

# What Events Were Reported by the Old Rus' Chroniclers?

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*The article is dedicated to a detailed study of a selected series of events reported by Rus' chroniclers from the eleventh to the early fourteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup>\* Items of information contained in the Primary Chronicle, as well as in the Laurentian, Hypatian (to 1200) and First Novgorodian (to 1352) Chronicles are catalogued, classified and analysed as a means of reflecting on guidelines that the chroniclers might have followed. Firstly, remarks on different kinds of events are counted in each chronicle and the percentages compared; this gives a general impression of the interests of the Old Rus' chroniclers. Secondly, the distribution of four kinds of remarks (events in princely families, changes of ecclesiastical hierarchs, the building of churches, natural phenomena and disasters) is studied in connection with the history of the texts. In general, the analysis corroborates Mark Aleshkovsky's point that recording these 'non-political' events is typical of the annalists who describe the present or recent past (those who wrote on the distant past dealt mostly with political events). But in some cases the situation seems more complicated: the repertoire of events reported in a chronicle could depend on the personal attitudes of annalists or their patrons, as well on the activity of a later compiler or reviser.*

The text of any of the extant Rus' chronicles is heterogeneous.<sup>2</sup> It reflects the work of many individuals. Some of them described events of the distant past; others recorded contemporary events; some created compilations, some revised or annotated already existing texts and so on. These individuals probably had in mind certain guidelines concerning the events worth mentioning in their chronicle. The purpose of this article is to try to discover these guidelines.

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<sup>2</sup> The Russian (and Old Rus') word *letopis'* (летопись, 'year-writing') is usually translated into English as 'chronicle' (especially in proper names of particular texts, like the *Primary Chronicle of Kiev* or the *Laurentian Chronicle*), although a more accurate translation might be 'annals' (see Guimon 2012a, 69–92). In this article I will use both terms: 'chronicle' when speaking of these texts in general or of some particular texts, and 'annals' when stressing their annalistic structure.

Mari Isoaho (ed.)

Past and Present in Medieval Chronicles

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Several decades ago Mark Aleshkovsky put forth the idea that there are two kinds of chronicles (or rather two kinds of layers underlying the extant chronicles): those describing the past and those describing the present.<sup>3</sup> The first had a tendency to become coherent narratives with a certain central topic (or several such topics), a kind of plot (Aleshkovsky called this ‘monothematism’). Events that had no relation to this plot are seldom reported. Other features of such layers are the lack of precise dates, references to later events and relative chronology. By contrast, the second kind of layer consists of annals written more or less contemporaneously with the events described. Such annals are full of precise dates. They are discrete, that is, they consist of entries on various types of events (such as changes of lay rulers and bishops, natural phenomena, the building of churches, etc.), which have no obvious connection with each other. These two kinds of layers are often mixed in the extant compilations, and it is a scholar’s task to separate them and thus to define, if possible, the nature of any particular fragment of a chronicle. Aleshkovsky attempted such a study for the *Primary Chronicle of Kiev*, but he pointed out that such a division is valid for later chronicle writing as well.

What Aleshkovsky did not do, and what seems especially important for realising this programme, is a systematic study of the kinds of events chosen by the chroniclers to report. Attempts at such a study have been undertaken on the material of the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> This text is a clear representative of Aleshkovsky’s second type, namely a chronicle kept year by year. As we will see below, it contrasts in some respects with the other Old Rus’ chronicles, which, I assume, also deserve study from this point of view.<sup>5</sup> I must also mention that there are studies dedicated to particular kinds of annalistic notes (for example, on the building of churches or the births in a royal family) and their distribution in the annalistic text.<sup>6</sup>

This article will deal with four annalistic texts, which, taken together, represent most of what has survived of the early Rus’ chronicle writing.

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3 Aleshkovsky 1976, 134–138.

4 Kvirkeveliia 1986; Guimon 2003; 2012a, 145–150.

5 In a recent article (Guimon 2012c) I analysed the kinds of events reported by the *Laurentian Chronicle*, 1156–1263. The main results will be summarised below.

6 See the bibliography in Guimon 2012a, 142–143.

1) The *Primary Chronicle of Kiev* (*Povest' vremennykh let*, usually translated into English as the *Tale of Bygone Years*)<sup>7</sup> was compiled in the 1110s. It survives as the first part of the *Laurentian*, the *Hypatian* and some other chronicles, extant in manuscripts from the late fourteenth century on. The *Primary Chronicle* is traditionally regarded as the first extant example of Old Rus' historiography, even though it is almost certain that the text was not written all in one sitting, but rather was based on several earlier chronicles from the eleventh century (or even the late tenth century). Whatever these texts might be, they are not extant as such and can only be reconstructed from the *Primary Chronicle* itself and some later Novgorodian compilations.<sup>8</sup> Thus, for purposes of this study it is safer to analyse the *Primary Chronicle* as represented in the earliest manuscript witness: the *Laurentian Chronicle*.<sup>9</sup> The *Primary Chronicle* has a non-annalistic introduction and an annalistic text for the years 852–1110. Only the latter text will be studied in this article.

2) The *Hypatian Chronicle*<sup>10</sup> for the years between 1111 and 1200, that is, after the *Primary Chronicle* ends<sup>11</sup> and before the *Galycian-Volynian Chronicle* (the text of the *Hypatian Chronicle* for the thirteenth century, which was originally non-annalistic) begins. The section of the *Hypatian Chronicle* for the twelfth century is also known as the *Kievan Chronicle*, as it was compiled in Kiev ca 1200<sup>12</sup> and largely reflects the annalistic writing in Kiev, although material from other cities (Chernigov, Vladimir and elsewhere) was also included. The *Hypatian Chronicle* survives in several manuscripts of which the oldest is the Hypatian manuscript from ca 1418.

3) The *Laurentian Chronicle*<sup>13</sup> survives in only one manuscript, written in 1377 by the monk Lavrentiy and two other scribes. The text consists of the *Primary Chronicle* and its continuation for the years 1111–1305 (with two big lacunae – between 1262 and 1283, and between 1287 and 1294). The annals for the years 1110s–1150s are more or less the same as in the *Hypatian Chronicle* and reflect a

7 *Povest' vremennykh let* (PVL). See Ostrowski D., Birnbaum D. J. & Lunt H. G. (eds.) 2004. Electronic version in <http://www.hudon.harvard.edu/~ostrowski/pvl/> (visited in 25 February 2015). English translation in Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953. See the discussion on naming the chronicle in the article by Mari Isoaho in this publication.

8 On this series of problems, see Timberlake 2001; Gippius 2012. I will return to this discussion at the end of this article.

9 There are many significant differences between the manuscripts representing the *Primary Chronicle*, some of which probably reflect the process of its revision in the early 12th century (see Gippius 2007; 2008). For example, there are several annalistic notes on the events of the second half of the 11th and early 12th centuries, which appear only in the *Hypatian* group of manuscripts (see a list of such notes in Gippius 2007, 36). They were added in the 1110s, but do not belong to the main body of the *Primary Chronicle*; thus, I will not take them into account below.

10 *Ipat'evskaya letopis'*. For a diplomatic edition see Shakhmatov 1908.

11 In 1110 the common text of the *Laurentian* and the *Hypatian Chronicles* stops. The text for the years 1110 (the rest of the annal) to 1117 of the *Hypatian Chronicle* is widely regarded as belonging to the *Primary Chronicle*, but for purposes of this article, it will be easier to analyse these annals together with the following text of the *Hypatian Chronicle*.

12 Olexiy Tolochko (2006) suggested that its final compilation dates after 1212.

13 *Lavrent'evskaya letopis'*. For a diplomatic edition see Karsky 1926–1928; an online facsimile is available at <http://expositions.nlr.ru/LaurentianCodex/> (accessed 15 February 2013).

shorter version of the annalistic writing of southern Rus'. From 1156 on in the *Laurentian Chronicle* the entries were clearly written in the north-east of Rus', in Rostov and/or Vladimir, although the *Laurentian* and the *Hypatian Chronicles* do not become completely independent of one another until almost the end of the twelfth century. The latest section of the *Laurentian Chronicle* (for the years 1287–1305) shows a special interest in another north-eastern city, Tver.<sup>14</sup>

4) The *First Novgorodian Chronicle* is represented by the Synodal manuscript<sup>15</sup> (written ca 1234, continued ca 1330, with additions in various hands for the years 1330–1352) and by the codices of the so-called *Younger Version* of the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* (two mid-fifteenth-century manuscripts and several later ones). The Synodal manuscript lacks its first sixteen quires (and starts abruptly in 1016); the initial part of the *Younger Version* probably reflects a late eleventh-century Kievan chronicle, earlier than the *Primary Chronicle*. In the annals for the eleventh century the relationships amongst the Synodal manuscript, the *Younger Version* and the *Primary Chronicle* are quite complicated. The text of the two versions of the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* for 1074–1330 is basically the same. In this article I will deal with the text of the Synodal manuscript, but I will also take into account the text for the years 1273–1298, which is lacking in the manuscript (owing to a missing quire), but which is known from the *Younger Version*. Both versions of the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* go back to the archiepiscopal annals of Novgorod, which were kept year by year, its authors changing with the changes of archbishops, as A.A. Gippius showed on linguistic grounds.<sup>16</sup>

This study will include two scholarly procedures. Firstly, I will count the annotations on different kinds of events in the above-mentioned chronicles and compare the results. This should give some general idea of the chroniclers' range of interests. Secondly, I will attempt to analyse the distribution of these types of annotations in the annalistic texts in connection with the history of the texts themselves.

With the first procedure, an important question must first be answered: what are the units that are to be counted? The text of Rus' chronicles is annalistic, consisting of annual entries (or annals) and, sometimes, of 'blank annals'. In most cases the annual entries can easily be divided into smaller parts, each dedicated to a separate event (these items can be called 'annalistic notes' or, if they are extended, 'annalistic narrations'). Very often these units are separated from one another by wordings such as 'In

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<sup>14</sup> The small fragment between the two lacunae also shows Tver connections.

<sup>15</sup> *Novgorodskaya pervaya letopis'*. See Tikhomirov 1964 (a facsimile); Nasonov 1950 (a diplomatic edition); and Michell & Forbes 1914 (an English translation).

<sup>16</sup> Gippius 2006. See the brief survey of the textual history of the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* in Guimon 2011.

this same year' (*В то же лето*), 'In this same winter' (*Тои же зимы*), etc. It is not a strict rule that with each such wording a new unit of annalistic text begins: one can read after 'In this same year' a clear continuation of what was narrated before; on the other hand, a completely new topic can start without any introductory wording whatsoever. Thus, dividing an annual entry into such elementary units is a delicate operation, and in some cases can be done in one of several ways. Nevertheless, most of the time the division can be accomplished quite easily. After all, for purposes of this article the strictness of the calculations is not crucial: a much more important task will be to map certain kinds of annalistic notes, and this does not depend on the procedure of dividing annals into units.

But let us start with the calculations. However inaccurate they may be, they give, I assume, some general idea of the content of the Rus' chronicles.

	<i>Primary Chronicle, 852–1110</i>	<i>Hypatian Chronicle, 1111–1200</i>	<i>Laurentian Chronicle, 1111–1305</i>	<i>First Novgorodian Chronicle (Synodal MS), 1016–1352</i>
Political and military events	193 (59.4%)	312 (62.7%)	326 (57.8%)	401 (50.9%)
Events in princely families	29 (8.9%)	76 (15.3%)	68 (12%)	21 (2.7%)
Changes of ecclesiastical hierarchs	12 (3.7%)	40 (8%)	55 (9.7%)	74 (9.4%)
Building of churches	20 (6.2%)	24 (4.8%)	44 (7.8%)	85 (10.8%)
Natural phenomena and disasters	27 (8.3%)	32 (6.4%)	46 (8.1%)	94 (11.9%)
Construction of fortifications, bridges and other civil structures	5 (1.5%)	5 (1%)	8 (1.4%)	17 (2.2%)
Changes of city magistrates ( <i>posadniks</i> and <i>tysyatskys</i> )	–	–	–	60 (7.6%)
Other	39 (12%)	9 (1.8%)	18 (3.2%)	36 (4.6%)
Total	325	498	565	788

Fig. 1. Kinds of events recorded in the main early Rus' chronicles.

We see from this chart that 50 to 60 per cent of the notes and narrations in each chronicle are dedicated to political and military events. It is difficult to divide this group of notes into subgroups, but in general it can be said that the subgroups include changes of princes, conflicts between them, revolts and conspiracies, wars (internal, with nomads, etc.), meetings of princes and peace agreements, relationships between Rus' princes and Tatar rulers (after the 1230s) and the like. I included in this group all notes on deaths of male representatives of princely families. It is a questionable decision, for sometimes very young boys died, an event that may be closer to the next group ('events in princely families'). But in many cases it is impossible to decide whose death is mentioned: that of an under-age boy or a political figure. As a result, all male deaths are counted here as political events. The notes and

narrations on political and military events form the main ‘plot’ of the chronicles, and in some sections, as we will see, they are the only content.

The next group is labelled ‘events in princely families’. These include births of sons and daughters, deaths of female members of the ruling dynasty, weddings and *postrigi* (cutting hair – a kind of initiation for princely boys). Notes in this group are very rare in the *First Novgorodian Chronicle*, because of the unstable position of princes and their frequent changes in Novgorod. Such notes are more numerous in the *Primary* and the *Laurentian Chronicles* and, especially, in the *Hypatian Chronicle* in the twelfth century.

Notes on changes of ecclesiastical rulers (metropolitans, archbishops, bishops and abbots) have approximately equal weight (8–10%) in all the chronicles except the *Primary Chronicle*, where they are less numerous. It must be said that from the early twelfth century the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* systematically reports the changes of the (arch)bishops<sup>17</sup> of Novgorod,<sup>18</sup> and from 1185 the *Laurentian Chronicle* does the same for the bishops of Rostov.<sup>19</sup> Notes on any other ecclesiastical hierarchs are not given systematically in any of the chronicles. Even the annals of Kiev (the *Primary* and *Hypatian Chronicles*) do not systematically follow the changes of the metropolitans of Kiev, although sometimes they report changes of bishops in other cities or changes of abbots.

Notes on the building of churches (I also include here the painting and renovation of churches, as well as the founding of monasteries) make up from 4.8 to 10.8 per cent of all the notes in the chronicles. The *First Novgorodian Chronicle* reports the building of churches more often than the other texts; we will see below that this difference is much more impressive if we examine the twelfth century alone: 20.1 per cent of the notes in this part of the *Novgorodian Chronicle* are concerned with the construction of churches. The situation is somewhat the same with natural phenomena and disasters (eclipses, comets, earthquakes, fires, floods, pestilence, locusts, bad harvests and the like). Their weight is similar in all the chronicles, but again the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* is at the forefront (with 11.9%), and the *Hypatian Chronicle* has the least (with 6.4%).

Notes on civic buildings are very rare in all the chronicles. Most of these notes report the construction of fortresses or bridges, but one (s.v. 1089 in the *Primary Chronicle*) is dedicated to the building activity of the Metropolitan Efrem in Pereyaslav: Efrem built two churches, a stone bathhouse (the first ever in Rus’, as the annalist emphasises), city walls of stone and other buildings.

<sup>17</sup> It is not known exactly when the bishops of Novgorod became archbishops. The first archbishop was probably Niphont (1130–1156), but he and some of his successors are still called ‘bishops’ in some of the sources.

<sup>18</sup> Guimon 2003, 338.

<sup>19</sup> Guimon 2012c, 45.

Changes of city magistrates (*posadniks* and *tysyatskys*) were reported only by the Novgorodian chroniclers. Posts with the same names existed in other cities as well, but only in Novgorod was their importance comparable to that of princes and archbishops. Changes in their posts often reflected changes in the alignment of forces in Novgorodian politics. From 1117 the *Novgorodian First Chronicle* regularly reports changes of *posadniks* (and does it so systematically that from the annalistic notes we can make almost a complete list of Novgorodian *posadniks* with the dates of their succession). From 1219 changes of *tysyatskys* begin to be reported as well, but less systematically.<sup>20</sup> In most cases the chroniclers report changes of these magistrates as separate events, but often it is not easy to separate these annotations from narrations of political events, as changes of *posadniks* and *tysyatskys* were an integral part of the political struggles of the epoch.

The group labelled ‘other’ includes notes on assorted events: the visits and movements of princes, metropolitans and so on, as well as martyrdoms, translations of relics, illnesses of princes and the like. Six times the chroniclers report (as separate annotations) deaths of people who were neither members of the princely dynasty nor church hierarchs, nor were they Novgorodian city magistrates (not even former ones). All these cases deserve special attention. Yan [Vyshatich] (1106, the *Primary Chronicle*) is said to have been the annalist’s informant. Petr Ilyich (1147, the *Hypatian Chronicle*) is said to be the ‘man’ of Svyatoslav’s father and to have died at the age of 90, exactly like Yan in 1106. German Voyata (1188, the *First Novgorodian Chronicle*) was a parish priest and, at the same time, a chronicler (s.v. 1144, where he made an autobiographical entry: ‘In that same year I was ordained priest by Saint Archbishop Niphont’). The deaths of three representatives of a Novgorodian aristocratic family of Malyshevichi (in the years 1217, 1243 and 1247) were mentioned by the Novgorodian annals, perhaps owing to their importance for Novgorodian politics (see Guimon 2006, 302–304). Some notes are of canonical importance: s.v. 1108 in the *Primary Chronicle*, which reports that a liturgical commemoration of Theodosius of Kiev (Feodosii Pecherskii) was introduced in all dioceses of Rus’; compare the annotation for 1145 in the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* where it says, ‘In that same year two priests drowned, and the bishop did not allow a requiem service for them’; see also the year 1227 in the same chronicle, where there are reports of the burning of four sorcerers (*volkhvs*), who were blamed for witchcraft (and the annalist comments that only God knows if this was truth). It is impossible to list here all of the remarks labelled ‘other’, but it is worth pointing out that I also included in this group some narrations in the *Primary Chronicle* concerned with Christian enlightenment of the Slavs and the Rus’, as well as some rhetorical passages

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<sup>20</sup> See Guimon 2006, 295–302.

that could be regarded as separate items in the annalistic text. The percentage of such narrations and notes in the *Primary Chronicle* (12%) is much larger than in later chronicles (1.8–4.6%). The content of the *Primary Chronicle* is rather less standard, because its compilers had to deal with the *beginnings* of the state and the church, with a remote legendary past, and not only with ‘routine’ events of their time. By contrast, the low percentage of ‘untypical’ notes in the later chronicles shows a certain level of their uniformity.

To discuss this level of uniformity another procedure may be helpful. Let us make the same calculations, not for all the texts of the chronicles mentioned, but for the text of the *Hypatian*, the *Laurentian* and the *First Novgorodian Chronicles* for the period for which all the three are comparable: the years 1111 to 1200.

	<i>Hypatian Chronicle</i> , 1111–1200	<i>Laurentian Chronicle</i> , 1111–1200	<i>First Novgorodian Chronicle</i> (Synodal MS), 1111–1200
Political and military events	312 (62.7%)	173 (60.1%)	136 (40.2%)
Events in princely families	76 (15.3%)	31 (10.8%)	13 (3.8%)
Changes of ecclesiastical hierarchs	40 (8%)	32 (11.1%)	29 (8.6%)
Building of churches	24 (4.8%)	21 (7.3%)	68 (20.1%)
Natural phenomena and disasters	32 (6.4%)	20 (6.9%)	42 (12.4%)
Construction of fortifications	5 (1%)	7 (2%)	6 (1.8%)
Changes of city magistrates ( <i>posadniks</i> and <i>tysyatskys</i> )	–	–	28 (8.3%)
Other	9 (1.8%)	4 (1.4%)	16 (4.7%)
Total	498	288	338

Fig. 2. Kinds of events recorded in each of three chronicles for the period 1111–1200.

This chart shows very similar figures for the *Hypatian* and the *Laurentian Chronicles* (but we must remember that they are not fully independent of one another; they share a great deal of common material, especially for the first half and the middle of the twelfth century). By contrast, the *First Novgorodian Chronicle* in Figure 2 differs from the other two chronicles more than in Figure 1. Here the percentage of political and military events is smaller (in Fig. 1 none of the chronicles showed a percentage less than 50%), and the building of churches is much higher (20.1% instead of 10.8%). The main explanation for this difference is that in the twelfth century, the annals in Novgorod were kept systematically, and in almost every case the annalists were contemporaries with the events they described, as will be discussed further below. On the other hand, the construction of churches in Novgorod played an important role in the rivalry between local aristocratic clans, and was thus politically significant. In



all other respects the percentages in all three chronicles are similar, again demonstrating a certain uniformity of guidelines among the annalists who worked in various cities of Rus’.

My next task will be to try and analyse the distribution of the various types of notes in the annalistic texts. The diagrams below reflect the distribution of annalistic notes on four kinds of events: family events (births, deaths of women, weddings, *postrigi*), changes of ecclesiastical hierarchs, the building of churches, and natural phenomena and disasters. The main kinds of events, namely political and military, are excluded from the diagrams simply because such events are reported in almost each annual entry in every chronicle. Nor do I include the notes on civic building and ‘other’ events, for such remarks are rare and would not alter the results very much. Nor do I include changes of city magistrates, because they are characteristic of only one of the texts analysed. Thus, the idea is to map four kinds of notes – those which appear in all the texts studied, but which at the same time are distributed unevenly. This unevenness will be the main issue in the rest of the article.

Let us start with an analysis of the *First Novgorodian Chronicle*. It makes sense to study its text only for the years 1115 to 1330, the reasons being that firstly, the text of the Synodal manuscript before 1115 is extremely brief, and secondly, it is partly dependent on the *Primary Chronicle* (or rather on an earlier Kievan chronicle, the so-called *Initial Compilation*).<sup>21</sup> After 1330 the continuous text in the Synodal manuscript stops, although there are several additions on flyleaves, which cover only some of the years. As mentioned above, the Synodal manuscript also has a hiatus between 1272 and 1299, which in the diagram below will be filled in with information from the *Younger Version* of the *First Novgorodian Chronicle*.

The first diagram reflects the annals for the years 1115–1238, that is, before the Mongol invasion of Rus’; the second covers the annals for the years 1239–1330.

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<sup>21</sup> See Guimon 2012b, 615–641.

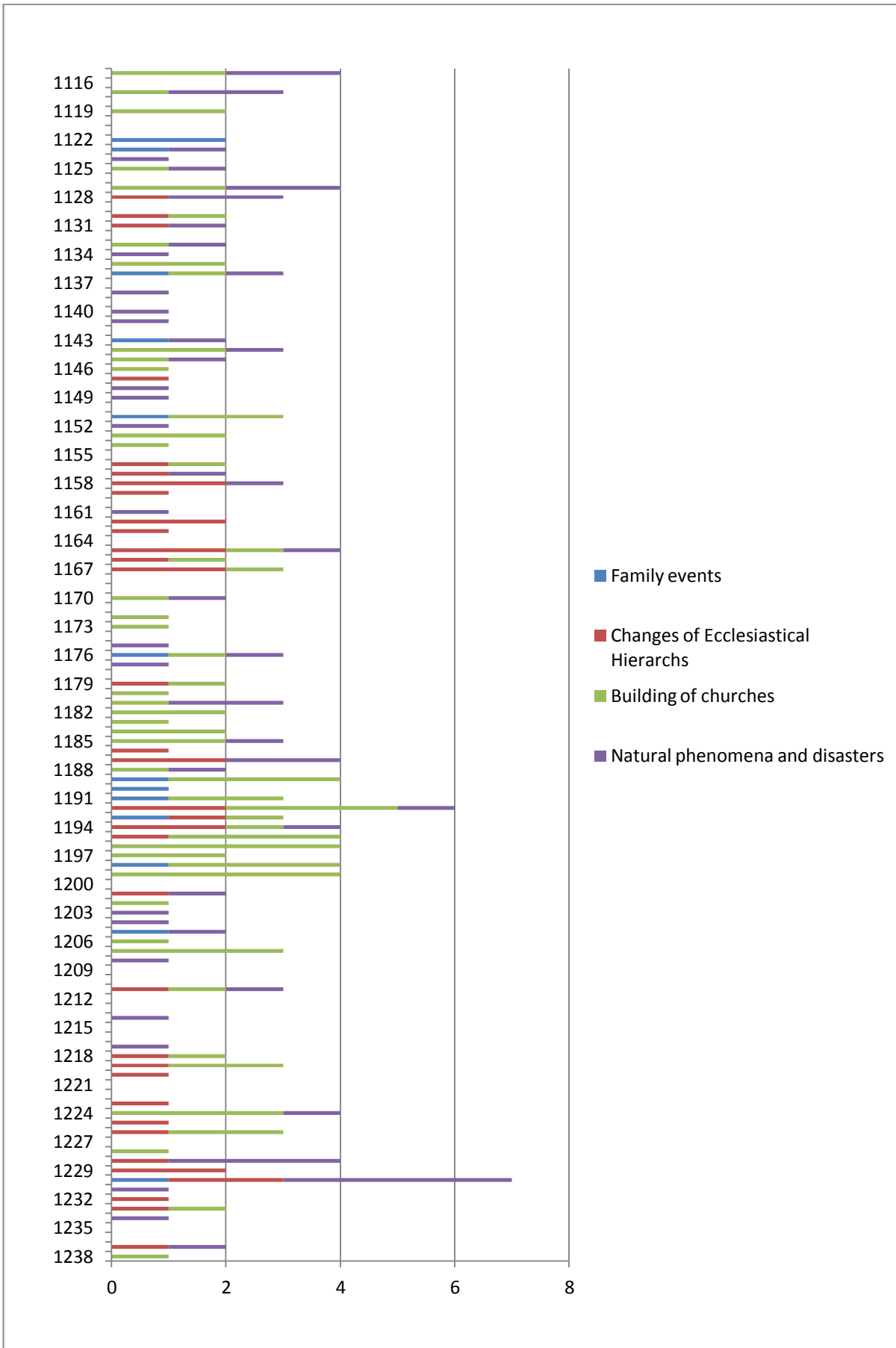


Fig. 3. Distribution of notes in the *First Novgorodian Chronicle*, 1115–1238.

This diagram shows no long breaks in reporting the kinds of ‘non-political’ events selected here (excluding family events, which are relatively rare in the Novgorodian annals, as already pointed out). This corresponds well to what we know of the annalistic writing in Novgorod in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Archiepiscopal annalists updated the annals year by year, and, although their work at different moments could be more or less regular, the annalists were always contemporaries with the events they described. Thus, if they had the idea that they should report certain kinds of events, they could easily do so. Some details here may be interesting (for instance, before 1133 the annalists reported construction only of stone churches, yet from that year on they took note of wooden churches as well).<sup>22</sup> In general, however, we see here a clear example of a chronicle kept year by year and with interest shown in all these kinds of events.

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<sup>22</sup> Guimon 2003, 340.

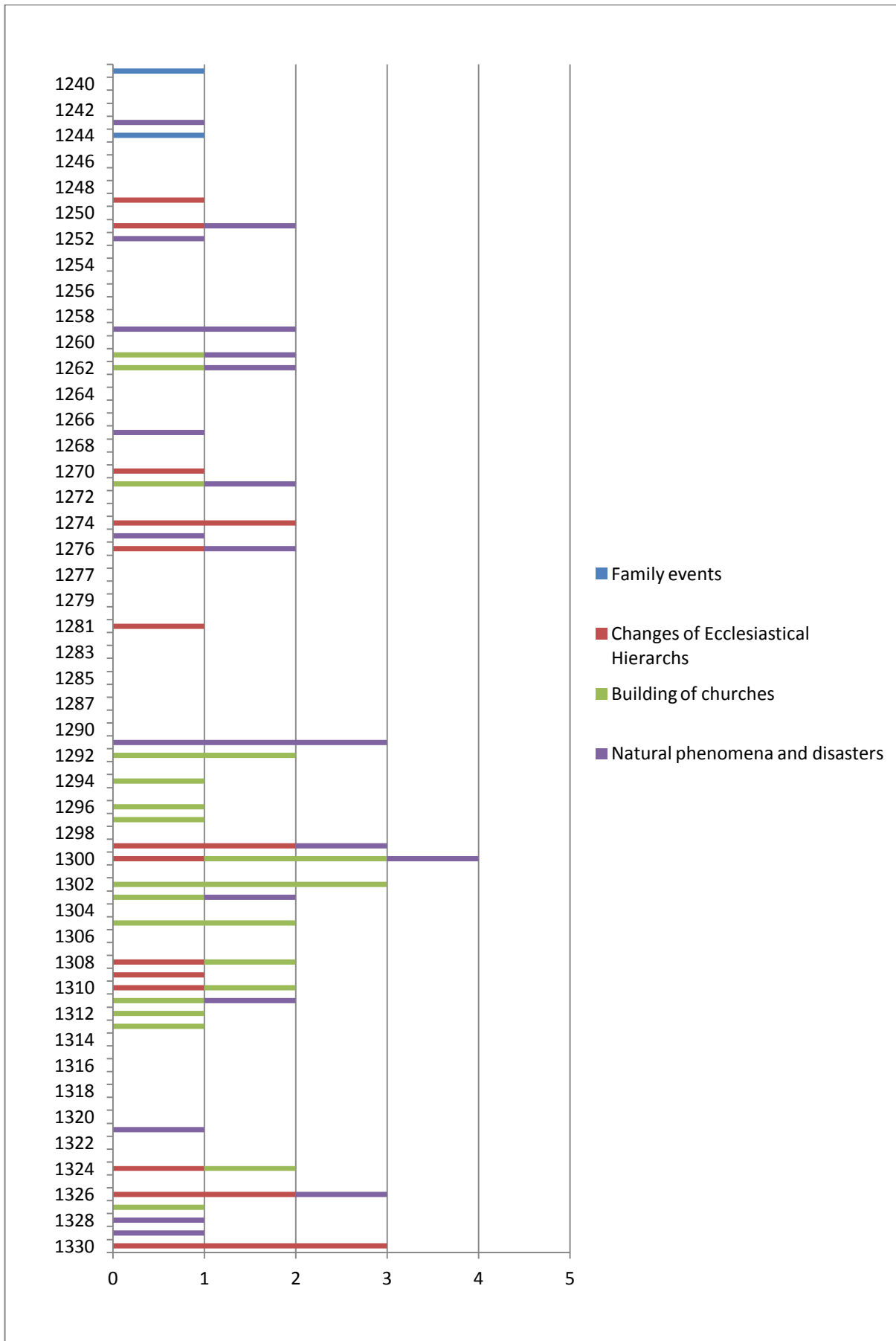


Fig. 4. Distribution of notes in the *First Novgorodian Chronicle*, 1240–1330.

Even though Novgorod itself was not invaded by the Mongols, the character of annalistic writing changed, as can be seen in the diagram above. Firstly, there was an obvious crisis in church construction

in Novgorod, which is reflected in the absence of remarks on church buildings between 1238 and 1261; from 1262, annotations about the buildings again appear, but up to the 1290s, such entries are far more seldom than before 1238. Secondly, we see long gaps in the reporting on any of these kinds of events, specifically in the years 1245–1248, 1253–1258, 1263–1266, 1277–1280, 1282–1290, 1314–1320. These breaks do not correspond to changes from one identifiable annalist to another.<sup>23</sup> One cannot conclude that these breaks always reflect long lapses in keeping the annals, because sometimes in these intervals there are precise dates for other kinds of events, which were probably recorded contemporaneously. It is impossible now to interpret these breaks in any simple way, but it seems clear that, after the Mongol invasion, the annalistic writing in Novgorod became less systematic, both in the periodicity of making new records and in the regularity of reporting ‘non-political’ events.

At first glance the picture of the twelfth century portrayed by the *Hypatian Chronicle* seems to be different.

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<sup>23</sup> Gippius 2006.

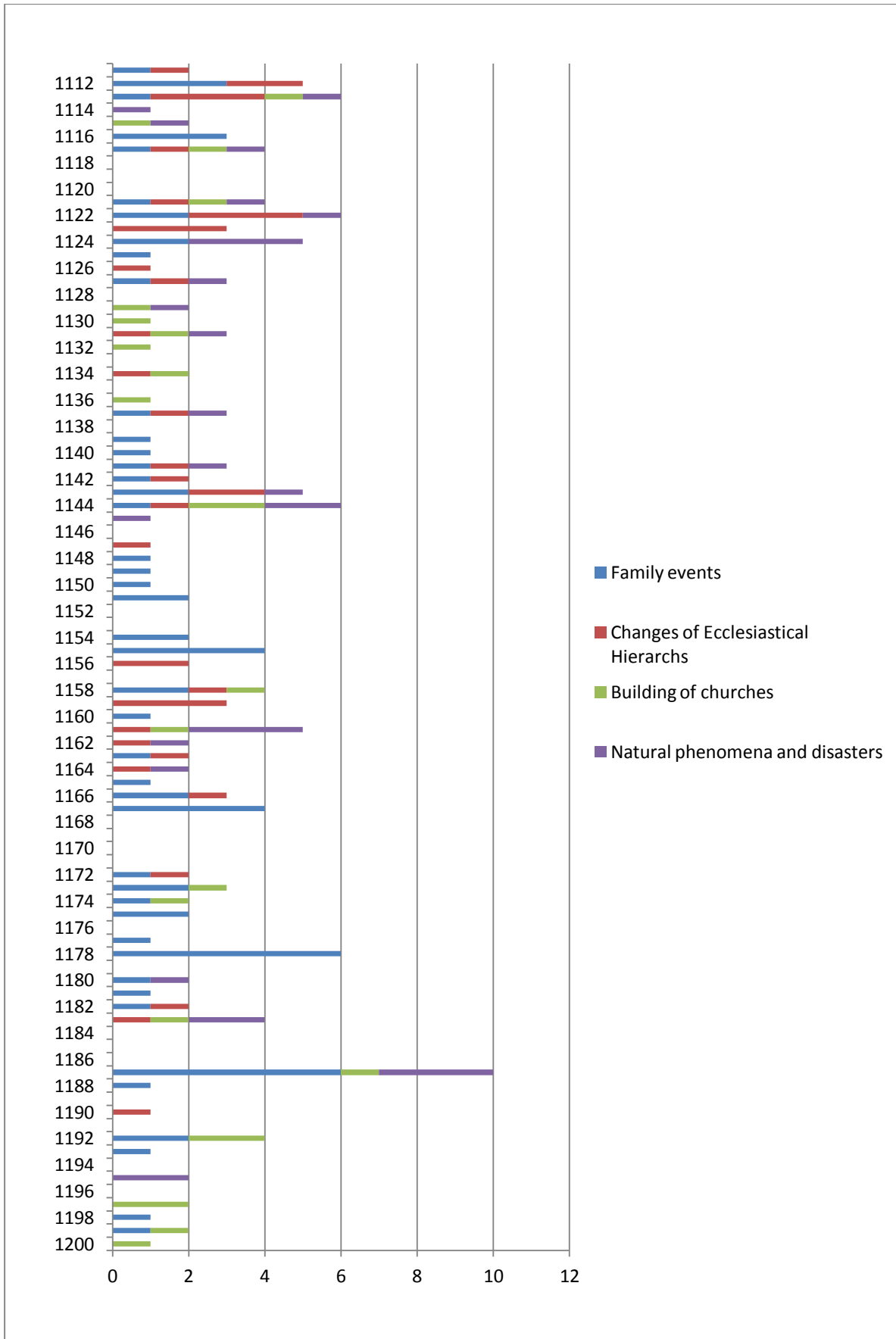


Fig. 5. Distribution of notes in the *Hypatian Chronicle*, 1110–1200.

However, on closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that in some groups of annals, the only ‘non-political’ events recorded are occurrences in princely families. To draw a diagram without the notes of this kind is, of course, an arbitrary operation, but it seems legitimate, firstly, because princely ‘family’ events

are the closest to ‘political and military’ ones (especially in the twelfth century, when the genealogical relations between the Rurikids became complicated and matrimonial links more significant), and, secondly, in some cases in the *Hypatian Chronicle* it is difficult to separate ‘family’ events from the surrounding narrations on political and military matters.<sup>24</sup>

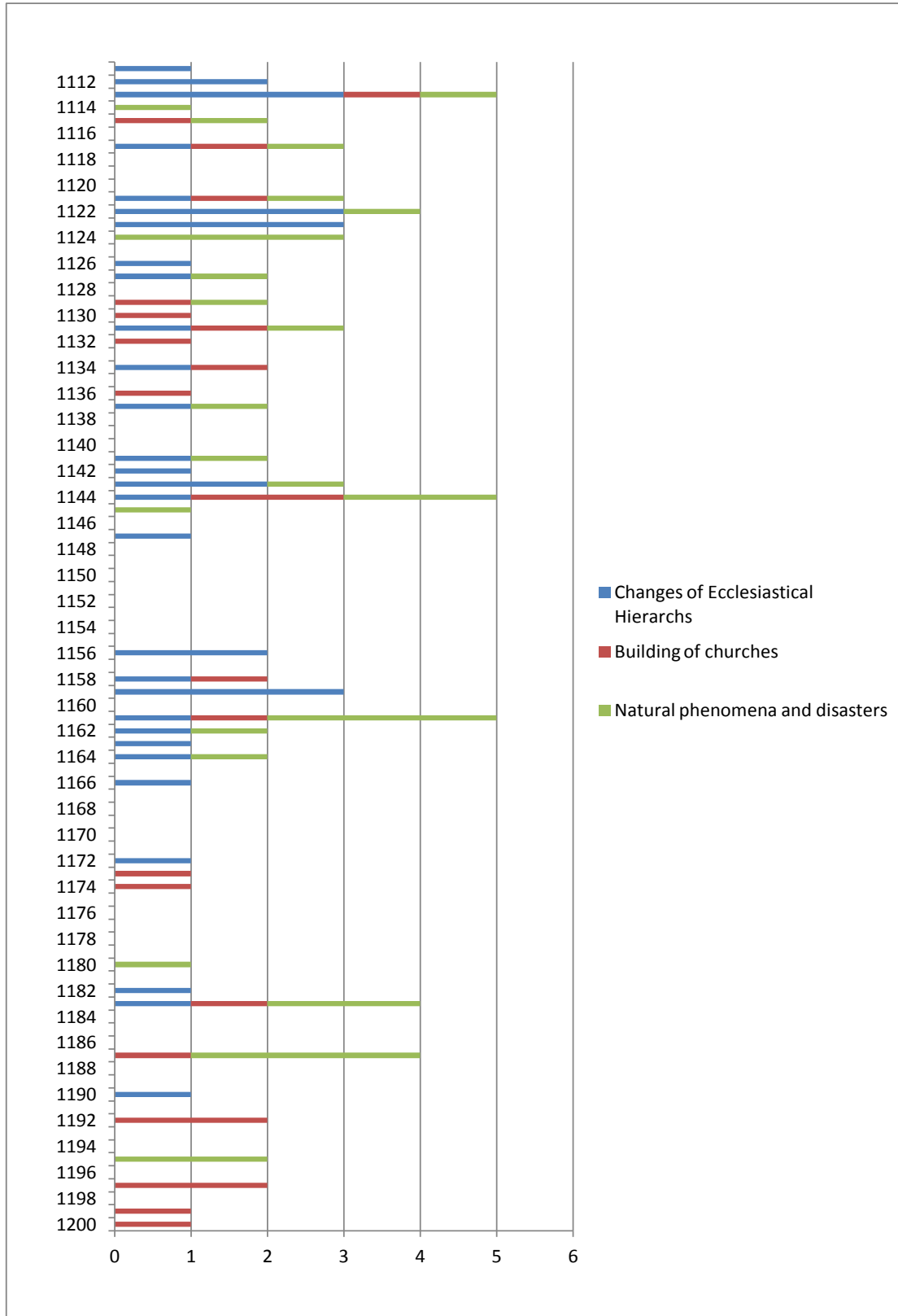


Fig. 6. Distribution of notes in the *Hypatian Chronicle*, 1110–1200 (without family events).

<sup>24</sup> Much more difficult than in the case of the other chronicles studied here.

Here we already see some gaps in reporting ‘non-political’ events. The longest gap comprises the text of the *Hypatian Chronicle* for 1148–1155. These annals are perhaps the most extended in all the early Rus’ chronicle writing. They include very detailed narrations on political events as well as some remarks on family events, but surprisingly, no information on changes of ecclesiastical rulers, the building of churches or natural events. There are several precise dates in these annals, although these are not very numerous. One can suppose that in this case we are dealing with a narration written retrospectively rather than year by year, and thus there is a plot, namely the political struggles of that time. On the other hand, some of the precise dates as well as some of the ‘family’ notes in this gap interval may go back to another source used by the Kievan compiler of ca 1200, namely the annals of Svyatoslav Olgovich.<sup>25</sup>

The textual history of the *Kievan Chronicle* is far from clear and needs further investigation.<sup>26</sup> Thus, I will not try to explain here the smaller intervals without ‘non-political’ events (annals for 1118–1120, 1138–1140, 1167–1171, 1175–1179, etc.). But in general, we see a certain inconsistency: in some areas the annals are full of ‘non-political notes’, while in others they lack any such notes with the exception of the ‘family’ ones. This practice corresponds to the general idea that scholars have about the *Kievan Chronicle*: it was a compilation made from several sources with many fragments written or thoroughly revised by the compiler himself.<sup>27</sup>

The *Laurentian Chronicle* gives a similar picture. It make sense to reflect its text in a diagram only from the year 1156, because from that time forth, the *Laurentian Chronicle* became more or less independent of the *Hypatian Chronicle*<sup>28</sup> and began to report on events in the north-east of Rus’. The following diagram represents the ‘non-political notes’ of the *Laurentian Chronicle* for the period 1156–1263 (before a long hiatus).

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<sup>25</sup> See Vilkul 2004.

<sup>26</sup> See the latest survey in Aristov 2011.

<sup>27</sup> On the work of this compiler, see Vilkul 2004 and Vilkul 2005.

<sup>28</sup> In fact, both chronicles go back to a common Kievan source, which is sometimes even better represented by the *Laurentian Chronicle*; see Vilkul 2005. On the other hand, after 1156 common material exists as well, but it is mostly north-eastern, not Kievan.



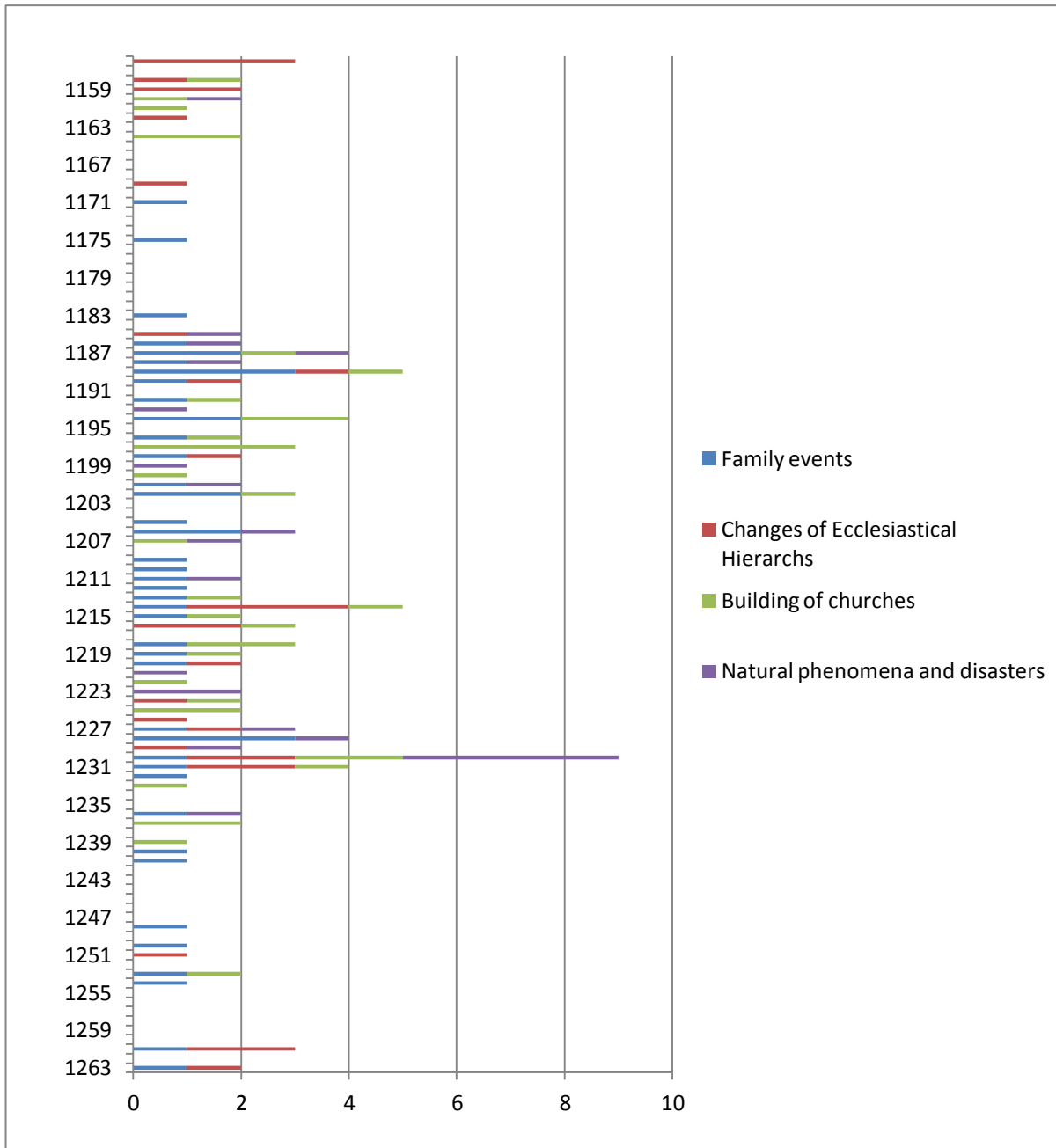


Fig. 7. Distribution of notes in the *Laurentian Chronicle*, 1156–1263.

On linguistic grounds Alan Timberlake (2000) suggested dividing the text of the *Laurentian Chronicle* into four segments during the years 1177–1203, each segment written by a different annalist. The borders of these segments correspond to the changes of bishops in Rostov, and thus a connection between bishops and annalistic writing in Rostov (as in Novgorod) can be established. One can suppose that a similar connection might exist after 1203 as well. At least two dividing lines seen on the diagram above correspond to changes of bishops. In 1184 Luka was ordained bishop of Rostov, and the *Laurentian Chronicle* has more than one ‘non-political’ note in almost every annual entry from 1185. In 1229 Bishop Cyril I abdicated his see; the new bishop (Cyril II) was ordained only in 1231. In the year 1229 the *Laurentian Chronicle* describes the trial of Cyril I, and the chronicler sympathised with the former bishop. Thus, one can presume that the annalist writing about Cyril I was active after

the bishop's abdication up until the arrival of the next bishop or even later. The segment in which 'non-political' events are often reported stops after 1233 and may be the end of the section written by this annalist. This hypothesis can be supported by the fact that notes on natural events are especially concentrated in the years 1185–1188 (which correspond to the episcopate of Luka, 1184–1189) and 1221–1230 (Cyril I, 1216/17–1229). The 'other' events are concentrated in the years 1218–1231, which also correspond to the episcopate of Cyril I.<sup>29</sup>

As in the *First Novgorodian Chronicle*, the *Laurentian Chronicle* includes a very small number of 'non-political' events after the Mongol invasion, consistent with the general scarcity of the annals for these years. After 1239 only a few births and weddings in the princely family are reported together with changes of bishops and the consecration of one church (1253). No natural phenomena are mentioned in this part of the chronicle.

By contrast, after the hiatus in 1294–1305 the *Laurentian Chronicle* demonstrates a picture similar to the twelfth-century Novgorodian annals: there are several notes on family events, on changes of church hierarchs and on natural events (but none on the construction of churches). Whatever is the exact history of this section, it is clear that the text here is based on a chronicle kept year by year.

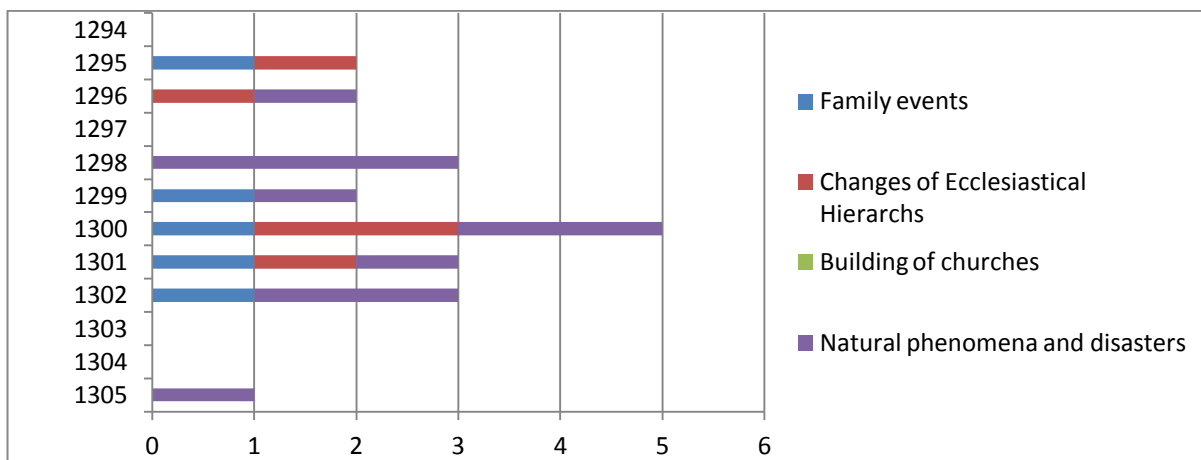


Fig. 8. Distribution of notes in the *Laurentian Chronicle*, 1294–1305.

Let us now turn to the *Primary Chronicle*. There is no sense in creating a similar diagram for all of its text. In its early section (before the Christianisation of Rus' in 988) there are, of course, no notes on changes of ecclesiastical rulers or church construction; there is only one entry on a natural event (about a comet in the year 911 taken from a Byzantine source); and there are several entries on matrimonial events (in the years 903, 977 and three times in 980), all based on oral tradition (with characteristic folkloric elements) and closely connected with the main 'plot', that is, the dynastic history of the

<sup>29</sup> See Guimon 2012c, 44–46.

Rurikids. In any case it is quite certain that there was no chronicle writing in Rus' before the conversion in 988, and thus this entirely retrospective text is based on oral tradition and foreign sources.

More interesting from our point of view are the sections of the *Primary Chronicle* from the late tenth, eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Various hypotheses have been advanced about the beginnings of historical writing in Rus', a phase variously dated at some point between the 990s and the 1060s; the first text has been reconstructed by scholars in various ways.<sup>30</sup> General scepticism about these reconstructions was expressed recently by Oleksiy Tolochko, but he also assumes that some brief historical records were made in Kiev much earlier than the *Primary Chronicle*, which was compiled in the 1110s.<sup>31</sup>

There is no room here to discuss these complicated questions. It seems to me significant that in the text of the *Primary Chronicle* for the first half of the eleventh century some of the yearly dates (although certainly not all of them) are quite reliable, as a comparison with foreign sources shows.<sup>32</sup> The first precise dates (month and day) appear in the *Primary Chronicle* for the years 1015, 1050 and 1054, and from the 1060s precise dates become frequent.<sup>33</sup> But the exact history of chronicle writing in the eleventh century is far from clear.<sup>34</sup> Any particular fragment of the eleventh-century section of the *Primary Chronicle* could appear either as an entry made by a contemporary or as part of a retrospective narration or even as a retrospective insertion into an existing text. All the more reason then to look at the distribution of notes on 'non-political' events in the *Primary Chronicle*.

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<sup>30</sup> See the general surveys in Guimon 2012a, 113–118, 211–213, and especially Gippius 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Tolochko 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Bakhrushin 1987, 17. I also refer to the paper by Alexandr V. Nazarenko, delivered in the symposium 'The Birth of Historical Writing in Ancient and Medieval Societies' (31 October – 1 November 2011), which has not yet been published.

<sup>33</sup> Aleshkovskij 1976, 143–144.

<sup>34</sup> See a summary of the present knowledge and discussions in Gippius 2012.

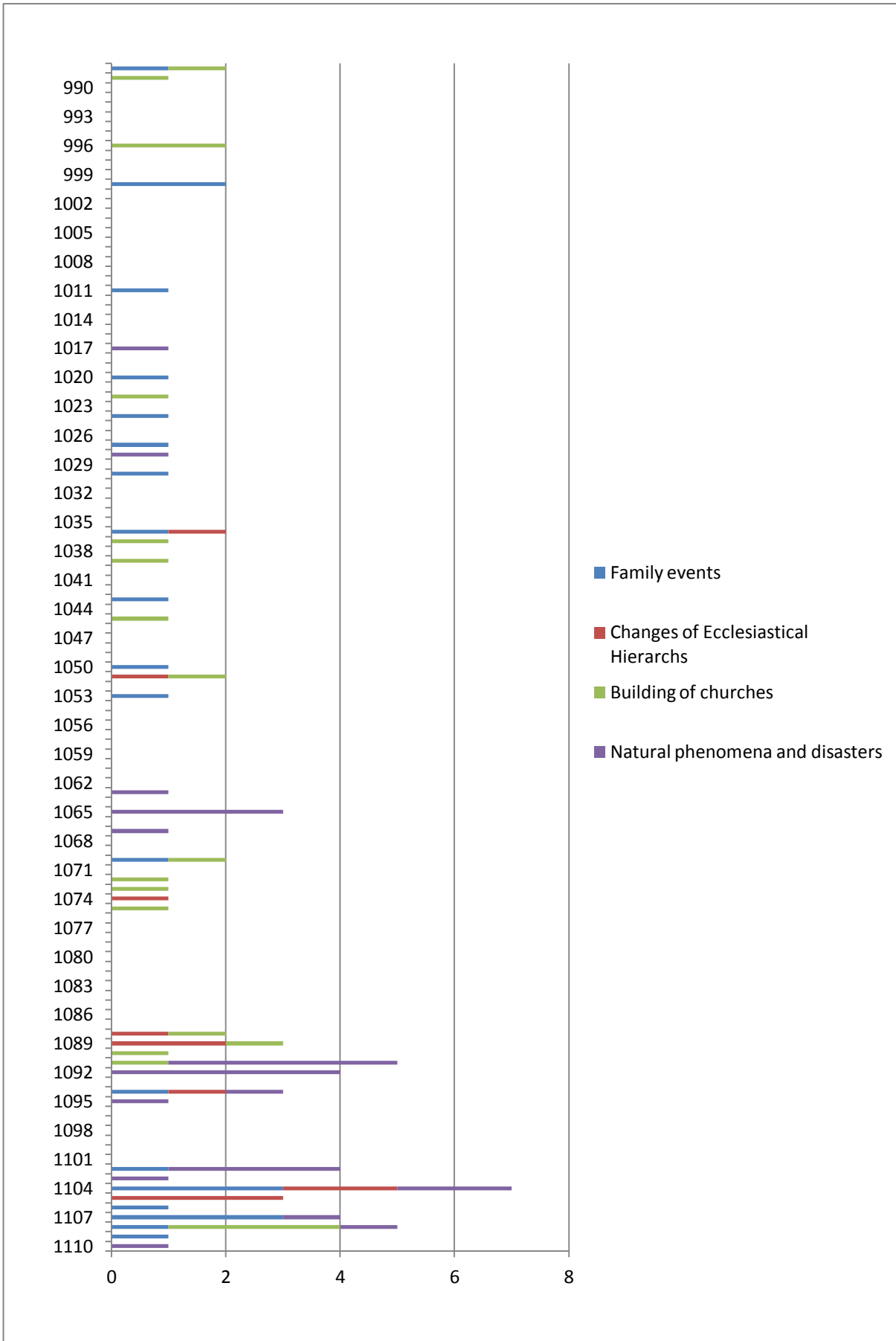


Fig. 9. Distribution of notes in the *Primary Chronicle*, 988–1110.

This diagram shows a certain difference between the text before and after ca 1060 (the time from which precise dates become frequent). Before that year we see no special areas of concentration of ‘non-political’ notes. While not numerous, they are distributed more or less evenly. Twelve annotations are dedicated to family events. Most of these belong to two series: 1) the brief entries in 1000–1011, dedicated to deaths of men and women<sup>35</sup> in the ruling family (these notes seem to go back to the original brief annals of the early eleventh century);<sup>36</sup> 2) notes on the birth of the sons of Yaroslav the Wise, which, as Tatyana Vilkul has shown, are distributed with an unnatural regularity: according to the *Primary Chronicle*, the sons were born every third year (1024, 1027, 1030, 1036<sup>37</sup>).<sup>38</sup> Nine annotations (or sometimes quite extended narrations) are dedicated to the construction of principal churches – an important part of the Christianisation of Rus’ as well as important achievements of Vladimir and Yaroslav (in the years 988, 989, 996, 1037 and 1045). Sometimes (in 989, 1022) church construction is mentioned in connection with military events. The narration on the foundation of the Kievan Caves Monastery (in 1051) is certainly a later insertion. Other notes on family events (988, 1020, 1043, 1050, 1053), the consecration of a church (1039), the appointment of a bishop of Novgorod (1036) and a metropolitan of Kiev (1051), a fire (1017) and a ‘serpent omen in the sky’ (1028) do not belong to any series. It seems likely that at least some of these entries were made by contemporaries, but the material is too sparse to be discussed in this way.

The section of the *Primary Chronicle* after ca 1060 leaves a different impression. Even if we exclude from this diagram the narrations that were certainly inserted retrospectively into a pre-existing annalistic text (on omens in 1065 and on the history of the Kievan Caves Monastery in 1074),<sup>39</sup> the general impression does not change. After the middle of the eleventh century we have three areas with concentrations on family events, ecclesiastical hierarchs, church construction and natural phenomena, namely the years 1063–1075, 1088–1095 and 1102–1110. In all three segments we find entries on all four types, while there are no remarks of these types outside these segments. This is very striking and must be explained.

35 Only women’s deaths (in 1000 [twice] and 1011) are reflected in the diagram, as it was decided to treat the deaths of men in princely families as ‘political’ events.

36 See Guimon & Gippius 2005, 185–186; Tolochko 2011, 214–216.

37 In 1033 there is an entry on the death of Yaroslav’s nephew, which probably belongs to the same pattern.

38 See Vilkul 2003.

39 See Timberlake 2001, 209, 212.

Alan Timberlake, analysing the dating formulas of the text of the *Primary Chronicle* for 1050–1110, suggested a preliminary division of this part of the text into five segments, each written by a different annalist.<sup>40</sup> Some of Timberlake’s boundaries correspond to our picture:

Timberlake’s segments	Areas of concentration of ‘non-political’ notes
1050–1060	–
1061–1071	1063–1075
1072–1076	
1077–1087	–
1088–1110	1088–1095
	–
	1102–1110

Fig. 10. The correspondence between Alan Timberlake’s segments and the areas of concentration of ‘non-political’ notes.

It must be said, however, that Timberlake’s boundary of 1087/1088 is based not only on the analysis of dating formulas (none of them appears in 1088–1090), but on the observation that these three annals include ‘a series of important punctual events’: the dedication of three churches, the deaths of two metropolitans and the death of an abbot. Timberlake concludes that these three annals belong to a person who started his work in 1091 and was responsible for the revision of the chronicle known as the *Initial Compilation*.<sup>41</sup> Thus, this is not a correspondence of data, but rather an interpretation of the same data.

If Timberlake’s division is correct, then two subsequent annalists could form one section of concentration on ‘non-political events’ (as in 1063–1075) or one annalist could be interested in these kinds of events in some groups of years and not interested in them in other years (as in 1088–1110). Thus, our diagram reveals not only the annalists’ personalities, but also something about the character of their work. We can suppose that in 1063–1075, 1088–1095 and 1102–1110 the annalists wrote about the present or the very recent past, and outside these zones they wrote about the more distant past. This would, however, again be an over-simplification. The intervals of 1077–1095 and 1096–1101 are full of precise dates, which probably means that these annals were contemporary with the events. Thus, it is impossible to interpret the diagram in any simple way. Nevertheless, one important observation must be made.

<sup>40</sup> Timberlake 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Timberlake 2005, 62.

The three segments in which ‘non-political’ notes are present correspond to three editorial events, which, according to Alexey Shakhmatov and his followers, were crucial points for chronicle writing in the Kievan Caves Monastery: *Nikon’s Compilation* of 1073,<sup>42</sup> the *Initial Compilation* (*Nachalny svod*) of 1095<sup>43</sup> and the *Primary Chronicle* itself of the 1110s. Although there are some doubts among scholars about these hypothetical compilations,<sup>44</sup> the existence of all three is confirmed by a solid argument.<sup>45</sup> Our diagram seems to support this general scheme: the bursts of interest in ‘non-political’ events correspond to these three editorial events. The simplest explanation seems to be that the persons who revised the chronicle in all three cases tended to record ‘non-political’ events that had taken place several years before the time of their work, as well as perhaps continuing to record them after a compilation had been completed.

This shows a certain instability in the annalists’ guidelines in the eleventh and the early twelfth centuries. For example, the person who, according to Timberlake,<sup>46</sup> wrote the annals in 1077–1087 clearly recorded contemporary events, as there are several precise dates in these entries. But all the events written down by this person were political and military. This annalist, one can assume, had no interest in recording the changes of ecclesiastical rulers or natural events. More or less the same can be said for the annals in the years 1096–1101. Such variability in the annalists’ guidelines contrasts with the situation later, especially in Novgorod in the twelfth century.

One can conclude that perhaps the Kievan compilers of the 1070s, 1090s and 1110s developed the guidelines for later annalists, giving them an idea of what kinds of events were worth mentioning in a chronicle. These guidelines were observed by many of the annalists who dealt with the present or recent past (especially in Novgorod before the Mongol invasion, but also in Kiev during some parts of the twelfth century, in Rostov in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, in Tver ca 1300). On the other hand, some of the annalists probably had narrower interests, even if they recorded contemporary events, and thus reported fewer ‘non-political’ occurrences (as in Novgorod and Rostov after the Mongol invasion). Certainly, those chroniclers who described the distant past or expanded pre-existing texts (as did the Kievan compiler of ca 1200) dealt mostly with ‘political and military’ events.

42 According to Savva Mikheev, 1078. See Mikheev 2011, 123–129.

43 According to Timberlake and Gippius, the early 1090s. See Timberlake 2001, 208; Gippius 2012, 61.

44 See, for example, Timberlake 2005, 68–69, on *Nikon’s Compilation*, and Tolochko 2011.

45 See Shakhmatov 2002–2003; Timberlake 2001, 203–212 (for the *Initial Compilation*); Mikheev 2011; Gippius 2012.

46 Timberlake 2005, 59–60.

To summarise, the central subject of the annals is concerned with changes of rulers, political conflicts, military campaigns, and (especially in Novgorod) the relations between the city community and the princes. Notes on princely deaths as well as on other dynastic events also played an important role. But the purposes of the annals certainly were not purely political.<sup>47</sup> Changes of ecclesiastical rulers, the building of churches, natural phenomena (some – if not all – of which were regarded as omens), as well as some other kinds of events were also described. At least the former three groups of annotations are characteristic of all four texts analysed in this article. The annotations are distributed unevenly, but it seems now that in most cases such notes became numerous when the scribes began recording the events at the time they took place. Thus, they all were substantial for the annalistic genre, and in many cases (though not in all) the absence of such notes must be explained in terms of retrospective ignorance, and not in terms of lack of interest.

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<sup>47</sup> Here is not the place to speculate on the functions of the annalistic genre in Rus'. For a review of possible or suggested answers, see Guimon 2012d. See also Danilevskiy 2004 (a hypothesis of eschatological purposes of the annals).



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