FROM GOTHYS TO VARANGIANS

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE BLACK SEA

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Cover design by Jørgen Sparre
Cover photos: reliquary cross and glass decorations from Gnezdovo

Printed in Denmark by Narayana Press, Gylling

ISBN 978 87 7934 537 9

AARHUS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Langelandsgade 177
DK-8200 Aarhus N

White Cross Mills
Lancaster LA1 4XS
England

70 Enterprise Drive
Bristol, CT 06010
USA

www.unipress.dk

The publication of this volume has been made possible by generous grants from Dronning Margrethes Arkeologiske Fond, Elisabeth Munksgaards Fond, Gieses Fond, Japetus Steenstrups Fond and Aarhus University’s Research Foundation

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www.pontos.dk
At the watershed between the Baltic and the Pontic before Gnezdovo

Johan Callmer

Introduction

The connections of northern and north-western Europe towards the south and the south-east crossed over from the basin of the Baltic to that of the Pontic and the Caspian. To make their way hence, travellers had to follow distinct and consistent routes across the watershed zones. There is much to suggest that major rivers were of crucial importance in leading travellers in the right direction. The relief and topography of continental Europe also contributed to this preference for routes on and along major rivers, since many rivers actually flow north-south or south-north. This by no means indicates that water routes were the only routes used to cross the continent, and indeed everything points to very flexible approaches to transportation by long-distance travellers. It is likely that summer travel was preferred even when boats were difficult to procure or not at all available. Beasts of burden could be fed on the grass on the ground en route, and camping was relatively easy in the open. Winter transport provided an elegant solution with sledges on the ice of frozen rivers and bogs, but the supply of fodder for animals had to be well organised and the relationship with local populations had to be close and positive. Most realistic is probably a combination of land and water transport and summer and winter travel.¹

In early Medieval Russia, travel connected with the collection of tributes was undertaken predominantly in winter, whereas long-distance travel was accomplished in summer. This pattern is already suggested by Ibn Fadlan and especially by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his well-known De administrando. In my opinion, the central importance of the major rivers for the traveller was that of orientation. Whatever method of travel one had chosen, the rivers guided one on to the crucial watershed zones, where one had to start following another artery. Important transitional zones of relevance to these connections between north and south are only found in certain parts of the watershed areas. Other parts are more unlikely and some even impossible whether the cause were high mountains, vast moorlands or large and uninhabited forests. This state of affairs is, in my opinion, the result of the limited availability of comprehensible routes and of the distribution of settled land. It was difficult to travel long distances without the support and coop-
eration of the local population, as already suggested, even if this often posed problems of security and of trust for the two sides involved; in addition to the logistic problems already mentioned. Functioning transitional zones in the early medieval period can be found at the Moravian Gate, in the present day
border lands between Poland and Ukraine between Zamość and Chełm, in the Minsk region in central Byelorussia and in the present-day borderlands of Byelorussia and Russia between the towns of Vitebsk and Smolensk (Fig. 1). Further east there are other significant zones between the Baltic basin and the Caspian basin but we shall concentrate here on the zone between the Western Dvina and the upper Dnepr.

The historically well known route "from the Varangians to the Greek" is ample reason for interest in this transitional zone between the north and the south. This route played a very significant role for the development of early Rus'. Its importance for the Christianisation of Rus' and for cultural development of Pre-Mongol Rus' cannot be overestimated. But how it began to function and how important it was in its earlier stages is little known. This problem has been discussed especially by E. Šmidt, G. Lebedev, G. Lebedev, V. Bulkin & V. Nazarenko and L. Alekseev. Recently a comprehensive survey of the early archaeological finds from the watershed zone was published by I. Eremanev. Some time towards the end of the 9th century an important entrepot came into existence on the northern shore of the Dnepr, slightly to the west of present day Smolensk. The place is known under the name of Gnezdovo and much has been written about it, although still too little has been published. Here I will dwell on the prehistory of Gnezdovo, or more accurately, the phenomena related to long-distance travel and exchange in this transitional zone, which actually antedate Gnezdovo itself as a large, permanent cosmopolitan settlement. There are also other archaeological questions motivating a closer look at the prehistory and early history of the watershed zone.

These problems touch upon the important question of the earliest presence of the Slavs in the central and northern parts of the East European woodland zone. I will here briefly comment on the cultural orientation of the local population of this area, population continuity and immigration, the question of demographic changes and the path to early statehood. The important task of contemporary research is to concentrate on the interrelationship between these variables. In my opinion, there have been great problems even considering two of these variables together so far.

The watershed zone

The landscape of this area between the big rivers has, in the northern half rather a lively relief energy as a result of numerous terminal moraines. This means that the landscape is mainly hummocky with numerous small and middle-sized lakes and peat bogs. Consequently the geology is varied, including sections with very poor sands and others with not too bad soils. The limit of the ice sheet almost reached down to the present river valley of the Dnepr, and thus the major part of the land between the big rivers is drained toward the north. With the single exception of the Berezina (not the Berezina Napoleon crossed on the retreat in 1812 with fatal losses, but a much smaller
all the northern tributaries of the Dnepr in the watershed zone are small and short. The landscape to the south along the Dnepr and to the south of the big river is less dramatic and sometimes has a plain character. The natural woodland here is mixed with varying proportions of deciduous and coniferous trees. Coniferous woodland gradually becomes dominating towards the north-east and in areas with poor soils. Mediocre to poor podsol soils prevail in the northern and intermediate parts as already stated, whereas towards the south the soils are slightly better. This is of course seen in a macro perspective. Good soils for agriculture can only be developed by working and manuring the fields over time, even if they are podsols. In particular, wide sections to the south-east of Smolensk have good soils. The woodland fauna was once rich with a wide range of mammals, birds and fish. There is much to indicate that still in modern time (17th century) beaver was rather common in the northern parts of the watershed zone, with their dense network of small rivers, wetlands and lakes. In the early medieval period wide and virtually uninhabited, or only very sparingly settled, woodland stretched out for almost a hundred kilometres towards the northeast. This was the Okovskij les of the Primary chronicle where the Dvina, the Dnepr and the Volga have their sources.

As some young Russian archaeologists have pointed out in recent years, the climate factor should not be neglected. For these parts of Eastern Europe it is important to note that we have considerable shifts of temperature and precipitation. After a cold, but not very wet, 5th century temperatures begin to rise, and reached a very high level (almost between 0.5 and 1 degree above the average) in the 7th century. Precipitation initially drops to its lowest in the 1st millennium in the middle of the 6th century, only to increase steadily to very high levels in the first half of the 8th century. From rather normal levels c. AD 800, both temperature and precipitation go down, but not radically, towards the middle of the century. In the second half of the 9th century there is a return to very high levels at the end of the 9th and in the first half of the 10th century. The high levels of precipitation (in the first half of the 8th century and in the late 9th century) may have influenced river transport significantly. The drier and colder first half of the 9th century is, however, less marked and has perhaps only influenced the water levels of smaller arteries. The flat profile of large tracts of land has rendered these changes less crucial. For the 8th to 10th centuries, the period most relevant in relation to the processes treated in this paper, climate is not without interest, but is hardly the decisive factor.

The Dnepr-Dvina cultural complex

We shall begin with a look at the later prehistory of the watershed zone. In the late Bronze Age (c. 600 BC) a number of rather similar cultural complexes are formed in the middle belt of the East-European woodland zone. Furthest to the west was the cultural complex of the stroke-decorated pottery in pres-
ent day Lithuania, parts of Latvia and adjoining areas. Further to the east, and with its centre exactly in the watershed zone between the Dnepr and the Dvina, the Dnepr-Dvina cultural complex was formed (Fig. 2). To the north-east and east there was the D’jakovo cultural complex in an enormous area stretching as far as east of Moscow. To the south of these three were another three cultural complexes with a certain similarity in many aspects of the material culture: from west to east they are called the Milograd, the Juchnov and the Upper Oka cultures. The three northern cultural complexes are, however, more closely related between themselves. The people who produced the Dnepr-Dvina material culture based their existence on animal husbandry (all common domestic animals were known) and agriculture (wheat, barley, millet and beans). Fishing and hunting played a varying but sometimes considerable role.

Both open settlement sites and hillforts are known. These hillforts are often small (600-1000 m²) and situated on small hills or spurs of land jutting out into river valleys or lakes. A few hillforts were possibly refuges, and some had a religious function as sanctuaries. The majority, however, were inhabited for centuries. The number of hillforts is large. In the present Smolensk region
(Smolenskaja oblast') more than 180 hillforts are known today – making them one of the most common archaeological monuments in the region. These, and other figures below concerning archaeological monuments in the Smolensk region, have been collected from the archaeological map of Russia published by Ju. Krasnov.\textsuperscript{14} The large number of hillforts notwithstanding, their often very simple fortification walls and palisades testify to unstable political organisation. The open sites are less well known than the hillforts. Houses were always built with standing post constructions. Graves are as yet unknown, which of course does not mean that there were no burials.

The pottery appears with simple, straight or only slightly s-curved profiles. When decorated, the pottery features finger impressions and pits. In the beginning, bone and antler artefacts play an important role in the technology of these cultures (arrow heads, harpoons, picks, net sticks, awls, needles, handles etc.). During the 2nd or 1st centuries BC iron technology is introduced, and iron is produced locally. Bronze was worked (including casting) at many sites. During the 2nd to 4th centuries AD we find some evidence of cultural transfers from the south in the southern fringes of the Dnepr-Dvina cultural complex (from the Zarubincy cultural complex). We consequently find some burnished wares and in two cases quadrangular houses with horizontal timber. In the east, cultural exchange with the related D'jakovo tradition was lively. Influences and imports from the Roman world are remarkably few in the Dnepr-Dvina cultural complex. There is, in my opinion, little to indicate the existence of a proper functioning long-distance trade route crossing the watershed; Roman imports reached the Baltic lands along other routes, via Poland and East Prussia or via Southern Scandinavia.

The Tušemlja cultural complex

In the 5th century AD there are some changes in the settlement pattern, and the material culture is also somewhat transformed. This new phase is called the Tušemlja cultural complex (Fig. 3).\textsuperscript{15} There are numerous settlements. Our statistics from the Smolensk region (c.f. above) list 88 sites, and considering the much shorter duration of this phase than the preceding (c. 350 years i.e. to the end of the 7th century) we can hardly speak about a diminution of the population. Rather we could, with a certain reservation, consider an increase. The number of inhabited hillforts is strongly reduced but we still have hillfort sanctuaries similar to those of the Dnepr-Dvina phase. Twenty-five sites including several hillforts are occupied in both phases. The considerable increase in open settlements and the corresponding decrease in hillforts could indicate the formation of larger social units equalling minor regions. The principles of the construction of houses remain unchanged.

The major difference is the appearance of graves in the archaeological record. We are here concerned with cremations deposited in pits. The artefacts accompanying the dead are more or less completely destroyed by the
intense heat of the cremation, and consequently yield very little information on the important classification criterion: dress traditions. The cemeteries are found close to the settlements. Pottery now appears with slightly s-shaped profiles only (Fig. 4). An addition among the very few pottery forms is low bowls with the said profile. Artefacts apart from pottery are found sparingly at the settlement sites. Jewellery seems to show correspondences both towards the south (i.e. Slav cultural milieu) and towards the north-west (i.e. Baltic cultural milieu). During the Tušemlja phase it remains difficult to trace regular long-distance routes across the watershed between the Dvina and the Dniepr. However, a small number of finds with a Baltic background are found in Slav milieu to the south of the Tušemlja territory. There are also finds of cowries (Cyprea moneta) in eastern Latvia, which derive from the south, thus most likely crossing the watershed. These finds in general can be dated to the 8th century and later, and since the final phase of Tušemlja is somewhere towards the end of the 7th century or the beginning of the 8th, the unambiguous connection with Tušemlja is difficult to ascertain. The question of trade through
Tušemļa territory can also be raised against the background of the inflow of silver to eastern Latvia and Lithuania already before AD 700, as evidenced by the finds of silver deposits with silver torques. In general it is well motivated to look upon the Tušemļa cultural complex as a continuation of cultural traditions founded in the Dnepr-Dvina cultural complex. Many specialists, i.a. E. Šmidt and V. Sedov, share this view of the development in the watershed zone.

The question of Early Slav presence in the watershed zone in the 5th and 6th centuries AD

Although the question of continuity seems to be settled, the watershed zone has an intrinsic potential for diverging views on the development of culture in Eastern Europe. Recently, two Russian archaeologists, N. Lopatin and A.
Furas’ev, have paid special attention to a small group of settlement finds in the watershed area.\(^9\) They have pointed out that in the early Tušemlja material culture (5th to early 6th centuries) there is some evidence of southern influences. These influences derive from the Kiev culture,\(^{20}\) a distant cousin of the more widely distributed Černjachov-Sintana de Mureș culture. In my opinion, N. Lopatin and A. Furas’ev overstate the significance of these influences. They argue that the sites with southern influences form a distinct tradition, rapidly creating a completely new culture further north dominated by Slav groups. They are here concerned with the so-called Long Barrow (dlimnya kurgany) culture; according to recent field research this complex encompasses the major part of the Baltic drainage of north-western Russia, in fact from eastern Estonia to well into the northern fringes of the Caspian basin as early as the 5th century AD.\(^{21}\) With their analysis, N. Lopatin and A. Furas’ev want to indicate this new scenario for the Slav colonisation in the Baltic drainage. Time and space does not allow for a detailed examination of the evidence. The argument is based on a number of narrow definitions of pottery forms, the majority of which are difficult to ascertain in a sherd material. A few years ago, E. Nosov, who is very familiar with similar ceramic material from north-western Russia, issued a warning against this minute treatment of the hand-made pottery of the period.\(^{22}\) In another connection, N. Lopatin rightly concludes that the majority of the northern Long Barrow pottery forms are specific to this cultural complex.\(^{23}\) Other aspects of the very early Slav culture cannot be identified with features of the Long Barrow culture (northern variant; on the northern and southern variants, see below the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type).

The question of the Slav colonisation of the Baltic drainage, however, is closely connected with the watershed zone. If the Slavs did reach the north from the south, which many scholars find most likely, they must have used the watershed for their northward expansion. I think that V.V. Sedov, who dedicated his long scholarly life to the archaeology of the Eastern Slavs, saw the problem that way, and seeing little evidence for the early Slavization of the watershed zone consequently developed a theory of a colonisation of north-western Russia from the west. He envisaged a migration of Slav groups from the lower Vistula through the Baltic lands towards the east.\(^{24}\) Today it must be concluded that this idea cannot be maintained for lack of hard evidence. The archaeological arguments for continuity between the Dnepr-Dvina and the Tušemlja cultural complexes are, as has already been pointed out, very strong. There is no other direct connection between the Dnepr-Dvina cultural complexes and the major language groups of Eastern Europe except that of the onomastic geography of lakes and rivers. For a long time, linguists have maintained that Baltic groups settled the upper Dnepr drainage in the prehistoric period, and that the Slavs were found further south.\(^{25}\)

The question of the date and the character of Slav colonisation of the forest zone shall now be left aside in order to return to the development of material
culture in the watershed zone. The discussion of the colonisation will, however, be continued below.

The Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type

The next cultural phase in the watershed zone is named the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type.\(^{28}\) It is closely related to similar complexes in the Polock and Vitebsk regions to the west and in the Toropec region further to the north-east (Fig. 5).\(^{27}\) There are also cemeteries and settlements on the uppermost Volga.\(^{28}\) The Long Barrow settlement consists of clusters of settlement sites along major and middle-sized rivers and lakes. The two biggest rivers seem to be without settlement or only very sparingly settled. Downstream the mouth of the Katynka there is only one site on the Dniepr. Along the Western Dvina there are only very few sites below the confluence of the Toropa in the far north-east. Between these clusters there are very wide tracts of uninhabited woodland and moors. The beginning of this phase could be dated to the first half or the middle of the 8th century. The number of monuments is definitely smaller than that of the Tušemlja cultural complex,\(^{29}\) while the number of sites (including a few hillforts) equals only a third of the preceding phase. The number of cemeteries is, however, more considerable with more than 40 alone in the watershed zone proper. Considering a period of c. 250 years for the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type this could indicate a more or less unchanged demography. There are a number of new cultural elements in this phase but there are also important indications of continuity. As much as 35% of the settlement sites reveal continuity from the Tušemlja phase. This is a much higher figure than for the continuity from Dniepr-Dvina to Tušemlja (22%). Observations at a few Tušemlja sites show that they burned down before they were resettled. It is, in my opinion, very unlikely that these indications could prove discontinuity.

The territory of the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type is not completely identical with that of the preceding Tušemlja complex. Long Barrow territory is somewhat smaller, but the core areas are the same and reduction is mostly evident in the periphery of the old Tušemlja territory. The relationship between the Long Barrow culture of the Polock type immediately to the north-west of the Smolensk Long Barrow culture is vague. Some scholars maintain that the differences are considerable, whereas others treat them as one cultural complex.\(^{30}\)

The settlement sites are located similarly to those of the Tušemlja cultural complex. Possibly the size of the open settlements is smaller, but only few excavations of any substantial size have been conducted. Hillforts are little used in this phase, except perhaps as sanctuaries. The hillforts at Rokot, Novoselki, Gorodok na Careviče, Staroe Sjalo, Usjaty and perhaps Gorodok na Lovati (see below) are exceptions to this rule (see below). Settlement sites rarely exceed one hectare in size and the cemeteries mostly indicate groups
consisting of a few families living together. There are however some exceptions to this rule with larger settlements and cemeteries with more than a hundred graves. House building seems to continue the principles from the earlier two stages. The cemeteries are situated close to the settlements, often in a low position in the landscape and generally close to water (Fig. 6).  

The cemeteries often comprise between 20 and 40 barrows. As the name of this phase suggests, the Long Barrow grave is an important innovation. The cemeteries, however, feature elongated, round and square barrows without a clear tendency to change in the composition. There are also cemeteries
exclusively composed of round or square barrows. This of course makes the name of the culture misleading. The long barrows are formed through additions to original round barrows thus containing several graves (Fig. 7). The graves are cremations in various positions in the barrows. Pottery vessels or birch bark pots were frequently used for urns. Early cremations are deposited in pits similar to those of the Tušemlja graves. Often the urns are turned upside down. Only in a later phase (presumably the 9th century) do cremation layers dominate. The grave form is certainly closely connected with groups living further to the north. In the north these barrows are erected already in the 5th century. Barrow cemeteries predating the 8th century are also known further west, in the Vitebsk region, where the material culture in the 8th and 9th centuries is very similar to that of the watershed zone. Non-ceramic artefacts are more frequent than in the Tušemlja phase.

The find material, especially from the female graves, shows a close resemblance to, or even identity with, Latgallian dress accessories. We are here
primarily concerned with neck rings, arm rings, pendants, chains, chain-spacers, annulets and wreaths (Fig. 8). The latter, in the shape of the traditional Balt vaivaga, the classical symbol of the married Balt woman, is of special interest since it is absent in Slav tradition (but was taken up by some Finnic groups). The only marked difference from Latgalician dress is presumably the lack of dress pins. Pins, however, play a comparatively modest role among the Latgallians, whereas they are much more common further west. The trapezoidal pendants so typical of the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type (Fig. 8) and of Latgalian female dress are also known from Slav cultural milieu where, however, they are dated to the 7th century or earlier. In their earlier history these pendants are spread over wide parts of Europe. Only in this late phase are they restricted to Baltic tribes and to the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type. The annulets have been hailed as exclusively Slav dress elements. This is an exaggeration since various annulets are also known from Finno-Ugrian and Baltic groups. The most common annulets (with scythe-shaped terminals and with an out-turned spiral) are characteristic of the Long Barrow complex (Fig. 8). Pottery is still mainly plain but the shapes are lower. Some of them have parallels among the Latgalian pottery, but in general they form an independent canon (Fig. 9). Special studies by V. Emukov show consistent differences from unambiguously Slav pottery.

Social differentiation is difficult to study in the archaeological material. It is however possible to grasp a certain variation of richness in female dress,
Fig. 8. Small finds from cemeteries and settlements of the Smolensk variant of the Long Barrow cultural complex.

and there are also indications of prestige elements on the masculine side (not seldom items imported from the steppe zone). We can also maintain a pattern of relatively rich and poor settlements. It is likely that the dominant groups
in society also played a more active role in the social and economic process which started when the long-distance trade connections reached the watershed zone and when political influence reached out from the north. In the course of the 9th century, dominant groups cooperated intimately with representatives from the north. It is likely that the low level centres mentioned below often were in the hands of the local “big men” and their families. Sometimes they came under strong cultural influence from outside. Notwithstanding its dating mainly to the 10th century, the cemetery of Novoselki with local grave custom combined with an exotic material culture may provide us with a model (see below).

The obvious indications of cultural change, most striking in the new grave rites and dress customs (but presumably also in other aspects), carry a strong
message of intensive communication between the inhabitants of the watershed zone and their northern and western neighbours. There are also numerous imports from the south-east, from the Saltovo-Majaki culture. First, we must mention numerous beads of glass and to a much smaller extent of cornelian belonging to the vast inflow of Oriental beads from the Caliphate. The vast majority certainly came via Khazar territory. Finger rings, metal buttons and bells also derive from the Saltovo-Majaki culture, i.e. the material culture of large parts of the Khazar domination (Fig. 10). The buttons could also mean that clothes of the steppe types arrived in the watershed zone. Several finds are connected with high status male burials. There are buckles and fittings for belts. Horset equipment and arrow heads also have their correspondences in the same direction (Fig. 11).  Dirhams are found in two graves (although possibly later than the 9th century). The expansion of trade in Eastern Europe from the second half of the 8th century certainly also involved the watershed zone (cf. below).

The latest possible dating of the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type reaches into the middle of the 10th century and no further. In fact in the Smolensk region a 10th century date may be called into question except in very few cases. The next settlement phase in the watershed area is that of sites with handmade Slav pottery (regularly also yielding some wheel-thrown ware). This pottery is given a standard date of 9th to 10th centuries, but in fact there is little to suggest 9th century dates. The number of sites of this type and date, according to the archaeological survey (mentioned above), is 58, compared with 37 for the Long Barrow phase. Whereas the indications of continuity have been strong between the preceding phases we are now confronted with a radi-
cally changed situation. Only in the case of a single hillfort could continuity be likely. Later Early Russian Slav settlements, especially from the turn of the 11th century, frequently used earlier locations. With few exceptions, however, the article here is concentrated on hillforts of the Dnepr-Dvina cultural complex. It is also relevant to point to a settlement shift to the south of the Dnepr in the 9th century (possibly the second half). Settlements and cemeteries on the left side of the Dnepr are later than the majority of sites and graves in the central watershed zone. Late traits are cremation layers instead of pits in the barrows and decorated pottery sometimes featuring prototypes from Slav cultural milieu in the Desna valley (Romny-Borševo pottery) (Fig. 9).

Many scholars working with the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type have had difficulty giving plausible explanations for the strong evidence of cultural change from Tušemlja to Long Barrow material culture. The predominant explanations for this change are cultural transfer and immigration from outside into the watershed zone. The introduction of the barrow graves and especially the idea of elongating barrows to form the long barrows are certainly influenced from the north, but this hardly requires a strong inflow of population from the north. Through these years, E. Smidt has consistently interpreted the emergence of the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type as the result of the complete replacement of the Tušemlja population by Baltic immigrants from the west. The weak chronology of the early phases of the Long Barrow cultural complex of the Smolensk type makes it possible that the introduction was not such a rapid process, but rather slower with a successive acceptance of new cultural elements. Changes in dress, most obvious in female dress, is most likely a phenomenon linked to social stress, as it is so well described by F. Barth. The motivation of the population in the Watershed zone to display Baltic dress items was certainly increased by interaction with populations to the south, i.e. Slav groups. This is another argument against

![Fig. 11. A snaffle of Saltovo-Majak origin found in barrow no. 2 at Droko, Demidov raion, Smolensk oblast' excavated by V. Sizov in the late 19th century.](image-url)
the common interpretation of the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type as relating to Slavs. A late dating for the dominance of Slav culture in this area was also supported by prominent Soviet-Russian scholars like M. Artamonov and I. Ljapuškin. Similar views were also expressed by I. Belocerkovskaja and by the research team of V. Bulkin, I. Dubov and G. Lebedev. A full characterisation of the 10th century developments in the watershed zone will not be presented here, since it is very well known that around AD 900 Gnezdovo was already established and had developed into an important entrepot.

Evidence of the long-distance trade networks of the 9th century in the watershed zone: dirhams and Scandinavian imports

Since it is presumed that northern imports may be related to routes of communication, the network of potential routes crossing the watershed should be mentioned. As stated in the introduction, travel both by land and by water should be considered. The importance of the rivers was as means of orientation and as vital parts of mental maps (Fig. 12). To enter the watershed zone from the north there are two possibilities. The first route follows the Dvina upstream past Vitebsk. The second has entered the Il'men'-basin either through the Volchov or through the Luga (with a short crossing from the uppermost Luga over to Il'men') and has followed the Lovat' upstream. From the upper Lovat' there is a short crossing or portage (volok) to Lakes Uzmen' and Usvjaat and further along the Usvjača river which flows into the Dvina. The Kun'ja, a tributary of the upper Lovat', provides another possibility to cross over to the Usvjača. The crucial crossing of the watershed from the Dvina side to the Dnepr may be conducted according to two alternatives. One can either choose the Kaspjja, a considerable artery flowing into the Dvina quite close to the Usvjača estuary, or pick the Lučesa further to the west. Having chosen the Kaspjja one can either follow the river up past Lake Kaspjja and cross over to the Katynka River or leave the Kaspjja turning into the Rutaveč to follow it due south to Lake Bol'saja Rutaveč. From this point there is a very short crossing over to the Berezina. Should one choose the Lučesa, one could either follow the river to its sources or cross over directly to the Dnepr. The second alternative on the Lučesa trail is to leave earlier by the small Deva River and by a short crossing reach the Oršica. This river leads on to the Dnepr.

Turning to the archaeological material directly related to long distance trade networks it will be divided into chronological phases. This is important when looking for a dynamic historical development. Below, the material has been divided into three chronological groups, each covering c. a third of a century. The main period concerned here is the 9th century AD. Some reflections on possible 8th century evidence will be included in the treatment of the first third.
Fig. 12. Detailed map over the watershed zone with centres, cemeteries, find spots of dirham hoards and crossings between the watersheds. Centers are marked with squares, dirham depots with triangles turned upside down, sopka type burialss with pyramidal triangles and Long Barrow cemeteries by circles.
The first third of the 9th century

The question of finds from the 8th century is not our main concern here, but the possibility of contact already at this time should not be entirely excluded, as has been mentioned with reference to the inflow of silver and cowries into eastern Latvia already in the 8th century (c.f. above). The Saltovo-Majaki imports may also be partly relevant. Since it is difficult to date classical Saltovo-Majaki material any later than the middle of the 9th century a considerable proportion of the imports to the Long Barrow groups must fall in this first third of the century. For lack of space, a detailed discussion of the Saltovo-Majaki material in the watershed zone will not be presented here, but its significance will be briefly touched upon in the conclusion. For the present, we are concerned with the 9th century and must first consider the finds of dirhams and Scandinavian artefacts in the watershed zone.

The first third of the 9th century contributes a highly relevant but complex find. In 1961 the well-known Leningrad archaeologist, G. Korzuchina, was working in the Toropec region. She was interested in the early medieval history of the region and documented barrow cemeteries in the vicinity of the Old Russian centre. The cemetery Toropec 2 was situated c. 1300 m from Lake Toropec and more than 2000 m from the hillfort centre of the Old Russian town. With a majority of circular barrows, but with a number of more or less oval graves and one rectangular one, this cemetery definitely had earlier traits than the barrow cemetery Toropec 1 at the lake with exclusively circular tumuli. Korzuchina chose barrow 23 for excavation in the central part of the cemetery. It was built of sand, 6.45 x 8.30 across and 1.13 m high and featured no ditches. The burial was a cremation layer on the old surface 1.25 x 2.00 m with cremated bones of two individuals: one c. 20-30 years old, the other a child of c. 2 years. There were many fragments of burnt bronze, silver and glass (Fig. 13). The find material includes the remains of a vainaga crest with bronze spirals and two mounts of sheet bronze. There were also several trapezoid pendants, often accompanying the vainagas. There were a pair of tweezers, two bronze beads, and fragments of glass beads, most likely segment beads and a small ceramic vessel. Accordingly, this grave could be classified as a typical cremation grave of the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type. It remains, however, to consider one additional find in the grave: an equal armed fibula of the early Ljönes-series. The variant can be identified as the Grimsta type. At present 11 specimens are known of this type. They have, in general, an eastern distribution and are mainly found in Sweden, Finland and Latvia. There is however an additional find from Hedey. The early Ljönes-series belongs to the very beginning of the 9th century and, together with the oval brooches, is one of the earliest examples of serially produced standard types. The Scandinavian fibula is obviously an exotic element in the local cultural milieu. There is an additional find of an equal armed fibula of the early Ljönes-series from the hillfort at Maskavitches to the west Polock to indicate
that these early finds of Scandinavian brooches are perhaps not so unique in these parts of Eastern Europe. As I. Ereemeev points out, the tweezers in the Toropec find are definitely early. Later excavations of some barrows in this cemetery have yielded further cremation graves but none with such exotic finds as barrow 23.

There is also a number of early finds of dirhams to indicate early long distance trade activities towards the south-east. The majority of the early dirham finds seem to point to a more easterly route from the Il'men'-basin towards the south-east to the Oka and on to the headwaters of the Don to reach Khazar territory there. However, an additional, more westerly route across the watershed could be indicated by finds of dirhams to the east of the Dnepr (with one exception). This route was most probably aiming at the sources of the Severskij Donec River. A number of dirham hoards indicate the direction of the trade route. The single hoard found to the west of the Dnepr comes from the gubernija of Minsk, which means that it could come from a place only 30 km west of the big river. Most impressive is the find of c. 2000 dirhams at Mohilev (terminus post quem AD 814-815) on the Dnepr. Some scholars give Orša, or the neighbourhood of Orša, as the location of this find but it remains uncertain where it was actually found. We can point

Fig. 13. Finds from barrow no. 23 of cemetery no. 2 at Toropec, Toropec raion, Tver' oblast', excavated by G. Korzuchina in 1964.
to further hoards at Litvinovići (Kosljaki) on the Sož (terminus post quem AD 823-824)\textsuperscript{52} and Jarylovci between the Sož and the Desna (terminus post quem AD 820-821).\textsuperscript{53} Further on towards the south-east are the hoards from Novyj Mlin (Paristovka) on the Sejm (terminus post quem AD 795-796)\textsuperscript{54} and Nižnjaja Syrovatka on the Psel (terminus post quem AD 812-813).\textsuperscript{55} With the hoard from Zavališno on the upper Oskol (terminus post quem AD 809-810) we are more or less on Khazar territory.\textsuperscript{56}

In the watershed zone itself there are several small and only partly studied finds of dirhams. In this category we find the hoards of Nabałtovo on the Toropa River, not far from Toropec, with only two coins (AD 801 and 815-816),\textsuperscript{57} Glazunovo close to the Usvjača River with four coins (AD 749-750, 782-783, 822-823, late 8th century/early 9th century)\textsuperscript{58} and two coin finds from Višiebsk on the Zapadnaja Dvina at the Lučesa estuary (AD 786/809, 823-824 and 807, 808).\textsuperscript{59} Whether these finds really belong to the first third of the 9th century remains uncertain.

Another rich grave find, in many respects parallel to the Toropec find, must also be dated approximately on the border between the first and the second third of the 9th century. This find also comes from the eastern section of the watershed zone. Near the village of Šiškino (1.8 km from the village) on the bank of the Carevič River (a tributary of the Vop River, in its turn a tributary of the Dnepr) a cemetery of 12 barrows, at a place called “Gorodok”, was partly excavated by V. Sizov in the late 19th century.\textsuperscript{60} There were at that time both long barrows and circular barrows. Among the five barrows excavated by V. Sizov, a long-barrow with a cremation grave is of utmost interest (excavated in 1881). The grave was located at one end of the barrow and the remains of the cremation were deposited in a pit, (c. 0.5 m deep), which had been covered by burnt planks and stones. Unfortunately the cremated bones have not been studied. The find material consists of burnt fragments of silver, bronze, iron, antler and glass (Fig. 14). The knife seems to be of a Scandinavian type.\textsuperscript{61} The silver fragments cannot be attributed to a defined artefact. The antler finds, however, definitely belong to the connecting plates of a comb. The type is rather rare in Scandinavia, where combs with broad, flat plates decorated with distal double lines/grooves dominate already at the end of the 8th century. Typical of the combs of this Scandinavian type are large fields with rather fine criss-cross lines bounded by vertical pairs of lines. So far, combs of this type are best known from Eastern Scandinavia (mostly Eastern Middle Sweden).\textsuperscript{62} They date from the late 8th and the early 9th centuries. The beads are of considerable interest with a number of types well known from the Saltovo-Majaki culture and thus probably ultimately deriving from the Caliphate.\textsuperscript{63} There are several rather large dark blue beads with blue eyes edged white.\textsuperscript{64} Another type of interest is a millefiori bead with blue-white-yellow-red ribbons and eyes in the same colours.\textsuperscript{65} There are also big double segment beads. The whole assemblage can be dated with reasonable confidence to the first quarter of the 9th century.\textsuperscript{66} A bronze chain with
double links fits nicely with this dating. As in the case of the Toropec grave, however, the most impressive find in the grave was two fragments of a large equal armed brooch of distinctly Scandinavian type. The fragments represent the two terminals with heads shown en-face with symmetrical, long trailing crests. The style, as well as the size (which can be estimated to between 15 and 20 cm) place this specimen among the early equal armed brooches of the Viking period. There are, however, until now no finds of exact parallels to this brooch. This is no big surprise because there are several very short series of brooches and unique pieces among the early big equal armed brooches. The fact that only the terminals are preserved could indicate that at the cremation the brooch had its normal “Scandinavian” function as a dress pin carried horizontally at the bosom. In the heat of the cremation the centrepiece of the brooch would melt and the ends fall to the ground where the heat is less intense. From Scandinavian cremation graves there are some parallel finds of one or two intact terminals. This could give a hint that the dress of the deceased woman was also of Scandinavian cut. This does not mean that the woman herself was Scandinavian, or even that she followed Scandinavian cultural
norms in their totality. An Arabic dirham may also have been found in the grave, but the information is incomplete. Close by the cemetery at Gorodok there is a hillfort, and a settlement may be suspected (cf. below).

The second third of the 9th century

From the second third of the 9th century there are numerous hoards in the watershed zone and in the surrounding lands. One of the earliest big hoards is that from Kislye. The hoard was recovered in 1967 on the bank of the small River Žerėspeja, a tributary of the Kasplja. The find was made in a settlement with cultural layers of the Tušemljica cultural complex and the Long Barrow culture of the Smolensk type. Later excavations by E. Šmidt (224 m²) yielded, amongst other things, a large number of pottery sherd, knives, a bronze pendant and a spindle whorl. The excavation revealed traces of post-built houses, furnaces and storage pits. The hoard may thus derive from a house. It was found in a ceramic vessel typical of the Long Barrow culture. The hoard, which is not yet published completely, is huge, containing 674 dirhams. The latest coin is dated AD 837-838. Highly interesting is the high number of dirhams from presumed Khazar mints (111 dirhams). The hoard is also well known because it contained a Scandinavian coin among the many dirhams, of the so-called Hedeby type of the early 9th century (the “stag and ship” motif) (Fig. 15).

The big hoard from Dobrino on the bank of the small Vorchita river (a tributary of the Lučesa, which is a tributary of the Western Dvina) has a terminus post quem of 841-842. The hoard comprised more than five hundred coins and a silver neck ring. This neck ring is a variant of the Glazov type (or Permian) neck rings so typical of the 9th century. However, the typical Glazov rings have a hook at one end, whereas the Dobrino neck ring has both terminals in the shape of a faceted quadrangular button. A similar silver neck ring has been found at Broungs, Bunge parish, Northern Gotland (Sweden) together with a typical Glazov neck ring.

Rather far to the west, beyond Polock, there are two hoard finds with very close termini post quem at Achrmeny (AD 852-853) and Poreč’ (AD 853-854). Just to the south of the watershed area proper, at the state farm of Sobolevo close to the village of Bača on the Merja River, a southern tributary of the Dnepr, an enormous hoard of more than two thousand coins with a terminus post quem of AD 856-857 was found. The find locality is very close to the present border between Byelorussia and Russia. From the village of Lučesa on the river with the same name (a tributary of the Western Dvina) another hoard with a terminus post quem of AD 862-863 has been recorded. These hoards may in fact belong to a distinct group of rather big hoards deposited in the 860s and 870s. The structure of these hoards, with very few late coins, may suggest that some hoards with termini post quem in the AD 850s or even 840s in reality belong to this group. (They should then rather be viewed with
the finds from the last quarter of the 9th century). It is most likely that these hoards belong to a rather short period of deposition connected with radical change in the political and economical structure in Eastern Europe in the second half of the 9th century. An additional hoard from Suchodrevo on the small Suchodrevka River, a tributary of the Lučesa, may in fact belong to this group of finds from the middle third of the 9th century. The hoard, which is lost today, comprised dirhams, finger rings with gemstones and silver neck rings. The single neck ring depicted by A. Sementovskij is of Balt type with a saddle-shaped terminal (Fig. 16). The finger rings, according to the description, cannot be anything but the typical Saltovo-Majaki rings with gemstones of glass or cornelian. Since these finger rings rarely occur in later contexts than the second half of the 9th century, we find it most likely that this hoard also belongs to the second third of the 9th century or only slightly later. There are hardly any hoard finds from the forest zone of Eastern Europe with terminus post quem later than the very beginning of the 870s. Only on the upper Oka do we find a small group of slightly later hoards.

There are several finds of Scandinavian artefacts dating to this second third of the 9th century or slightly later. We shall begin with three finds of massive armlets of Scandinavian type. These armlets, with the broadest and thickest part forming the centre of the ring and with tapering ends, begin to be produced in Scandinavia sometime around 800 or slightly later. They succeed armlets with a thin centrepiece and thickening ends, very typical of the second half of the 8th century. With time the breadth and thickness is
increased and, in addition to the transversal wavy patterns taken over from earlier armlets, new patterns of decoration are introduced.

A recent find of an armlet of the 9th century comes from the intriguing site of Vitebsk. The topographical situation close to the mouth of the Lučesa flowing into the Dvina is important. It seems likely, in the light of numerous