poem is expressed through his uncontrollable desire to annihilate his enemies. The concept of the “Riuzen/Reussen in fury” (“der Reusse wolt vor zorne / Es nam der starche Reusse den fanen in zorne do...”) appears several times in the text. He became so absorbed in destroying his enemies that he almost quarreled with Ortnit, who urged him not to be so cruel.

On the other hand, the Rus’ king embodies all the traits characteristic of a European knight: defending his honor and seeking revenge for fallen comrades, he fiercely devastated his enemies. He also reveals himself as a Christian warrior, for when his opponents begged for mercy, he agreed on the condition of penance: everyone struck by the King of Rus’ was to observe a strict fast until the Day of Judgment. In other handwriting versions, Ilias, together with Ortnit, baptized the pagans, while the ruler of Rus’ destroyed their idols: “der künig von Reussen die abgötter von sien altaren”³⁰. In the poem’s decisive moment, their victory over the pagans culminates in Ortnit’s marriage to the Syrian ruler’s daughter.

The active military campaigns of Rus’ian lands drew the attention of 13th-century minnesingers. After 1230, the poet Konrad von Marner (d. 1265) turned to the kind of legend that noble patrons desired to hear performed by courtly singers³¹.

26 Oleh Odnorozhenko, *Nauka pro herby*. <https://sigillum.com.ua/geraldyka/majsternya-2/>

27 Ibidem.

28 Oleh Odnorozhenko, *Nauka pro herby*. <https://sigillum.com.ua/geraldyka/majsternya-2/>

29 Arthur Amelung, Oscar Jänicke, *Ortnit und die Wolfdietriche: nach Müllenhoffs Vorarbeiten (Deutsches Heldenbuch)*. Teil 4, Band 2, Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1873, p. 255.

30 *Heldenbuch*. Augsburg: Johann Schönsperger, 1491. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 19r. *Strassburger Heldenbuch* Straßburg: Johann Prüss, 1479. [Ohne Paginierung], Gedruckt in gotischer Schrift, Inkunabel, p. 56.

31 The name of the author has not been established. However, scholars of his work believe

Das er jm gab ein schlag
 Mit seinem güten schwerte
 Gar bald er tode lag.
 ¶ Sein wunnighliches waffen
 Im in der hende kland
 Er machte manigen schlaffen
 On allen seinen danck
 Vil manigem faracenen
 Nam er do sein leben
 Vnd das stünd auch die seinen
 Weyst got wol vnuetgeben.

Hye streypt heylser Ot
 nit mitt den heyden vor der burg
 vnd schlüg je vil zü tode.



Man lassen wir sy streyten
 Also sprach elter reich
 Vns wirt leicht über reyten
 Der heydnisch künig reich
 Die heyden vns erfaren
 Die porten sind bewart
 Die vor hyn offen waten
 Die sind nun zü gesparrt.
 ¶ Magst du das hert nit wende
 Du reich künig otmit
 Sy brennen dir behende
 Dein hiel in kurzer zit
 Des hast du lützel ere
 Vnd darzü grössen schaden

Vnd kumbst auch nymetmere
 Zü cristenlichem staden.
 ¶ Mit mit geschwinde worten
 Do einen heyden zwang
 Der schloß jm auff die porten
 Mit den seinen er auftrang
 Sy entwichen jm on gnade
 So krefftig was sein gewoz
 Er schlüg je vil zü tode
 Vnd ertrendte sy in dem mörz.
 ¶ Do otmit der bescheyden
 Dem reussen do entweich
 Do ward auch gegen den heyde
 Sein streyten also weich
 Sy frümpten jm schaden zwate
 Den er nit mocht vol klagen
 Er verlor sein helde gate
 Vñ ward auch nyder geschlagen
 ¶ Do kam elterich der kleine
 Hyn widerumb geritten
 Hört edeler fūrste reine
 Hie ist genüg gescreiten
 Ker dich zü andern streüssen
 Vnd rich du deinen zorn
 Oder du hast den reussen
 Vnd all dem man verlor.
 ¶ Do sprach der lampartee
 D dhem elygas
 Es leyt mie ymmer schwete
 Das ich nit bey dir was
 Ich müß nach deinem tode
 Immer traurig wesen
 Das got demer sel genade
 Vnd wöll dir genädig wesen.
 ¶ Der edel heldt ellende
 Sein schilt zü rugken warff
 Er nam zü beyder hende
 Sein liechtes waffen scharpff
 Die schwert gar laut erklingen
 Gar fast er auff sy schlüg
 Die vor hyn auff in drungen
 Die lieffen weyt genüg.

Fig. 7. Folio 18r. The struggle of Ortnit's troops against the pagans.
Heldenbuch. Augsburg: Johann Schönsperger, 1491. München, Bayerische
 Staatsbibliothek, 2 Inc.c.a. 2575.



Fig. 8. Folio 19r. Ilias of Rus' topples pagan idols, while Ornit baptizes the people. *Heldenbuch*. Augsburg: Johann Schönsperger, 1491. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 2 Inc.c.a. 2575.

He listed various interests among the knightly public: some favored the exile of Dietrich von Bern, others preferred King Rother, some wanted stories about the “Riuzen Stürm” (“the Rus’ian attack”, or “the Rus’ian assault”), others focused on Eckhart’s misfortune, and some were drawn to Kriemhild’s treachery³².

Unfortunately, the author did not go into detail about what the “Rus’ian attack” was. This mention is neither unique nor an accident in German medieval literature. The mysterious “Riuzen Stürm” was cited by the poet Hugo von Trimberg (1235/1240–1313), who is also known for his didactic works. He composed the poem “Der Renner” in Middle High German – a didactic manuscript that contains descriptions of practical exercises in text structuring, designed for teaching purposes at the University of Tübingen. Nowadays, it is rightly considered a masterful example of refined High Medieval German poetry.

Like Marner’s poem, Hugo von Trimberg addressed the switching moods, desires, and demands of people, and considered changes in the tastes of the elite to be important for minstrels. Among other things, he listed popular topics in his time. Among them are the adventures of Dietrich von Bern, the hero of Ecken, the “Rus’ian attack” (“Rus’ian battle”), and the lives of the heroes Siegfried and Tristan: «...sprichet einer, ich hoerte gern / Von hern Dietrich von Bern / Und ouch von den alten recken, / Der ander wil von hern Ecken, / Der dritte wil der Riuzen stürm, / Der Vierde wil Sifrides wurm, / Der fünfte wil hern Tristerant...») (verses 16183 – 88)³³. Hugo von Tremberg’s “Der Renner” should not be considered a compilation of Marner’s poem. Obviously, the theme of the “Rus’ian attack” was still relevant among representatives of the knightly elite at the beginning of the 14th century, although individual preferences had changed. Unfortunately, the author did not provide any additional information about the content of this song,

that he was a traveler and held a prominent position among his contemporaries, as evidenced by frequent mentions of him. From the analysis of other sources, it can be assumed that his name was Kondrat (Philip Strauch, *Marners Leben und Dichtungen. Inaugural-dissertation zur erlangung der Philosophischen doctorwürde an der Universität Strassburg*, 1876, Trübner & Comp., p. 1.

32 Quote: “Singe ich dien lüten minú liet / so wil der erste daz, wie dietrich von berne schiet, der ander / wa kúnig Ruother sas, der dritte wil der rússen sturm / so wil der vierde eggehartes not / der fünfte, wen kriemhilt verrie”. Ewa Willms (Hrsg.), *Der Marner: Lieder und Sangsprüche aus dem 13. Jahrhundert und ihr Weiterleben im Meistersang*, Walter de Gruyter, 2008, p. 250; Strauch, *cit.*, p. 124.

33 Gustav Ehrismann (Hrsg.), *Hugo von Trimberg. Der Renner*, Bd. 1, Tübingen, 1909, p. 283.



Fig. 9. Title page of "Der Renner" (1468). Der Renner. Switzerland, c. 1468. Colodny, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer 91.

so little is known about it except for its general title. In later parts of the poem, the development of the same idea about the existence of this epic work is noticeable: “Dirre saget von den Priuzen, Jener singet von den Riuzen” (lines 10603–4)³⁴. According to P. Berkov, these lines sound like a proverb rather than an author’s expression. The following references to Riuzen in the poem are given as follows: “Denne swere in stinge oder sagte hiute / Von den Riuzen bî guotem wîn” (lines 9560–64)³⁵. This also indicates the existence of a song or ideas about a Rus’ian attack³⁶. The scholar of Marner’s works, Philipp Strauch, found no clear explanation for the use of this expression. In his opinion, it is merely “a general phrase that defies interpretation”³⁷. He did not delve into an analysis of the ethnonym “Riuzen”, simply noting that battles with Ruthenian warriors are also found in the “Thidrekssaga” and in the “Wolfdietrich poems”³⁸. When analyzing the latter, general references that are unrelated to the “Rus’ian attack” (battle) are noticeable. However, later studies have pointed to more thorough explanations. First, there are well-founded opinions that references to the “Rus’ian attack” relate to a certain epic work that the Germans remembered in the 13th – early 14th centuries³⁹. In addition, according to P. Berkov, these references may not refer to a single work but to several songs or poems that tell of a successful Rus’ian assault or battle⁴⁰.

Against this background, it is worth comparing the Rus’ian (Galician-Volhynian) chronicler’s reports on the “Rus’ian battle”. This source contains separate episodes from the military history of the Galician-Volhynian state in the 13th century, in which this concept is used, but without a detailed explanation. Moreover, the “Rus’ian battle” was characteristic not only of the military art of the Rus’ian elite but also became popular among the Polish nobility. The chronicle mentions the Mazovian prince Konrad I (1187–1247), who, during the campaign near Ka-

34 Literally: “One tells of the Prussians, the other sings of the Rus”. Gustav Ehrismann (Hrsg.), *Hugo von Trimberg. Der Renner*, p. 49.

35 Literally: “Then he would swear, declare, or tell today of the Rus’ over good wine”. *Ibidem*, p. 6.

36 Pavel Berkov, “Das «russische Thema» in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur”, *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, 21/1 (1976), p. 302.

37 Strauch, *cit.*, p. 34.

38 *Ibidem*.

39 P. Berkov argued that “if this source did not exist or if it were not one of the most beloved works in the late 13th and early 14th centuries, then Hugo von Trimberg would hardly have listed it among other epic poems”. Berkov, *cit.*, p. 302.

40 *Ibidem*.

lisz in Poland, urged his knights to battle. Among other things, it is noted here that “Konrad liked Rus’ian battle” (“Кондратоу же любящю Роускыи бой”)⁴¹. Unfortunately, apart from this brief mention, no other information has survived. Accordingly, it is difficult to determine how well the German knights and minstrels of that time understood “Riuzen Stürm” and whether this concept coincided with the preferences of the Mazovian ruler.

Scholars have suggested that references to Rus’ may have been influenced by Prince Alexander Yaroslavovich’s (d. 1263) victories over the Teutonic Knights in several battles. The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle about the exploits of the Novgorod army was cited in support of this view⁴². Whether this victory could have become a certain literary basis for the spread of “Riuzen Stürm” in the poetry of the Holy Roman Empire cannot be answered unequivocally. In addition, from around the 1240s, Prince Danylo successfully resisted the Hungarian-Polish coalition, a resistance that may also have been reflected in European poetic tradition. It is also worth remembering that during the battle near Yaroslav in 1245, the Hungarian ban Filny described the Rus’ian troops as an army that attacks skillfully but cannot maintain pressure for long⁴³. The representative of the Hungarian nobility had a well-established idea of the power of the Galician-Volhynian state, so the capabilities and military glory of Rus’ were known in Europe. It is unknown to what extent the German knights were impressed by the Rus’ warriors’ victory over them. The information about “Riuzen Stürm” is unlikely to be related to the defeats by Prince Alexander. From this point of view, the military glory of Danylo Romanovych (reinforced by campaigns against the Czech Kingdom and an alliance agreement with the Teutonic Order) could have played a significant role in European opinion.

Besides, another source may be proposed that offers significant evidence concerning Rus’. Ulrich von Liechtenstein’s (1200–1275) poem “Der Frauendienst” had an impact on the European medieval world. The famous minstrel distinguished himself by his service at the court of the last Austrian Babenbergs and took part in

41 Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej, Ipatevskaya letopis, col. 755.

42 Berkov, *cit.*, p. 302–303.

43 Roman Holyk, «Тоземльцы и иноплеменики»: “ruskyi patriotyzm”, “obraz svitu” ta etnichni stereotypy serednovichnoi Halychyny u Volyni». *Kniazha doba: istoriia i kultura [Princely era: history and culture]*, 4 (2011), p. 102.

the struggle for their possessions after the dynasty's extinction⁴⁴. As a 13th-century military man, he was well versed in the customs of medieval warfare. Describing the battle near the Leitha River on June 15, 1246, between the armies of Frederick II the Warlike (1211–1246) and the Hungarian king Béla IV, he noted the decisive influence of the Rus'ian warriors: "der Reuzzen schar dô kom gerant"⁴⁵.

The "Reuzzen" (Riuzen) squad began the battle, and Lord Heinrich von Liechtenstein (father of the poet Ulrich) and his knights opposed them. Between these two forces stood Duke Frederick II the Warlike. He instructed his warriors, promising to make them rich in case of victory. While he was busy with this, the Rus'ian knights approached him from behind, after which he died ("jämmerlich todt lag")⁴⁶:

Owê des, daz dô geschach!
 der fürste leider übersach,
 daz dar gesprangte der Reuzzen schar
 (daz übersach er leider gar),
 die wîle er hie di sînen mant.
 der Reuzzen schar dô kom gerant
 hinden ûf den fürsten rîch:
 dâ von gelac er jâmerlich.
 Der strît zesamne schön kom sâ.
 dô weste ouch niemen, daz lac dô
 des strîtes herre ze einer sît.
 ûf dem stuont vast enstet der strît:
 owê, owê der grôzen nôt!
 dâ gelac der fürste tôt.

Oh, woe for what happened there
 The prince, alas, did not see
 that the Rus' host had broken
 through, (for he, regrettably, did not
 notice it at all), for at that moment, he
 was tending to his own men.
 And the Rus' contingent then surged
 forward and struck the mighty prince
 from the rear; From this, he fell in
 grievous suffering.
 The battle closed into a tight,
 narrow struggle.
 And no one knew who it was that lay
 there – the commander of one side of
 the fight. At that place, the combat
 grew fiercely intense:
 oh woe of great misfortune!
 There the duke fell dead
 (verse: 1666-1667)

44 Franz Spechtler, «Liechtenstein, Ulrich von». *Neue Deutsche Biografie*, 14 (1985), pp. 522–523.

45 Karl Lachmann, *Ulrich von Liechtenstein*. Berlin, 1841, p. 527. Rus' was well known among the Austrian nobility. The German poet Tannhäuser († 1256) counted Rus' on a par with Poles, Czechs and Hungarians among the tributaries of the Austrian duke. (Johannes Siebert, *Der Dichter Tannhäuser*. New York, 1980, p. 82).

46 Ludwig Tieck (Hrsg.), *Frauendienst oder: Geschichte und Liebe des Ritters und Sängers Ulrich von Liechtenstein, von ihm selbst beschrieben*. Stuttgart und Tübingen, 1812, p. 259.; Bechstein, Reinhold (Ed.) *Ulrich von Liechtenstein, Frauendienst*, vol. 2, F. Leipzig, A. Brockhaus, 1888, p. 256.

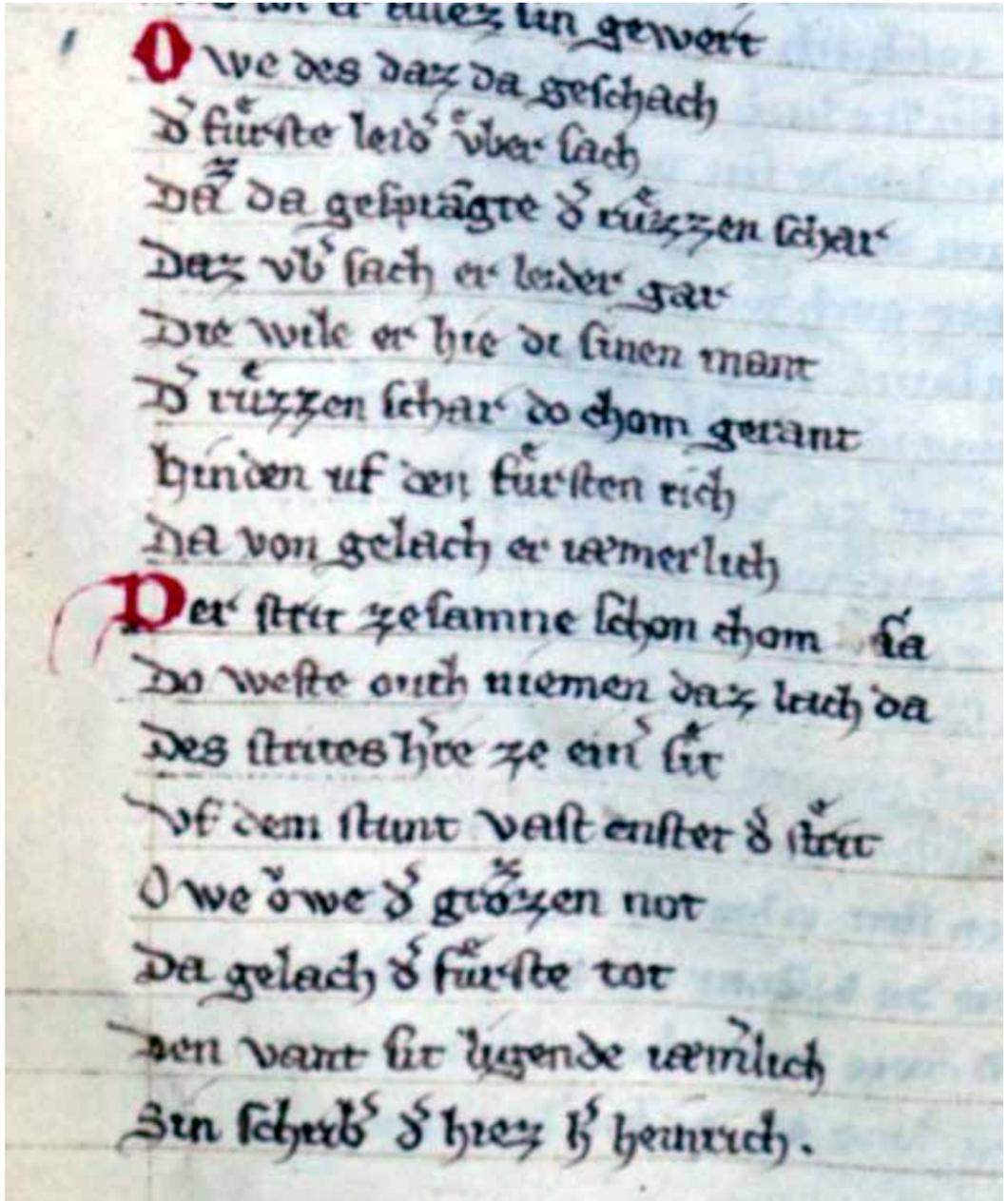


Fig. 10. Folio 116v. The “Rus’ian host” (“rüezen schar”) breaks through the battle line and strikes Duke Frederick II of Austria from the rear. Ulrich von Lichtenstein, *Frauen-dienst*. Süddeutschland, ca. 1300–1320. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 44.

This episode clearly showed that the Rus'ian tactics surprised their opponents and left a mark on German poetry. Although the Austrian duke was unprepared for the sudden and powerful attack of the Rus'ian warriors and died during this battle, his army still defeated the invaders. There is no reason to doubt the historical accuracy of this information. The tradition of the death of the Austrian duke in battle with the king of Rus' is reflected in several chronicles of the 13th–14th centuries⁴⁷. The resonance of the battle's outcome near the Leitha River was also reflected in the chronicle tradition. The Galician-Volhynian Chronicle notes that the duke died in battle, but at the hands of his own "boyars" (noblemen)⁴⁸. The anonymous compiler of the Hustyn Chronicle (an early modern historical source) did not doubt that the Austrian duke died in battle with Danylo Romanovych⁴⁹. Contemporary scholars are unsure whether Prince Danylo led the Rus'ian detachment or whether it was his rival for the Galician lands, Prince Rostyslav Mykhailovych (the son-in-law of the Hungarian king⁵⁰). In any case, Rus'ian participation in the battle near the Leitha River had a noticeable resonance. This event could have served as the basis for the formation of the image of "Riuzen Stürm" in the German-language poetry of that time.

In the heroic epic "Biterolf and Dietleib," the circle of heroes is expanded to include Eastern European princes serving the Hun (Hungarian) king Etzel. This epic poem was written around 1250. It intertwines various plots, making it more of a chivalric romance than an epic. According to the text, Etzel captured the king of Prussia and made him his vassal. In the service, he was ordered to fight against neighboring Poland. The text of "Biterolf and Dietleib" demonstrates the emotions of a medieval warrior: the difference is shown between the actions a person performs himself and those he must perform according to his duty. Therefore, the Prussians and Poles in the author's mind were neighbors who did not seek war. As indicated in recent studies, the time in the novel reflects an era before conflicts between these peoples (unlike the time when "Biterolf and Dittleib" was

47 Parshyn, *cit.*, pp. 89–91.

48 Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej, Ipatevskaya letopis, col. 820.

49 Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej, Hustynskaya letopis, Vol. 40, 2003, p. 121.

50 See also: Karl Lechner, *Die Babenbergen: Mark-Grafen und Herzoge von Österreich 976–1246*, Böhlau, 1994, p. 296; Norbert Mika, *Walka o spadek po Babenbergach 1246–1278*. WAW, 2008, pp. 18–19.

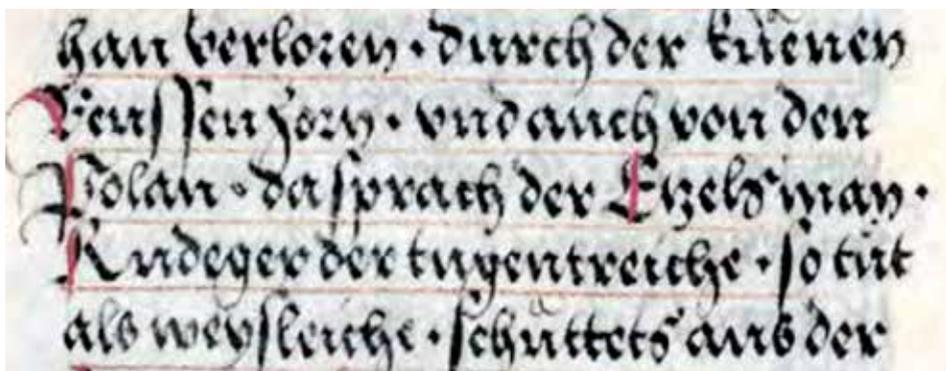


Fig. 11. Lamentation for the heroes slain by the Rus' (Riuzen zorn) and Polish (Pölan) troops.

Mario Klarer, (Ed.), *Ambraser Heldenbuch*, De Gruyter, 2022, p. 202.

written in the 13th century)⁵¹. Poles and Rus' in the epic are perceived together as common enemies of German chivalry. According to the plot, the knight Ramung mourned the fallen warriors who perished because of “the valiant wrath of the Rus' and the Poles” (“durch der küenen Reussen zorn vnd auch von den Polan”) (verses 3769–71)⁵². The insertion about the “küenen” (bravery) of the Rus' is not accidental, because in the minds of German authors, Rus'ian warriors were often defined by courage. Accordingly, the unknown author of the poem (who was a knight and well-versed in warfare) noted the courage of the Rus'. For him, defeat by weaker or less courageous warriors could be perceived as a shame, so the insertion about the Rus' wrath is quite appropriate, as it emphasizes both their skill and the suddenness of their attack.

However, whether this “Rus'ian wrath” was originally part of the concept of the “Riuzen Stürm” is difficult to determine. Yet, given the explicit reference to Polish troops' participation in the battle, this episode makes clear historical allusions. In 1253, Danylo Romanovich's expedition to the Opava land took place in support of his son Roman's claims to the Austrian ducal throne⁵³. The expedition

51 Florian Schmid, *Constructions of Identities and Processes of Othering. Images of Polish Characters, Polishness and Poland and Their Roles in Medieval German Literature. Germans and Poles in the Middle Ages*, BRILL, 2021, p. 285.

52 Oskar Jänicke, Franz Roth (Eds.), *Biterolf und Dietlieb*. Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1866, p. 56.

53 Alexei Martyniuk, *Do Herbershteina. Avstryia i Vostochnaia Evropa v systeme personal-*

of the Rus'ian army, which included contingents of Polish princes and "exotic" Lithuanian reinforcements⁵⁴, could have had wide resonance, as reflected in "Bitterolf and Dittlieb"⁵⁵. Also noteworthy is the author's significant expansion of his knowledge of political geography: the fighting for the German knighthood expanded far to the east, covering Prussia and the Polish principalities. This aspect fully corresponds to the realities of the 1250s for the poem's composers.

Thus, secular medieval poetry preserved necessary evidence of the imagery of Rus' and its warriors, who became a significant part of the European cultural sphere and historical memory. The depictions of Rus'ian troops – whether in references to the "Riuzen Stürm" or the participation of Rus' contingents within multiethnic armies – underscored the symbolic and geopolitical significance of Rus' in the imagination of medieval European chivalry. A characteristic feature of these representations was the interplay between historical reality and literary convention: Rus'ian warriors were portrayed at times as allies, at others as members of the "barbarian" forces opposing the heroes of Western European epics.

In connection with the "Riuzen Stürm", it is worth mentioning the "Rus'ian attack" ("Rus'ian battle") known from the chronicles. It remains uncertain what the scribe precisely meant by this term. However, one known supporter of this "Rus'ian battle" ("роускъи бои") was the Mazovian prince, who, from the perspective of the Rus'ian elite of the time, was a foreigner. No other adherents of this episode, nor the regions of its diffusion, are attested in surviving sources. Thus, the writings of the German poets Marner and Hugo von Trimberg reflect a certain awareness – perhaps differently articulated – of these distinctive martial and cultural features, which left a lasting imprint on the literary imagination of the late Middle Ages.

nykh sviazei (XIII – nachalo XVI veka), Kvadriga, 2019, pp. 208–209.

54 Leontii Voitovych, *Halych v politychnomu zhytti Yevropy XI–XIV stolit*, Lviv, 2015, pp. 308–309.; Parshyn, Illia. «The Galician-Volyn State at the Crossroads of Worlds». *The Path from Primitiveness to Civilization. Ukrainian Medieval Costumes*, 2023, pp. 393–446.

55 Martyniuk, *cit.*, pp. 208–209.

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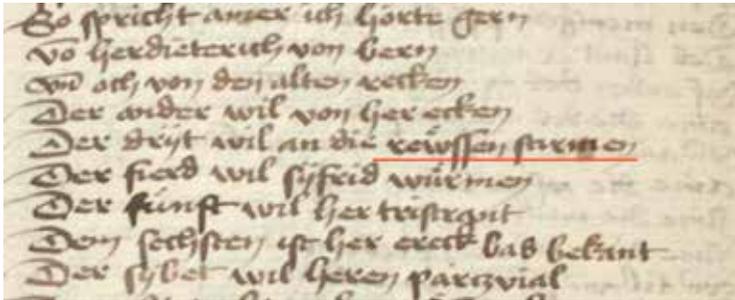
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