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SEVERIA AS A HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHIC CONCEPT

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ABSTRACT

The issue of the formation of three Eastern Slavic people from the single Kievan Rus' is extremely complicated. Special difficulties arise during the determination of the nature of historical-ethnic development in the regions with established ethnic boundaries. Severia is one of such regions. In this paper, the author attempted to reflect the perception of the Severian territory and its population in historical science in different periods.

Keywords: *Severia, historical-ethnic processes, ethnic-cultural distinctiveness, East Slavic unions, localisation of chronicles, Severyuks*

LA SEVERIA COME CONCETTO STORICO-GEOGRAFICO

SINTESI

La questione della formazione di tre popoli slavi orientali dal singolo stato Rus' di Kiev è estremamente complicata. Difficoltà particolari si verificano nel tentativo di determinare la natura dello sviluppo storico-etnico nelle regioni con confini etnici stabiliti. La Severia è una di tali regioni. Nel presente contributo, l'autrice ha cercato di rispecchiare la percezione del territorio severiano e della sua popolazione nella scienza della storia dei diversi periodi.

Parole chiave: *Severia, processi storico-etnici, individualità etnico-culturale, unioni degli Slavi orientali, localizzazione di cronache, severiani*

INTRODUCTION

Since Ukraine's declaration of independence, new discussion began, including discussion on the issues of forming the Eastern-Slavic nations and the ethnic structure of the Kievan Rus'. A number of sources, which belittle the commonality of origin and close connection of historical destinies of Eastern Slavic nations, attempt to substantiate different alternative variants of the theory of a single Eastern-Slavic ethnic-cultural commonality. The thesis claims that the Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian nationalities began forming long before the formation of the Kievan Rus', while the Ukrainian ethnic group was the dominating one in the Kievan state.

Nowadays, Russia is accused not only of enslaving the freedom-loving Ukrainian people, but also of "stealing" its national history. For example, according to Ukrainian Dr. Sc. in History Ya. Dashkevych, Moscow rulers "beginning with Ivan IV (the Terrible) ... understood that one cannot create a great nation and a great empire without a great past. Therefore, they needed to enrich their historical past, and even appropriate other people's past. Hence, Moscow tsars set the task of appropriating the history of the Kievan Rus', its glorious past, and creating the official mythology of the Russian Empire" (Spiritual and contractual documents of great and appanaged princes of the 14th-16th centuries, 1950).

Under these conditions, a comprehensive study of the issue of the Eastern Slavic people's ethnogenesis is extremely relevant, and is of great practical importance.

The formation of three nations – Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian – on the single Old Rus' basis occupies a special place in the history of Eastern Slavic people and is an extremely complicated issue. Special difficulties are associated with the clarification of the nature of historical-ethnic development of the population in the regions, where the ethnic boundaries of the specified nations were formed. One of such regions was Severia – an original region of the Eastern-Slavic world, where due to historical conditions, the ethnic-cultural originality of the population was preserved to the end of the 17th century.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the introduction to "The Tale of Bygone Years", the chronicler describes the settling of Slavic tribes in Eastern Europe. This part of the chronicle mentions "Severs" («севера») as one of the Slavic tribes. In terms of the place of settlement in Eastern-Slavic lands, Severs are called the last ones among other tribes. The chronicler determines the territory of Severs as the lands "... along Desna, Seym and Sula" (The Tale of Bygone Years, 1962, 5). However, the historical-geographical aspect of Severia is little studied. Due to the lack of special works, which would generalise and systematise information about Severian topography, there is no specific opinion regarding its localisation in scientific literature. Various

works determine the territory of the Severian land differently: the lands along the Desna River; interfluvies of Sozh and Desna Rivers; Desna-Seym interfluvies; Desna River basin and Oka River upper reaches; the region of Putivl and Briansk, etc.

The lack of coordination in localisation of this region is caused by the uncertainty of the "Severian land" concept, which is identified with the settling region of the "Sever", mentioned in chronicles, or with the territory of the Principality of Chernigov in the 11th-13th centuries, or with the Principality of Novgorod-Seversk in the 12th-13th centuries, or with Severia in the 14th-16th centuries.

"The Tale of Bygone Years" provides only the "Sever" ethnonym and its derivatives: "Severo", "Severy", "Severeny", "Severyane" («северо», «северы», «северены», «северяне») (Laurentian chronicle, 1962, 6, 10, 11, 12, 19, 24, 29, 148, 149; Hypatian chronicle, 1962, 5, 8, 9, 10, 14, 17, 21, 135, 136). The latter one is most frequently used in historical literature. However, according to linguistic data, the original text of "The Tale of Bygone Years" in the 12th century did not mention the "Severyane" («северяне») ethnonym – 'an-e was introduced by the authors of much later codes, replacing the forms without suffixes (Hasburgaev, 1979, 208-209). Such forms include the "Sever" («северь») ethnonym. The appearance of the form "Severo" («северо») is associated, according to linguists, with the typical phenomenon of the transition of the –hard sign ending (-ь) to –o (Dnepr – Dnipro, Psl – Pslo, Vorskol – Vorsklo (Днепръ – Дніпро, Псьльъ – Псло, Ворьсколь – Ворскло)) (Etymologic dictionary of annalistic geographic names of the Southern Rus', 1985, 153; Solovyeva, 1956, 65).

The Kievan chronicle uses the attributive word-combination "Severian towns" (Hypatian chronicle, 1962, 629). In the Galicia-Volhynia chronicle, in terms of the events of the second half of the 13th century, the northern Dnieper Left-Bank lands are mentioned as "Zadneprovye" (Beyond the Dnieper) (Hypatian chronicle, 1962, 872, 892), while the description of these events that dates back to the end of 16th century uses the name "Severian Russian land beyond the Dnieper" («Северская земля русская за Днепром») (Strykowski, 1846, 248). It is important that the authors of later codes, while modernising, if necessary, the texts of Old Rus' chronicles when they copied them, used the term "Severian land" («Северская земля»), which was not used before. For example, the text of "The Tale of Bygone Years" in the 14th century version reads, "and let the Russian land be divided by the Dnieper: Yaroslav on this side, and Mstislav on the other side" («... и разделиста по Днепр Русьскую землю: Ярослав прия сию сторону, а Мьстислав ону»); a later interpretation: "... and let this land be divided by the Dnieper: one be Kievan land, and other be Severian land" («... и разделиста си землю по Днепр: един Киевскую землю, а другой Северскую землю») (Laurentian chronicle, 1962, 149; The Lvov Chronicle, 1910, 90). There are other similar examples.

According to a number of researchers, the first document to use the term “Severian land” is the oath of loyalty of Prince Fedir Lyubartovich to King Władysław II Jagiełło and Queen Jadwiga, which gave him “the land upon their will named Severia with all towns and all belongings” («землю до своей воли на имя Северскую со всеми городми, со всеми оужитки») in 1393 (The Tale of Bygone Years, 1962, 51; Tretyakov, 1937, 13). During the 14th–18th centuries, sources register a number of related toponymical formations: “Siver”, “Sivera”, “Severshchina”, “Sivershchina”, “Siver land”, “Siver side”, “Siverskaya ukraina”, “Siver country” («Сивер», «Сивера», «Северщина», «Сиверщина», «Сиверская земля», «Сиверская сторона», «Сиверская украина», «Сиверский край») (Archeographic commission, 1841, 113, 201, 350; Supplements. V.1., 257, 260, 294; Velichko, 1864, 97; Rusanova, 1966, 121, 203, 220, 339, 508 et al; Archeographic commission, 1875, V.8, 11, 400; 1878, V. 10., 330; Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1890, 33, 57, 344, 369, 419, 463 et al.; The History of the Kazan Kingdom (The Kazan Chronicler), 1903, 44; Spiritual and contractual documents of great and appanaged princes of the 14th–16th centuries, 1950, 437, 482; Bolotnikov, 1959, 119, 126, 134, 175, 185, 187, 197, 219 et al.; The New Chronicler, 1965, 59, 62, 71, 77; Bevzo, 1970, 112, 121; The Eyewitness Chronicle, 1971, 57, 65, 89, 95, 123, 124, 151, 162; Belarusian-Lithuanian Chronicles, 1980, 166). This toponym is genetically connected with an earlier ethnonym “Sever” («северь»), found in chronicles, and is the result of its transformation into a new onomastic formation.

Most researches, who studied chronicle tribes, set the task of determining their tribal boundaries. Certain historians and authors of works on historical geography of Russia related the entire Dnieper Left-Bank lands to the “Sever” (Barsov, 1885, 147–152; Hrushevsky, 1904, 167–168; Hrushevsky, 1911, 226, 230; Seredonin, 1916, 141–142). The historians, who studied Severia (P.V. Golubovskiy, D.I. Bagaley, V. Lyaskoronskiy, A. Andriashev and V.V. Mavrodin), shared this opinion. In particular, P.V. Golubovskiy supposed that the chronicler mentioned only the central part, the core of the Sever territory, while the entire area of the Sever people was considerably larger (Golubovskiy, 1881, 2). Archaeological excavations of Slavic burial mounds of the 11th–14th centuries, which distinguished complexes of women’s decorations that were peculiar to each Eastern-Slavic tribe, laid the foundation for determining the Severian land boundaries for the abovementioned researchers. Spiral temple rings were acknowledged as such decorations for the Severs. Although A. A. Spitsyn noted the mixed population of the Severian land, when determining the tribal boundaries of the Sever, he proceeded from the established opinion (Spitsyn, 1899, 338–340).

In 1937, the “Soviet Archaeology” journal published two articles on the correlation of archaeological monuments of certain Kievan Rus’ lands and those of

the primary chronicle tribes. P.N. Tretyakov suggested that traditional forms of decoration, in particular, temporal rings of the 10th–11th centuries do not fall within the boundaries of tribal groups, distinguished by A.A. Spitsyn, but correspond to the boundaries of feudal principalities. According to P.N. Tretyakov, the tribal groups did not exist in the 11th–12th centuries, and it is necessary to search for their traces among older antiquities (Tretyakov, 1937; Tretyakov, 1961, 310). A.V. Artsikhovskiy shared A.A. Spitsyn’s opinion (Artsikhovskiy, 1937).

Many studies of the 1950s–1970s continued searching the material culture and funeral rites of individual regions for specific peculiarities, corresponding to the chronicle tribes (temporal rings, signet rings, and ceramics). Archaeology distinguished and studied a number of Eastern-Slavic tribes, including Severians (The Soviet source studies of Kievan Rus’, 1979, 90–91). Modern archaeologists deepen the knowledge of the history and peculiarities of the culture of Eastern-Slavic tribal unions (Grigoryev, 2000).

While considering the issue of Polans’ and Severians’ tribal boundaries, B.A. Rybakov concluded that a significant part of the Dnieper Left-Bank lands in the 8th–10th centuries was occupied by Polans. In his opinion, the area of Severian settling coincides with the boundaries of the Principality of Novgorod-Seversk in the 12th century (middle reaches of the Desna River, upper reaches of the Psel River, middle and upper reaches of the Sula River) (Rybakov, 1947, 81–105). The opinion of B.A. Rybakov regarding the localisation of chronicle Sever was supported by G.F. Solovyeva (Solovyeva, 1956, 141). I.P. Rusanov localises the Sever within narrower boundaries (Rusanova, 1966, Table 18, 19).

Thus, the starting point for determining the Severian territory in terms of studying its history is the evidence of the chronicler that the Sever lands were located “... along Desna, Sula and Seym” («седоша по Десне, и по Суле, и по Семи...»), and archaeological data (Figure 1).

The chronicler is probably correct to locate the territory of Severia along the Desna, Seym and Sula Rivers, i.e. the territory of the tribe that became the centre of the Severian tribal union, gave its name to this union, and later – to the principality. From this perspective, the review and specification of the Sever’s settling boundaries by B.A. Rybakov and other researchers are reasonable. However, the area of the Severian tribal union as a political union was considered significantly greater than the boundaries that were specified by the chronicler, and included different ethnic groups of the population.

The boundaries, which were specified by the chronicler, contain most Roman archaeological monuments that the majority of researchers relate to the “Sever”, mentioned in chronicles (Rybakov, 1947, 94, Figure 4; Berezovets, 1953a, 25–26; Berezovets, 1953b, 28–44; Tretyakov, 1953, 242; Sedov, 1970, 126–134; Sukhobokov, 1975, 146–147; Grigoryev, 2000). Roman antiquities are rarer in the southern and northern lands

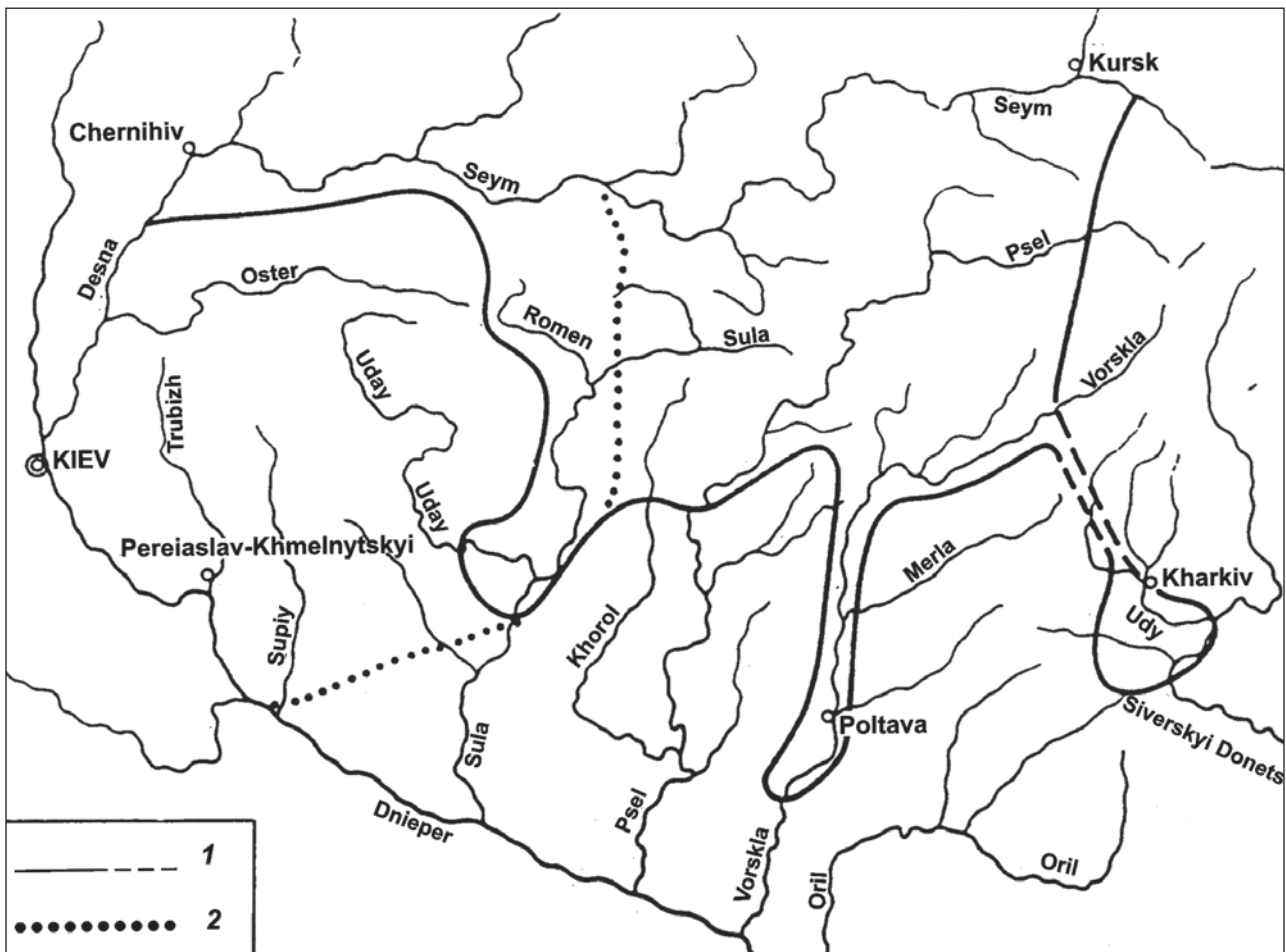


Figure 1: Severia settling in the Dnieper Left-Bank forest-steppes, according to archaeological data (8th-10th centuries)

along the Desna and Semy Rivers. It is obvious that the lands along Desna, Semy and Sula Rivers were the centre of the Severian tribal union. Proceeding from archaeological materials, D.T. Berezovets outlined Severia by approximately the following boundaries: in the North, approximately along the Lyubech – Starodub – Briansk line; in the North-East and East, not farther than the Briansk – Kursk conditional line; in the South-East Kursk, Novi Sanzhary (lands along the Vorskla River); in the South, Novi Sanzhary – Sary – Lubny. D.T. Berezovets considers the rest of settlements south of Kharkiv the result of the settling of Severians in the end of the 9th or the beginning of the 10th century. D.T. Berezovets keeps the question regarding the western boundary open, suggesting that the interfluvies of the Dnieper and Desna River influenced the course of historical events, associated with the formation of Kievan Rus' (territory of the "Russian land", according to A.N. Nasonov (Nasonov, 2006)), at an early stage. Due to further rapid development of culture, tribal peculiarities of this region disappeared earlier.

In this paper, the territorial concept of Severia is limited by the boundaries, specified above (Figure 2). Afterwards, most of this region joined the ethnic territory of the Ukrainian nation.

The term "Sever" and "Severia", encountered in 14th-17th centuries' sources does not entirely correspond to the "Sever land" of the 8th-10th centuries. At the same time, the region that is distinguished in this paper, where sevryuks are mentioned by 15th-17th centuries' sources (Bagnovskaya, 2002), mostly coincides with the lands, where most Roman monuments were discovered, which evidences the preservation of the ethnic-cultural originality of Severian population to the 18th century.

It is difficult to reconstruct the territorial boundaries of Severia, based on the fragmentary information about it, found in 14th-15th centuries' sources. However, the constancy of this toponymical formation, its active use as official terminology (Platonov, 1937, 3-4), and fact that Severia became part of the Grand Duchy of Moscow allow referring to the method of extrapolation with the use of official material from the 16th-17th centuries,



Figure 2: *Severia, according to archaeological data (map compiled by the author)*

as opposed to the documents of previous centuries. The location of Severia when it was part of the Grand Duchy of Moscow (1503-1618) is outlined by the following points: Bryansk, Gomel, Drokov, Kursk, Mglin, Morivsk, Novgorod-Seversk, Pochep, Putyvl, Radogoshch, Ryl'sk, Starodub, Trubchevsk, and Chernigov. All they existed in the 14th-15th centuries. This territory covers only part of the Severian ethnic-cultural habitat that is evidenced by archaeological findings of the pre-state and Old Rus' period: apart from lands along the Desna and Seta Rivers, it also included the basins of Vorskla and Psel Rivers, and the upper reaches of the Sula River.

Thus, the name "Sever" («северъ») related only to the Severian lands, which became part of the Principality of Chernigov during second half of the 11th – the first half of the 13th centuries, and did not include Pereiaslav that

was affected by the consequences of the Mongol invasion and the considerable outflow of population from this territory.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, it can be said that the tribes of the pre-state period, described in chronicles, are by themselves complex ethnic-social unions, which formed from several tribes, including tribes of different ethnicities. After becoming part of the Kievan Rus', these tribal unions evolved towards political, socioeconomic, and ethnic consolidation. However, this process was not completed. The Kievan Rus', for a short period, created prerequisites for the formation of a single people, based on closely related groups, but these prerequisites

failed to become effective factors for the establishment of a new ethnic community – the Old Rus' people. Too many circumstances prevented this process from being completed. Affected by the developing feudalisation of the society and the political disintegration of the Kievan Rus' it caused, the historical-ethnic development took a different course – the course of intensification of communal and regional trends. Further development of feudalisation caused the establishment of three big feudal centres, around which the territories of individual principalities were formed. Another period of ethnic consolidation happened at the times of feudal principalities, including the Principality of Chernigov. It spanned most of the territory of the Severian tribal union. The southern regions of Severia were part of the Principality of Pereyaslavl. Territorial bonds of the population assume the leading role in this period. In chronicles, people are more often referred to as Chernigovites, Novgorodites, Kurskites, etc. However, the weak economic relations of that time and the natural economy facilitated the stability of local peculiarities and tribal borders. Probably at that time, the term "Северская земля" (Severia, Sever Land) became a regional phenomenon that reflected the history of the land and extended beyond the political concepts of the Principalities of Chernigov, Novgorod-Seversk, and Pereyaslavl. The lands of the former two partly included the lands of Radimichs and Vyatichis. The lands of the Principality of Pereyaslavl were not ethnically united either – they included the former lands of Severians and Polans. Some Severian settlements along the upper reaches of the Psel, Vorskla, and Siverskyi Donets Rivers ended up within the boundaries of Polovetsian camping grounds. Further consolidation of population in early feudal states was hindered by their intensifying feudal fragmentation and the lack of internal unity of the central regions of principalities and peripheral regions, which often changed hands. The trend of the emergence of two centres (apart from Kyiv) – the Principalities of Galicia-Volhynia and Vladimir-Suzdal – around which the rest of the south-western and north-eastern Rus' lands were grouped, was interrupted by the Mongol invasion.

Even before the Mongol invasion, the Chernigov-Severian land ended up "between" the said centres – their princes strived for gaining a foothold in Kyiv. The Mongol invasion and the subsequent historical situation in Eastern Europe facilitated the conservation of the isolated, "middle" status of Severia between the north-eastern and south-western Kievan Rus' lands, on the one hand, and the steppe nomads, on the other hand. Furthermore, in the 14th century, the Severian lands were contested by two states – the Grand Duchies of Lithuania and Moscow, who laid claim to the heritage of the Kievan Rus'. Severian principalities constantly changed hands. These circumstances also facilitated the conservation of the ethnic-cultural isolation of the Severian population.

As is known, the Mongol invasion did not affect the ethnic composition of the Old Rus' lands, including Severian lands. The population of its southern and south-eastern regions encountered steppe tribes long before that. Certain tribes settled down along the borders of the Chernigov, Severia, Pereyaslavl, and other principalities. After the Mongol invasion, some nomadic groups moved back into the steppes, but part of them, especially seminomadic people, remained at their previous places of dwelling. Some of them even moved northwards, into the forest steppes, due to the relocation of the population from the Pereyaslavl and Chernigov Principalities into the forest regions beyond the Desna River. The fact that the population of the southern regions of Severia dwindled is indisputable, but the statement regarding the complete desertion of these lands is unacceptable.

These conditions revealed the resilience of the historical name of Severia and its population. 15th-17th century sources mention Severia, Severian cities, rivers and dwellers of this land – Sevryuks. Sevryuks are descendants of the ancient, pre-Mongolian population of Severia. According to sources, Sevryuks lived approximately within the territory of the ancient "Sever". They are not, however, direct descendants of "Sever" people – they are descendants of the Severian population, which underwent long historical development. In the 14th-16th centuries, the Kievan Rus' ceased to exist, as did the Principalities of Chernigov and Pereyaslavl as independent states. People were called Sevryuks, i.e. the dwellers of Severia, rather than Russians or Chernigovites. This was probably a regional name, but closely connected with the history of Severia, and, probably, used in the 14th – first half of 17th centuries as the population's self-designation. The preservation of the "Sevryuks" name to the second half of the 17th century was facilitated by the fact that Severian lands changed hands several times between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (and then the Kingdom of Poland) and the Grand Duchy of Moscow in the 14th-16th centuries. Therefore, it was difficult to develop and affirm a name that was associated with this or that state affiliation (politonym).

Thus, the integrity of the Severian land was determined by its ethnic-cultural unity that was inherited from the Sever people, mentioned in chronicles, rather than by political institutions. Sevryuks were a special group of the Old Rus' population, which preserved its regional isolation in the 14th-16th centuries (in some regions – to the second half of the 17th century). After the end of the 16th century, and, mostly, in the 17th century, the population of former Severia joined the formation of the Ukrainian and Russian nationalities (perhaps, to a certain extent, Belorussian, as well).

SEVERIJA KOT ZGODOVINSKO-GEOGRAFSKI KONCEPT

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POVZETEK

Problem oblikovanja treh vzhodnoslovanskih narodov iz ene same države, Kijevske Rusije, je izjemno zapleten. Posebne težave nastanejo pri opredeljevanju narave zgodovinsko-etničnega razvoja na področjih z uveljavljenimi etničnimi mejami. Eno izmed takšnih področij je Severija. Avtorica je v članku poskušala zrcaliti zgodovinsko pojmovanje severjanskega ozemlja in njegovih prebivalcev v različnih obdobjih.

Celovitost Severije je bila prej posledica njene etnično-kulturne enotnosti, zapuščine severjanskega ljudstva, omenjenega v kronikah, kot pa vplivov političnih institucij. Severjani so bili posebna skupina staroruskega prebivalstva, ki je v obdobju med 14. in 16. stoletjem (v nekaterih predelih do druge polovice 17. stoletja) ostajala regionalno izolirana. S koncem 16. stoletja, povečini pa v 17. stoletju se je prebivalstvo nekdanje Severije vključilo v oblikovanje ukrajinskega in ruskega (do neke mere morda tudi beloruskega) naroda.

Ključne besede: Severija, zgodovinsko-etnični procesi, etnično-kulturna svojstvenost, vzhodnoslovanske skupnosti, lociranje kronik, Severjani



Figure 3: Coat of Arms of Severia. 1672. File:Герб Северной страны 1672 года.gif. From Wikimedia Commons

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