AGATHA 'THE GREEK' – EXPLORING THE SLAVIC SOLUTION

***by William Humphreys*[1]**

ABSTRACT

The editorial for *Foundations* **1** (2) (July 2003) speculated that Agatha, mother of St. Margaret, one of the most important women in Scottish Medieval history, could have been sister to 'Anastasia' ('Maria' of Byzantium), the Greek wife of the Kievan Prince Vsevolod (d. 1093). Did western chroniclers mistake a tradition of imperial relationship to mean that Agatha was descended from the Ottonian or Salian dynasties when, instead, it infers her descent from a leading noble family of Byzantium. This article uses the surviving evidence to explore further the arguments for and against the Slavic solution. The author concludes that Agatha might have had Greek ancestry, through her putative father, Iaroslav.

*Foundations (2004) **1** (4): 275-290* *© Copyright FMG*

Background

De Vajay's theory (1962) that Agatha was a niece of the Salian Emperor Henry III is plausible if we accept implicitly John of Worcester's testimony that Agatha was *filia germani imperatoris Henrici*.[2] In a previous article (Humphreys, 2003) I questioned the reliability of John's *Chronicon ex Chronicis,* while the validity of the Slavist viewpoint, as propounded by Jetté (1996) and Ingham (1998), was considered. The article refers to studies of contemporary figures such as John, Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester and William of Malmesbury as suggesting William's account pre-dated and was more 'original' than the chronicles associated with Worcester[3].

Why another variant theory?

Scope exists for alternative viewpoints because the surviving evidence is ambiguous:

---

[1] The author is a graduate in Business Management & Economics and a Fellow of the Securities Institute. He has had a life-long interest in genealogy and has researched and considered the Agatha question for approximately 12 years.

Contact details: – c/o FMG (see info pages/inside of front cover).

[2] In a related article de Vajay (1971) provided further evidence for the 'Salian' solution.

[3] In c.1045, Edward The Confessor agreed that the See of Wilton could be transferred to Malmesbury Abbey, again suggesting continuity between Wilton (Wiltshire), associated with Agatha's daughter Christina, and Malmesbury (Wiltshire), synonymous with William of Malmesbury. Also, Thomson (1987) notes that William visited Worcester at least twice, once in the period 1113-1124 and again in the period 1124-42. In a letter to Queen Matilda, William explains how some of the *Gesta Regum* had been written during her mother's lifetime. In view of this, Thomson suggests some research had been completed by c.1115, consolidating the notion that William was the earliest and most original authority. Thomson (1987) says of William: "*he quite explicitly preferred the earliest source of a story unless there were reasons to do otherwise.*" Noting that William may have consulted over 400 works by 200 authors Thomson describes him as "*voracious and omnivorous reader who attempted to read for himself the totality of what was available to the western world of the time.*" Thomson also observes, "*William worked hard at his reading, comparing different versions of the same story*", and goes on to comment (p.20): "*implicit in William of Malmesbury's account of the relationship between two or more sources is the assumption that the earliest version is the most reliable and authoritative.*" However, William was not perfect and he (or his scribe) did occasionally make basic errors.

- Parsons (2002) drew attention to the fresco evidence of a donor portrait, known to have existed in the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev, as potentially contradictory. Only five as opposed to seven documented sons of Iaroslav (d. 1054) were thought to be represented[4], and there were four or five daughters, in contrast to the three known to history. This, Parsons suggested (2002), was to achieve artistic symmetry.
- Critics of the onomastic evidence correctly observe the popularity of the Greco-Roman onomastic tradition only from the time of Agatha and Edward, not before. In the Rurikid dynasty, pronounced usage of the Greco-Roman fund is usually, but not exclusively, found amongst the descendants of Vsevolod (d.1093) and his Greek wife 'Anastasia'[5].
- Russian sources are completely silent about Edward 'The Exile' and there is only cryptic, allegorical evidence from Hungary[6]. The most revealing evidence concerning Agatha derives from the *Leges Anglorum*, which speaks implicitly of St. Margaret's descent from the Kings of Russia. Paradoxically, St. Margaret's biographer and personal acquaintance, Turgot, writing a hundred years before the *Leges Anglorum*, states nothing of her maternal ancestry.

Tracing the evidence

Information about Agatha may have been so sparse that it took on 'mantra' like qualities, the context of which became lost in time.[7] We do know she may have been the sister of a Queen (or dynastic equivalent)[8], of a noble and believing family, and that she may have been related to an Emperor and married in Russia to Edward, but this tells us little about her ancestry.

The Anglo Saxon chronicles

The potentially earliest authority, the 'D' variant of The Anglo Saxon Chronicle (written c.1100-1130) refers, under the year 1057, to Agatha as *caseres maga* – the Emperor's relation or kinswoman. We are not told which Emperor and of which Empire. At this juncture, the notion that this *caeseres* was the Emperor Henry III had not yet emerged. Subsequently, under the entry for the year 1067, a tentative allusion is made to St. Margaret's maternal kin going back to Emperor Henry who

---

4 Ellis Davidson (1976) was of the view only four daughters were discernible. The portrait apparently dates from c.1045.

5 The Greco-Roman onomastic tradition manifested itself through cultural and dynastic affinity. The allegorical references in the Russian Primary Chronicle to Solomon – a libertine who repented of women (Vladimir) and his subsequent wisdom and Vladimir being a 'David' (as a model of Kingship), demonstrates the Greco-Roman tradition was in the Kievan consciousness. This is consistent with the allegorical comparisons that the 11th century Byzantine Chronicler Psellus makes between classical figures such as Alexander, son of Philip and Solomon and Romanus III (d.1034), again clearly part of the consciousness of the Orthodox state.

6 William of Malmesbury enlightens us with the interpolated account of Edward under the year 1065 AD, suggesting that he was neither valiant nor a man of ability. This might explain why his deeds and actions are never recorded in Russian Chronicles.

7 The phenomena of recurring, ornamental epithets and how this oral tradition migrates through time (as observed by the American Scholar Milman Parry), is discussed by Knox (1996) in his introduction to Homer's *Odyssey*.

8 Ingham (1998) observed that 'soror' may also have meant cousin.

ruled over Rome. The vagueness of the phrase 'goes back', betrays a lack of detailed knowledge and, more importantly, does not imply an immediate relationship.

Our problem is understanding exactly how the then contemporary Chroniclers of Western Europe perceived what constituted a Roman Emperor. The following quote from Whittow (1996, p.292) has some resonance:

The Byzantines recognised the Carolingians and their Ottonian successors in the west as 'emperors of the Franks', but since 812 imperial protocol had explicitly reserved the formula 'emperor of the Romans', for the emperor in Constantinople[9].

However, *germani*, a word integral to Agatha's Salian identity, also means 'true' when used as an adjective. Although not the context in which John of Worcester applied *germanus*, it is valid to question (for reasons to be explained) whether chroniclers were confused by the context in which *germanus* had originally been intended to be applied. Therefore, was Agatha a kinswoman of a true Emperor? Or was Agatha a daughter of the brother of the Emperor Henry?

Abbot Aelred

With this in mind we should now consider Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx's *Vita Sancti Edwardi regis,* which is presumed to date to c.1160. The following quote, cited by Ingham (1998, p.251) seems relevant:

Imperator Romanus, cujus cognatum regis nepos filius Eadmundi ferei lateris…

[The Roman Emperor, whose kinswoman was married by a nephew of the King (Edward the Confessor), a son of Edmund Ironside….]

Do the two words *Imperator Romanus* betray a clue to Agatha's identity that may have been overlooked? Was Agatha kinswoman of an *Emperor Romanus* or do we innocently take it to mean 'the Roman emperor'[10]? Simeon of Durham referred to the German Emperor Henry as *Henrico Romanorum imperatori*[11] and contextual examples from the Chronicles of John of Worcester, William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis give many examples of nation kings in the genitive form *i.e.* the *-orum* ending. The subject of the sentence would seem to govern the usage, although we should not rule out this possible alternative meaning.

Aelred's better known *Genealogia regum Anglorum* recounted how The Confessor enlisted help from the Roman Emperor to arrange the return of his nephew. This account differed from William of Malmesbury who, in Book II of the *Gesta Regum*

---

[9] In 962, the German Emperor Otto I invaded Italy and entered Rome, where he was crowned Emperor in St.Peter's. Otto I subsequently referred to himself as 'Imperator Augustus', with his son Otto II probably adding the epithet 'Roman' in consequence of his dispute with the Byzantine Emperor Basil II. Byzantium strove to buy Otto II off by marrying him to a Byzantine noble lady and recognising his title of 'Emperor'.

[10] A great grandson of Agatha Lecapena, Romanus Argyros, later became Emperor Romanus III (d.1034) through marriage.

[11] Arnold (1885, p.155): *"et filiam Gunildam, quae nupsit Henrico Romanorum imperatori"* – referring to the marriage of Canute's daughter, Gunnilda. A few lines previously, we are told *"Eadwardus vero Agatham filiam Germani imperatoris in matimonium accepit".* Arnold takes this to mean 'marrying the German Emperor's daughter' adding weight to the notion that the context in which *germani* had originally been intended had been lost. Roger of Wendover (Hewlett, 1965), working from a source thought to date to c.1180, states in *Flores Historiarum* that Agatha was "*sorore Henrici Romani imperatoris"*, suggesting both a sororal and an imperial relationship.

Anglorum, merely states that the Confessor sent messengers to the King of Hungary to send over his nephew. This, perhaps the earliest of all our sources, is bereft of German involvement.

Gaimar

The 12th century Anglo-Norman poet Gaimar recounts how, after leaving Sweden (c.1028), Walgar (guide to the English princes) passed Russia after only 5 days and came to the land of Hungary. "*On the sixth day Walgar arrived beneath the City of Gardimbre*." Ingham (1998), while discussing the etymology of Gardimbre, stops short of an identification of the place. However, he does note the strong probability that the first syllable *gardr* is synonymous with the old French for 'fortified town'. However, could the etymology of the last two syllables *im-bre* represent a phonetic migration of the Swedish for mist/fog/vapour *(d)imma,* and/or, the Latin for a shower of water (or rain) *imber?* Gardimbre could therefore be a fortified town associated with mist or water.

Moving forward 8 years to 1036, Barlow (1970, pp.44-46) says that 'The Confessor' came from exile to England in that year with his brother Alfred, whom John of Worcester erroneously calls the elder brother. Barlow is candid enough to admit this view of events is not corroborated in the recognised sources. However, Gaimar's evidence provides a good reason why the younger Alfred (d.1036), and not the Confessor, was lured back to England following Canute's death in 1035. Representatives of apparently pro-English factions had been sent to Normandy to retrieve the then Aethling Edward from exile. In Gaimar's *Estoire des Engles* (Hardy, 1889) we are told unequivocally (4779 – 4792):

Now they discussed what they should do,
For which heirs they should send.
If they sent to Hungary
It would be too far, they have little aid.
In the end they agreed
That they should send to Normandy
For Eadward and for Aelfred.
Eadward was the elder brother.
He had gone into Hungary
To help his cousins
In a War which they had.
The people of Velcase caused it.
When the English did not find him,
They brought Aelfred with them.

There are reasonable grounds for assuming that the testimony of Gaimar betrays an underlying truth, despite the obvious time compression of the Russian sojourn into Hungary[12]. From Byzantine sources we know that the Pechenegs crossed the Danube

[12] Gaimar, when referring to the exiled princes Edmund and Edward as being received by the king and queen at Gardimbre, also infers Hungary was a subject nation of this same King & Queen. Possibly this means one of two things. Either Andrew, as eventual heir to Hungary, was subject to the same process of benevolence as Edmund and Edward (and ultimately kinship), or Edmund and Edward eventually passed from Russia to a 'parent' State (Byzantium?), which is perhaps what Gaimar means when he says it took them 5 days to pass Russia - roughly the downstream sailing time from Kiev to the Black Sea (800km). In this scenario, Russia (and not Hungary) might have been viewed as culturally and religiously subject to Constantinople.

into Transylvania in c.1034. By 1036, the year in which the Confessor had apparently gone to his nephews in exile, the Pechenegs were attacking Kiev. Interestingly, the attribution of Vel(e)case would seem to centre on the phonetic variant of the Russian Chronicler Nestor's *Valachs* which appears to be a Russian term of reference, comparable to *Volokh,* for alien speaking foreigners[13].

The *Leges Edwardi Confessoris*

William of Malmesbury (Mynors et al., 1998) describes the brothers Eadwig (Edmund) and Edward as taking refuge with the King of the Huns "*Hunorum regem petierunt*". While the essence of taking refuge is sound for the main part, this was probably in Russia and not Hungary[14].

As Ingham (1998) observes from the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* (p.253):

Edwardus……aufugit de ista terra usque ad terram Rugorum, quam nos uocamus Russeiam. Quem rex ipsius terre, Malesclodus nomine, ut audiuit et intellexit, quis et unde esset, honeste retinuit eum.

[Edward……fled to the land of the Rugi, which we call Russia. Him, the King of this same land, Malescodus [Iaroslav] by name, when he heard and understood who he was, honourably kept.]

Ingham considered this work to originate from c.1135 and made the phonetic connection, not obvious to the uninformed, that Malescodus and Iaroslav are one and the same. One reasonable explanation is that Edward arrived in Russia shortly after the invasion of Sweden by Canute in 1028. The elder Russian prince was then thought to be Iaroslav's brother, Mstislav (d.c.1036). Here the phonetic similarities are more striking. It seems only logical to suggest that Mstislav received Edward and not Iaroslav.

Ingham also quoted the following from *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* (p.253):

Et ipse Eadwardus accepit ibi uxorem ex nobili genere, de qua ortus est ei Eadgarus Adeling et Margareta regina Scotie et Christina soror eius.

[And this same Edward took there a wife of a noble family, by whom was born to him Edgar the Atheling and Margaret Queen of Scotland, and Christina his sister.]

Previous commentators have observed that 'a wife of noble birth' is not the same thing as saying 'he won for himself a daughter of the same King'. The undoubted implication is that Edward was married in Russia to Agatha, a lady of noble birth. Here at least there is some consistency in the sources as the interpolations within the 'D' variant of the Anglo Saxon Chronicle (under 1067) describe Agatha as being descended from a noble and believing family.

William of Malmesbury's account of 1017 jumps chronologically straight from Sweden to Hungary, ignoring the probable sojourn in Russia (as observed by Gaimar, Adam of

---

[13] *Valachs*, although potentially of general application, is perhaps also synonymous with the Vlach of Romania (Georgescu, 1991). We should not forget the evidence of Vitalis who associates the Athelings with Dacia "*in Daciam relegavit*" (a remnant of which had earlier become a Byzantine Diocese). The later testimony of Roger de Hoveden has the Atheling as marrying the daughter of the king of the '*Dogorum'.* In my previous article (Humphreys, 2003) I speculated that *velecase* may have been associated with a 9th century indigenous people known as the *Ves.*

[14] Original apologist accounts of the role of St.Stephen of Hungary concerning the murder and maiming of Duke Vazul (d.1037), suggest he warned the young princes Andrew and Levente, sons of Vazul, to flee Hungary.

Bremen and the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris*). While conjectural, any sojourn in Novgorod or Kiev would have occurred in the period c.1028-c.1046. It is in Russia, the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* tells us, that Edward married Agatha, "*a lady of noble birth*". In fact, the reports that Edward married the dynastic equivalent of the Queen's sister (while in Russia) may suggest that his bride was sister of 'Anastasia' – a Greek princess who, in c.1046, was married to Iaroslav's son and eventual heir, Vsevolod (d.1093)[15]. In essence this argument is based around semantics.

To summarise, there are two key questions:

- In taking refuge with the 'King of the Huns', as much so in Hungary or Russia, whose sister did Edward marry?
- Would it follow that Edward may have married a kinswoman of the 'true' Emperor in Russia?

The *Leges Anglorum*

The strongest evidence for the Slavist argument is also the least contemporary. Written possibly 180 years after the birth of Agatha, the *Leges Anglorum* tells us that Margaret (Queen of Scotland) was descended maternally from the race and blood of the Kings of Russia. Ingham (1998, pp.254-256), argued impeccably that the description "*ex genere et sanguine regum Rugorum*" rules out the possibility of mere affiliation to the Russian Princes. The counter-view is somewhat tenuous, suggesting that the 'shared blood' would be through mutual descent from the Greek ancestors of 'Anastasia', the wife of Vsevolod (d.1093)[16]. This would assume the testimony of William of Malmesbury had no derivative influence on the *Leges Anglorum*.

The Varangians and the Byzantines – an unlikely alliance

There are some similarities between the Life of Harald Hadrada and Edward 'The Exile'. The *Morkinskinna* (Anderson and Gade, 2002) recounts that, in c.1031, Harald Hardrada made his way to Iaroslav and served in many campaigns against Iaroslav's enemies. Harald later asked for the hand of Iaroslav's daughter Elizabeth but was rebuffed (not indefinitely) because he was landless. Harald then determined to go abroad. From Apulia he set sail to Constantinople to the Emperor who was then

---

[15] Western sources appeared to view the rulers of Russia as 'kings' while eastern sources viewed them as 'khans' or 'khagan'. Hence the recourse to 'dynastic equivalent'. However, it is improbable 'Anastasia' would have been viewed as the uncontested equivalent of queen prior to c.1078. If she died prior to 1078, this argument becomes problematical. Possibly, Edgar, Margaret and Christina would have at some stage learned their 'Uncle' Vsevolod was now ruler of all Rus and, by default, Agatha would retrospectively have become sister of the Queen of Rus, certainly before the surviving Chronicles were written.

[16] Vernadsky (1948) quoting indirectly from *The Book of Annals* noted that Vsevolod's wife was described as "*a Greek princess*". Her identity has been subject to dispute although, working on the basis that any third marriage of the then future Constantine IX (d.1055) was illegal under Roman law, we can reasonably suggest she was a daughter (not born in the purple) of Constantine Monomachos and his mistress, the 'Augusta Scleraina' d.c.1044, therefore having no legitimate dynastic claims. Psellus (d.c.1081) clearly tells us that Constantine "*was the last scion of the ancient family of Monomachi*" and this subsequently explains the assumed soubriquet of Scleraina's grandson, Prince Vladimir 'Monomakh', making collateral relationship unlikely. By the mid 12th century individuals such as King David of Scotland and the Grand Prince Mstislav-Harold of Kiev would have been no more unrelated regardless of whether they shared common ancestry through the Monomachoi or the Rurikids.

Michael Catalactus (d.1041) and the much married Queen (Empress) Zoe. Generally, Harald is believed to have arrived in Constantinople in 1034.

Noting the pseudonym of Nordbrikt used by Harald in Constantinople, the *Morkinskinna* observes that the Empress Zoe accused Harald of wanting to be familiar with her niece, the maiden Maria. We are led to believe Harald and Maria continued to meet often and, following a narrow escape by Harald from Maria's chamber, the Empress Zoe continued to accuse Harald of being familiar. So successful was this charge that the Empress Zoe and the Emperor Munac (Monomachos) seized Nordbrikt and had him bound and brought to a dungeon.

There is the basic story line that Harald, while serving in Constantinople, falls for Maria, is imprisoned, escapes, subsequently abducting Maria before arranging her safe return. By implication, assuming the identification with Constantine IX (Monomachos) is correct, this latter episode would have happened in late 1042. This event may possibly have some relevance to the Byzantine-Rus conflagration of 1042/43 but, more importantly, it demonstrates the displacement of some Scandinavians from their homelands in c.1028/30, who sought refuge firstly in Russia, and then in Byzantium.

Although past commentators such as Ellis Davidson (1976) have dismissed this Maria as a fictional character, there may have been an underlying real event involving "*a noble lady of the Greeks.*" William of Malmesbury heard of this episode and recounted a story of how Harald had to do battle with a lion, which he was condemned to fight as a punishment for "*debauching a noble lady of the Greeks*."

Who was Maria and was she a kinswoman of Agatha?

Harald's sojourn in Constantinople is generally thought to have occurred between c.1034/1042, inferring that he once more returned to Russia before returning to Norway in c.1045. Consequently, the 'maiden' Maria may have been born c.1020/23. The description given in the *Morkinskinna* describes Maria as a niece of the Empress Zoe. However, it is not known how Zoe could have had a niece Maria, particularly as Psellus (Sewter, 1966) infers that neither of Zoe's sister's, Theodora and Eudocia, were ever married. More likely this is an 'adoptive' position to reflect a matriarchal but non-blood relationship to one of Zoe's potentially numerous near relatives derived from any one of her three husbands.

Perhaps in Maria we have a Byzantine noble lady who falls for Harald. He subsequently abducts her, following his rejection in marriage to Iaroslav's daughter Elizabeth, some years earlier. Sometime on his return journey (perhaps to Kiev, to where he had sent much of his riches gained in War while in the service of the Varangian guard), Harald returns Maria to Byzantium, possibly expecting the hand of Iaroslav's daughter Elizabeth in marriage in exchange.

Taking chronology and conjecture to their theoretical limits

Issues of relatedness aside, Agatha's chronology suggests that she could be contemporaneous to two Greek ladies; Maria born c.1020/23 and Anastasia, born c.1033. Agatha might also have been a great niece of the Emperor Romanus III - a

descendant of Agatha Lecapena[17]. However, she would not have been 'born in the purple' and so would have had no dynastic claims[18].

Some western sources infer that Edward married the daughter and heiress of a king, who, consequently, intended to make Edward his heir. This is relevant as Iaroslav had 7 known sons and the Emperor Constantine IX (d.1055), while having no children 'born in the purple', almost certainly had one daughter - Anastasia.

Theoretically, Edward could have married a daughter of Constantine (in Russia) and might then have been considered to have inherited some notional legacy. This could link in with the 'Dacian' legacy that we know of from Vitalis and the surprising possibilities provided by Abbot Aelred who spoke of Agatha as a *cognatam* of an *Imperator Romanus.* The subsequent vagueness of the chroniclers may be explained if Agatha were illegitimate, as any progeny of Constantine and his mistress, the 'Augusta' Scleraina[19] would have been. Chroniclers of the 12th century, often vying for royal patronage, would be expected to focus on the two other, more respectable contenders, an imperial niece or a queen's sister.

Therefore, Agatha could have been of noble birth, from a believing (imperial) family. She may have had reason to be in Russia, where she was married to Edward 'The Exile'. Her theoretical Greek ancestry would reconcile some of the onomastic heritage[20] found amongst her descendants, giving rise to an imperial tradition that may later have been mistaken for a relationship to the Ottonian dynasty and their Salian successors. However, while the above explores a reconciliation of the imperial tradition from a Slavic perspective, it is not the most plausible of the available interpretations.

---

17 This interpretation is dependent on which Scleraina was the mother of Agatha. Both Scleraina partners of Constantine are thought to have been descendants of Pulcheria, sister of Romanus III (d.1034).

18 We do not know the date of Constantine's 'unlawful' third union. From Book VI of Psellus' *Chronographia* we learn Constantine's second wife had been procured for him by Romanus Argyros (d.1034) when Romanus was still a private citizen *i.e.* before 1028. Psellus tells us this second wife died while Constantine was still an ordinary citizen, the implication being this was before Constantine's career was able to benefit from the elevation of Romanus Argyros 'to the purple' *i.e.* before 1028. Consequently, Constantine was forced into a *secret affair* with a niece of his former wife. The subsequent elevation of his mentor Romanus III 'to the purple' in 1028 brought Constantine into close company with the Empress Zoe. Psellus relates to us that Constantine's "*graceful manners and his conversation in which he excelled all others*" were the reasons why he won the Empress Zoe's heart. However, following the death of Romanus III in 1034, the new Emperor, Michael Calaphates, had Constantine exiled to the Greek island of Mitylene (Lesbos). Constantine's mistress went with him into exile. From this evidence (Psellus apparently knew Constantine personally), we might infer this 'unlawful' third union had its roots in the mid 1020s.

19 Possibly synonymous with the *sebaste* Maria (Brook, 1981, p.45).

20 I am left with the vexing question of who was Queen Helena, the possible Mother of Swedish Princesses Margaret and Christina? It is understood Anders Berg once conjectured she may have had Greek origins, possibly being married in Russia to Inge I of Sweden (d.1112) during his exile. The chronology of her children, who are likely to have been betrothed when first nubile, suggest Helena was born c.1065/70. Although an example for the name 'Helena' is found amongst the daughters of Bela I of Hungary, I am inclined ask whether Helena of Sweden is synonymous with the Helena, daughter of Robert Guiscard – Duke of Apulia. Interestingly, this Helena was betrothed to the infant Constantine Ducas of Byzantium in the 1070s. This intended union was subsequently terminated by the Emperor Nicephorus Botaniates c.1079. The Varangian guard would logically have provided the 'mechanism' by which Helena could subsequently have been brought into contact with Inge, but is there anything known of her career to suggest this could have been possible?

Iaroslav, possible Father of Agatha - five anomalies

- The evidence of the Laurentian text of *The Russian Primary Chronicle* (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 1953) implies Iaroslav's conception pre-dated the involvement of his Father, Vladimir, in the taking of Polotsk.
- Extrapolating backwards, the same Chronicle also implies Iaroslav had been Prince of Novgorod since c.988.
- In 1939 a forensic examination of Iaroslav's remains, undertaken in Russia by D G Rokhlin, suggested that he was approximately 66 years old at death (not 76).
- The evidence of the Hypatian Text implies Iaroslav did not settle in Kiev until 1019 which, when compared with the ambiguous evidence of the Laurentian Text, suggests Iaroslav may actually have been born c.991.

Who was Iaroslav's first wife; was she mother of Anastasia, wife of Andrew I of Hungary?

In the entry for the year 6562 (1054), *The Russian Primary Chronicle* (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 1953, p.143) provides the following:

The end of Iaroslav's life drew near and he gave up the ghost on the first Saturday after the feast of St.Theodore (Feb 19th). Vsevolod bore his Father's body away and laying it upon a sled, brought it to Kiev……..when they had transported the body they laid it in a marble sarcophagus in the Church of St.Sophia, and Vsevolod and all his subjects mourned him. All the years of his age were 76.

This implies that Iaroslav may have been conceived c.977. However, the *Laurentian Chronicle* apparently used inclusive dating,[21] which suggests that Iaroslav was conceived c.978/79. This is incongruous with the same *Chronicle's* dating of the taking of Polotsk to 978–980 (see Cross and Sherbowitz, 1953, p.91). It has been suggested that this falsifying of Iaroslav's age was done retrospectively to validate Iaroslav's usurpation of the Kievan throne and his elevation to the seat of Novgorod. Some years previously Rogneda, the daughter of the Rogolod, Prince of Polotsk and possible 'mother' of Iaroslav, is alleged to have rejected Vladimir's offer of a union because he was a slave's son. This haughtiness apparently angered Vladimir who forcibly took Polotsk. He slayed members of her family during the attack and then took Rogneda as one of his wives. Even allowing for inclusive dating, this still implies Iaroslav was born (as a younger son) within 18 months of the earliest possible taking of Polotsk.

Given this troublesome chronology, the Russian forensic evidence that concluded Iaroslav may have been born c.986 seems credible[22]. It also fits better with the fact that Iaroslav was siring children as late as c.1038. Could he have sired at least 10 children by only one woman when he was in his 40s and 50s? The figure of 10 children assumes Ingegerd had no miscarriages and every child that was born to her

---

21 I thank Igor Sklar for this information.

22 Again I thank Igor Sklar for this information. I am also indebted to him for the finding that the majority of Russian chronicles report Iaroslav's age as 27/28 when he assumed the throne of Kiev in 1016. Using inclusive dating, this implies Iaroslav was conceived c.988. With recourse to the research of Igor Sklar, the forensic study of 1939, corroborates the unlikeliest of small physical details about Iaroslav.

and Iaroslav survived to adolescence. The age of Iaroslav may have been mis-stated or, alternatively, the intervention in the affairs of Polotsk did not occur 978-980.

Debating Iaroslav's parentage

Was Iaroslav a son and not step-son of Anna, daughter of Emperor Romanus II of Byzantium, contrary to the evidence of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and the *Chronicle of Tver*?

The union between Vladimir and Anna, daughter of Romanus, is alleged to have taken place c.988/89[23]. This has resonance with the testimony of Abbot Aelred who, in c.1160, described Agatha as "*Imperator Romanus, cujus cognatam…*"[24] The *Ipatiev Chronicle* states that Iaroslav was 18 in 1016. If this evidence can be trusted, this would be good reason to question, as some do, why Henry I of France sought a union with the daughter of a Viking princedom[25]. Likewise, it fuels discussion of why two children of the German Emperor Henry III were married to grandchildren of Iaroslav[26].

The traditional view that Iaroslav was a son of Rogneda of Polotsk is further cast into doubt, if somewhat indirectly, by Hollingsworth's study (1992) into the *Hagiography of Kievan Rus*. Drawing together the Laurentian and Hypatian texts of the *Povest*

---

[23] These events cannot be dated precisely. There was possibly acceptance of conversion, baptism and then marriage, but not necessarily in that order. Taken from Hollingsworth (1992, p.175), *The Memorial and Encomium for Volodimer* implies: "*after his holy baptism the blessed prince Volodimer lived for 28 years.*" As he died in 1015, this suggests he was baptised in 987. "*In the second year after his baptism Volodimer advanced to the cataracts, in the 3rd year he took Cherson.*" Hollingsworth observes that this does not accord with the evidence of the *Povest* and, on p.176, goes on to quote from *The Life of the Blessed Volodimer.* Here, the narrative implies that only one year after the return of Vladimir's emissaries (who by tradition had been dispatched to find a suitable religion), Vladimir advanced on Cherson, subsequently demanding the Emperor Basil's maiden sister - Anna. Once more, we have a source that compresses key events into the short space of one year and another which details an event which was rather more episodic in nature. Whittow (1996, p.373) provides a critical perspective… "*With Bardas Phocas threatening his throne he (Basil) needed military help…and his sister was his most exchangeable asset…the chronology of the negotiations, of Vladimir's baptism, of the Rus arrival and military operations that followed are all controversial. The Byzantine, Armenian and Arab sources are brief and contradictory, and the Povest is typically little more than subsequent myth making.*" Vladimir possibly agreed to accept the Orthodox faith c.987, received Anna in marriage in 988 and took Cherson in 989 in an offensive against the Phocades. Due to these forced circumstances, a formal baptism of Vladimir may not have happened until c.990 or later.

[24] There is the interesting but obscure tale of 'Chrysocheir' who Blondal (1978, pp.49-50) recounted was a kinsman of Vladimir (d.1015). 'Chrysocheir' apparently fled to Byzantium with a guard of men in an attempt to join the imperial mercenaries. His motives were not trusted and he was subsequently put to death. Blondal speculated that 'Chrysocheir' was synonymous with 'Audmundr', who he suggested might have been an English princeling who had fled to Kiev and from Kiev to Constantinople.

[25] Jackman (2001) appears to accept that Anna, wife of Henry I, was granddaughter of Anna of Byzantium (d.1011).

[26] Obolensky (1971, p.159) made the following observation concerning the crown sent by Constantine Monomachos, Emperor of Byzantium to Andrew I, King of Hungary (d.1060): "*for the crown to which the surviving plaques bear witness was of the kind which the emperor bestowed on the highest dignitaries of the empire.*" Those, that seek to attribute 'Greek' ancestry to Anastasia, Queen of Hungary and her 'sister' Agatha may find significance in this observation. It is more meaningful if also viewed in the context of the subsequent naval command granted to Agatha's son Edgar in the Byzantine Fleet by Alexius I Commenus, Emperor of Byzantium (d.1118). The *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (Mynors et al., 1998, p.413) recounts how Emperor Alexius I (d.1118) respected the English and numbered them among his special friends.

Vremennych Let, attributable to the 14th and 15th centuries respectively, Hollingsworth (1992, pp.192-197) reveals, unintentionally, the origins of a potential myth concerning Iaroslav's ultimate parentage.

Hollingsworth relates to us (p.192) that following Vladimir's death in 1015 "*the accursed Svyatopolk began to rule in Kiev.*" He goes on to say that Iaroslav, following a 'tip-off' from his sister Peredslava, arrived at (or near) Kiev in 1016, with the armies of Svyatopolk and Iaroslav, who began a three month stand-off. The information that "*Jaroslav gained the upper hand*" is probably attributable to the Laurentian text, as is the information that "*Iaroslav was then 28 years old*" when settling on his Father's throne in Kiev.

Here is the real key, on which the Hypatian text elaborates. Explaining the episodic nature of this internecine struggle between Iaroslav and Svyatopolk, we are told Iaroslav entered Kiev in 1017, *and the Churches were burned*'. This information is corroborated by a Continental source. Svyatopolk subsequently fled to the Poles and, in 1018, regained the throne of Kiev with the help of Boleslaw of Poland. Iaroslav finally vanquished Svyatopolk's army in 1019 at the bloody battle at the Al'ta: "*Iaroslav came and settled in Kiev having worked long and hard with his retinue and having achieved victory after a mighty labour*".

This source states that Iaroslav settled in Kiev in 1019 but the Laurentian text, through juxtaposition of fact, leaves the reader to assume Iaroslav settled in Kiev in 1016, being the year he first came to challenge Svyatopolk for Kiev. If Iaroslav was 28 when he assumed the Kievan throne, there is a very real possibility he was born c.991 and not c.988.

Chronicles of a slightly later date (such as *Tver*), would automatically infer from the Laurentian text that Iaroslav was born c.987/88 and was therefore son of Rogneda of Polotsk. There is a genuine genealogical possibility that Iaroslav was a son of Anna of Byzantium but, for reasons of politics, fraternal usurpation and juxtaposition of text, this may have been hidden from us. Subsequently, the precious and unprecedented gifts made by Byzantium to the throne of Hungary in the 1050s does suggest that kinship may have been involved.

Questioning the identity of Iaroslav's first wife

There is also the issue of who was Iaroslav's first wife. This is relevant as Andrew I of Hungary (d.1060) married Anastasia, a daughter of Iaroslav[27]. The Slavist viewpoint takes this to mean that William of Malmesbury's *Agatham reginae sororem* was Agatha, sister of Anastasia, Queen of Hungary[28]. Subsequently, Andrew's daughter

---

[27] A very interesting internet based dialogue has been progressing between Igor Sklar and Phillip Moody. There is some debate as to whether Il'lia, Iaroslav's eldest son by his 1st wife, married a Danish princess, by whom he might possibly have fathered a child before death, possibly in the 1020's. Also, there appears to be reasonable evidence that Aestred, Mother of Ingegerd-Irene – the wife of Iaroslav, was more precisely Aestred-Margarete. It is tempting to speculate that Il'lia may have been a convenient hypocoristic diminuitive, that acted as a phonetic prompt for Margaret of Scotland finding a suitable westernized equivalent 'Alexander' for one of her own sons. Similarly, the phonetic stucture of Vsevolod (Fee-sef-o-lod) might, in the search for a phonetic westernized equivalent, have produced the name 'Phillip' (Fee-lip)?

[28] The Convent of Malmesbury personally commended a copy of the Gesta Regum Anglorum to Agatha's grandson, King David of Scotland (c.1140). Quoting from Mynors et al. (1998, p.3): "*To their Lord the most glorious and religious King David, the convent of Malmesbury offer greetings and faithful prayers. Your majesty's illustrious lineage and your great and generous spirit in good works……explains the confidence with*

Adelaide married Wratislav II, King of Bohemia (d.1092) by whom Adelaide may have had 4 children at the time of her death in 1062, implying a date of birth for Adelaide of c.1035/38.

However, as Iaroslav of Kiev (d.1054) did not marry Ingegerd of Sweden until c.1019 and Andrew and Anastasia's eldest son Salomon was not born until c.1052, this conflicts with the likelihood that Andrew's earlier child, Adelaide, was born at least 10, and more probably 15 to 17 years before Salomon. The balance of probability is that Adelaide is a daughter from Andrew's earlier marriage[29]. This theory seems preferable to the one that suggests Anastasia was daughter of Iaroslav's unknown first wife as this has obvious implications for Agatha.

The Comital House of Haldensleben

Recent authorities, Parsons (2002) and Jackman (2001), have highlighted possible examples of the then exceptionally rare forename Margaret and a male root form of Christina[30] in a period that was contemporary or before that of Agatha, mother of St. Margaret.

In brief, it is suggested that Count Bernard of Haldensleben married a daughter of St. Vladimir of Kiev. The mother of this girl is supposed to have been a daughter of Conrad of Swabia (d.997). Consequently, Oda of Haldensleben – a daughter of this supposed union – is alleged to have married a 'Count Christinus'. Theoretically, a daughter of this union may have been Agatha – born c.1023/30.

Conrad of Haldensleben, brother of Oda, was also father to a Diagnementa-Margarethe. While this would be an almost ground breaking example in usage of this name at this time, the generation is only collateral to and, not preceding, that of Agatha. It would be a hard case to argue that onomastic funds were carried between collateral cousins, not linked to preceding generations. Not losing sight of the belief in the originality of William of Malmesbury, it is difficult to see how any of the Haldensleben family could argue that they were 'sister of a queen'.

Conclusion

It seems unlikely that Agatha was sister to Anastasia, the Greek wife of Vsevolod. Jackman (2001, p.23) chose not to accept the importance of the 13th century testimony of Alberic of Troisfontaines who, in *Chronicon ad 1100,* apparently described Agatha as "*regine Hunorum sororem*". However, Alberic may simply have been restating material from William of Malmesbury.

While the life of Harald is tangential to the identity of Agatha, it does identify a sequence of well documented events relating to the life of Edward 'the Exile', that

---

which we seek your Majesty's authorisation in offering to your niece our Lady the Empress Matilda this History of The English Kings." It is unlikely Malmesbury would commend a piece of work to King David that contained factually inaccurate information concerning his mother's family.

29 Bak (1994, p.23) appears to accept the existence of Andrew's earlier marriage to "*a pagan woman*".

30 More specifically, these two characters were apparently known to History as 'Diagnmenta-Margarethe' and 'Christinus'. I have found two 10th century examples of the 'Christian'' root name which probably precede that of 'Count Christinus'. Namely, these are Christian, Margrave of the Saxon Nordmark (d.c.965) and Bishop Strakhvay-Chrystian of Regensburg – a Bohemian Prince.

could explain how the Greco-Roman onomastic heritage entered the consciousness of Edward's family and their contemporaries. Edward probably fled Scandinavia in 1028, Harald in 1030. Edward sought refuge in Russia, as did Harald. Both were of similar age and there is no reason why Edward's movements did not continue to mirror other Varangians who went on from Russia to serve in Constantinople, even if only for a time.

The ambiguity and uncertainty of the 12th century chroniclers allows us to patch together a solution that depends on our own perspective. Still we are left with the possibility that Agatha had some Orthodox ancestry. Agatha was possibly the daughter of Iaroslav of Kiev (d.1054) who, just possibly, was a son of Anna of Byzantium. Less likely, Greek ancestry might be derived through sorority with the Greek wife of Vsevolod, Grand Prince of Kiev (d.1093). Both these possibilities would tie in with a misunderstood tradition of imperial relationship.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express sincere gratitude to Philip Moody who has brought to my attention potential sources contextual to this subject, particularly in aspects of Scandinavian history contemporary to the life of Edward 'The Exile'. I would also like to express sincere gratitude to Igor Sklar who has provided an invaluable insight into the Russian authorities and sources not usually available to Western researchers and are summarised in more detail below.

References

Anderson, Theodore M & Gade, Kari Ellen (translators, 2000). *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)* (Bragadottir, Kristin, editor). Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, pp.130-151.

Arnold, Thomas (editor, 1885 [reprinted 1965]). Symeon of Durham's *Historia Regum,* Vol. III. London: Longmans.

Bak, Janos M (1994). *Roles and Functions of Queens in Arpadian and Angevin History.* In: John Carmi Parsons (editor), *Medieval Queenship*. Allan Sutton Publishing.

Barlow, Frank (1970). *Edward The Confessor.* London: Eyre & Spottiswode, pp.38-54.

Brook, Lindsay L (1981). The Byzantine Ancestry of HRH Prince Charles, Prince of Wales. *The Genealogist* **2**(1): 3-51.

Blondal, S (1978 [translated and rewritten by Benedikz, B]). *The Varangians of Byzantium.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Cross, S H & Sherbowitz-Wetzor, O (editors and translators, 1953). *The Russian Primary Chronicle.* Cambridge, Massachussets.

Ellis Davidson, H R (1976). *The Viking Road to Byzantium.* London: George Allen & Unwin, pp.207-230.

Hardy, Thomas Duffus (editor, 1889). *Lestorie Des Engles*, by Master Geoffrey Gaimar. London: HMSO.

Georgescu, Vlad (1991). *The Romanians – A History.* (Calinescu, M, editor; Vronan, A, translator). London: IB Touris & Co.

Hollingsworth, P (1992). *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp.175-197.

Humphreys, William (2003). Agatha, mother of St. Margaret: The Slavic versus Salian solutions - a critical overview. *Foundations* **1**(1): 31-43.

Ingham, Norman W (1998). Has a missing daughter of Iaroslav Mudryi been found? *Russian History* **23** (3): 231-270.

Jackman, Donald C (2001). A Greco-Roman Onomastic Fund. In: *Onomastique et Parente dans l'Occident Medieval, Prosopographica et Genealogica,* **3**: 14-56.

Jetté, René (1996). Is The Mystery of The Origin of Agatha, Wife of Edward The Exile, Finally Solved? *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* **150:** 417-432.

Knox, Bernard (1996). Introduction. In: Homer's *The Odyssey* (Translated by Robert Fagles). Bath: Bath Press, Viking Penguin.

Mynors R, Thomson R & Winterbottom M (editors and translators, 1998). William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* Vol.1. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Obolensky, Dimitri (1971). *The Byzantine Commonwealth.* London: Weidenfield & Nicolson.

Parsons, John Carmi (2002). Edward The Aethling's Wife Agatha. *The Plantagenet Connection,* Summer Issue.

Hewlett, H G (editor, 1965 [reprint]). Roger of Wendover: *Flores Historiarum,* Vol III. London: HMSO.

Sewter, E R A (1966). Fourteen Byzantine Rulers. In: *The Chronographia of Michael Psellus*. London: Penguin.

Thomson, Rodney M (1987). *William of Malmesbury*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press.

Vajay, Szabolcs de (1962). Agatha, Mother of St.Margaret Queen of Scotland. *Duquesne Review: Journal of Social Sciences* **7:** 71-80.

Vajay, Szabolcs de (1971). Mathilde, Reine de France Inconnue. *Journal Des Savants (Oct – Dec 1971): 241-260.* Paris.

Vernadsky, George (1948). *Kievan Russia.* In: *A History of Russia,* Vol. II. London: Oxford University Press.

Whittow, Mark (1996). *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025.* Basingstoke & London: MacMillan.

Addendum: Russian sources consulted by Igor Sklar

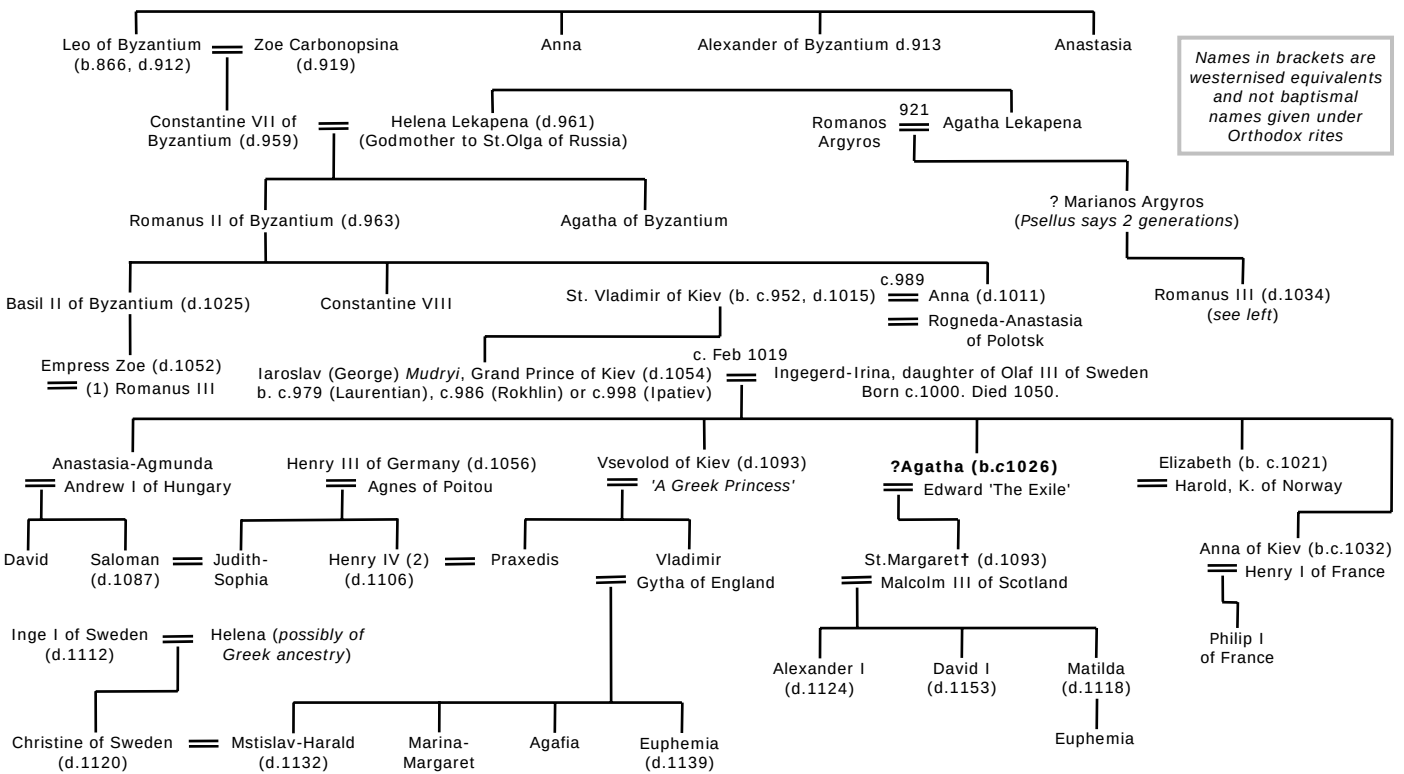
Pcholov, E V (2001). *The Genealogy of the Russian Princes until the beginning of the 11th century. Moscow.* The Russian State Humanitarian University, pp.169-171.

Pcholov, E V (2001). *Rurikovichi: The Dynastical History*. Moscow.

Rapov, Oleg Mikhailovich (1988). *The Russian Church from 9th to the first third of the 12th century: The adoption of Christianity*. Moscow, pp.321-323.

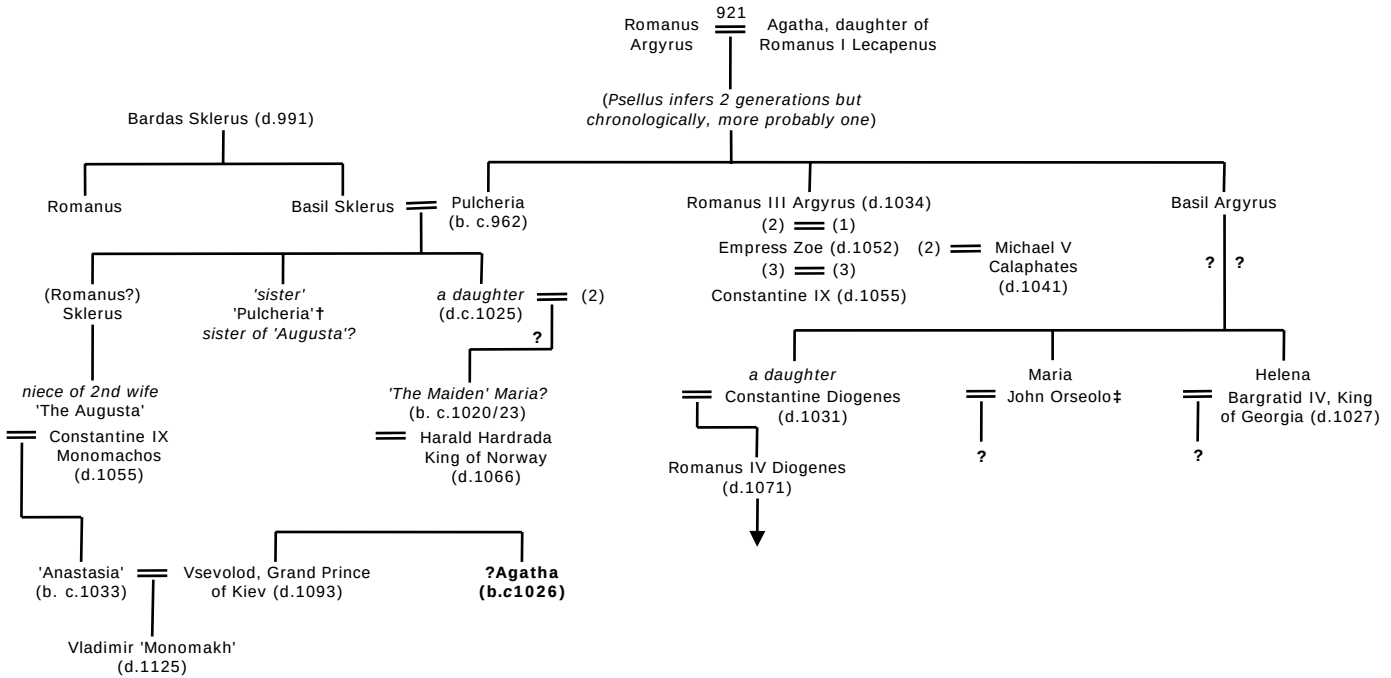
Rokhlin, D G (1940). Itogi anatomicheskogo I rentgenologicheskogo izucheniya skeleta Yaroslava Mudrogo. *Kratkie soobshcheniya Instituta istorii materialnoi kultory,* Vol.VII[31]: 53-56. Moscow and Leningrad.

[31] This same volume apparently includes articles by authorities such as Ginzburg, Gerasimov, Rydzevskaya and Karger.



† Through 'shared' ancestry from Olave III of Sweden, St. Margaret was 2nd cousin to Inge I of Sweden (d.1112), father of the Princesses Christina & Margaret (born 1080s).

Fig 1. ***Abridged Chart from Slavist perspective illustrating potential for migration of the Greco-Roman onomastic tradition from Byzantium to the Kievan and Varangian homeland, reconciling the tradition of imperial relationship (German)***



† Psellus describes this Pulcheria as Constantines 'sister'. He probably meant sister-in-law as Psellus later infers Constantine had two sisters, Helena & Euprepia.

‡ John Orseolo was brother to Otto, the Doge of Venice (d.1031) who married 'Helena'?, sister of St. Stephen, King of Hungary (d.1038).

Fig 2. ***Some Byzantine relationships of the 10th & 11th centuries - known and conjectural***