Three chamber graves at Gnioszdovo

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Cremation has been regarded as the prevailing burial rite at Gnioszdovo, but since 1960 an increasing number of inhumations in pits under mounds have been found (due to modern excavation methods). Some of the pits are large and contained graves in wooden chambers. Three chamber graves are discussed in this article. All three are Scandinavian graves from the 970’s (acc. to linds and dendrodates). Two contained each a woman in a sitting position, and one contained a rich male grave with a horse. Costumes and burial rites show that the dead were Scandinavian. The main bulk of the Scandinavian finds at Gnioszdovo point to Middle Sweden, but the materials discussed here point to Denmark and Southern Norway.

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In archaeological literature one can still see the opinion that cremation was absolutely prevailing at Gnioszdovo. (This spelling is closer to the Russian pronunciation than the variant Gnezdovo. The same applies to Timeriova. — The scholarly transliteration is Gnězdovo, Timeřévo, Puškina Kirpičnikov, Nedošivina, Šestovica, Černigov [ISO/R9 norm]. Editor’s comm.) Indeed, for a long time only remains of cremations were found during the excavations of the mounds. Exceptions were rare and surprised archaeologists, many of whom considered them to be outside the general chronological limits of Gnioszdovo.

However, from 1960 the number of inhumations began to increase noticeably, and it became possible to interpret some formerly unidentified pits under the mounds as burial pits. In recent years the number of burial pits has grown and they now number around 85. Even if more than 1100 mounds were excavated by 1986, the number of studied inhumations is considerable and adds a new element to the general picture of Gnioszdovo.

The inhumations at Gnioszdovo were found thanks to modern excavation methods where the whole mound was thoroughly investigated.

The narrow trenches of the old excavations could not include the complete burial pits, which therefore were not discovered. Modern re-excavations of mounds with traces of old excavations, revealed pits unnoticed before. As a survival of the cremation ritual, a light bonfire imitating a funeral pyre was burnt on the ground prepared for the mound, and only afterwards was the burial pit dug. This circumstance is probably the reason for the mistakes in the research: as the archaeologists reached the level of the pyre without finding any objects in it, they stopped digging and regarded the mound as a cenotaph. Excavation trenches dug only down to the level of the pyre, and occasionally a bit into the filling of the burial pit were sometimes traced in the profiles of the mounds during modern excavations.

On many of the Gnioszdovo mounds there are cavities that for a long time were interpreted as traces of carelessly filled pits from old excavations. Examinations from the last decade have shown that in many cases it is not so: the cavities are a result of the mound falling in after the rotting of the roof on the burial pit. Small mounds often not more than half a meter high and “ruined” by sunken pits, were usually not...
excavated since they were regarded as not very promising. But the burial pits were often found exactly under those unpretentious mounds.

Some pits stand out because of their size: 2.5 × 3.75 m and even 4.5 × 4.5 m. Along the walls of these big pits traces of wooden facing were occasionally found, and sometimes remains of the floor and the roof. There is no doubt that these are burial chambers, a previously totally unknown burial ritual at Gnioskovo, a ritual which one by the way might have supposed because of some objects which have not been on the pyre: a leather bridle with mounts, oval brooches with traces of gilding, objects of thin bronze or silver threads not damaged by the fire, etc. But it became possible to talk with certainty about chambers at Gnioskovo only after they were discovered by excavations (Avdusin 1976 pp. 122–123).

The bad preservation of organic material at Gnioskovo hindered the discovery of inhumations including those in chambers. In most of the burial pits no skeletons were found: they were not preserved. Also wood and bone are preserved only in exceptional cases, and therefore there are practically speaking no traces of coffins. It was impossible to discover coffins by the help of the distribution of the rivets as did A. S. Gräslund (1981) in Birka: the rivets in the Gnioskovo inhumations were poorly preserved as also, by the way, objects of non-ferrous metals. The preserved metal objects are very corroded. The sandy soil of Gnioskovo accounts for this. It is well ventilated, fine sand, and the air which came into the grave caused the decay of organic objects and corrosion of metal ones.

According to the literature, the inhumations found during earlier excavations at Gnioskovo, were situated on the outskirts of the cemetery. It is now proven that some mounds with burial pits, among them with chambers, were situated in the middle of the Central and the Dniepr mound groups (Avdusin 1977; Avdusin & Puškina 1982 pp. 68–80). The mounds around them have also been excavated and they contained the usual Gnioskovo graves: cremations with grave goods, without grave goods, and cenotaphs. Already this fact lets us suppose that the mounds with burial pits including those with chambers and mounds with cremations are contemporary. This supports the view which we have suggested earlier, that the Gnioskovo cemetery was used for a short period of time and that there are no indications of any evolution of the burial rituals.

The chambers in our opinion, have the following characteristics:

The first is the traces of wooden facing along the walls, sometimes together with a wooden roof and in some cases with a wooden floor.

The second characteristic is the size. If the usual inhumations are found in pits measuring 190 × 90 cm, 230 × 85 cm or even 280 × 120 cm, then the chambers are usually considerably larger: 225 × 275 cm, 320 × 150 cm etc.

That is why some pits under mounds can be classified as chambers, even if the facing of the walls, the bones, and the grave goods are not preserved. Such are for example pits measuring 275 × 175 cm, 345 × 210 cm. Some pits with sizes close to these constitute an intermediate variant which characterize them more as chambers, although there is no certainty about it. Thus, a pit 240 cm long, and 170 cm wide contained only the skeleton of a horse, while the master probably was buried in the neighboring mound which is analogous in structure and size. The other pit measuring 280 × 120 cm contained only a human skeleton. Similar mounds seemingly have to be regarded as an intermediate group.

Mounds covering two contemporary burial pits, either side by side or in a row are not classified as chamber mounds. No couples' burials have been found in chambers.

The third characteristic of the chambers is not external, constructional, but internal, ritual. The chambers contain only inhumations, and the bodies can be extended, twisted on the back or on the side, or sitting. Aside from the human skeleton, there is sometimes also a horse skeleton in the chambers. Between them is a pile of horse furniture and sometimes even a saddle. The chamber ritual for male graves contain weapons either by the skeleton or thrust into the wall.

According to these criteria 13 burials can be regarded as chambers. In the Central group there are 10 mounds: Nos. 66, 72, 76, 191, 196,
203, 212, 255, 301, 306. In the Dnepr group there are 2 mounds: Nos. 4, 13 and in the Ol'šanskaja group — 1 mound: No. 28.

As mentioned, the chambers were nearly always dug after the burning of the ritual fire. This characteristic is clearly seen in the Dnepr group, where the soil makes it easier to see the stratigraphy than in the Lesnaja (Forest) or Central groups. Remains of constructions inside the buried pits were found in 7 out of 85 inhumations. Usually the remains of wood are very insignificant, as areas of rotten wood or pieces of charred planks, which does not make it possible to form an idea about the construction of the building. The mounds described below are rare exceptions.

In 1982 several mounds were excavated on the southern part of the Central group. In two of them were found the remains of wooden constructions which were well enough preserved to allow details of their construction to be seen. Neither of the mounds stood out among the other ones because of their sizes: 0.5 m high, 9—9.5 m wide. On the top of them were cavities which were regarded as traces of earlier excavations or plundering. Under the mounds, on the original surface, were seen slight traces of fires, cut through by rectangular burial pits, oriented along the cardinal points.

The pit in mound C–301 measured 3 x 3 m, 0.8 m deep from the original subsoil surface (Fig. 1). In the pit were found remains of a notch-built log framework measuring 2.1 x 2.1 m. The framework was placed on the bottom of the pit and was centered to the north eastern corner so that there was an empty space of about 0.15—0.75 m between the walls of the pit and the framework. Besides, the framework was askew in relation to the axes of the pit. A solid layer of decayed wood, 0.08—0.1 m wide, could be traced about 0.25—0.3 m high where the walls were. One can suppose that originally the framework had been higher, because there were traces of single spots of decayed wood in the filling of the pit. The framework was covered by a roof, obviously made of planks 0.1—0.2 m wide and 0.02—0.03 m thick lying north-south, i.e. along the axis of the chamber. The remains of this layer fell into the framework and were seen as distinct stripes of decayed wood. In the north-western corner the roof seemed to protrude a little over the framework. The floor was better preserved and was uncovered over the whole area. It consisted of planks 0.05 m thick and 0.15—0.25 m wide and was oriented in the same direction.

On the floor there were well preserved pieces of birch bark, especially in the northern part. Almost in the middle there were spread in disorder 50 beads of golden and silver-glass, yellow and ribbed glass beads, a cross-shaped pendant with punched ornamentation (Fig. 4: 1, 2), and a fragment of an equal-armed bronze brooch. To the south-west of these, by the wall of the framework, were iron hoops and a handle of wooden bucket shaped like a truncated cone, lying on its side, and a small thrown clay vessel with line ornamentations (Fig. 4: 3). In the south-east corner there were remnants of a round birch bark box with a bundle of different textiles, in which lay small fragments of an oval bronze brooch (Fig. 4: 4), weak traces of a little wooden cup. By the side of it stood two wax candles (Fig. 4: 5), protruding 5 cm above the roof. Nine more thin candles and fragments of them were found in different places in the eastern part of the framework. Most of the candles have slightly melted edges. In the south-west corner and along the southern wall were some unidentified small bones.

The pit in mound C–306 measured 2.3 x 2.85 m and was 0.78—0.8 m deep from the surface of the subsoil (Fig. 2). In the pit there were the remains of a wooden chamber in post construction, measuring 2 x 2.6 m between the corner posts. Along the walls of the pit, a height of up to 0.4 m, was a layer of rotten wood, 0.05—0.1 m thick. To judge from the fact that the rotten wood was evenly distributed along the walls of the pit, and bent around the posts, the walls of the burial construction consisted of a row of horizontal planks or logs squeezed between the posts and the subsoil walls of the pit. The imprints of the wooden facing were clearly visible on the surface of the subsoil. The corner post was preserved 0.15—0.2 m above the floor, had a diameter of ca. 0.25 m, and the post holes were 0.3—0.4 m deep. The ends of the posts turned out to have different shapes: three of them were blunt and one was axed into a cone.
As in the first case one can suppose that the burial chamber was higher than the height of the preserved wooden planks. The roof and the floor were traced. The upper layer which probably was the remains of the roof, was badly preserved and consisted mainly of a thin layer of rotten wood found as spots and belts of the cross-bearing beams. The lower cover, probably the floor, consisted of tightly laid planks 0.03 m thick and 0.15–0.3 m wide. The flooring covered the whole bottom chamber on the subsoil of the pit. It was covered with a thin layer of light-grey clay and birch bark.

One more detail of the construction of the chamber must be mentioned, which is fairly well seen: 0.9 m from and parallel with the western wall there was a plank set on its edge, as if separating the remains of the burial from the rest of the construction.

In the western part of the chamber, on the floor, were found fragments of two double-shell ed brooches of gilt bronze of type JP 51 b (?). Under them were preserved small fragments of silk and pieces of the shoulder-straps of the skirt (Fig. 4:9). A little further to the south there were a thrown clay vessel with wave ornamentation.

Fig. 1. The pit under mound C-301 with remains of a notch-built log framework with roof and floor of planks. — Gropen under gravhaug C-301 med rester av en laftet tømmer-ramme med tak og gulv av planker.
tion and a lathed-turned wooden cup with traces of silver mounts along the brim (Fig. 4: 10, 11). On the northern half of the floor was found a transparent glass bead (Fig. 4: 12). Besides, mainly in the eastern part of the chamber there were 3 large and 9 thin wax candles and fragments of them. One of the candles had melted completely into a wax lump with the imprint of the wick (Fig. 4: 6–8). Elsewhere drops of wax were found on the floor.

The third mound was situated on the outskirts of the Dnepr group, 1.8–1.5 km from the Central group. It was excavated in 1984. The mound which was disfigured, was 11–11.5 m wide, 0.9 m high. There was no clearly visible cavity in the top of it.

Under the mound, on the subsoil, there was an intensive oval fire with traces of criss-cross laying of the fire, oriented towards the parts of the world. The center of the fire was cut through by a rectangular burial pit measuring 3.5 × 3.7 m, 0.95–1 m deep from the surface of the subsoil. In the pit were found remnants of a burial chamber in post construction. The size
measured between the corner posts was 2.5 x 2.5 m, which is the same as the bottom of the pit. 30—40 cm long untrimmed pine posts were preserved, projecting a little above the top of the post holes (Fig. 3).

Only some areas of rotten wood and some nearly fully rotten planks of the roof and the floor were preserved. The planks of the roof obviously lay east-west. Judging by the sizes and shape of the area of rotten wood on the bottom of the pit, the floor was made of planks, 0.1—0.15 m wide, in the same direction and on two perpendicular crossbeams. In the western end of the pit were found remnants of birch bark on the floor level. The bottom of the pit was daubed with a greyblue clay. On the floor of the burial chamber was found a large number of items from a male burial. Along the western wall lay — in the south-western corner — a long grey slate whetstone (Fig. 6:12), two barrel-shaped iron weights covered with bronze (Fig. 6:4, 5), a crampon with two spikes (Fig. 6:16), a fragment of a thin silver disc. Almost in the middle and not far from the wall — a crushed, small thrown clay vessel with linear-wavy ornamentation (Fig. 6:18) and the handle of a bucket which obviously was hollowed out of one piece of wood, and not made of staves, because there were no hoops with the handle, as usually fastened it to the bucket. Closer to the wall lay: an iron bit with two links (Fig. 5:4), an iron clasp from the bridle (Fig. 6:13), fragments of a second clasp, fragments of one bronze and one iron mount. Further to the north and north-west from these objects were found 5 arrow-heads (Fig. 6:1), an iron clasp, 8 cast
Fig. 4. The finds from grave C-301: nos. 1–5, and from grave C-306: nos. 6–12. — Funnene fra grav C-301: nr. 1–5, og fra grav C-306: nr. 6–12.

bronze buttons (Fig. 6: 2) and a fragment of textile. In the north-west corner a lancet-shaped spear-head stood with the point upwards (Fig. 5: 1; type JP E, or A. N. Kirpičnikov type I). Almost in the middle of the chamber were two stirrups with rounded step (A. N. Kirpičnikov type I; Fig. 5: 6), and a sword with a semicircular pommel (type JP V; Fig. 5: 2). On the lower part of the blade lay a horseshoe-shaped bronze brooch with faceted heads and remains of textile. To the left of the sword was a cast silver pendant cross with punched ornamentation (Fig. 6: 3), remains of the upper chest part of a caftan which consisted of two close lines of narrow silk ribbon and 24 bronze buttons (Fig. 6: 2). The caftan was tightly buttoned. A little to the east of the low rim of the fastening of the caftan, evidently at the belt, there was a little yellow-grey slate whetstone (Fig. 6: 11), a strike-a-light (Fig. 6: 15) with a piece of flint and two iron rings. These objects lay in a dark-brown, fine, spot of rotten material measuring 18×19 cm. Inside the area there were 7 fragmented bronze badges from a belt purse (Fig. 6: 6–9), a piece of cloth, and some hazel nuts. In the south-eastern corner of the pit were found the remains of a horse’s skull with two iron rings with small rods (Fig. 5: 8) and one more iron ring.

The analysis of the burial equipment give reason to suppose that in the first two cases women were buried in a sitting position. As in most cases of this type of burial the vessels were placed to the right of the deceased, and the burial was probably oriented towards the west. The ethnic identity can fairly easily be defined by the set of brooches and details of the dress — a skirt with hinges, a goffered linen shirt and a dress of the tunica type. This costume is characteristic for Scandinavia from the IX to the beginning of the XI centuries (Hägg 1981). — The third mound contained a man, evidently buried with a horse or part of a horse.
Fig. 5. Finds from the male grave Dn-4. — Funn fra mannsgraven Dn-4.
On the whole the goods and ritual in all three burials are fairly well known at Gniodzovo and other burial sites (Šestovitsa, Timeriovo, Kiev), except for some details which we will discuss more closely. The grave goods which enable us to date the graves have to be studied in detail.

Both oval brooches in mound C-306 belong to the type JP 51b, which is datable to the second quarter-middle of the X century. (Petersen 1928 pp. 59—67). The necklace from mound C-301 consisted of golden and silver glass beads, yellow beads and large ribbed beads, a combination which is characteristic for the second half of the X century. The silver pendant crosses from our mounds add to the material recently described in an article by N. G. Nedosivina. The one from mound C-301 is cut out of a thin silver disc, the other, from mound Dn-4, is cast. Both crosses are decorated with punched ornaments, but it looks unfinished on the pendant from the male burial. N. G. Nedosivina dates analogous finds mainly to the second half of the X century, partly to the beginning of the XI century. (Nedosivina 1983 pp. 222—225).

The spearhead and the sword are especially interesting in the male burial. Based on the Old Russian material A. N. Kirpičnikov (1966a p. 32) dates the lancet-shaped spearheads without ornamentation on the socket to the X century. According to Jan Petersen (1919 pp. 154—156) this type was in existence in the end of the VIII—first half of the IX century, but survived to the end of the IX century.

Swords with semicircular pommel and hilts decorated with a complicated pattern of alternative silver and bronze threads, belong to type JP V. Finds of such swords in Rus’ are dated to the X century (Kirpičnikov 1966b pp. 9—12) while in Scandinavia they existed in the first half of that century. (Petersen 1919 pp. 26—28).

Battle axes of type II are dated to the X—beginning of the XI century by A. N. Kirpičnikov (1966a p. 35). The strong corrosion and fragmentary state of preservation make it impossible to identify the construction and type of the bits. Stirrups with rounded step of type I existed in Eastern Europe from 900 to 1000 A.D. (Kirpičnikov 1973 p. 47).

Two rhombic arrowheads were singled out among the rusty arrows. It should be noted that all types of ornaments, every-day items and weapons from the three burials under discussion, are represented among the finds from earlier excavations at Gniodzovo.

All three pottery vessels belong to types of vessels which constitute a series of finds in mounds with cremations. It was unexpected to find a wooden cup, a birch bark box, textiles, and candles. Some special conditions in the soil which filled the pit, preserved the organic material in these mounds.

The wooden cup in mound C-306 was lathe-turned and had rounded shape. The rim was decorated with thin silver staples. Such bronze bindings are known in cremations at Gniodzovo, but in these cases the form of the vessels remains unknown. Several lathe-turned wooden vessels of a similar shape with bronze staples have been found in Birka burials (Arbman 1943 Taf. 214:1, 215:1a-c; Lindeberg 1984 pp. 242—244).

The remains of the birch-bark boxes consisted of two discs 27 cm in diameter. Along the rim were small holes. This shows that the walls of the box — probably of cloth — were sewn to it. In the bundle of cloth found between the birch bark discs, were the remains of a red gold-worked silk garment, embroidered with tapes of smooth and denser silk and of a goffered linen shirt. An oval bronze brooch was wrapped in the garment. Aside from this, fragments of brown, coarse, woolen cloth and a piece sewn of two ribbons of untinctured blue linen — a fragment of a skirt, and some fragments of silk ribbons of different width were found. The fragments of silk are of Spanish and Byzantine origin. (We would like to thank M. V. Fehner for identifying the textiles and valuable consultations.)

The remains of the caftan from mound Dn-4 consists of two lines rows of narrow silk ribbon forming a kind of breast-plate 36 cm long. Clothes of similar cut are known from pictures and are reflected in archaeological materials.

Finds of candles are very rare. At present there are only three analogies in Old Rus’ material. A conic candle has been found on the level of the roof of a rich couple’s grave 100 at Timeriovo. Among the finds were Arabic coins from 960—970 A.D., which dated the burial
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Fig. 6. Finds from the male grave Dn-4. — Funn fra mansgraven Dn-4.


A piece of wax found on the edge of the pit of a couple’s burial with a horse from Šestovitsa. (Blief’dt 1977 pp. 138—142). Among the finds was a sword of type JP W and a lancet-shaped spearhead, some stirrups, arrows, a belt purse, a bone facing from the bow of a saddle in Jelling style etc. On the whole these two complexes are contemporary with those from Gniozdovo and belong to the middle and second half of the X century. A crudely made candle found in one of the mounds at the river Ol’sa near the river Berezina belongs to a later period. The candle stood in a clay vessel which stood at the feet of the deceased on the subsoil in the mortuary house (Zavitnevič 1892 p. 140). Outside Eastern Europe there are a few finds of candles and pieces of wax in contemporary burials in Jutland and Southern Norway. There are no such finds in Sweden.
A 58 cm long candle was found on the roof of the post construction burial chamber in Bjerringhøj in Mammen. Another small piece of wax was found inside it. The burial is dated to the end of the X century (Brøndsted 1936 pp. 106–107).

A fragment of wax candle was found on the top of the roof of the chamber in the northern mound at Jelling. The grave in it is dated to the middle of the X century (Brøndsted 1936 pp. 119–120, Roesdahl 1974 pp. 208–223). Rich silk textiles were also found in these graves.

Wax and candles have been found in some Norwegians burials, amongst which there are also boat burials. All authors of publications of Scandinavian finds remark that they are rare and belong to burials from the upper social level and point out that the burials are rich (Shetelig 1912 pp. 222–223). — It is interesting that the size and the method of production of the Gniodovo candles are the same as of the find in Mammen — 2.5–3 cm wide, rolled up of uneven wax tapes. (Worsae 1869 Pl. 7:6).

Where it has been possible to determine clearly enough the sizes and construction of the Gniodovo chambers, they fit completely into the picture based on the material from other cemeteries from the X and the beginning of the XI century. The sizes of the chambers in the Šestovitsa mounds vary from 5.5×5.5×1.4 m to 2.5×1×0.8 m; two chambers at Timeriovo measured 5.2×3.75×0.3 m and 2.9×1.9×0.6 m; in Černigov: 5–4.6×3.8–3.1×1.7 m. Wooden constructions in the form of coffins in notch construction are found in Kiev and Černigov, of post construction in Šestovitsa and Kiev.

The closest analogies to the chamber burial from the Dnepr group is to be found in the Šestovitsa material: here, as a rule, the remains of the horse were placed across the pit near the feet of the deceased. In two such cases (mound XXVIII 1925 and XII 1925) there were swords and riding horse harness, and at the head of the deceased lay a spearhead, quivers with arrows, and not far away a bucket or a thrown pottery vessel (Blifeldt 1977 pp. 175–177, 188–189). However, unlike Gniodovo, the horse in the Šestovitsa mounds were usually placed on a subsoil bench. Apart from mound Dn-4 at Gniodovo two chambers with male burials in the Central group contained remains of a horse, — in these cases the horse was placed at the side of the master, but also on the bottom of the pit (Avdusin & Puškina 1976; Avdusin, Kamencaja & Puškina 1978).

From Šestovitsa comes also a find of a birch-bark box with sides and with a bundle of woman’s clothes, evidently laid as a ”gift” in the couple’s burial (Blifeldt 1977 — mound 26 [1946] and mound 98).

The custom of burying the dead in a sitting position has already been observed at Gniodovo, — in mound C-196 excavated in 1976 and containing a rich female grave which on the basis of the equipment and ritual is Scandinavian (Avdusin & Puškina 1976 — mound C-196, where by the way, is found one pendant cross not mentioned in N.G. Nedosivina’s article). Analogous and contemporary burials are known in mounds at Timeriovo and Šestovitsa (female Scandinavian graves with characteristic equipment), from the Kiev necropolis (a woman in a couple’s burial) — all these are burials in chambers. A. S. Gräslund notes that burials in a sitting position are characteristic for the Birka chambers, and shows similarity in the burials in Middle Sweden and Middle Dnepr (Gräslund 1981 pp. 37–39).

The dividing of the chamber with a barrier as found in mound C-306, has a certain interest. This constructional detail is known in Jelling and some chambers in Hedeby, but is unknown in other Scandinavian monuments (Worsae 1869).

The examined material allows us to state that the female burials are Scandinavian and that the male burial is connected with the Varangian armed forces (“družina”). The ritual and the mentioned analogies to the burial equipment give reason to date all three complexes to the second half of the X century. The unique preservation of wood in the mounds makes it possible to specify the date. Test samples of two corner posts from the chamber in mound C-306 and four from chamber Dn-4 were sent to the laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology at the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The dendrodote of the first mound was 979 A.D., and for the second 975 A.D. (We wish to express our gratitude to N.B. Černyh and A.F. Urjeva, who supplied...
These dates coincide well with the date of the Mammen burial — the end of the X century and mound 100 from Timeriovo — the 970-ies based on the date of the youngest coin. The Gniodzovo complex is similar to them particularly the composition of the equipment and details in the ritual — candles, wooden constructions in pits.

Two more questions have to be discussed. They are indirectly connected with the material under discussion. The first is the question of date of some north European objects and types in Rus'. According to Scandinavian analogies the sword and the spear from mound Dn-4 should be dated not later than the first half of the X century, as also the burial itself. Mound C-306 could on the basis of type JP 51b be dated to the middle of the X century, and the dendrodates give the last quarter of the century, which means that these objects outlive their Scandinavian parallels by more than 25 years. In this connection one can draw attention to a find of an equalarmed brooch of an early type from the second quarter of the IX—end of the IX century in a mound together with a thrown vessel with a stamp (mound 85 from S.I. Sergeev's excavations), the famous “hybrid” sword of type JP D from mound C-2 excavated in 1949, is in Scandinavia dated not later than the IX century. It becomes obvious that it is risky to directly transfer the dating of the Scandinavian material to east European finds.

The second question concerns the character of the burial. N. G. Nedošivina's assumption that "the cross in the burials not only is a decoration, but also a ritual object, connected with the spread of Christianity", is in our opinion supported by the fact that the cross was found together with candle and wax. Some authors have considered the candles as not being connected with Christian ritual, but were lit during the funeral as a protection against the malevolent activity of the deceased. In Christianity, however, the candle also is a protection — against an "unclean power". Evidently, those buried in the chambers with pendant crosses and wax candles may be considered as some of the earliest Christians in the Smolensk region on the Dnepr.

We call to attention that a reliquary cross probably from the second half of the X century has been found on the open settlement at Gniodzovo (Astašova 1974 pp. 249–252). One can suppose that bearers of the new religion at Gniodzovo as well as Timeriovo and Kiev, are among those buried in the 970-ies, with a mixed ritual which combined the new cultic symbols and old heathen burial constructions and set of activities performed on that occasion — the placing in the grave of a horse, everyday objects, gifts for the repose of the soul.

As a conclusion we put forward yet another supposition. Usually all the Scandinavian parallels to some of the elements in the ritual and grave equipment at Gniodzovo have been connected with Middle Sweden. The material which we have discussed here enables us to note another contact line — going to Denmark and southern Norway.

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References
Tre kammergraver fra Gniodzovo


Kremasjon er blitt betraktet som den absolutt dominerende gravskikk på Gniodzovo, men fra 1960 er det stadig blitt funnet inhuma-sjoner i groper under hauger (takket være moderne utgravningsmetoder). På grunn av størrelsen og tresteres er 13 definert som kammergraver — en tidligere ukjent gravskikk på Gniodzovo. Alle er enkeltgraver. Tre kammergraver er diskutert i artikkelen. Alle tre ligger under hauger av normal størrelse (h. 0,5 m, diam. 9–9,5 m), med groper etter det sam Nhiềute de kammeret.

Grav C-301 (fig. 1) var en kvinnesgrav i laftet kammer (2,1 x 2,1 m) med tak og gulv av planker. Kvinnen var gravlagt sittende. Funn: fig. 4:1–3, foruten: 50 glassperler, fragment av en likearm brorsje, en trebøtte med hemper og hank av jern, foruten en neverte med en bunt tekstiler og fragmenter av en oval brosje (fig. 4:4). Spor av en liten trekopp. Ved siden av tinen stod to vokslys (fig. 4:5). Ni tynne lys og fragmenter av dem ble funnet på ulike steder.

Grav C-306 (fig. 2) var en kvinnegrav i kammer i stolekonstruksjon (2,3 x 2,85 m) med tak og gulv av planker. Funn: fragmenter av to ovale brosjer type JP 51b (?) med spor av silke og skulderbrokopp. Håndlaget leirkar, dreid trekopp med spor av sølvbeslag langs randen, en glassperle, 3 store og 9 tynne vokslys og biter av dem (fig. 4:6–12).

Grav Cn-4 (fig. 3) var en mansgrav i et kammer i stolekonstruksjon (2,5 x 2,5 m) og tak og gulv av planker (som var dårlig bevart). Funn: Fig. 5 og 6, foruten stykker av en tynn sølvplade, hank fra et uthulet spann, en andre beltespenne, fragmenter av ett beslag av bronze og ett av jern, 8 støpte bronseskinner som fig. 6:2, ett fragment av tekstil, en hesteskoformet brosje. Spor av øvre del av en kaftan i form a to smale silkebånd og 24 knapper som fig. 6:2. I SØ-hjørne lå restene av et hestekranium med tre jernringer (hvorav 2 som fig. 5:8).

På grunn av drakten er kvinnene skandinaviske, og mannen har på grunn av gravgikkens forbindelse med de varjagiske troppene ("druzhina"). Funnene og analogiene til grav-
Chamber graves at Gnoizdovo

skikken daterer gravene til annen halvdel av det 10. årh. Dendrodateringene av C-306 og Dn-4 er hhv. 979 og 975 e. Kr. På grunn av de nærre likhetene tilhører også C-301 970-årene.

Funn av vokslys er sjeldene, men er kjent fra Timerjovo (øvre Volga) og Šestovitsa (Černigov). Analogier er kjent fra Bjeringhøj (Mammen), Nordhaugen på Jelling, og i norske graver — alle rike graver.

Dateringene viser at det er risikabelt å overføre de skandinaviske dateringene av skandinaviske funn til funn i Østeuropa. Funn av lys og kors sammen med den hedenske gravskikken indikerer at der er kristne blant dem som i 970-åren ble gravlagt på denne måten i Gnoizdovo, Timerjovo og Kiev.

Til slutt fremsettes en antagelse: dette materialet viser kontakter med Danmark og Sørnorge, i motsetning til de fleste anden skandinaviske elementer på Gnoizdovo som peker mot Mellansverige.

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