

## Chapter 9

## SKILLS WORKSHEET

### Persia, Byzantium, and the Rise of Russia

#### Analyzing a Primary Source

*Whether or not the Rus were descended from the Vikings, there was definitely a Scandinavian presence in the area that became Russia. In A.D. 922 Ibn Fadlan, an envoy from the Caliph of Baghdad, witnessed a Viking funeral performed by Scandinavian merchants on the Volga.*

*Read the passage below, and answer the questions that follow.*

I was told that the least of what they do for their chiefs when they die, is to consume them with fire. When I was finally informed of the death of one of their magnates [authority figures], I sought to witness what befell [took place]. First they laid him in his grave—over which a roof was erected—for the space of ten days, until they had completed the cutting and sewing of his clothes. . . . At the death of a rich man they bring together his goods, and divide them into three parts. The first of these is for his family; the second is expended for the garments they make; and with the third they purchase strong drink, against the day when the girl resigns herself to death, and is burned with her master. To the use of wine they abandon themselves in mad fashion, drinking it day and night; and not seldom does one die with the cup in his hand.

When one of their chiefs dies, his family asks his girls and pages, “Which one of you will die with him?” . . . So, when the man of whom I spoke had died, they asked his girls, “Who will die with him?” One of them answered, “I.” . . . The people now began to occupy themselves with the dead man—to cut out the clothes for him, and to prepare whatever else was needful. . . .

When the day was now come that the dead man

and the girl were to be committed to the flames, I went to the river in which his ship lay. . . . The dead man, meanwhile, lay at a distance in his grave, from which they had not yet removed him. . . .

. . . Near him in the grave they had placed strong drink, fruits, and a lute; and these they now took out. . . . They now clothed him in drawers, leggings, boots, and a *kurtak* and *chaftan* of cloth of gold, with golden buttons, placing on his head a cap made of cloth of gold, trimmed with sable [fur]. Then they carried him into a tent placed in the ship, . . . supported him with the pillows, and, bringing strong drink, fruits, and basil [an herb], placed them all beside him. . . .

The next of kin to the dead man now drew near, and taking a piece of wood, lighted it, and walked backwards to the ship, . . . until the wood which had been piled under the ship was ignited. Then the others came up with staves [pieces of wood] and firewood, each one carrying a stick already lighted at the upper end, and threw it all on the pyre. . . .

From “Ibn Fadlan’s Account of Scandinavian Merchants on the Volga in 922” by A. S. Cook from *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 1923. Reprinted by permission of *The Estate of A. S. Cook*.

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1. What reasons might the Vikings have had for cremating their dead in boats?

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2. What items were placed in the boat with the dead man?

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3. What do these items suggest about Viking beliefs about death?

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