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National Shrines and Women's Power: The History of Sophia of Minsk, Queen of Denmark

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Abstract

This article compares two national shrines, the Cross of Dagmar (Denmark) and the Cross of St. Euphrosyne (Belarus), providing novel evidence that both crosses could have been made by the same master. It has long been contended that the Cross of Dagmar allegedly belonged to Queen Dagmar from Bohemia, the first wife of the Danish king Valdemar II, son of Sophia of Minsk and Valdemar the Great. A former director of the Danish National Museum, Fritze Lindahl, was the first to propose a hypothesis that the Cross of Dagmar could have come to Denmark together with Sophia via Minsk, Belarus. The purpose of this article is to verify Lindahl's hypothesis, combining the Belarusian and Danish sources for the first time. The paper also contributes to queenship studies, taking out of oblivion Queen Sophia—a “forgotten queen” of Danish politics and the Baltic Sea region in the 12th century.

Keywords

the cross of Dagmar – the cross of St. Euphrosyne – Sophia of Minsk – history of Denmark

1 Introduction

Belarus has been considered a *terra incognita* in Denmark, a country whose name in Danish (“Hviderusland”) has had a connotation of a white, blank spot on the Danish mental map of the world. However, Belarusian principalities maintained strong historical connections with Denmark, and the marriage of Sophia, a daughter of Volodar of Minsk and Richiza of Poland, to King Valdemar established a permanent practice—for the next 500 years Danish kings only married foreigners.¹ Sophia and Valdemar had nine children, two of whom were kings of Denmark in their time.

The unexplored matrimonial and genealogical ties between the Kingdom of Denmark and the Belarusian Principalities, as well as their historical and cultural connections, inspire this article. Our motivation has been twofold: to unveil the connections between Danish and Belarusian lands in the Middle Ages through the story of their two national shrines and the life of one of the most prominent Belarusian women in the Middle Ages—Sophia of Minsk and Polatsk, Queen of Denmark; and to encourage further research into Danish-Belarusian historical relations.

In her paper from 1978, the former Danish museum director, Fritze Lindahl, suggested that the Danish national shrine—the Cross of Dagmar—was brought to Denmark by Queen Sophia, a daughter of Volodar, ruler of Minsk. The purpose of this article is to verify Lindahl’s hypothesis, combining the Belarusian and Danish sources for the first time.

Unfortunately, the hypothesis has never been investigated further by scholars, in part due to lack of access to the sources, but also because ancient Belarus itself has represented an unexplored field of academic research. One significant reason for the lack of research is that the Polatsk chronicle was lost, making the old Russian chronicles the dominant sources of information. As John Lind puts it: “our knowledge about Polatsk and its dynasty is limited, because it did not attract much attention from the chroniclers, whose records have been traded in the preserved chronicles. During this period, these are instead focused on the history of Kyivan state. It has been debated whether a special Polatsk chronicle had existed. Polatsk is best covered in the Ipatiev Chronicle, the Lavrentiev Chronicle, and the so-called Chronicle Compilation from 1479, which to varying degrees shortens a common source material.”²

The problem, however, is not only in the lack of extant written sources, especially the loss of the Polatsk chronicle, but also in the biases contained in

¹ Netterstrøm and Andersen, 2018, s. 37.

² Lind 1992, s. 246.

the surviving ones. For example, Sophia of Minsk is not mentioned in the Old Russian Chronicles and the only source which can therefore shed light on her personality is “Gesta Danorum” by Saxo Grammaticus,³ which is known to be rather biased towards depicting King Valdemar I and bishop Absalon, the latter also being the main mastermind behind the chronicle.

As Theresa Marie Earenfight explains: “a glance at any dynasty’s genealogy in any history textbook on medieval Europe written before presents a curious picture: men beget men with hardly any women in sight. The problem was not that queens were absent. Countless European queens in the Middle Ages were highly visible in their lifetimes in chronicles, letters, fiscal documents, household records, wills, donations, art-works, and literature. The problem was that historians put kings at the center of history. They dismissed queens in general as incidental, as simply wives or daughters, meddlers in politics or dabblers in the patronage. Generations of scholars who privileged the study of war, diplomacy, and law considered queens unimportant to serious study unless they simply could not be ignored because they ruled in their own right (as queens regnant) or did things that affected governance.”⁴

The existing state of the art is represented by only a few studies conducted by Danish, Swedish and Belarusian scholars, namely Kurt Villads Jensen’s “Korstog ved verdens yderste rand, Danmark og Portugal ca. 1000 til ca. 1250” (“Crusades at the Edge of the World, Denmark and Portugal from c.1000 to c.1250”);⁵ Maria Samonova’s “Polotsk principdom in the system of dynastic ties and political relations of Rus’ with Scandinavia and Poland in XI—beginning of XIII centuries”;⁶ and Andrej Katliarchuk’s “Swedes in the history and culture of Belarusians”.⁷ Katliarchuk discovered the name of Sophia of Minsk.⁸ John Lind conducted a thorough investigation of matrimonial ties between Denmark and Russian Principalities in the article “De russiske ægteskaber: dynasti- og alliancepolitik i 1130’ernes danske borgerkrig” (“The Russian Marriages: Dynasty and Alliance Politics in the Danish Civil War in the 1130s”), published in *Historisk Tidsskrift* in 1992.⁹ The author points to the particular cultural cohesion, with its roots in Viking times, as the foundation for close Danish-Belarusian ties long after the Great Schism.

3 Gesta Danorum by Saxo Grammaticus.

4 cit. from Netterstrøm and Andersen 2018, s. 19.

5 Jensen 2011.

6 Samonova 2012.

7 Katliarchuk 2007.

8 His findings were summarized in the first article about Sophia in Belarus, which was published in *Nasha Niva* on 13 May, 2005.

9 Lind 1992.

The present research is based on descriptive, comparative and interpretive historical methods. The combination of sources makes this study both original and representative, including among its primary materials Old Russian, Danish, British, German and Byzantine chronicles.¹⁰

The personality of Queen Sophia inspired a Danish historian, Birgitte Hammer, to write a fiction book about this remarkable woman, putting flesh on the few facts that we know about her from the historical sources.¹¹ It is a historical portrait of Queen Sophia and an accurate restoration of her times, which should become part of the curriculum at all Belarusian schools. A translation of this book from Danish into Belarusian is being prepared by the Danish-Belarusian Culture Society “Beladania”.

The growing influence of feminist studies has led to fascination with strong queens not only in fiction and film, but also in academic research. Scholars have brought overlooked queens out of historical oblivion, while also reassessing the significance of well-known queens in a more nuanced way. The study of queens and queenship in Medieval Europe has marked a new tendency of queenship studies, represented by Pauline Stafford,¹² Wladimir V. Bogomoletz,¹³ Cynthia Lawrence¹⁴ and others.

Feminist-influenced queenship studies have been joined by a large number of historians who do not define themselves as feminists, but who share the ambition of paying greater attention to queens.¹⁵ Feminist-influenced queenship studies are generally characterized by more balanced assessments of both strong and less-powerful queens, whereas feminist studies are known for being concerned with the historical subordination (or oppression) of women and highlighting examples of powerful and energetic representatives of the female gender in Medieval Europe.

2 The Cross of Dagmar and the Cross of St. Euphrosyne

In spite of its small size (appr. 3.4 cm), the Cross of Dagmar (see illustrations 1 & 2) is one of the most known Danish national symbols, dating to between 1000 and 1200. Small commercial copies of this cross are often an indispensable

10 The Tale of Bygone Years, Laurentian and Hypatian editions; The Nikon, or Patriarch's Chronicle; “Vita et miracula sancti Thomae” by William of Canterbury; Wilhelmi abbatis Genealogia regum Danorum in “Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii aevi”.

11 Hammer 2015.

12 Stafford 1997.

13 Bogomoletz 2005.

14 Lawrence (ed.) 1997.

15 Netterstrøm and Andersen 2018, s. 19.



ILLUSTRATION 1 The Cross of Dagmar (front), made in gold and enamel, size 4,3 cm × 2,9 cm × 0,3 cm

PHOTO CREDIT: LENNART LARSEN, NATIONALMUSEETS
SAMLINGER ONLINE



ILLUSTRATION 2 The Cross of Dagmar (back side), made in gold and enamel, size
 4,3 cm × 2,9 cm × 0,3 cm
 PHOTO CREDIT: LENNART LARSEN, NATIONALMUSEETS
 SAMLINGER ONLINE

gift at baptisms or other solemn occasions. Its original was found, supposedly in Queen Dagmar's grave, at St. Bendt's Cathedral in Ringsted in the 1680s by a priest, Christian Blichfeldt. The priest "in an unsure manner ascribed [the cross] to Queen Dagmar (1186–1212), a Bohemian princess, born Dragomir, daughter of the king of Bohemia Ottokar I (1155–1230) married to the Danish king Valdemar II", who was a son of Sophia from Polatsk.¹⁶

An alternative hypothesis, suggested by a Danish historian and former director of the National Museum, Fritzse Lindahl, is that this cross belonged to Princess Sophia from Minsk and Polatsk (1140–1198), the wife of King Valdemar the Great (1131–1182) and the mother of King Valdemar II. Lindahl assumed that this Byzantine cross, which was as valuable as two castles, might have traveled to Denmark from Belarus as a dowry of Princess Sophia and later given to her daughter Richiza, whose grave was carelessly destroyed by Blichfeldt in 1680 in his attempt to make a tomb for himself and his family above the graves of the Valdemar dynasty. According to Lindahl, the cross's route to Denmark was "possibly through the city of Minsk in Belarus, where Queen Sophia, wife of King Valdemar I the Great, mother of Richiza and King Valdemar II."¹⁷

Lindahl questioned Blichfeldt's arguments about the cross's affiliation with Queen Dagmar. Queen Richiza's tomb, which is right next to Queen Dagmar's tomb, was completely destroyed during Blichfeldt's excavation works, with the result that the contents of the two tombs were mixed together. But Blichfeldt may not have known Queen Richiza, who was a daughter of Sophia but who was an exiled Swedish queen, named after Sophia's mother. When he found the beautiful enamel cross, he named it after the queen he knew about, namely Dagmar, who was known in folk songs as the young queen with a gentle mind, whose last words before her death were those of requesting her husband to release all the prisoners.

Around 1695, the cross was placed in the Royal Art Chamber, which was later transformed into the National Museum. However, the question of its origin still remains unsettled for scholars and since its deposit in the Royal Art Chamber, the cross has been named the "The Cross of Dagmar". Where the original of the Cross of Dagmar was produced is not known with certainty. In the 1997 catalogue "The Glory of Byzantium", the author points at iconographic relationship between the Cross of Dagmar and crosses from the Kyiv area, but also finds clues to its origin in Northern Greece (Thessaloniki).

While there is no archaeological evidence of cell enamel workshops in Thessaloniki, encolbions were common in Kyivan Rus' (illustration 3), which

16 Rasmussen 1979.

17 Lindahl 1978.

was influenced by Byzantine culture during the introduction of Christianity and boasted goldsmiths who learned Byzantine cell technique. Crosses such as the Cross of Dagmar were called “Kyivan Crosses”.

Encolpions, or Byzantine reliquary crosses (also known as Kyivan crosses) were very popular in the East Slavic lands in the 10–13th centuries. A Russian specialist in enamel jewelry, Tatyana Makarova, acknowledges that the Belarusian city of Polatsk was one of the biggest cultural centers at that time, producing fine encolpion crosses and excelling in medieval cloisonné enamel technique.¹⁸ It is this particular technique, used in the Cross of Dagmar, which makes it a little miracle of artwork.

Similar examples were found in many Belarusian cities. For example, during excavations in Minsk in the Nyamiha area, a bronze encolpion was found showing the crucifixion, Our Lady and eight saints, four of whom are evangelists (illustration 4). In the center of Polatsk, an encolpion with an image of one of the Polatsk princes was also found.

It is known that Byzantine emperors maintained close ties with the ancient Belarusian Principalities. Polatsk was one of the richest metropolises of the time on a par with Kyiv and Novgorod. In Polatsk, where Queen Sophia came from, there is archaeological evidence in the form of a goldsmith’s workshop where the remains of thin gold ribbons were found.¹⁹ These gold ribbons were used to make jewelry in cell enamel technique.

Golden crosses covered with enamel were often given as a precious gift. An account by Frederick II of Staufien, (1090–1147), father of Frederick Barbarossa, reveals how immensely expensive these crosses were. It is said that his wife brought with her a reliquary cross from Byzantine, and that the couple could acquire the bulk of two cities for this sacred jewel.²⁰

In 1161, St. Euphrosyne of Polatsk ordered a local artist, Lazar Bogsha, to make a cross in gold, enamel and precious stones, which she gave to the Church of the Holy Savior, also built for her means (illustration 5). The image of Christ on this cross is regarded as the very best of the Old Russian objects made with cloisonné technique.²¹ Master Bogsha was not young when he completed the cross commissioned by Euphrosyne and the inscription on the cross is similar to inscriptions dated to the 1130s.

St. Euphrosyne of Polatsk was the granddaughter of a prince of Polatsk, Usiaslau, and daughter of Prince Sviataslau of Polatsk. Medieval princesses

18 Makarova 1975.

19 Tarasau, S. [Тарасай, С.]. 2021. Eufasinn’a-Ofrasinn’a-Afrasinn’a Polackaja. Jaje chas, jaje kryzh [Еўфрасі́ння-Офрасі́ння-Афрасі́ння Полацкая. Яе час, яе крыж] Minsk: Tsymbrau.

20 Grove 1981.

21 Makarova 1975, p. 70.

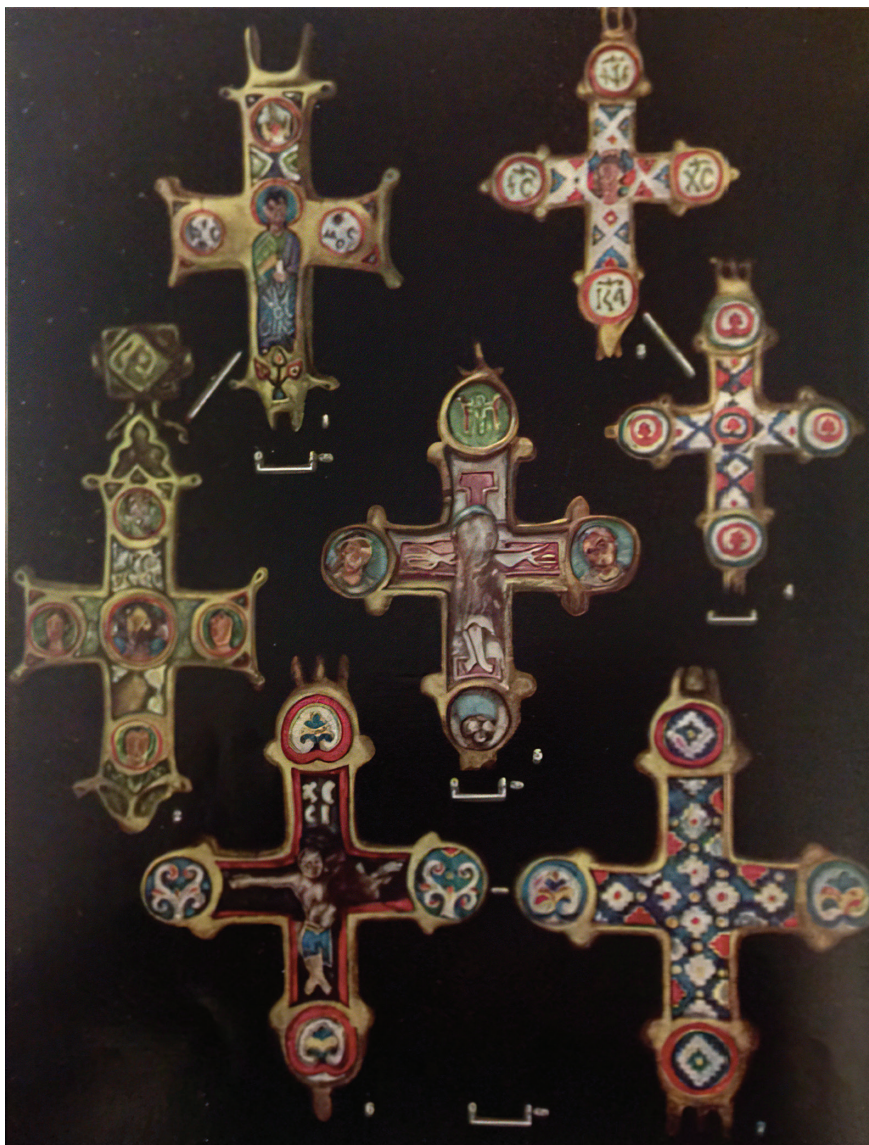


ILLUSTRATION 3 Kyivan enamel crosses, similar in size and technique to the Cross of Dagmar but with different colour combinations, patterns and facial expressions
 SOURCE: MAKAROVA, T. PEREGORODČATYE ĖMALI DREVNEJ RUSI [ПЕРЕГОРОДЧАТЫЕ ЭМАЛИ ДРЕВНЕЙ РУСИ]. MOSCOW, 1975



ILLUSTRATION 4 Bronze cross found in Minsk in 2002 by archeologist Sergei Tarasov
 PHOTO CREDIT: SERGEI TARASOV

were a valuable means for men meeting their political goals, but Euphrosyne chose another path. She escaped from marriage and became a nun at the Sophia Cathedral in Polatsk where she spent her time copying books. St. Euphrosyne, Queen Sophia's aunt, became one of the most famous women of her time. She is known for her enlightenment work of great historical significance.

Comparing the pictures of the Cross of St. Euphrosyne and the Cross of Dagmar shows a great resemblance between the two objects.²² According to Batyushkov's description from 1890, fifty years before the cross disappeared during the Second World War, the most important colors in the Cross of St. Euphrosyne were blue and green; complementary colors were red and white. This is the same color scheme as in the Cross of Dagmar.

Another important feature that points at the fact that the crosses could have been produced by the same master is the facial expression of the saints. Even the plates on the Cross of Saint Euphrosyne could have been suspected to have been made by different masters if not for the set of unique features which testify to the high professionalism of Lazar Bogsha, who mastered a variety of styles. However, all the faces on the Cross of St. Euphrosyne are characterized by "big

22 Dubinka-Hushcha, L. 2021. Dagmarkorset og Belarus-forbindelsen. Skalk 5, 30–35.

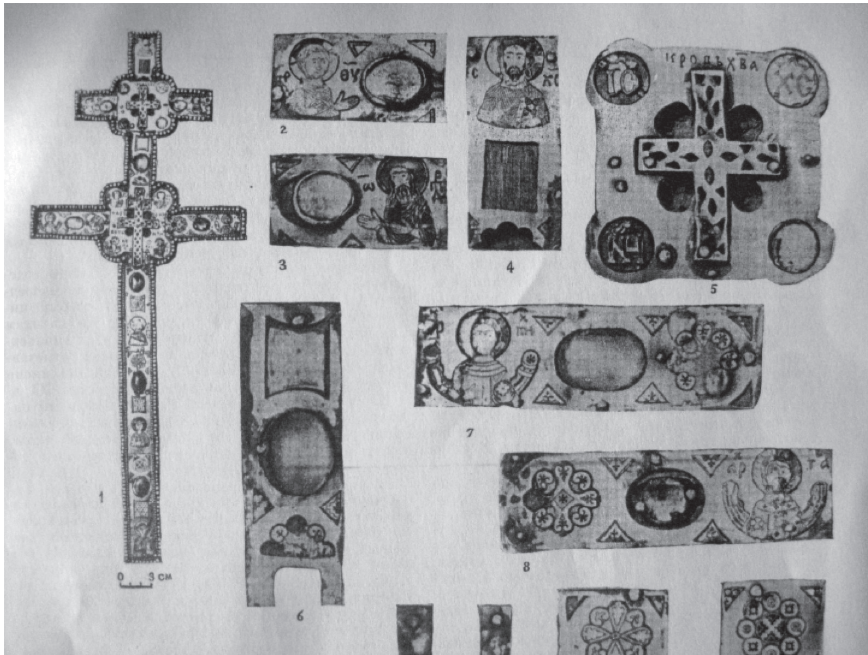


ILLUSTRATION 5 Cross of St. Euphrosyne, 51,8 × 21 cm. This is an altar cross, therefore it is bigger in its size than the Cross of Dagmar. The picture was taken from the original, hence the black-and-white quality of it

SOURCE: BATYUSHKOV, P.I. *BELARUS' I LITVA*. ST. PETERSBURG, 1890

eyes with accentuated pupils, thick black eyebrows reaching to the temples; a characteristic pattern of the mouth with drooping of corners of the mouth.”²³ If we compare the eyes, eyebrows and the shape of the mouth on the faces of St. Euphrosyne Cross and the Cross of Dagmar, we can see that they are actually identical (illustration 6 a, b & c).

Each cell on the Cross of Dagmar was made by using thin gold plates, and the surface between the images was coated with pure enamel, which was applied in a melted form at high temperature. The technique behind the making of the cross makes it a small miracle of craftsmanship.

Cell enamel, or cloisonné, is made of extremely thin fine silver or gold threads. They bend in shapes that define the colored areas. Most existing Byzantine enamels were made as soldered cloisonnés, but modern jewelers have abandoned the use of soldering method to glue the cloisonné threads because it is associated with great difficulty.

²³ Makarova 1975, p. 72.



ILLUSTRATION 6 A, B AND C

Comparison of the enlarged elements of the two crosses (St. Euphrosyne and Dagmar)

SOURCES OF ORIGINAL PICTURES: LENNART LARSEN, NATIONALMUSEETS SAMLINGER ONLINE AND BATYUSHKOV, P.I. (OP. CIT.)
AUTHOR OF THE COMPOSITION: LIZAVETA DUBINKA-HUSHCHA.

It becomes quite clear how demanding the craft is when trying to make a copy of the cross in our time. So far, there are commercial versions in silver and gold, which are made with either stamping or pit enamel technology, which are easier to perform, but which cannot repeat the same finest expression formed by thin golden threads welded to the surface.

There can be no doubt that, after its arrival in Denmark, the precious jewelry was used in the richest and most powerful circles. Only the most privileged in society could afford to own such items. The cross was apparently worn by a woman from the royal family, who thereby marked her social status and Christian faith.

3 Sophia of Minsk, Queen of Denmark and Valdemar the Great

At a very young age, Sophia traveled to Denmark together with her mother Richiza and was betrothed to Valdemar, son of Knud Lavard. Valdemar at that time, together with Sven Erikssøn, later nicknamed Grathe, and Knud Magnussøn, was preoccupied with internal strife over royal power. After several outbursts in the Danish civil war, Knud had promised his half-sister Sophia, Princess of Minsk and Polatsk, to Valdemar and gave her a third of the values that he had inherited. These were partly large areas of land, partly other values. Due to the support from Knud, Valdemar won in the internal strife and became the sole king, one of the most powerful in Denmark's history.

King Valdemar was a son of Knud Lavard and Ingeborg, who was an ancestor of Vladimir Monomakh. He is thought to be named after his grandfather and, according to Knytlinga chronicle,²⁴ was allegedly born in Kyiv. The Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus, however, does not mention this fact. According to John Lind, "we have no reason to doubt Knytlinga's version: that Valdemar was actually born to his grandfather, Mstislav, and later grew up in Russia. We now also understand why Valdemar got his exotic name for the Danish royal house after his mighty great-grandfather, Vladimir Monomakh, rather than being named after his father or grandfather. The fact that Valdemar was given a Russian name, without apparently having a Nordic parallel name like his grandfather, also supports Knytlinga's version, as it suggests that Valdemar was intended for a future in Russia and not in Denmark at baptism."²⁵

Else Roesdahl describes how Queen Sophia came to Denmark as Valdemar's fiancée in connection with the dynastic strife.²⁶ Sophia and Valdemar belonged

²⁴ Sogur Danakonunga.

²⁵ Lind 1992, p. 235.

²⁶ Roesdahl 2018.

to the competing lines of the Rurik dynasty. Sophia was the daughter of Prince Volodar of Minsk and the king's daughter Richiza. In her previous marriage with the Danish king Magnus, Richiza had a son, Knud, of whom Sophia was a half-sister. Sophia's engagement to Valdemar was meant to seal an alliance between Knud and Valdemar.

After what was meant to be a friendly meeting (and turned out a bloodshed) in Roskilde, Knud was murdered and Valdemar married Sophia to secure his position against Knud's murderer, the claimant to the throne Sven Grathe. When Sven was killed later that year in the battle of Grathe Hede, Valdemar the Great became the sole king, and Sophia became queen of all Denmark.

Roesdahl points out that the dynastic function of the marriage is reflected in the fact that the couple's children were named after both Valdemar's and Sophia's ancestors, and that Sophia as a widow queen was active in negotiations about her daughters' politically-motivated marriages with sons of Emperor Frederik Barbarossa.²⁷

We have little knowledge about women in the Middle Ages in general, and the women of the Russian princely dynasty in particular: even the daughters of the Kyiv prince are rarely mentioned by name in the Russian sources about them.²⁸ However, it seems that this obscurity is not only due to the lack of sources. For example, every schoolgirl in Soviet Belarus knew about Anna of Kyiv, a Rus' princess who became queen of France in 1051 upon marrying King Henry I. The Soviet myth of Anna served as a tool of historical and political instrumentalization of the past of old Rus' that united the "drevnerusskii narod" (the ancient Russian peoples)—the Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians—and had great recognition in the Western Europe. In today's Ukraine Anna of Kyiv is recognized as a Ukrainian princess. At the same time, Ingegerd or Saint Anna of Novgorod became extremely popular in Russia.

What about Sophia? Saxo Grammaticus, who wrote a Danish history published in 1104,²⁹ only mentioned Sophia a few times and he was not very positive towards her. He praised King Valdemar in high tones and boasted of Absalon, who was archbishop and had hired Saxo to write a Danish history. This means that our knowledge of Queen Sophia is influenced by the interpretations of Saxo and Absalon, according to whom she was a queen of no importance.

The marriage of Sophia and Valdemar established a practice, which continued in the Danish royal family for over 500 years. By choosing a queen of international origin, Valdemar could secure an exalted position over the domestic elite and its various warring factions, which would not have been

27 Netterstrøm and Andersen 2018, p. 37.

28 Lind 1992, p. 227.

29 Gesta Danorum by Saxo Grammaticus.



ILLUSTRATION 7 One of the coins (bracteates) from 1157 to commemorate the wedding between Valdemar the Great and Sophia of Minsk
 PHOTO CREDIT: ANDREAS MOGENSEN,
 NATIONALMUSEETS SAMLINGER ONLINE

possible if the king were married to a local nobleman's daughter.³⁰ The marriage took place after the Great Schism, which had separated the Eastern and Western Churches. John Lind believes that "the close connections between the branches of the Danish royal family and the Rurik dynasty were based on a continuing existing cultural cohesion that had roots back in the Viking Age."³¹

But Sophia was not only a tool for Valdemar, according to historian Ole Fenger, but also an independent, politically important person who is depicted on coins and frescoes together with Valdemar. The coins of Valdemar the Great represent the king and his queen with a scepter, a flag, or a sword in its sheath between them (illustration 7). Queen Sophia's image on the coins is the evidence of her political influence.

There is also a document contending that Sophia and Valdemar gave money to the church in Vå, in Skåne, nowadays Sweden. It was rather unusual that the queen was mentioned and that she put her signature on this document.

³⁰ Netterstrøm and Andersen 2018, p. 37.

³¹ Lind 1992, p. 238

This allows for a hypothesis that Valdemar, who is known as the king who built the most churches in Denmark, was not alone and that Sophia played an active role in his endeavors.

This hypothesis can also be supported by archeological evidence. Historians Boris Zharov and Andrej Katliarchuk point at the architecture of Kalundborg Church, whose distinctive foundation has the form of a Greek cross which was not typical for Danish architecture. The church was founded in approximately 1150 by Esben Snare (Absalon's brother). It has the same basic shape as Sophia Cathedral in Polatsk, Sophia's homeland. Against this background, Katliarchuk believes that the choice of architecture of the church in Kalundborg was made under Sophia's influence. This architecture is unique to Denmark and is clearly inspired by Byzantine traditions, which have also influenced churches in Eastern Europe, most remarkably in ancient Polatsk in Belarus.

4 Conclusion

This article contributes to research into the hypothesis that the Danish national shrine—the Cross of Dagmar—was brought to Denmark by Queen Sophia, the daughter of Volodar, ruler of Minsk. The similarities of the specific artistic features of the two national shrines: the Cross of Dagmar (Denmark) and the Cross of St. Euphrosyne (Belarus) described in this article provide new evidence in support of Fritze Lindahl's hypothesis about the origin of the Cross of Dagmar from Belarus. Thus, the original claims of Christian Blichfeld, who discovered the cross and ascribed it to Queen Dagmar, prove to be unsustainable and were based on his rather subjective knowledge about various queens buried in the church.

There is still a wide gap in scholarly knowledge about the connections between Danish and Belarusian lands in the Middle Ages. However, even the short period covered in this paper allows us to conclude that the territory of Belarus was actively involved in political and cultural exchanges with Denmark and other Scandinavian countries. British chronicles contend that representatives from Belarus were frequent visitors in Denmark, bringing gifts to Sophia.

The object of this research is in line with the so-called “queenship studies”. The role of Sophia of Minsk, Queen of Denmark, was analysed using descriptive, comparative and interpretive historical methods. The combination of sources (the Old Russian, Danish, and British Chronicles, as well as German and Byzantine chronicles) has made this study original and representative. The article has renewed attention towards Sophia's personality in the context of discussions about the role of women as drivers of change in Belarusian society.

After many years of academic research on this topic, whose results are presented in this paper, popular seminars and blogs have appeared recently attempting to tell the story to a wider audience, although they are not always historically accurate. This can be explained by the process of “nationalisation” and “instrumentalization” of medieval princesses, which is taking place in the post-Soviet countries, as in the case of Anna of Kyiv. Queen Sophia does deserve to appear in the Belarusian history schoolbooks, but the role of academic community is not to create or support popular myths, rather to fill in the blank spots in our mutual history based on the verified theories and empirical data.

When it comes to national symbols, it does not have to be huge in its physical size. The so-called “Dagmarkors” (Cross of Dagmar) is held especially dear to the Danes because of its spiritual, historical and artistic value. The Cross of St. Euphrosyne is also a cherished symbol of the Belarusians, although it unfortunately disappeared along with many other valuables in Belarus during World War II. Until now, researchers have not tried to equate the two crosses, which makes this study new and unique and opens up for new possibilities for future research into the Cross of Dagmar.

Max Weber defined power as the ability to put one's will through in any social relationship.³² It is difficult to prove whether it was Sophia's daughter, Queen Richiza, or Sophia's daughter-in-law, Queen Dagmar, who last owned the Cross of Dagmar. It is most likely that the cross was found in Queen Richiza's, and not Queen Dagmar's tomb, but the cross in any case continues to be a symbol of the great spiritual value a small object can possess, a timeless “soft power” legacy from one or several of the significant women of the Middle Ages.

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32 cit. in Netterstrøm and Andersen 2018, pp. 20–21.

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