

# LAND, SEA AND HOME

Edited by  
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# VIKING-PERIOD PRE-URBAN SETTLEMENTS IN RUSSIA AND FINDS OF ARTEFACTS OF SCANDINAVIAN CHARACTER

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Questions concerning the origins of the Old Russian towns have been a long-standing problem in Russian historical scholarship. Different authors at various times have made a range of suggestions of what the immediate reasons for the emergence of the towns may have been: a good position on international trade routes; the rapid growth of the agricultural hinterland; the initiative of a ruler; the need for a market place for different tribes; the trading activity of Scandinavian merchants; and more.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars have recently also turned their attention to the Scandinavian antiquities found in the territory of Old Russia. That there was occupation by Scandinavians is recognized in general terms, and this is attributed primarily to Scandinavian warriors, as members of a princely retinue.<sup>2</sup> Such a view, however, scarcely touches upon the subject of Scandinavian participation in the development of handicraft, trade, or the emergence of the towns.

It is clear that the historical causes of the appearance and formation of the towns may vary greatly. None the less the majority of authorities agree with the view that a town defined as the economic centre of some large agricultural region is not to be found earlier than the beginning of the 11th century. At that time towns such as Ladoga, Novgorod, Smolensk and some others became the centres or the capitals of the principalities and territories. But in the 10th century we find pairs of settlements existing side-by-side, one of which develops into a true town while the other loses its function as a trade and production centre and develops into a small feudal estate centre. Pairs of settlements of this kind are well known in Old Russia. They include

<sup>1</sup> E. N. Nosov, 'The problem of the emergence of early urban centers in Northern Russia', 236-56 in J. Chapman and P. Dolukhanov (eds.), *Cultural Transformation and Interaction in Eastern Europe* (Aldershot, 1993); В. О. Ключевский, *Курс русской истории*, том 1, 140-1 (Moscow, 1987) [V. O. Klyuchevskii, *The Course of Russian History*, vol. 1]; М. Н. Тихомиров, *Древнерусские города*, 64-7 (Moscow, 1956) [M. N. Tikhomirov, *Old Russian Towns*]; Б. А. Рыбаков, 'Обзор общих явлений русской истории', *Вопросы истории*, 4 (1962), 41-2 and 49-51 [B. A. Ribakov, 'General survey of the events of Russian history'].

<sup>2</sup> В. Т. Пашуто, *Внешняя политика Древней Руси* (Moscow, 1968), 25-9 [V. T. Pashuto, *The Foreign Policy of Old Russia*]; Рыбаков [Ribakov], *op. cit.* in note 1, 37.



Novgorod with Ryurik Gorodishche; Smolensk and Gnezdovo; Chernigov and Shestovica; and more besides.<sup>3</sup>

In every case, the settlement that has the main concentration of Scandinavian finds, coins, imports and trading equipment of the 10th century subsequently yields to its neighbour the role of the administrative, economic, religious and military centre. Despite this, those settlements regularly continue to be characterized as pre-urban centres. They share the features of a polyethnic population, developed handicraft, participation in long-distance trade, a distinct social structure, and a military retinue.

By Scandinavian antiquities of the Viking Period in Old Russia, we primarily mean different artefacts, structures or arrangements in housing that have direct parallels in the archaeology of northern Europe and no prototypes in the culture of the local populations of eastern Europe of the 1st millennium A.D. We also treat boat graves, the special treatment of weaponry (ritual damage, for instance), the stone facing of mounds, or fire-layers, as Scandinavian features of pre-Christian burials. Most of the objects assigned to a Scandinavian culture differ in form and decoration from the local Baltic, Finno-Ugric and Slavonic objects. These differences help us to identify the Scandinavian items amongst the innumerable archaeological finds from the territory of Old Russia. Weapons, jewellery and amulets form the bulk of the Scandinavian finds.

The interpretation of the weaponry as Scandinavian is a provisional one as the weapons themselves have no ethnic character. However, the typical Nordic ornamentation of the hilts of some swords, the pattern-welding of some of the blades — known to the Scandinavians in the 9th century — and the constant references to Varangians (a term meaning 'Scandinavian') as members of the prince's retinue in the Russian Chronicle permit us to assume that majority of these objects came to Old Russia with the Scandinavians.<sup>4</sup> Swords, battle-axes and spearheads are therefore important finds.<sup>5</sup>

The category of Scandinavian jewellery comprises various types of brooch, arming and bracelet, pendants and more. Oval (tortoise) brooches are a highly characteristic element of female dress from the Viking Period. These are the most common type in the finds from Russia, with brooches of Petersen's Type 51 dominant. The same type of oval brooch is most typical in Scandinavia itself throughout the 10th century.<sup>6</sup> The use of a pair of oval brooches means the wearing of a costume that was unknown to Slavonic, Baltic or Finno-Ugrian women.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> В. Я. Петрухин and Т. А. Пушкина, 'К предыстории древнерусского города', *История СССР*, 4 (1979), 100–12 [V. Ja. Petrukhin and T. A. Pushkina, 'On the history of Old Russian towns'].

<sup>4</sup> *Повесть временных лет (по Лаврентьевской летописи)*, 13, 16, 23, 26, 36, 37, 58 and 63 (St Petersburg, 1996) [*The Russian Primary Chronicle (After the Laurentian Manuscript)*].

<sup>5</sup> A. N. Kirpichnikov, 'Connections between Russia and Scandinavia', in K. Hannestad, K. Jordal, Ole Klindt-Jensen, K. Rahbek Schmidt and C. Stief (eds.), *Varangian Problems* (Scando-Slavica supplementum, 1, Copenhagen, 1970), 63.

<sup>6</sup> I. Jansson, 'Economic aspects of fine metalworking in Viking Age Scandinavia', 1–19 in *Economic Aspects of the Viking Age* (British Museum Occasional Paper, 30, London, 1981), at p. 12, fig. 1.

<sup>7</sup> A. Zariņa, *Apģērbs Latvijā 7.–17. gs.* (Riga, 1999), 68; В. П. Левашева, 'Об одежде сельского населения Древней Руси', 117 in *Археологический сборник* (Труды Государственного Исторического музея, 40, Moscow, 1966) [V. P. Levasheva, 'On the clothing of the rural population in Old Russia', from *Archaeological Dictionary*]; А. А. Голубева, 'Меря', 80 and 361 in В. В. Седов (ed.), *Финно-угры и балты в эпоху средневековья* (Moscow, 1987) [L. A. Golubeva, 'Merya', in V. V. Sedov, *Finno-Ugrians and Balts in the Middle Ages*].

The category of Scandinavian amulets and ritual items comprises Thor's-hammer rings, pendants in the shape of miniature weapons, strike-a-lights, pendants in the form of human (male) faces, and valkyrie figures. Such amulets could not have been objects of trade even if the pagan religions of the Slavs, the Balts and the Vikings were similar.

Finds of everyday objects are not very numerous, with the exception of one-sided antler combs. Finds of tools such as smithing and jewellery-making tools, or clay and stone moulds for casting Scandinavian-type jewellery, are both highly interesting and very important. Finally there are some finds of runic inscriptions, rune-like signs, and possibly even magical symbols, engraved on various objects.<sup>8</sup>

Scandinavian antiquities of the Viking Period have been found at about 150 locations in Old Russia. These sites lie over a wide area from Lake Ladoga in the North to the Lower Dnepr (Dnepr rapids) and the River Don in the South, and from Volyn' (western Ukraine) in the West to the area of the Kama River in the East (Fig. 1).

The majority of the finds represent burials from the end of the 9th and the 10th centuries. Known settlements of the same date are fewer in number, and only a small proportion of them have been examined scientifically. The earliest finds are from the settlement of Staraja (Old) Ladoga, the *Aldeigjuborg* of the Norse sagas. These date back to the second half of the 8th century. The latest finds occur in cultural layers of the 11th century at Novgorod and Suzdal.<sup>9</sup>

This large corpus of material with such a strong representation of female objects cannot have been connected exclusively with warriors and traders. Rather it must indicate a fairly large-scale immigration of whole families from Scandinavia (mainly from central Sweden) who were strong enough to preserve their distinctive characteristics for a couple of generations.<sup>10</sup> The distribution of these finds is irregular. Some archaeological sites have one or two objects or burials; others have the whole series of artefacts and evidence for their local production in some cases, or groups of Scandinavian burials, or houses of a characteristically Scandinavian type.

Most of the archaeological sites with Scandinavian finds are situated in the region connected to the most important routeways of eastern Europe: the Baltic-Caspian route via the Rivers Volkhov and Volga, and the Baltic-Black Sea route via the Volkhov and the Dnepr. The majority of the hoards of Arabic coins of the 9th–10th centuries and of finds of trade equipment are from this area too. The oldest Russian towns mentioned in the Russian Primary Chronicle (Ladoga, Novgorod, Smolensk, Kiev, etc.) appeared and functioned in the same area on the banks of these rivers.

<sup>8</sup> A. Stalsberg, 'The Scandinavian Viking Age finds in Rus': overview and analysis', 448–71 in J. Weisbecker (ed.), *Oldenburg–Wolin–Staraja Ladoga–Novgorod–Kiev: Handel und Handelsverbindungen im südlichen und östlichen Ostseeraum während des frühen Mittelalters* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988); E. A. Melnikova, 'The eastern world of the Vikings' 81–9, tab. 2, figs. 3–5 in L. Lönnroth (ed.), *Gothenburg Old Norse Studies 1* (Göteborg, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> A. Stalsberg, op. cit. in note 8, 453–8; T. A. Pushkina, 'Scandinavian finds from Old Russia: a survey of the topography and chronology', 83–92 in P. Hasson (ed.), *The Rural Viking in Russia and Sweden* (Örebro, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> I. Jansson, 'Warfare, trade or colonization? Some general remarks on the eastern expansion of the Scandinavians in the Viking period', in Hasson (ed.), op. cit. in note 9, at pp. 27 and 51–5.

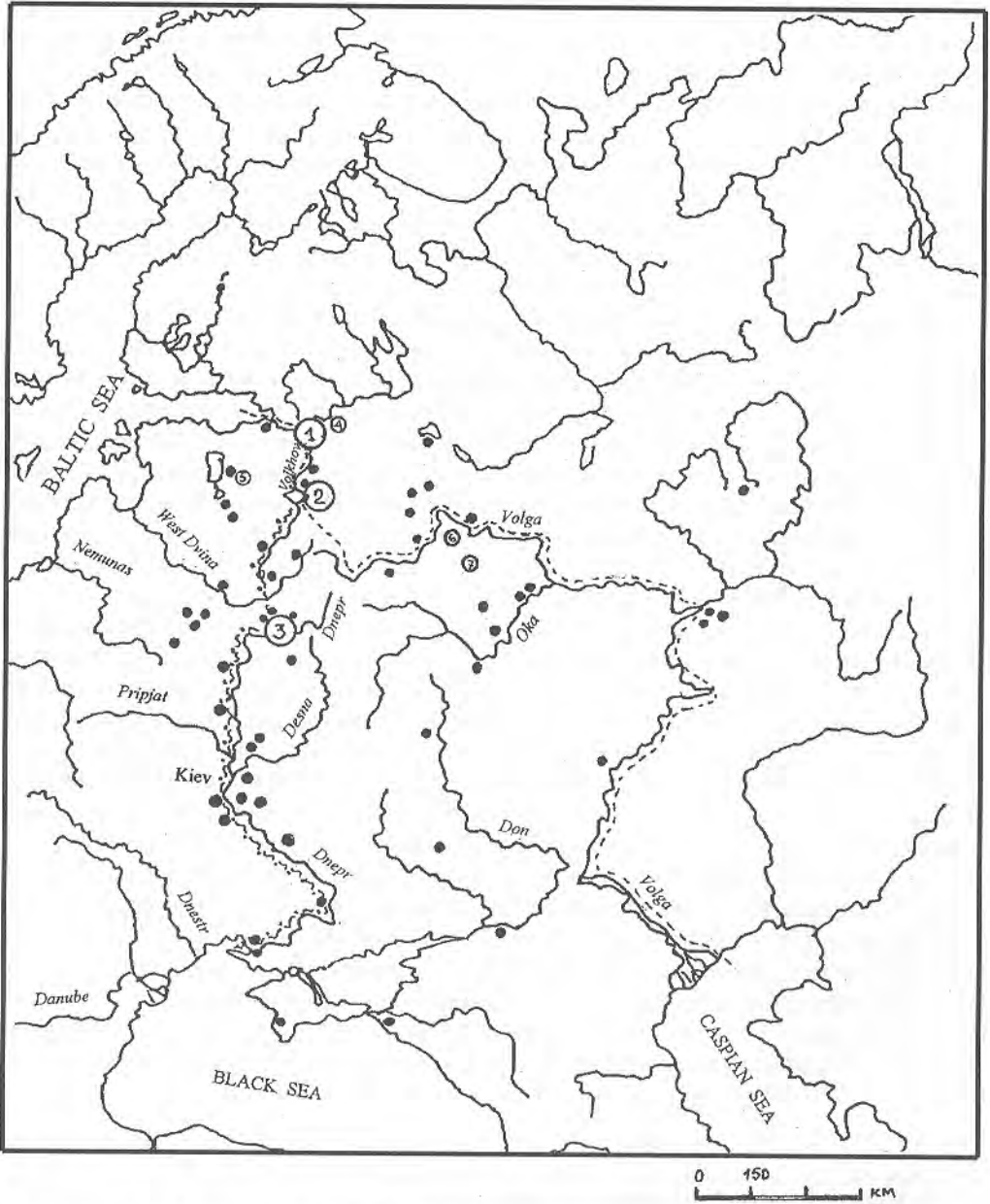


FIGURE 1. Scandinavian finds in Old Russia (●). (1) Staraja Ladoga; (2) Ryurik Gorodishch; (3) Gnezdovo [6 sites]; (4) burials mounds of the Ladoga Lake region [24 sites]; (5) Pskov district [25 sites]; (6) Jaroslavl' district [4 sites]; (7) burial mounds of the Vladimir-Suzdal' district [10 sites]. After Stalsberg, *op. cit.* in note 8, with additions by the author. Plain dotted line: Baltic-Caspian route; wiggly dotted line: Baltic-Black Sea route.

There are three clusters in the map of Scandinavian finds: distinctive Scandinavian concentrations dependent upon the water roads of Old Russia.

The first of these clusters is situated at the beginning of the route from the Baltic Sea to the Volga and the Dnepr. It lies on the lower River Volkhov and includes Staraja Ladoga and its hinterland. Scandinavian finds are known here from the middle of the 8th century to the 10th century. The Scandinavian material culture is represented not only in jewellery and amulets but also by many everyday objects such as tools, and in some elements of the layout and structure of houses. Unfinished jewellery, antler combs and iron items indicate that some of the objects of Scandinavian character and type were produced here. According to the archaeological evidence, Scandinavians were a constant element in the population of Staraja Ladoga from its very inception.<sup>11</sup>

The second cluster is situated in the upper reaches of the River Volkhov on the shore of Lake Il'men near Novgorod the Great. This includes Ryurik Gorodishche (the hill-fort of Ryurik). Here, there are about 50 settlements and cemeteries dating from the 9th and 10th centuries. This region was densely populated during the period in question.

Yevgeny Nosov, the director of the investigations of Ryurik Gorodishche, has proposed that this hill-fort was a non-agrarian centre and the predecessor of Novgorod the Great as an administrative, trading and craft-production centre of the network of Slavonic rural settlements from the 9th century to the second half of the 10th.<sup>12</sup> Novgorod became a town in the second half of the 10th century and later developed into the capital of the feudal republic, while Ryurik Gorodishche became a prince's residence beyond the territory of the town. In the present author's opinion, a 'Scandinavian veil' characterizes the period in which Ryurik Gorodishche flourished, when there was a princely retinue based there and collecting tribute, in addition to the Slavonic élite. The Scandinavian finds (male and female dress accessories and jewellery, amulets and everyday objects) belong mainly to the 10th century.<sup>13</sup> The other Scandinavian finds of the 10th century belong to two or three sites on the banks of the River Volkhov, while only a few Scandinavian artefacts were found in Novgorod in the culture layer of the second half of the 10th and first half of the 11th centuries.

The third concentration of Scandinavian finds lies south of Ryurik Gorodishche in the Upper Dnepr region near Smolensk. This region presents a different picture of rural settlement in the 9th–10th century from that in the Novgorod area (Fig. 2). Archaeological sites of this period are very sparse here. This implies that the population was low and that there was no developed agricultural hinterland. There are only a few groups of so-called long barrows that represent the local, mixed Balto-Slavonic population, and round Slavonic mounds. Contemporary settlements are also

<sup>11</sup> I. Jansson, *op. cit.* in note 10, 28–31; O. I. Davidan, 'Contacts between Staraja Ladoga and Scandinavia', in Hannestad et al. (eds.), *op. cit.* in note 5; idem, 'Kunsthandwerkliche Gegenstände des 8. bis 10. Jahrhunderts aus Alt-Ladoga (Die Sammlung der Staatlichen Ermitage in St. Petersburg)', *Zeitschrift für Archäologie des Mittelalters*, 20 (1992), 5–61.

<sup>12</sup> E. N. Nosov, 'Ryurik Gorodishche and the settlements to the North of Lake Ilmen', 5–66 in M. A. Brisbane (ed.), *The Archaeology of Novgorod, Russia* (Soc. Medieval Archaeol. Mon., 13, Lincoln, 1992), at pp. 58–9.

<sup>13</sup> Nosov, *op. cit.* in note 12, 46–55 and 59; Jansson, *op. cit.* in note 10, 35.

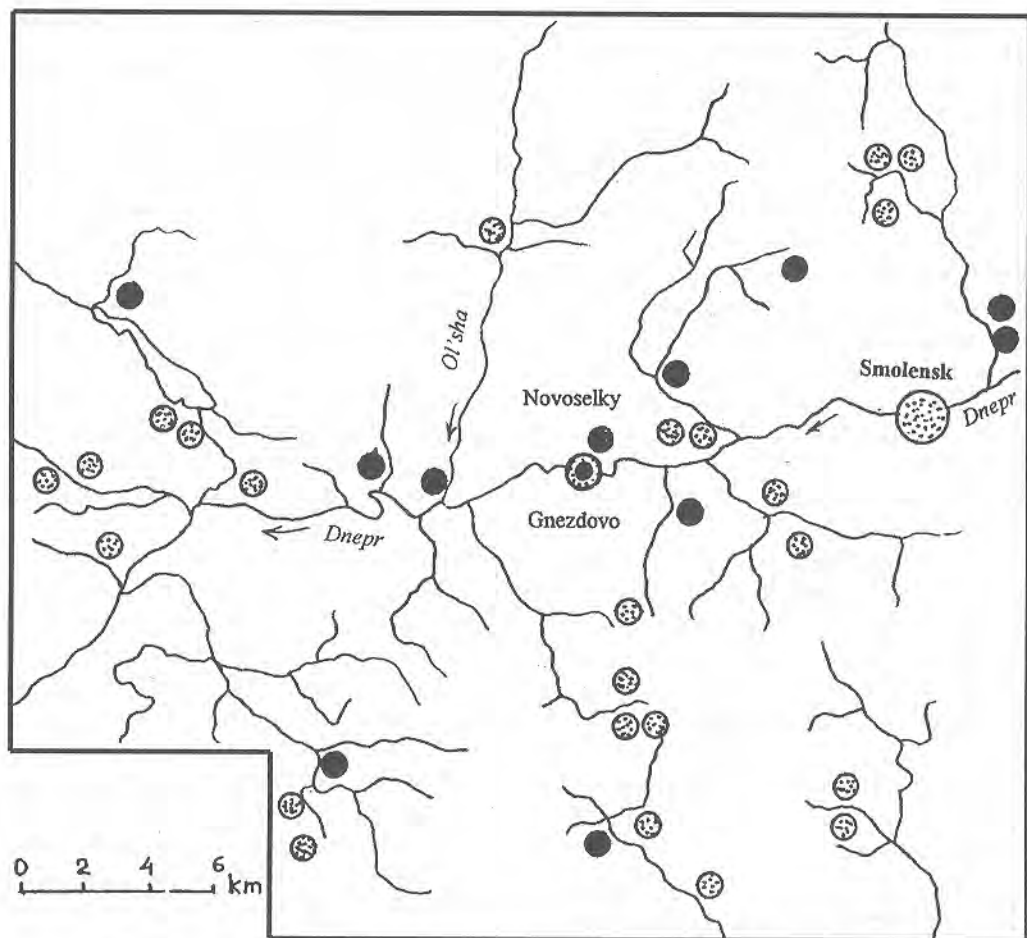


FIGURE 2. Archaeological sites of the 9th–13th centuries in the Smolensk region.  
Black dots: 9th–11th centuries; stippled dots: 11th–13th centuries.

known, but these are isolated. The cemeteries usually consist of 10–30 mounds and the settlements are less than 2 ha in area. Cremation is the uniform burial rite. There are no traces of social and professional differentiation within the communities that buried in these cemeteries. They have a casual character. The quantity of finds of eastern coins and trade equipment is even lower. The majority of Scandinavian finds, including Scandinavian-type burials, are concentrated in Gnezdovo (Fig. 3).

Modern Gnezdovo is a small village situated 13–15 km west of the present city of Smolensk on the banks of the River Dnepr. It is mentioned by name only twice in early documents, of the 14th and 17th centuries respectively, and nothing earlier. Smolensk is one of the earliest Russian towns, which, according to the Russian Primary Chronicle, was captured by Oleg (a Scandinavian) on his way to Kiev in A.D. 882. However, the oldest excavated layers in Smolensk are dated no earlier than



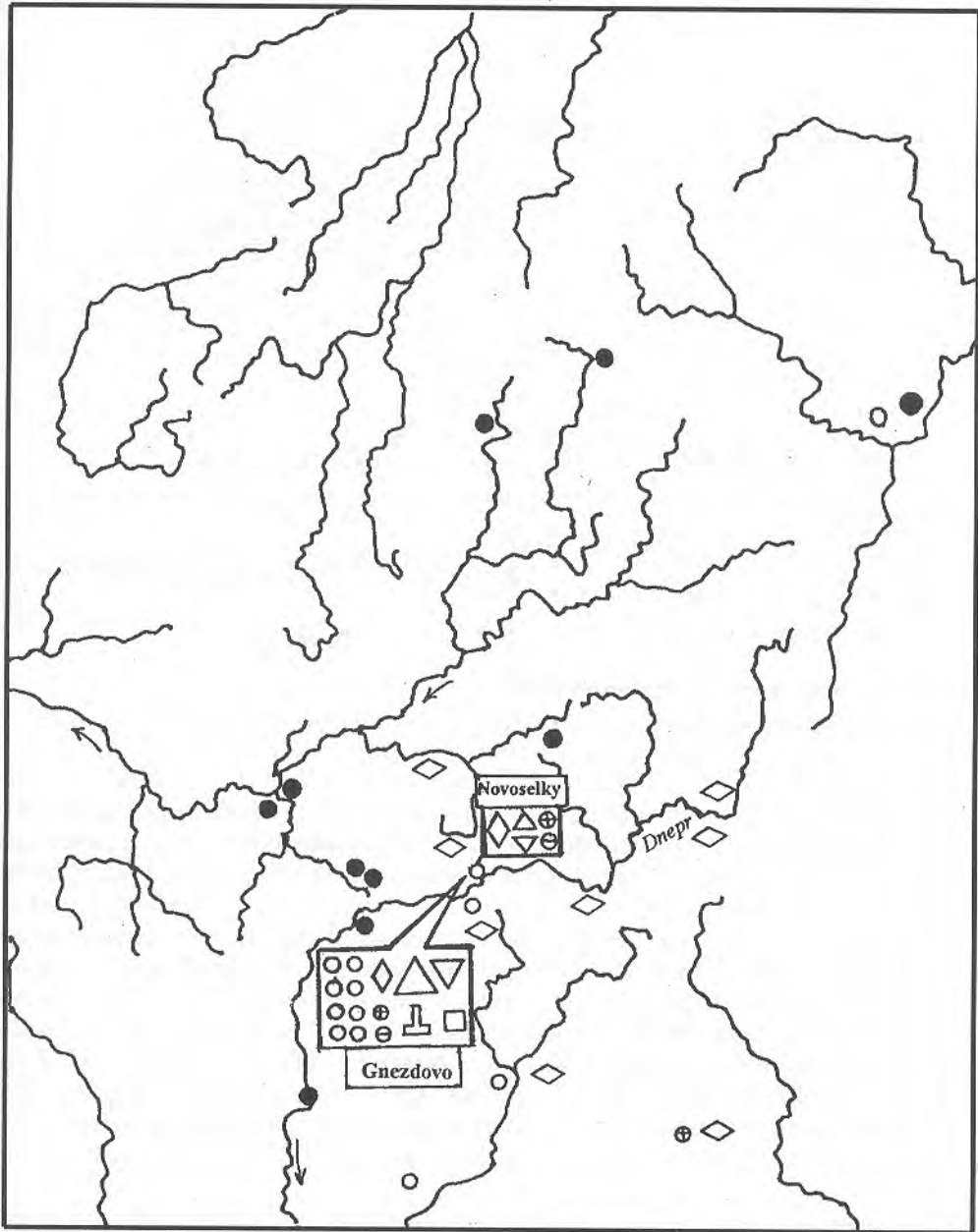


FIGURE 3. Scandinavian finds in the Upper Dnepr region (see Fig. 1:(3)). Filled circles: 9th-century hoards; open circles: 10th-century hoards; halved circles: Arabic coins; cross-in-circle: trading equipment; pendant triangles: weaponry; standing triangles: jewellery; T-shapes: amulets; rhombuses (vertical): Scandinavian burial rites; squares: evidence of local Scandinavian craft; rhombuses (horizontal): miscellaneous finds.

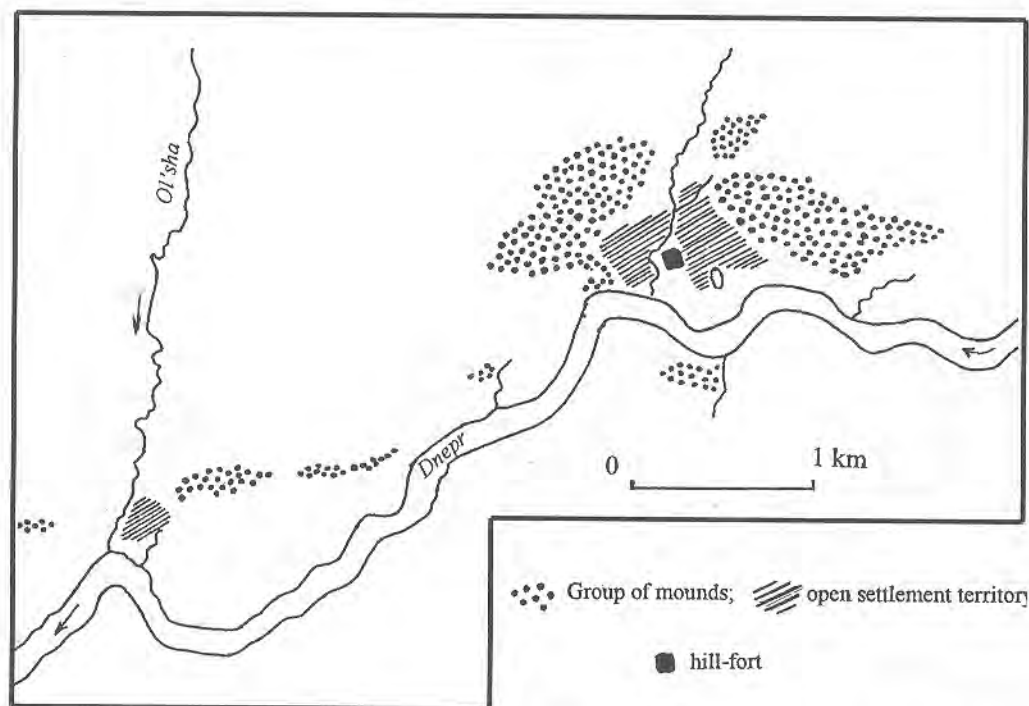


FIGURE 4. The Gnezdovo complex. Dotted area: the burial mounds; hatched area: open settlement zones; black square: the hill-fort.

the second half of the 11th century. Subsequently, in the 12th century, Smolensk is known as a capital of the principality.<sup>14</sup> On the other side of the river, at Gnezdovo, there is a large area of settlement and burial mounds that relate to the Middle Viking Period.

The Gnezdovo archaeological complex consists of two known settlements and about 3,000 barrows, which are organized into eight groups, or cemeteries, around the settlements. The central part of this complex remains is governed by a hill-fort surrounded by an open settlement covering some 16 ha. Two cemeteries comprising more than 2,300 barrows lie to the West, North and East of the settlement (Fig. 4).

The second part of the complex consists of a small settlement 3 km to the West of the central part, with about 400 burial mounds close by. No settlements associated with the remaining cemeteries have yet been located, but we can postulate their existence.

The central settlement came into being no later than at the turn of the 9th to 10th centuries. It was not very large to begin with. It was about 4 ha in area and had no

<sup>14</sup> П. П. Астахова, *Древний Смоленск до начала XV века (по археологическим данным)* (Moscow, 1986), 19 [N. I. Astashova, *Old Smolensk to the Beginning of the 15th Century (Archaeological Evidence)*]; А. В. Алексеев, *Смоленская земля в IX–XIII вв.* (Moscow, 1980), 190 and 195 [L. V. Alekseev, *The Smolensk Region in the 9th–13th Centuries*].

fortifications. Some later fortifications — sand banks with wooden walls on top, and along the perimeter of the hill-fort — were erected in the central part of the settlement on the bank of a small tributary of the Dnepr. These defences were constructed in the first quarter of the 10th century.

By the end of the 10th century the settlement surrounding the hill-fort had grown so that its culture layer covered about 15 ha. According to the results of archaeological investigations this open settlement had an unstructured building plan, and the buildings were disposed in an irregular pattern. We infer that the settlement had no defined layout, although there were some laid-out plots in the eastern part of the area.

Traces of different craft activities were found over the entire area of the open settlement and inside the hill-fort. Intensive craft-production, including the working for both ferrous and non-ferrous metals, took place here. Slag, slagged clay, and fragments of crucibles and moulds were quite numerous. Jewellery-making tools, pieces of sheet bronze and wire, bars of metal, and fragments of defective or unfinished artefacts were also found. There were some fragments of cut antler and unfinished antler combs.<sup>15</sup> Some fragments are from moulds for casting Scandinavian jewellery, such as brooches and pendants with typical zoomorphic decoration.<sup>16</sup> Spectral analysis of the bronzecasting and jewellery-making waste shows that craftsmen at Gnezdovo used three types of alloy. One of these is characterized by a high lead and zinc content that is typical of Scandinavian jewellery production in the Viking Period. The finds of moulds and the metallurgical evidence testify that at least some of the Scandinavian jewellery was locally made.<sup>17</sup>

There are in fact also defective or unfinished decorative items characteristic of the local Slavonic and Baltic cultures. In addition, there is all the necessary evidence of the local blacksmith's craft at Gnezdovo — smithing slag, and half-finished products, including a semi-manufactured blade produced in a threefold welding technique. Production of tools and utensils, as well as weaponry, was based upon a blacksmith's welding pattern. Analysis of the correlation between welding patterns and functional categories reveals that the most widely applied technique was threefold welding. This technological method is absolutely prevalent for the hand-made knives, of which it accounts for some 85%.<sup>18</sup>

The Slavonic and Baltic populations of the Upper Dnepr region had no knowledge of multi-layer iron welding. As a rule they stuck to ordinary and simple techniques. All knives from the rural burial mounds of the 9th–10th century are made simply of iron. On the other hand a few arrows, axes and scythes from Gnezdovo were also made using this multi-layer welding technique. We can therefore suggest that Gnezdovo craftsmen both knew and made use of this progressive technology. It

<sup>15</sup> Т. А. Пушкина, *Гнездовское поселение в истории Смоленского Поднепровья (IX–XI вв.)* (Moscow, 1974), 10 and 15–16 [T. A. Pushkina, *The Gnezdovo Settlement in the History of the Smolensk Region (9th–11th Centuries)*].

<sup>16</sup> N. V. Eniosova, 'The casting moulds from the Upper Dnieper region (10–11th cent. AD)', 336–40 in E. Jerem and K. T. Biro (eds.), *Archaeometry 98: Proceedings of the 31st Symposium, Budapest, April 26–May 3 1998*, Vol. II (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Н. В. Епиосова, *Ювелирное производство Гнездова (по материалам курганов и поселения)* (Moscow, 1999), 14 [N. V. Eniosova, *Fine Metalworking at Gnezdovo: The Evidence from the Burial Mounds and the Settlement*].

<sup>18</sup> Т. А. Пушпина and А. С. Розанова, 'Кузнечные изделия из Гнездова', *Российская археология*, 2 (1992), 200–18 [T. A. Pushkina and L. S. Rozanova, 'Ironworkers' production at Gnezdovo'].

can be proposed that Gnezdovo craftsmen were Scandinavians, on the evidence of the multi-layer iron welding found in Anglo-Scandinavian craftwork of the Viking Period, together with the existence of the same method in Russia at Staraja Ladoga, where it was known in the 8th–9th centuries.<sup>19</sup>

Both the quality and quantity of the finds relating to craft-production in Gnezdovo differ fundamentally from the finds at small rural settlements. Two groups of finds that emphasize this difference in particular: coins and trading equipment. About 7% of the Gnezdovo burial mounds contained scales and weights, and about 6% had coins. More than 1,100 Arabic coins come from the seven hoards, and 170 further individual coins were found in the open settlement and the hill-fort here. Trade equipment has been found at only five places, and just two fragments of Arabic coins have been found in burial mounds of the 9th and 10th centuries outside of Gnezdovo.<sup>20</sup>

The archaeological material thus consistently distinguishes Gnezdovo from other contemporary settlements of the Upper Dnepr region. This impression is corroborated and enhanced by a comparison of the material of the Gnezdovo cemeteries.

The principal burial rite at all the Gnezdovo cemeteries was cremation, although inhumations still account for some 20% of the graves examined. There are some cremations in boat-graves, while some of the inhumations were in chamber-graves. The barrows associated with various types of burial do not form specific groups. There are no universal differences between the implements found in the burial mounds of different cemeteries, or associated with different methods of burial. Correlations between some categories of find are, however, of some interest. About 13% of graves whose contents are known were burial mounds containing some form of weaponry. About 7% of the burials contained coins and/or scales and weights. About 6% of the burials contained Scandinavian-type brooches, Thor's hammers, or other amulets.

In respect of its ethnic character, Gnezdovo was mixed from its very beginnings. The sets of female jewellery, the shapes of the ceramic vessels, some features of the burial practices, and some details of metalworking demonstrate this conclusively.

The population of Gnezdovo had three components: the Slavs, the Scandinavians and the Balts. The background of the Slavonic group was complex. The burial custom of the pagan Slavs was a very simple one: unfurnished cremation, or burial with just a few objects, usually knives or pottery and sometimes one or two arrowheads or single beads.<sup>21</sup> Amongst the cremations there are some female burials with wire temple-rings that are highly characteristic of the Eastern Slavs. Some finds of Moravian jewellery and the similarity in shape of Gnezdovo and Western Slavonic wheel-thrown

<sup>19</sup> А. С. Розанова, 'К вопросу о технике кузнечного производства в Старой Ладоге', 175–8 in *Новгородские археологические чтения* (Novgorod, 1994) [L. S. Rozanova, 'On the question of the technology of blacksmith production at Staraja Ladoga'].

<sup>20</sup> Т. А. Пуškina, 'Les trouvailles monétaires de Gnezdovo: un marqueur des relations commerciales', 215–24 in M. Kazanski, A. Nersesian and C. Zuckerman (eds.), *Les centres proto-urbains russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient* (Paris, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> И. И. Ляпушкин, 'Славяне Восточной Европы накануне образования Древнерусского государства', *Материалы и исследования по археологии СССР*, 152 (1968), 85–6 and 111–12 [I. I. Ljapushkin, 'Slavonic Eastern Europe on the eve of the formation of the Old Russian state'].



pottery show that there were also central European and Baltic Slavs within the population. However, the majority of the pottery has parallels at the Slavonic sites of the Middle Dnepr region of the southern Rus'.<sup>22</sup>

The sets and typical shapes of female jewellery, the characteristic amulets, burial customs, some features of the weaponry and objects of everyday life, and certain details of handicraft practices, especially in ironworking and jewellery production, prove the presence of Scandinavians here.

The social and professional structure of the whole population of Gnezdovo and that of the Scandinavians there were not the same. A few large and middle-sized burials mounds stand out amongst other Scandinavian-style barrows. These have double or single cremation or inhumation burials in chamber-graves, rich and varied grave goods including eastern or Byzantine imports, ritual cauldrons, swords and armour, and drinking horns. They seem to be the burials of members of the nobility of the military retinue. Some of the burials which do not differ in their furnishings from well-known burials of the Viking Period in Scandinavia belong to freemen of middle rank. These mounds contained only characteristic brooches, or Thor's-hammer rings, together with everyday objects such as ice-skates or antler combs.

The majority of the Scandinavian finds are attributable to the 10th century, especially to its later half. Scandinavians provided permanent and quite numerous residents of Gnezdovo. They seem to have been joining the Gnezdovo community on a continuous basis — it is otherwise difficult to explain the chronological and typological resemblances between the Scandinavian finds at Gnezdovo and those in Scandinavia, especially in central Sweden.

It is generally accepted that the population of Gnezdovo was both ethnically and socially heterogeneous. This fact alone distinguishes Gnezdovo from other settlements in the region in the 10th century. There is also some impressive evidence of highly advanced handicraft. Numerous finds of Arabic and Byzantine coins, and scales and weights, in the burials and in the settlement show that the majority of the population here participated in trade. On one hand, silver coins were not 'dead treasure' but were rather in active use. On the other hand more than 1,100 silver coins which composed the seven Gnezdovo hoards of the 10th century were a 'treasure' of the relevant social group.

As a further element, traces of Christianity appeared in Gnezdovo earlier than at other sites of the Upper Dnepr region. This region was officially converted only in 1014, but crucifix-shaped pendants, wax candles and simple oriented inhumation graves appeared at Gnezdovo around the middle or in the third quarter of the 10th century. The same phenomena do not occur in rural cemeteries before the 11th century.<sup>23</sup>

The problem of interpreting Gnezdovo is basically that of the historical and archaeological context of its development. The connexions between Gnezdovo

<sup>22</sup> E. В. Каменецкая, 'О некоторых типах керамики Гнездова', *Советская археология*, 1 (1988), 258–62 [E. V. Kamenechkaia, 'On some types of pottery at Gnezdovo'].

<sup>23</sup> N. Makarov, 'Far northern parts of ancient Russia on the their way to Christianity', in M. Müller-Wille (ed.) *Rom und Byzanz im Norden: Mission und Glaubenswechsel im Ostseeraum während des 8.–14. Jahrhunderts*, Bd. II (Mainz-Stuttgart, 1998), 269.

can be proposed that Gnezdovo craftsmen were Scandinavians, on the evidence of the multi-layer iron welding found in Anglo-Scandinavian craftwork of the Viking Period, together with the existence of the same method in Russia at Staraja Ladoga, where it was known in the 8th–9th centuries.<sup>19</sup>

Both the quality and quantity of the finds relating to craft-production in Gnezdovo differ fundamentally from the finds at small rural settlements. Two groups of finds that emphasize this difference in particular: coins and trading equipment. About 7% of the Gnezdovo burial mounds contained scales and weights, and about 6% had coins. More than 1,100 Arabic coins come from the seven hoards, and 170 further individual coins were found in the open settlement and the hill-fort here. Trade equipment has been found at only five places, and just two fragments of Arabic coins have been found in burial mounds of the 9th and 10th centuries outside of Gnezdovo.<sup>20</sup>

The archaeological material thus consistently distinguishes Gnezdovo from other contemporary settlements of the Upper Dnepr region. This impression is corroborated and enhanced by a comparison of the material of the Gnezdovo cemeteries.

The principal burial rite at all the Gnezdovo cemeteries was cremation, although inhumations still account for some 20% of the graves examined. There are some cremations in boat-graves, while some of the inhumations were in chamber-graves. The barrows associated with various types of burial do not form specific groups. There are no universal differences between the implements found in the burial mounds of different cemeteries, or associated with different methods of burial. Correlations between some categories of find are, however, of some interest. About 13% of graves whose contents are known were burial mounds containing some form of weaponry. About 7% of the burials contained coins and/or scales and weights. About 6% of the burials contained Scandinavian-type brooches, Thor's hammers, or other amulets.

In respect of its ethnic character, Gnezdovo was mixed from its very beginnings. The sets of female jewellery, the shapes of the ceramic vessels, some features of the burial practices, and some details of metalworking demonstrate this conclusively.

The population of Gnezdovo had three components: the Slavs, the Scandinavians and the Balts. The background of the Slavonic group was complex. The burial custom of the pagan Slavs was a very simple one: unfurnished cremation, or burial with just a few objects, usually knives or pottery and sometimes one or two arrowheads or single beads.<sup>21</sup> Amongst the cremations there are some female burials with wire temple-rings that are highly characteristic of the Eastern Slavs. Some finds of Moravian jewellery and the similarity in shape of Gnezdovo and Western Slavonic wheel-thrown

<sup>19</sup> А. С. Розанова, 'К вопросу о технике кузнечного производства в Старой Ладоге', 175–8 in *Новгородские археологические чтения* (Novgorod, 1994) [L. S. Rozanova, 'On the question of the technology of blacksmith production at Staraja Ladoga'].

<sup>20</sup> Т. А. Пуškina, 'Les trouvailles monétaires de Gnezdovo: un marqueur des relations commerciales', 215–24 in M. Kazanski, A. Nersesian and C. Zuckerman (eds.), *Les centres proto-urbains russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient* (Paris, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> И. И. Ляпушкин, 'Славяне Восточной Европы накануне образования Древнерусского государства', *Материалы и исследования по археологии СССР*, 152 (1968), 85–6 and 111–12 [I. I. Ljapushkin, 'Slavonic Eastern Europe on the eve of the formation of the Old Russian state'].

pottery show that there were also central European and Baltic Slavs within the population. However, the majority of the pottery has parallels at the Slavonic sites of the Middle Dnepr region of the southern Rus'.<sup>22</sup>

The sets and typical shapes of female jewellery, the characteristic amulets, burial customs, some features of the weaponry and objects of everyday life, and certain details of handicraft practices, especially in ironworking and jewellery production, prove the presence of Scandinavians here.

The social and professional structure of the whole population of Gnezdovo and that of the Scandinavians there were not the same. A few large and middle-sized burials mounds stand out amongst other Scandinavian-style barrows. These have double or single cremation or inhumation burials in chamber-graves, rich and varied grave goods including eastern or Byzantine imports, ritual cauldrons, swords and armour, and drinking horns. They seem to be the burials of members of the nobility of the military retinue. Some of the burials which do not differ in their furnishings from well-known burials of the Viking Period in Scandinavia belong to freemen of middle rank. These mounds contained only characteristic brooches, or Thor's-hammer rings, together with everyday objects such as ice-skates or antler combs.

The majority of the Scandinavian finds are attributable to the 10th century, especially to its later half. Scandinavians provided permanent and quite numerous residents of Gnezdovo. They seem to have been joining the Gnezdovo community on a continuous basis — it is otherwise difficult to explain the chronological and typological resemblances between the Scandinavian finds at Gnezdovo and those in Scandinavia, especially in central Sweden.

It is generally accepted that the population of Gnezdovo was both ethnically and socially heterogeneous. This fact alone distinguishes Gnezdovo from other settlements in the region in the 10th century. There is also some impressive evidence of highly advanced handicraft. Numerous finds of Arabic and Byzantine coins, and scales and weights, in the burials and in the settlement show that the majority of the population here participated in trade. On one hand, silver coins were not 'dead treasure' but were rather in active use. On the other hand more than 1,100 silver coins which composed the seven Gnezdovo hoards of the 10th century were a 'treasure' of the relevant social group.

As a further element, traces of Christianity appeared in Gnezdovo earlier than at other sites of the Upper Dnepr region. This region was officially converted only in 1014, but crucifix-shaped pendants, wax candles and simple oriented inhumation graves appeared at Gnezdovo around the middle or in the third quarter of the 10th century. The same phenomena do not occur in rural cemeteries before the 11th century.<sup>23</sup>

The problem of interpreting Gnezdovo is basically that of the historical and archaeological context of its development. The connexions between Gnezdovo

<sup>22</sup> E. В. Каменецкая, 'О некоторых типах керамики Гнездова', *Советская археология*, 1 (1988), 258–62 [E. V. Kamenechkaia, 'On some types of pottery at Gnezdovo'].

<sup>23</sup> N. Makarov, 'Far northern parts of ancient Russia on the their way to Christianity', in M. Müller-Wille (ed.) *Rom und Byzanz im Norden: Mission und Glaubenswechsel im Ostseeraum während des 8.–14. Jahrhunderts*, Bd. II (Mainz-Stuttgart, 1998), 269.

and the rural settlements of the Upper Dnepr region are unclear.<sup>24</sup> There are only a few individual finds of the typical Gnezdovo knives and antler combs in the hinterland of the site. Meanwhile, some evidence of agricultural activity amongst the inhabitants of Gnezdovo has been found at the central settlement, in the form of two shares for ploughing implements, and scythes. Taking into account the dispersed distribution of contemporary archaeological sites in the hinterland, we may infer that these connexions could not have been very important to Gnezdovo. This implies that there was no agricultural basis for the development of the town.

The main contacts that Gnezdovo had were rather of long-distance character. It found its place in the network of early urban or pre-urban centres in Russia and the Baltic region.

As we know from the written sources, especially from the Russian Primary Chronicle and the work by Constantine Porphyrogenitus *De administrando Imperio*, in the 10th century these centres were controlled by the princely, Kievan retinue known as the Rus', which used the Norse language even in the mid-10th century.<sup>25</sup> In consequence it should be no surprise that the majority of Scandinavian finds are from Ryurik Gorodishche and Gnezdovo.

It is possible to suggest that Gnezdovo was a residence of the princely retinue in the 10th century. Such stations for a military élite (Rus'), collecting tribute, were called *pogost* in the Old Russian tradition. The stormy growth of these centres is dated from the middle of the 10th century, after Princess Olga had founded some new *pogosti* in the Dnepr, Desna and Novgorod regions: in fact, new settlements similar to Gnezdovo and Ryurik Gorodishche appeared on the other principal rivers of the Old Russian territory. But this system of *pogosti* disappeared in the period of the end of the 10th century and beginning of the 11th.<sup>26</sup> The development of agricultural settlements then became one of the most important factors in the establishment and prosperity of towns. The roots and the economic strength of these towns lay in their agricultural hinterland. *Pogosti* or pre-urban centres such as Gnezdovo had no such roots.

The absence of real connexions between Gnezdovo and its hinterland prevented the further development of this trading and productive settlement. It did not become a town. It is noteworthy that the Scandinavian features of the blacksmith's craft disappeared with the decline of Gnezdovo. The advanced technology of multi-layered iron-welding is unknown in Smolensk — the more primitive technology of the southern Russian smiths is dominant in that town from the 11th century onwards.

Gnezdovo, however, did not utterly perish at the beginning of the 11th century: it transformed into a feudal estate centre, referred to in the documents of the 14th century as a residence of the service people near Smolensk. This was how Gnezdovo co-existed with Smolensk in the 11th century and later.

<sup>24</sup> T. A. Pushkina, 'The Gnezdovo settlement: a Viking Age settlement near the Upper Dnieper', *Gnumeria*, 64 (1991), 359–64.

<sup>25</sup> Константин Багрянородный, *Об управлении империей (текст, перевод, комментарий)* (Moscow, 1989), 45–51, Ch. 9, commentaries 6, 11 and 13 [Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio (Text, Translation, Commentary)*].

<sup>26</sup> В. Я. Петрухин, *Начало этно-культурной истории Руси IX–X вв.* (Smolensk and Moscow, 1995), 154–70 and 265–8 [V. Ja. Petrukhin, *The Beginning of the Ethno-cultural History of Russia in the 9th–10th Centuries*].



The network of centres whose active life depended on the presence of the princely retinue and on participation in international trade was formed in Old Russia in the 10th century. The Scandinavians — warriors, craftsmen, merchants and women — were a considerable part of their permanent, free population. According to the archaeological evidence we have, there was no active expression of agricultural activity by the Scandinavians here.

To no small degree, the Scandinavians ensured intensive craft-production and the development of centres such as Rurik Gorodishche and Gnezdovo. When these centres were superseded, their elements of Scandinavian culture, practically unknown on rural sites, also virtually disappeared in the towns which flourished in their vicinity.

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