



THE RURAL VIKING
IN RUSSIA AND SWEDEN

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LECTURES

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SCANDINAVIAN FINDS FROM OLD RUSSIA A SURVEY OF THEIR TOPOGRAPHY AND CHRONOLOGY

The Volga and Dnepr trade routes which connected the Baltic Sea with the Black and the Caspian Sea played a very important role in the development of Eastern Europe. These routes connected Northern Europe with Byzance, Old Russia and the East.

The Volga trade route began to function around the 7th century – a few hoards with Sasanian coins are known from the district of the Kama river. Several finds and small hoards with Arabic coins of the 8-9th centuries mark the road from the Upper Volga to the Finnish Gulf through the Ilmen lake and the Volchov.

The Dnepr trade route described in the Russian Primary Chronicle (Nestor's Chronicle) as the route from the Varangians to the Greeks had two variants. This route was used from the 9th century, but its variants had different periods of active use. The 10th century is the time of the formation and very active use of the route along the Dnepr and the Volchov. A second variant of this route, using West Dvina, was formed and began to be used very actively along the whole distance not earlier than the 11th century.

Both routes were connected with each other through a system of small rivers, lakes and short portages. This system was used sporadically in the 9th century.

Scandinavians arrived in Eastern Europe before the Viking period. Several finds of the Vendel period (7th-8th centuries) are known from Lithuanian and Estonian cemeteries and from Gotlandic graves in Grobin in Latvia. Grobin is mentioned as Seeburg in Rimbert's Vita Ansgarii in connection with a Swedish campaign against the Curonians in 850.

Written sources of the 9th century inform us about Scandinavians from the inner districts of Eastern Europe too.

Annales Bertiniani mentions *Rhos*, who in reality were *Sueones*, in 839. The Russian Primary Chronicle tells about Scandinavians called *Varangians* in 859 (the legend about the Varangian tribute from the Čud' and Slavs and Merians and all the Kriviči) and then later in 862 (the episode about the expulsion of the Varangians and the invitation of them to rule).

The Primary Chronicle goes on to tell about the Varangians during the

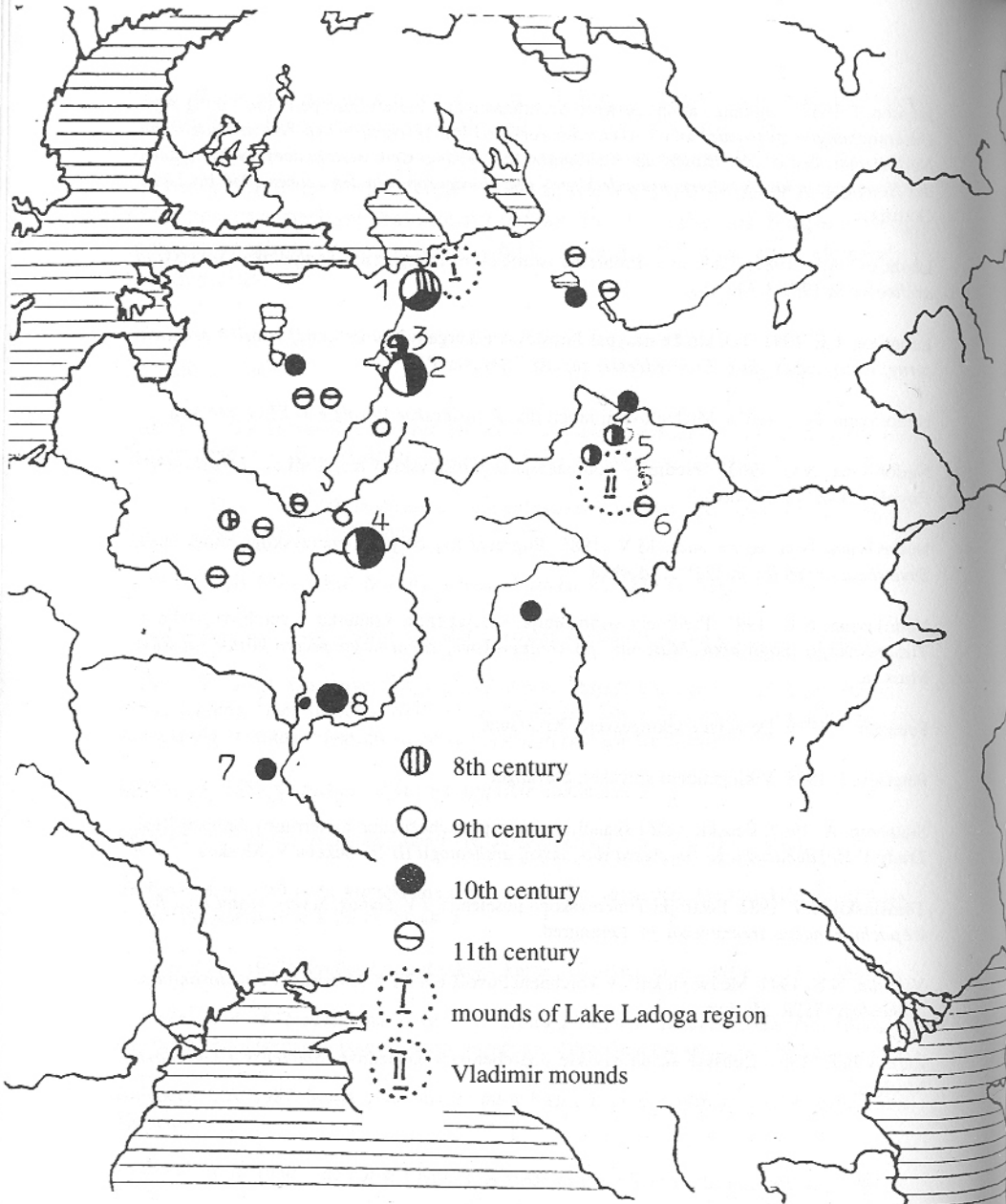


Fig. 1. Scandinavian finds from Old Russia. 1) Staraja Ladoga (Old Ladoga). 2) Rjurikovo Gorodišče. 3) Novgorod. 4) Gnězdovo, Novosělki. 5) Timerëvo. 6) Suzdal'. 7) Kiev. 8) Šestovica.

10th and first half of the 11th century. The Varangians are mainly mentioned as members of the prince's retinue.

The Scandinavian finds in Old Russia are very numerous and various. I would like to present some of the preliminary results of my studies of them.

More than 650 finds of weapons, jewellery, amulets and everyday objects of the 8th–11th centuries were found at 70 sites. The sites lie in the wide area from Lake Ladoga to the Lower Dnepr (the Dnepr rapids) and from Minsk to the district of the Kama river. Objects marked with runic signs and inscriptions are known too.

The main part of the finds belongs to burials from the end of 9th and the 10th century. Synchronous settlements are known in lesser number and they are investigated less. The earliest finds belong to the settlement of Staraja Ladoga (Old Ladoga). They were found in the cultural layer of the 8th century. The youngest finds are known from the cultural layers of the 11th century in Novgorod and Suzdal'.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FINDS

The main part of the objects attributed to Scandinavian culture differs in shape and ornamentation from the local Baltic, Finno-Ugric and Slavonic objects. These differences help us to identify the Scandinavian items among countless archaeological finds.

Weapons, jewellery and amulets compose the main part of the Scandinavian finds.

Swords, axes, spear-heads, arrowheads, battle-knives, shield-bosses and some details of helmets compose the finds of weapons.

The interpretation of the weapons as Scandinavian finds is conditional because the weapons have no ethnical meaning. But the typical North European ornamentation of some of the swords, the pattern-welding of some of the blades – known by the Scandinavians in the 9th century – and constant mention of the Varangians as members of the prince's retinue in the Chronicle permit me to assume that the main part of all these objects came to Old Russia with Scandinavians. Thus swords, battle-axes and spear-heads are important finds.

More than 100 swords of so-called Carolingian type were found in Rus'. Eighteen swords have West European inscriptions which are known in Scandinavia too (*Ulfberht* for instance). It is very important that swords of types B, H, E and V are more numerous in Russia and Scandinavia than elsewhere. These swords are known in 49 examples in Russia (Kirpičnikov

1966a, II, pp. 6–19, 27–41).

Usually we consider that lanceolate arrowheads are Scandinavian. They are so numerous that nobody has yet counted them. But about 38 % of the arrowheads in Gnězdovo have a lanceolate shape.

The group of Scandinavian jewellery consists of about 400 different brooches, arm-rings and pendants.

Oval brooches are a very typical part of women's clothing in the Viking period. They are most numerous among the Russian finds – more than 200 have been found. Oval brooches of Petersen's type 51 are dominant. The same type is more characteristic in Scandinavia during the whole 10th century (Jansson 1981, p.12, fig. 1).

The other women's brooches consist of 87 examples of trefoil, equal-armed and circular brooches.

Fifty-two ringed pins which belong to the male costume were found. Petersen's type 227 of the 10th century is dominant.

Ninety-two examples of simple iron neck-rings and Thor's hammer rings of iron were found. Scandinavian forms of amulets are miniature weapons, strike-a-lights, human masks, arms or Valkyries of bronze or silver. There are 68 of these finds (Novikova 1995, pp. 79-83).

The famous miniature bronze statuette of Thor is a very interesting find (Puškina 1984).

Finds of everyday objects are not so numerous. There are about 40 finds: a double-pronged and a three-pronged iron fork; strike-a-lights, antler points decorated with an animal's head; bone gaming pieces; a soap-stone vessel and soap-stone spindle-whorls; tweezers decorated with a man's head; some keys of special shapes, etc.

Finds of tools such as the smithing and jewellery-making instruments from the Staraya Ladoga hoard, and fragments of clay and stone moulds for the casting of Scandinavian jewellery, have special interest for us.

GENERAL TOPOGRAPHY

The main part of the Scandinavian finds comes from the area of the Lower Volchov and the south-eastern Ladoga region, the district of Upper Volga near Jaroslavl' and the Upper Dnepr region near Smolensk, from the neighbourhood of Novgorod and the Middle Dnepr area (Kiev, Černigov and its vicinity). In addition, some separate finds are known from Pskov and its neighbourhood, from Beloozero as well as other sites.

The map shows very well that the main part of the finds comes from sites

situated along or near the important river routes of Eastern Europe (Fig. 1).

CHRONOLOGICAL TOPOGRAPHY

I divide all Scandinavian finds of the Viking period in Russia into three groups: the first group dates to the 8th–9th centuries; the second to the 10th century; and the third to the 11th century.

The earliest traces of Scandinavian presence in the Russian territory were found in the north on the Lower Volchov.

The earliest find is dated to the 760's. This is the hoard with smithing, jewellery-making and wood-working instruments from Old Ladoga. The instruments were found during the excavations of a work-building. These objects have good parallels in finds from Mästermyr on Gotland and other places in Scandinavia. The handle of a pair of tweezers or a key decorated in typical Vendel style was found together with the instruments in the Ladoga hoard (Rjabinin 1980, pp. 161–177).

The cultural layer of Old Ladoga from the second half of the 8th to the end of the 9th century gave us some more finds. There were found: a small, smooth oval brooch (7th or first half of the 8th century); several single-sided bone combs; an axe of Petersen's type C; a few spear-heads of early types; a small iron Thor's hammer; a fragment of an iron neck-ring and of a wooden stick with an engraved runic inscription (Davidan 1970, pp. 79–91).

Scandinavian burials were found in the Plakun cemetery near Old (Staraja) Ladoga. They are dated to the 9th century and correspond to the early group of the Scandinavian inhabitants at Ladoga.

Rjurikovo Gorodišče (Rjurikovo fortified place) near Novgorod is the second archaeological site which has certain cultural layers of the 9th century and Scandinavian finds. An oval brooch of Petersen's type 37:11 and two equal-armed brooches of Petersen's type 58 are typical Scandinavian ornaments from the 9th century. Fragments of two iron neck-rings were also found there (Nosov 1990, p. 121, fig. 44:5, 6). The cemetery of Rjurikovo Gorodišče is still unknown.

Early cultural layers with good preservation and a strong dendrochronological foundation are so far known only at these two sites.

About 170 burials of the Viking period have been excavated to the east of Old Ladoga in the south-eastern Ladoga lake region. Only two of them can be dated to the end of the 9th century: two oval brooches of Petersen's type 27 and an equal-armed brooch of type 58 – both early types – lay together in one burial, and an early sword of Petersen's type E was found in another. Another early sword of type B was found in a destroyed mound, but we do not know all the finds from this burial. The other 15 Scandinavian burials are dated to the 10th century.

Unfortunately we do not have any traces of the settlements corresponding to these groups of mounds. The size of these groups of mounds is not great. Usually they are situated on the banks of small rivers (Kočkurkina 1973).

In the Timerëvo cemetery near Jaroslavl', 464 burials were excavated, and 64 of them were determined to be Scandinavian. Only four of them belong to the end of the 9th century and the others to the 10th century. Early Scandinavian burials are dated with the help of oval brooches of types 37:3 and 37:11 and an equal-armed brooch of type 58. There are no other early Scandinavian finds here (Fechner & Nedošivina 1987).

The Timerëvo settlement was dated by the excavator to the 9th–10th centuries. There are few objects of Scandinavian origin among the finds of the 9th–10th centuries. Two hoards of the 9th century with Arabic coins were found at the settlement. Thus they confirm indirectly that the settlement existed in the 9th century; four coins from one of the hoards had engraved runes (Dubov 1982, pp. 143–187).

Some objects of Scandinavian origin from the 8th–9th centuries were found at Sarskoe Gorodišče (Sarskoe fortified place). They include an axe of type C and a tongue-shaped strike-a-light decorated with an open-work bronze plate (Leont'ev 1981, pp. 141–149).

Two equal-armed brooches of type 58 were found in mounds in the area between West Dvina and Upper Dnepr. A hoard from the first half of the 10th century with Arabic coins is known from this region; a Scandinavian coin from Hedeby was among the contents of the hoard (Korzuchina 1964, pp. 302, fig. 2:5; Šmidt 1993, p. 124).

Two Scandinavian burials of the 9th century have been found in the Smolensk Dnepr region. I refer to two mounds which were excavated in Gnëzdovo and Novosëlki not far from it. A broken sword of type H and an equal-armed brooch of type 60 were found together in Gnëzdovo. A similar, damaged, sword was found in one of the Novosëlki mounds.

The Gnëzdovo cemetery consists of more than 3 000 mounds and about 1 000 of them have been excavated. Judging from the burial rite and the peculiarities of the grave-goods, no less than 60 burials are Scandinavian. All but one or two belong to the 10th century.

The Gnëzdovo settlement is situated near the cemetery and has a very rich collection of archaeological finds. We can mention some objects of early types, found during excavations of the earliest part of the settlement of the 10th century. There are an equal-armed brooch of type 58 and a small simple ringed pin from the fortified place.

Scandinavian finds from the 9th century are not known from sites south of Gnëzdovo (Dedjuchina 1967, pp. 191–206).

Finds from the 10th century are more numerous and more various and are spread more widely. Weapons, Thor's hammer rings, amulets, different brooches and everyday objects were found at different archaeological sites, not just in the above-mentioned ones. They were found at many places of Old Russia: in mounds, in settlements, and in the contents of hoards.

The finds of the 11th century are less numerous, and I think their quantity is less than the finds of the 9th century. A few finds from the 11th century are known in Novgorod and Suzdal', in a few Belorussian sites, and in the region of Beloozero (White Lake).

Thus the map and the chronology of the archaeological finds show the gradual penetration of Scandinavian elements from the north to the south and to the south-east from the second half of the 8th to the beginning of the 11th century.

TYPES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

The Scandinavian finds are concentrated to 23 sites in the region of Lake Ladoga. All these sites are situated on the banks of four small rivers. The size of the mound groups is not great: usually the groups consist of 2–15 mounds. These small cemeteries ought to belong to small settlements consisting of 1–2 farmsteads.

About 80 objects of Scandinavian origin were found at these 23 sites. Typical Scandinavian jewellery (oval brooches) and details of the burial rite (boat-grave or damaged weapon) were found together with elements of local Finnish culture in some cases (Kočkurkina 1973).

The areas between the Upper Volga and its tributary, the Kljazma, is the second region of the Scandinavian finds. I refer to the finds in the so-called Vladimir mounds. The find circumstances of these finds are largely unknown, because the mounds were excavated at great speed in the 19th century. We can only say that 15 Scandinavian objects were found in the 7 700 excavated mounds, and that the Scandinavian objects come from 10 different sites (Lapšin 1981, pp. 45–48). In contrast to the cemeteries of the Ladoga region, the Vladimir mounds compose groups of some tens or hundreds of barrows. This means not only a bigger size for their settlements but also a longer period of existence for the cemeteries.

It is very important to note that finds of weapons are not typical for the Vladimir mounds. The earliest burials of these mounds date to the second quarter of the 10th century.

Two settlements synchronic with the cemeteries were discovered in this area in Gnezdilovo and Vasil'kovo near Suzdal'. Only five Scandinavian objects were found here. The excavators suppose that these settlements had the role of centres for small rural regions (Lapšin & Muchina 1988, pp. 138–140).

The area near Jaroslavl' city on the Upper Volga is the third region of Scandinavian finds. About 130 Scandinavian finds were recovered here.

The Scandinavian finds mainly belong to the Timerëvo mounds. About 80 Scandinavian finds of the 9th–10th centuries were found in the mounds and the settlement at Timerëvo.

The Petrovskoe mounds are situated 5 km away from Timerëvo. Here 115 barrows were excavated, and 6 of them had Scandinavian brooches of the 10th century.

The Michajlovskoe cemetery is situated on the other bank of the Volga, 22 km from Timerëvo. At this cemetery 171 mounds were excavated, and 17 of them can be interpreted as Scandinavian. There are 29 Scandinavian objects from Michajlovskoe.

All the four archaeological sites (including Sarskoe Gorodišče mentioned above) have different interpretation.

Sarskoe Gorodišče was the administrative and trade-industrial centre of one of the East Finnish tribes called *Merja* (Leont'ev 1996, p. 18–21). Timerëvo, Petrovskoe and Michajlovskoe could be centres for the Old Russian population. Some researchers have noted the likeness between the archaeological finds of the Vladimir sites and the finds of Timerëvo and Petrovskoe (Leont'ev 1989, pp. 79–86).

We know of about 270 Scandinavian finds from five sites in the Upper Dnepr region. The main part were found in the Gnëzdovo and Novosëlki mounds. Gnëzdovo and Novosëlki lie very close to each other – the distance between them is about 6 km.

Some time ago there were more than 30 mounds in Novosëlki, and 17 of them have been excavated: 13 Scandinavian objects were found here.

The Gnëzdovo archaeological complex consists of a large settlement and eight groups of mounds. The groups contained about 3 000 mounds, and about 1 000 of them have been excavated (Avdusin & Puškina 1982, p. 71). More than 250 Scandinavian objects were found during the excavations and as stray finds. About 140 items belong to the material from the settlement (I do not count the lanceolate arrowheads and combs).

Gnëzdovo was an important industrial-trade centre belonging to the prince's retinue during the whole 10th century (Petruchin & Puškina 1979, pp. 101–106).

A noticeable number of Scandinavian finds of the 10th century are known from South Russia in the Middle Dnepr region. The finds come from mounds in Kiev, Černigov and Šestovica. About 55 Scandinavian objects were found in these cemeteries in about 25 burials. All these finds are dated from the mid- and late 10th century.

Kiev was the capital of the Old Russian state from the end of the 9th

century. Černigov and Šestovica were regional administrative centres. The prince's retinue probably stayed at Šestovica.

The main part of the Scandinavian finds recovered from settlements were concentrated to three sites: Old Ladoga, Rjurikovo Gorodišče and Gnězdovo. A considerable number of Scandinavian everyday objects and tools were found there besides weapons, jewellery and amulets. The shape of certain instruments, moulds for Scandinavian ornaments, the alloy of some half-finished bronze items, and some characteristics of the smithing technology, all show the presence of Scandinavian craftsmen among the inhabitants of these centres.

Old Ladoga, Rjurikovo Gorodišče and Gnězdovo differ markedly from synchronous rural settlements. The large size, the indications of different crafts and trade, the concentration of imports (Old Ladoga, Gnězdovo), and finds of weapons (Gnězdovo) compose the most important features of these settlements. The concentration of Scandinavian finds means that Scandinavians, and not only the warriors, may have stayed and lived there.

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