https://doi.org/10.12685/xd2g5566

Keynote

Northern Rus': Exploring Identity in Medieval Past

Nikolaj Makarov

Chapter I

While exploring identity in medieval society on the basis of archaeological records we penetrate into rather a dangerous space, where one takes a free hand in the choice of source material and research methods. Obviously, construction of any standard research procedure concerning identity mirrored by material remains is hardly possible and any observations aimed at this subject are more or less subjective. Nevertheless, though the concept of identity was introduced into medieval archaeology only in the last few years, this aspect of medieval past has become especially attractive for the discipline since the very time of its formation within the framework of cultural-historical archaeology. Research interest to medieval monuments in Russia was raised by the accepted view on the antiquities as not only physical material remains of a remote historical epoch, but also as the traits of definite human groups mentioned in Russian chronicles. The significance of archaeological remains as the source material was to a great extent determined by the concept on their association with certain ethnic, religious or social groups, such as the Varangians and the Slavs, the Orthodox and the pagans, the princes' armed followers (*druzhina*) and the clergy. Up to the last few decades it was commonly assumed that all these groups manifested themselves in special material symbols which normally make them recognisable for an archaeologist.

In the paper I shall examine various cultural phenomena connected with expression of ethnic, regional and religious identity in Medieval Rus', in particular in its northern part. To what extent do the documentary sources and archaeological records which witness the existence of human groups with common identity (or are regarded as such) correspond to each other? In what way should we explain the cases when they do not seem to fit each other – by acknowledging the incomplete character of archaeological data or misleading stereotype approaches applied to the interpretation of written sources? What are the limitations of archaeological knowledge in reconstructions of the past identities? I shall make an attempt to highlight these problems proceeding from the archaeological data from the territories, which once constituted remote north-eastern periphery of Europe.

Chapter II

Archaeological investigations in various parts of the territory which once were Medieval Rus' have yielded rich evidences of the dramatic cultural changes of the late first to the early second millennia AD. These changes probably should be regarded as the most important phenomena in the cultural history of Eastern Europe. Their chronological span may be defined in general from ca. 900 to 1050 AD, varying somewhat in different regions. The innovations introduced during this relatively short period had resulted in the formation of a new material culture all over the vast territories from the Middle Dnieper in the south to Lake Ladoga in the north and touched practically all spheres of culture.

The scale and character of the shifts became more or less clear only in the recent decades, after wide-range field works at various types of

medieval sites were carried on and more precise studies on their chronology was undertaken. Due to these innovations, Medieval Rus' obtained new types of weapons and tools, accessories and costume decorations, ecclesiastic buildings and fortifications. Rather few types of ornaments and implements known in the 10th century were still in use in the second half of the 11th century. Thus, material culture of the Russian plain had passed through an almost complete renewal, displaying a higher degree of complexity in numerous categories of artefacts – from wheel-made pots to metal book fastenings – that had never before been familiar to the inhabitants of the remote East European woodlands.

The origin of different innovations, taken by itself, can be explained in the context of the specific historical conditions of the 10th to the early 11th centuries in connection with economical growth, formation of more advanced political organisation and social system, development of long-distance trade and conversion to Christianity. Many of them are regarded as the introduction of more advanced technologies borrowed from the adjacent countries by the local craft, or as a result of more intense goods circulation in the trade network. The traditional assumption is that the introduction of new articles and techniques was strongly stimulated by the growth of urban centres, which opened new perspectives for manufacturing and trade. However, these positivistic interpretations narrow the real meaning of the phenomenon of medieval innovations in the Russian plain. In my opinion, the emergence of new artefacts signified much more than purely technological or cultural progress. It was also a breakdown of established patterns, deeply rooted in the local traditions. Rejection of those traditions in medieval communities could only be sensible and needed special efforts. By assuming new standards in material culture and a new lifestyle, medieval society manifested its transition to a new state.

It is worth to note in this connection that the late 10th to the first half of the 11th century in Eastern Europe was marked by a disappearance of the old, and emergence of new names defining different groups of population. Old ethnonyms usually interpreted as "tribal names" of different Slavic tribal units, first mentioned in the introduction to the Primary Chronicle, gradually went out of use. The ethnonym of the Polyanians was mentioned for the last time in 944, that of the Severianians – in 1024, and that of the Sloveians – in 1036. They were replaced by new terms, their etymology being derived from the names of the towns – the centres of major regions and principalities, such as "kijane", "chernigovtsi", "pleskovichi", "novgorodtsi". Ethnic term "Rus'", referred mostly to the population of the middle Dnieper basin but in some cases also to the population of Medieval Rus' as a whole became more widespread in that time as well. Records in the chronicles and birch bark documents of the 11th century also yield the first evidences of new Finnish groups (such as the Vod' and the Korela), which had not been mentioned in the Primary Chronicle's earliest part. It is obvious, that both new collective names and new material culture are the indications of the new identities that had emerged in medieval society. On the other hand, formation of new identities was hardly possible without the creation of a material world, different from what existed before.

The recent researches allow us to suggest a new view on the common features in Medieval Rus' culture which indicate its unity in the 10th to the early 13th centuries (Sedov 1982; Sedov 1999). Archaeological data revealed the picture of a strong cultural consolidation within the Russian plain, in the territories which were ruled by the Russian princes in that period. This unity could not originate from the earlier Slavic culture developed by the inhabitants of the Russian plain. It was created in the 10th to the 11th centuries on the basis of early urbanisation, growing production of urban craft, intense trade exchange and political consolidation of the territory under the rule of the Riuric dynasty. Artefacts regarded as the evidence of the cultural unity and state power manifestations represent mostly new products of the urban craft and very often borrow from Byzantine (women's metal ornaments), from the West-Slavic areas (women's metal ornaments), from the Baltic and Scandinavia (weapons) or the southern steppes (men's metal belt garments). What we know from archaeological records proves, that when calling "the Rus'" after conversion to Christianity (988) "the new people" in the Primary Chronicle (The Russian Primary Chronicle, 1953) the chronist was not simply following ecclesiastic stylistic patterns. Self-consciousness of the Rus' as the "new

wine-skin" – the new people – expressed in Metropolitan Illarion's writings (Illarion 1994) is adequately reflected by archaeological data.

Chapter III

Drawing the attention to the common characteristics of Medieval Rus' culture that indicated its growing convergence in different regions, we shouldn't underestimate the fact, that medieval chronicles mention various regional groups of population, named after the largest urban centres as outstanding actors on the historical scene in the 10th to the 12th centuries. There can be no doubt that these groups, integrated by common settling in geographical regions marked with distinct boundaries, consolidated as political units, acting as independent participants in military conflicts, created their own political and cultural identities. Yet, medieval archaeology in Russia was much more focused on the old tribal groups in attempts to distinguish different cultural patterns and areas corresponding to different ethnic unities, than on the demarcation of the new groups which came into being in the 10th to the 11th centuries.

Evidently, medieval populations settled within different regions displayed a certain variety of material culture. Special features could be determined by different factors, such as geographical position, intensity of urbanisation, the nature of external connections, etc. It is obvious, that many of these characteristics were not essential for the self-identification of the regional groups. However, we should assume that newly formed regional units having gained certain positions in political and territorial systems as well as sufficient resources, aspired to create material symbols of their own in order to distinguish themselves from the "others" and express their ambitions. These symbols must be clearly recognisable for their creators as well as for neighbouring groups. Thus, the search for the manifestation of regional identity in archaeological material of Northern Rus' suggests a new view on the most impressive and well-known medieval monuments.

The prehistory of medieval Novgorod (fig. 1) is usually connected with the expansion of the *sopki* burial monuments; they represent large conical earthen mounds, up to 10 m high, containing cremation burials typical of north-western Russia. *Sopki* mounds date from the 8th to the 10th centuries, however, the recent researches reveal that most of them were constructed during the 9th to the 10th centuries (Nosov 1992; Konetskij 1993; Petrenko 1994). For many decades, investigations of the *sopki* mounds were primarily concentrated on their ethnic attribution, inspiring lively debates concerning the origin of this burial rite and its probable roots in Slavic, Scandinavian or Finnish burial traditions. It was only in the last decade, that the discussions have started on the symbolic role of the *sopki* mounds. They are considered to reflect the phenomena of power and social domination that emerged in connection with the rise of the new social groups who manifested their control over the vast, newly settled territories (Konetskij 1993; Nosov 2001).

Meanwhile, *sopki* mounds seem to be the most vivid material expression of the "Novgorodan" cultural and political identity in the 9th to the 10th centuries. Being strongly different from burial constructions known in the other regions of Rus', they could rather express common cultural pattern of the Novgorod land settlers than define peculiar traditions of the local groups of Slavic, Scandinavian or Finnish origin. Symbolic meaning of the *sopki* mounds as the monuments designed to stress high social status of the regional elite can be seen from the fact that material culture of the Novgorod land in the discussed period pro-duced a rather poor repertoire of objects which may be regarded as indications of wealth and social ambitions. The ideas on the high status of Novgorod settlers, their special role in the formation of the Rus' state, their cultural difference from the rest of Rus' population clearly described in medieval texts, would have hardly assumed any material expression if not the *sopki* mound tradition.

Turning to north-eastern Russia, I would point to the connection between the rise of the church-building activity in the Suzdal region (fig. 1) and the formation of the "Suzdalians" as a consolidated regional group. Their name "Suzdalians" was first mentioned in the Primary Chronicle in 1096, some 120 years later than the "Novgorodians", but by the middle of the 12th century the Suzdalians appear to be one of the most active groups of Medieval Rus' population with a strong regional solidarity.

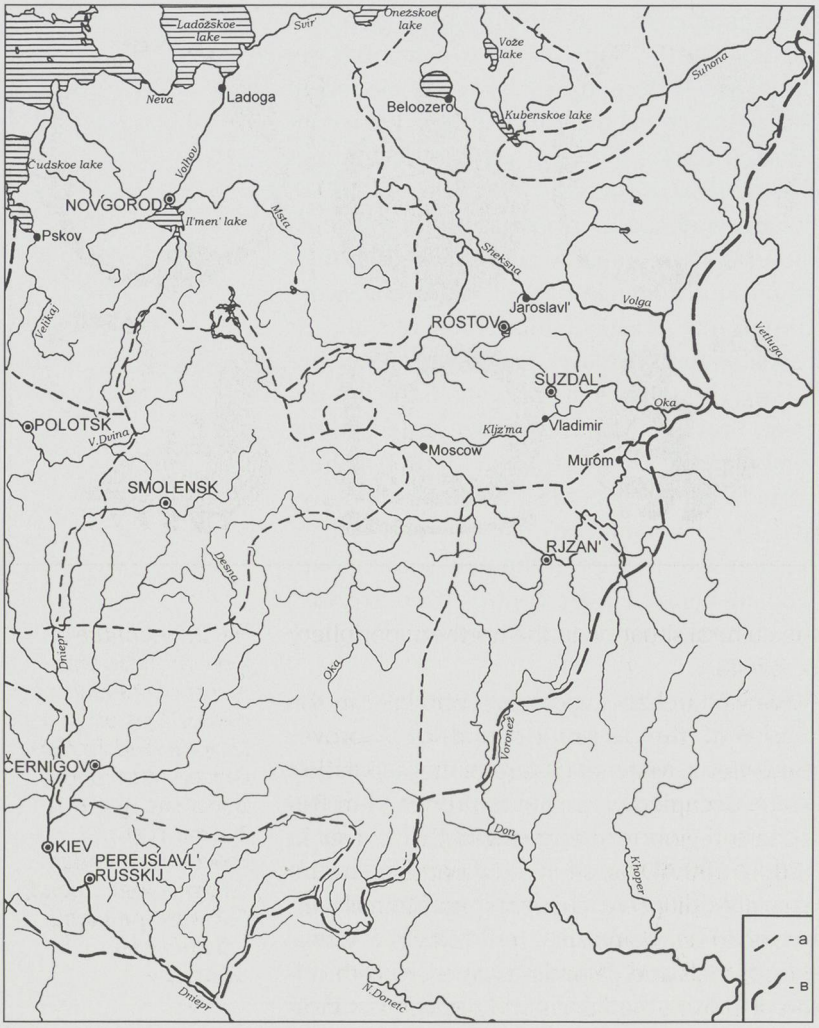

Fig. 1: Medieval Rus': places mentioned in the text. a) borderlines between Medieval Rus' principalities; b) borderline of Medieval Rus.

The name was first referred to the settlers of the town Suzdal and its vicinities, but since the second half of the 12th century it was often used as a common term to define the population of Rostov-Suzdal principality which occupied vast territories in the Volga basin. It was at that time, in the early 1150s, that prince Jurij Dolgorukij started constructing churches in the Romanesque building technique of face carved-stone blocks. The character and design of these monuments strongly differed from the ecclesiastical buildings of Southern Rus', Novgorod and the earliest temples in Suzdal, constructed of brick (in Novgorod of brick and flagstone) following the Byzantine architectural tradition. Detailed investigation of the Suzdal church-building tradition characterised by face stone blocks with specific stylistic elements and carved decorations revealed, that the temples had been built with the participation of Romanesque master-builders, who moved to the Rostov-Suzdal region in the 1150ies from south-western Rus' (Galich) and Poland, and in the 1160s probably also from Lombardy (Voronin 1961; Ioannisian 1999). Various scholars examined the political aspects of the church-building activity, which demonstrated strength and political domination of Rostov-Suzdal principality in Medieval Rus' since the second half of the 12th century (Voronin 1961). It was also pointed out, that political and military situations might have forced Jurij Dolgorukij, who could not find skilled masons of local origin in Suzdal, to invite craftsmen of Polish origin from Galich, the more so that he was involved in long-term conflicts with the most of Rus' principalities and had the prince of Galich, Vladimir Volodarevich as one of his few allies (Ioannisian 1985).

However, I would rather stress the fact that the construction of church buildings of limestone blocks with carved decoration manifested a strong change in the established tradition of ecclesiastic architecture which had developed in Rus' urban centres for a century and a half since the Convertion. And it can hardly be a coincidence that the new style and building techniques were introduced at the time when the Suzdalians, who formerly had been a peripheral group of Rus' population dependant on Kiev became one of the most powerful regional units aspiring for at least equal status with the Kijans and the Novgrodians (see, for instance, military campaigns against Kiev in 1169 and against Novgorod in 1170). The new architectural style vividly indicated the difference between the "Suzdalians" and the other regional groups of Rus' population.

Thus, different regional groups aspired both to express their belonging to a common universal culture established in Rus' and to mark the peculiarities distinguishing them from the "others", their high position in the hierarchy of Medieval Rus' territorial units. Material symbols, used for the expression of regional identity, could be different. Their choice was probably determined by cultural traditions, by local resources available, by the degree of social and political ambitions of the groups, by the ethnic composition of the society and other factors which remain unknown.

Chapter IV

Let us now turn to the more detailed examination of the archaeological data, which may re-

late to the ethnic identity of the human groups, settled within the regions lying in the cultural frontier, on the periphery of large cultural and linguistic areas, where individuals and groups of people speaking different languages had contact and interacted with one another. Vast territories of Northern Russia, stretched northward from the Volga and eastward from Lake Ladoga, may be regarded as such an area in the period of 950 to 1300 AD through the evidence of written sources and toponymics. Both give indications of Finnish groups inhabiting the area and Slavic expansion starting since approximately 950 AD. Yet, the historical sources present a poor basis for any conclusions as to the number of the Finnish and Slavonic-speaking population, the location of the regions settled by different ethnic groups and the character of their interrelations. What we know, is that the medieval development and colonisation resulted in the late medieval and early modern period formation of the Russian population comprising several regional groups, and in formation of a number of the Finnish peoples – the Vepsians, the Karelians, the Kola Lapps and the Komi-Zyrians. Extensive archaeological investigations of the past decades carried out in Northern Russia, and our field work in Beloozero region in particular, shed new light on the cultural situation and cultural interactions during the period of 950–1300 AD.

The northern periphery of Russia is often considered to be a territory which gives the archaeologists perfect opportunities for ethnic attribution of medieval monuments, due to cardinal differences between the cultures of the main ethnic interacting unities, named in the written sources. It was traditionally accepted by historians and archaeologists that burial rites, pottery shapes and decoration, and women's dress ornaments which developed and became widespread in Finnish and Slavic groups in the late 1st millennium AD, strongly differed from each other and thus produced reliable ethnic indications for the identification of populations in the contact zones as Finnish or Slavic units. Most of the scholars have the opinion, that Finnish-speaking and Slavonic-speaking populations in the periphery were organised in separate communities and settled separate dwelling sites on their own land units. Slavic and Finnish ethnic identity was regarded as the basic factor which shaped the cultural situation in the northern periphery of Russia.

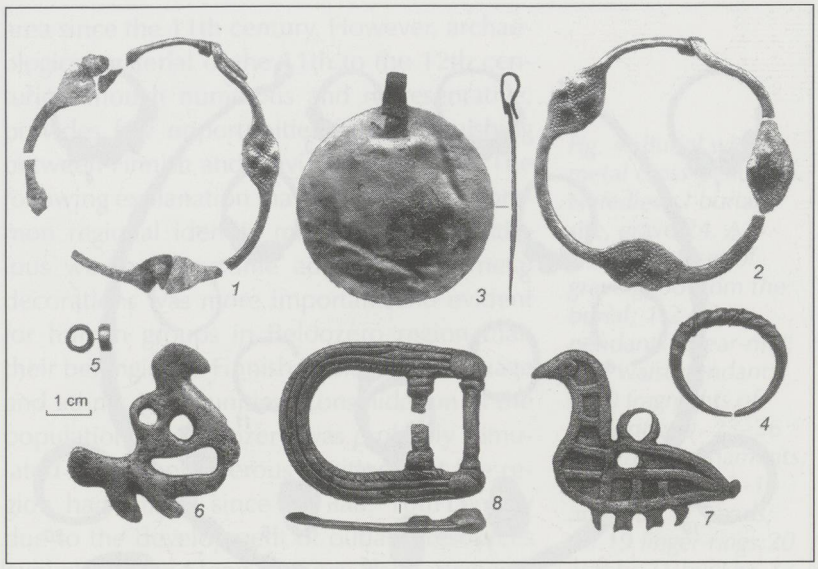

Fig. 2: Set of the women dress ornaments containing decorations of Slavonic and Finnish character. Minino I burial site, grave 1. 1.2 ear-rings; 3 necklace pendant; 4 finger-ring; 5 bead; 6.7 waist pendants; 8 belt-buckle; all bronze.

However, archaeological data obtained in the course of the recent excavations improves these views. Material culture of the population which occupied extensive territories from Beloozero region to the northern Dvina river in 1000–1300 AD, is, all in all, a peculiar combination of different elements, traditionally interpreted as "Finnish" and "Slavic". Ornaments, tools and ceramics connected with different cultural traditions and regarded as indications of different ethnic groups were systematically found here together, at the same sites. Wheel-made pottery with line-and-wave decoration of the so-called Slavic type and hand-made pottery with stamp ornamentation connected with the Finnish traditions are normally present at the sites within the same deposits; most probably they constituted elements of a single integrated culture. Burial rites in most of the medieval cemeteries vividly display a combination of Slavic and Finnish ritual traditions. One can hardly separate Finnish and Slavic elements in this cultural composition.

One of the most impressive examples of the formation of a new cultural pattern by means of combining cultural elements originating from Slavic and Finnish traditions is the set of women's costume ornaments, which was in use in Beloozero region since approximately 1000 AD (fig. 2; 3; 5).

It included, as basic elements, earrings and necklaces of Slavic types (fig. 2,1–3; 3,1–7; 5 B 3,7–9) and pendants of various shapes worn on the waist (fig. 2,6.7; 3,22–25; 5,14),

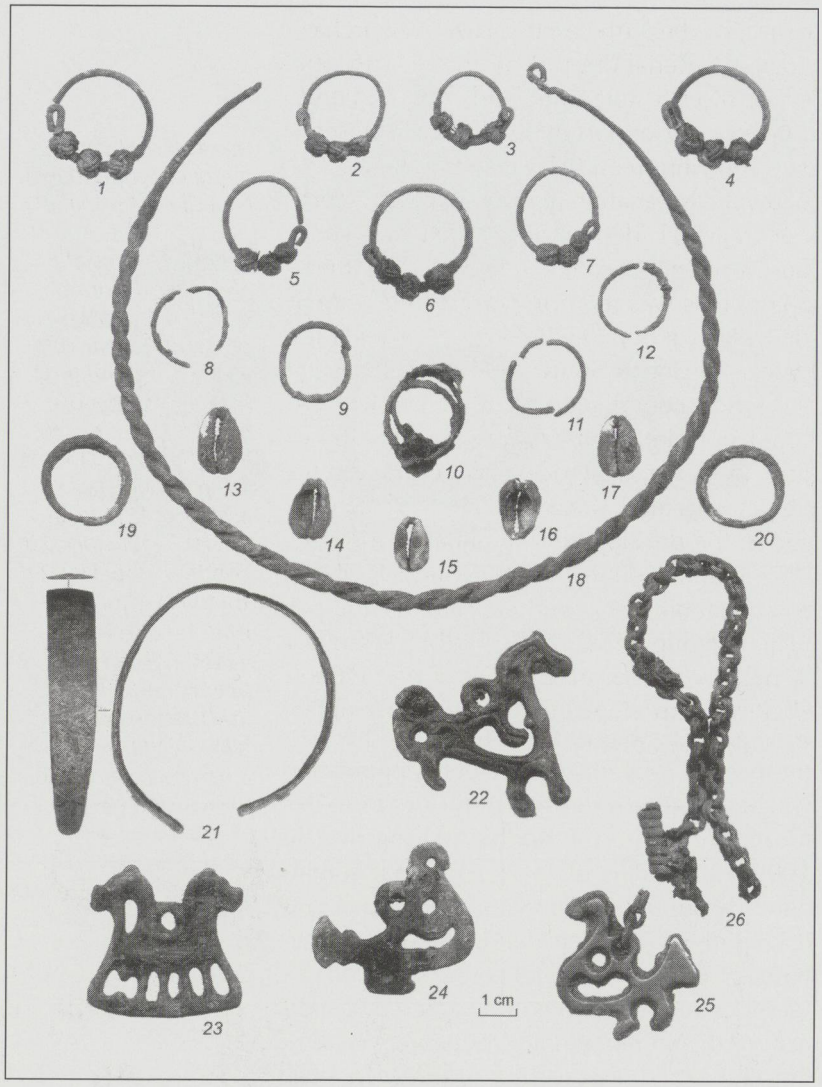

Fig. 3: Set of the women dress ornaments containing decorations of Slavonic and Finnish character. Minino I burial site, grave 3. 1–12 ear-rings; 13–17 pendants of cauri shells; 18 neck-ring; 19.20 finger-rings; 21 arm-ring; 22–25 waist pendants; 26 waistband chain; 1–12; 18–26 bronze; 13–17 cauri shells.

the feature originating from the Volga Finnish cultures. These items were often supplemented by metal head bands, torques, brooches, armrings and fingerrings. Ornaments of western types, which spread to the backwoods of Northern Russia from the Baltic area and Novgorod – such as neckrings, metal head bands, penannular brooches – were dominating in this set of ornaments in 1000–1100 AD, while waist pendants, small in number and in size, remained a modest part of dress decoration. Since approximately 1100 AD metal head bands, neckrings and penannular brooches were seldom used, in contrast with waist pendants, which represented an important part of the women's costume. Single pendants in that time were replaced by complicated sets of ornaments of various forms, attached to the waistband. Some of these ornaments, connected with the Volga Finnish style of metal decorations, represented new, formerly unknown types. By the end of the 12th century the number of metal ornaments in women's costume decreased. Sets of ornaments of the late 12th to the early 13th centuries were often confined to earrings and modest necklaces, but some of them included waist pendants as well (Makarov 1997).

Thus, during at least 200 years, Finnish and Slavic ornaments in Beloozero were used in one single attire and rarely worn separately. An important issue is that Finnish decorations became the most impressive part of this composition not in the initial period of the colonisation, but after 1100 AD, when economical and cultural integration of Beloozero region with Rus' metropolis became much stronger and local consumers had direct access to the artefacts of common Russian forms.

Beloozero region produced further, more paradoxical combinations of heterogeneous elements originating from quite different cultures and included in the same association. The assemblages where women's ornaments and amulets of Scandinavian types were found are of special interest. The only cremation burial, which contained Scandinavian decorations (Krokhinskie Peski cemetery), has yielded a set of ornaments consisting of an oval brooch, a penannular brooch of the Baltic origin, earrings and waist pendant of the Volga-Finnish -type with attached chains and bells. The oval brooch and penannular brooch probably were worn as a pair. The character of the burial rite and construction of the barrow, where cremated bones were placed in the earthen mound surrounded by a circular ditch show similarities with Slavic burial traditions in spite of certain special features (Makarov/Zakharov/Buzhilova 2001). Inhumation grave 59 in Nefedievo cemetery (the early 12th century) is of no lesser interest. Skeletal remains of a child were furnished with a Scandinavian round pendant of Borre style and animal-shaped pendants of Finnish character (Makarov 1997). Two amulets of Scandinavian origin were discovered in the course of the excavations at Nikolskoe V dwelling site. Iron Thor's hammer and a set of silver rods fixed on a silver ring were found here in the cultural deposits together with a duck-foot shaped pendant and hand-made pottery with stamped ornamentation, widely spread in Beloozero region (Makarov/Zakharov/Buzhilova 2001). The small size of the settlement (about 1500 m^2) and strong domina-

tion of hand-made pottery in the occupational deposits (over 90%) clearly indicate that "Scandinavian" amulets and "Finnish" pottery were owned by the same individuals.

Intermixture of the artefacts belonging to different cultural traditions at the same sites is often interpreted as the evidence of a multi-ethnic composition of the communities which inhabited the towns and large trading settlements in the 10th to the 11th centuries. Many scholars share the idea that the rising social elite in Medieval Rus' incorporated groups of different origin, and that for certain periods these groups could preserve their own customs and ethnic identification. However, these explanations cannot be applied to Beloozero. All we know about medieval burial grounds and settlements in Beloozero region proves them to be the sites of more or less ordinary status, and not special ones where aristocracy and military elite had its residence. One can hardly assume that the population of dwelling sites with total numbers of 20–30 individuals in Beloozero consisted of different ethnic groups. It is possible, that their inhabitants had different origins, but common life in small hamlets dispersed in the forested outland maintained their consolidation and formation of common cultural patterns rather than shaping different ethnic communities.

In what way should one interpret artefact associations of heterogeneous composition in Beloozero region? What can be said on the ethnic identity of the groups that created these special cultural patterns? Should they be explained as the evidence of the intermixture of Slavic and Finnish groups, or as the effect of cultural contacts through which Finnish-speaking communities loaned women's dress ornaments of Slavic character, or alternatively, Slavic settlers borrowed Finnish traditions? In many cases artefact material from the burials leave opportunity for different interpretations. Historical and linguistic data from the later period account for the Russian population settling in the centre and in the east of Beloozero region and the Vepsians – Finnish-speaking people – occupying its western part. Obviously, both groups emerged on the basis of medieval population. The Primary Chronicle mentions the Ves' people as the first-settlers in Beloozero region (the 9th to the 10th centuries) and the "Belozertsy" as the regional group of Russian-speaking population known in the area since the 11th century. However, archaeological material of the 11th to the 12th centuries, though numerous and representative, provides few opportunities for distinguishing between Finnish and Slavic communities. The following explanation may be suggested: common regional identity manifested in prestigious women's costume adorned with metal decorations was more important and evident for human groups in Beloozero region than their belonging to Finnish or Slavonic language and ethnic communities. Consolidation of the populations in Beloozero was probably stimulated by new prosperous position that the region had gained since the late 10th century due to the development of outland resources exploitation and long-distance trade. Regional consolidation and new pretensions of the peripheral group under discussion produced demands for special material signs of common identity comprising various elements of different cultural traditions.

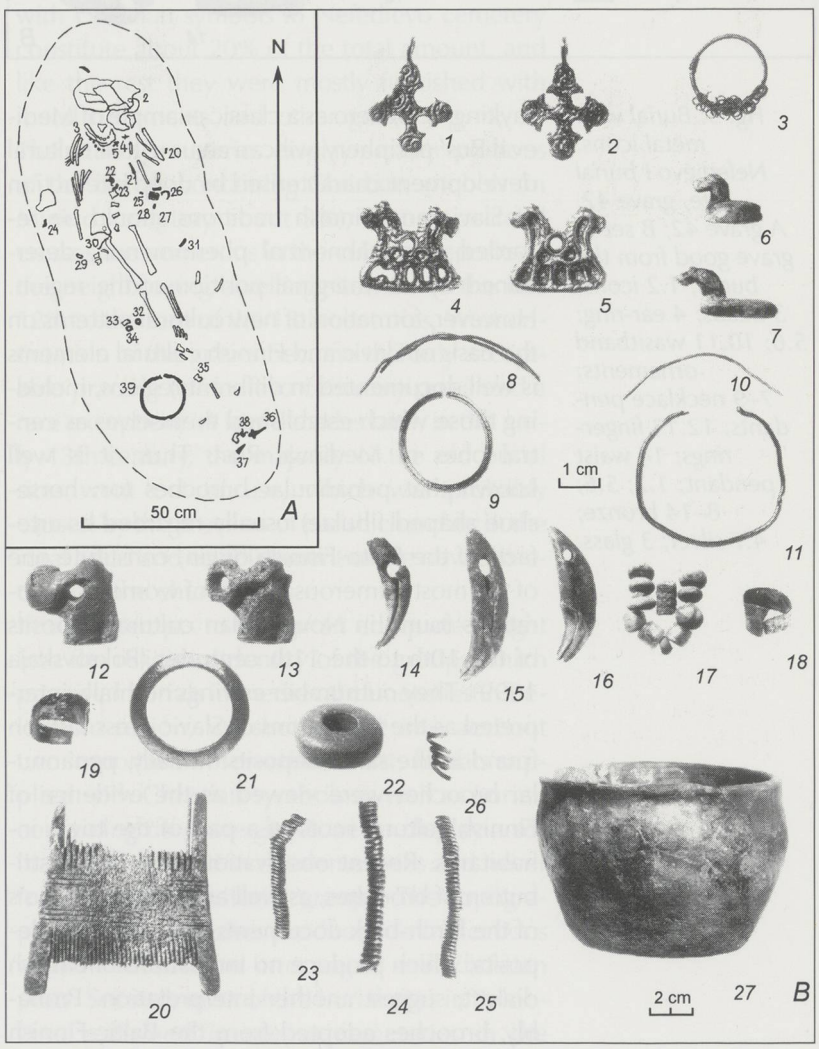

Fig. 4: Burial with metal cross-pendants. Nefedievo I burial site, grave 24. A grave 24; B set of grave good from the burial; 1.2 cross-pendants; 3 ear-ring; 4–7 waist pendants; 8.10 fragments of neck-ring; 9. 23–26 waistband ornaments; 11 arm-ring; 12–16 amulets; 17 beads; 18.19 finger-rings;20 comb; 21 buckle; 22 spinning whorl; 27 pot; 1–5; 8–11; 18.19; 21; 23–26 bronze; 6.7, 12–16; 20 bone or horn; 17 glass; 27 clay.

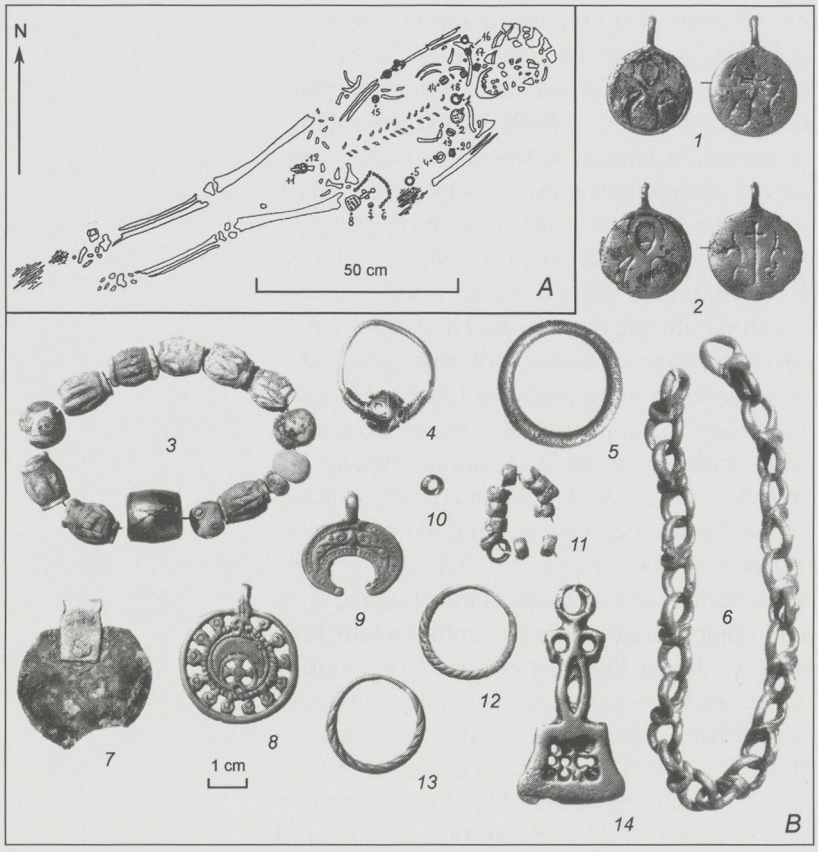

Fig. 5: Burial with metal icons. Nefedievo I burial site, grave 42. A grave 42; B set of grave good from the burial; 1.2 icons; 3 beads; 4 ear-ring; 5.6; 10.11 wasitband ornaments; 7–9 necklace pendants; 12.13 finger-rings; 14 waist pendant; 1.2; 5.6; 8–14 bronze; 4.7 silver; 3 glass.

Tayking Beloozero as a classic example of Medieval Rus' periphery, we can assume that cultural development characterised by deep interaction of Slavic and Finnish traditions should be regarded as an abnormal phenomenon, determined by the marginal position of the region. However, formation of new cultural patterns on the basis of Slavic and Finnish cultural elements is well documented in different regions, including those which established themselves as central ones of Medieval Rus'. Thus, it is well known that penannular brooches (or: horseshoe shaped fibulae) usually regarded as artefacts of the Balto-Finnish origin, constitute one of the most numerous groups of women's decorations found in Novgorodan cultural deposits of the 10th to the 11th centuries (Pokrovskaja 1999). They outnumber earrings normally interpreted as the indications of Slavic dress fashion found in the same deposits. Initially, penannular brooches were viewed as the evidence of Finnish cultural roots of a part of the town inhabitants. Recent observations over the distribution of brooches, as well as linguistic analysis of the birch-bark documents found in early deposits, which produce no indications of Finnish dialect, suggest another interpretation. Probably, brooches adopted from the Baltic-Finnish area became the details of women's attire among the urban population and that of the surrounding area without having any ethnic meaning (Nosov 1990). Together with earrings and necklaces they constituted the main elements of Novgorodan women's dress decoration, indicating its speciality.

Thus, Novgorod and Beloozero, representing central and peripheral areas of Northern Rus', display similar phenomena in the composition of material culture. The detailed review of archaeological material from both of the regions gives clear indications that the artefacts, usually regarded as easily recognisable and stable markers of certain ethnic or territorial units, in reality could be easily extracted from their original cultural context and used for constructing new identities. Adaptations of foreign cultural elements that turned to be means of non-verbal communication, expressions of wealth, social position or regional belonging were spread in medieval society much wider than it is commonly assumed. The interpretation of the trends in question as special standards practised exceptionally by higher classes should be revised.

Chapter V

Conversion to Christianity probably had created more vivid and distinct material expressions than any other shifts that occurred at the turn of the millennium in Russia. Its most impressive indications in archaeology are the introduction of monumental church-building and Christian art, the formation of the new burial rite and the spread of the metal cross pendants used as personal ware. From the earliest medieval texts we get clear impression that the opposition between Christianity and paganism became the most fundamental idea in the conscience of Russian society, or at least of its literate elite, which invested enormous resources in manifesting their new religion. Written sources draw a picture of the Christians and the pagans as the two religious groups with clear and distinct self-identification. Burial mounds containing cremations (the latest of them dating to the late 10th to the early 11th centuries AD) and inhumations oriented to the West and not equipped with any grave goods, placed in the cathedrals and the church-yards (the earliest of them dating to the 11th century) constitute two groups of archae-

ological material which perfectly correspond with the above cultural and historical opposition between the pagans and the Christians. Yet the archaeological picture is much more complicated, as the vast majority of the 11th to the 12th centuries burial monuments are the mounds or ground cemeteries with West oriented inhumations containing dress ornaments and grave goods. The size of the burial mounds and the character and the number of mortuary gifts in the graves vary. Some of the deceased buried in the barrow cemeteries of this type were furnished with cross-pendants. Those who followed this burial ritual formed the greater part of Rus' society until the turn of the 12th century. Their religious identity has been debated since the 1850s when medieval burial mounds in Russia first became the objects of wide-scale excavations.

Exclusion of these individuals from the Christian confession was accepted by many archaeologists, especially in the Soviet period (Rybakov 1987; Sedov 1993) results in limiting the Christian commune in Rus' to a small group consisting almost solely of the town inhabitants. While interpreting these monuments as Christian or as those with the domination of Christian graves, as it is often claimed in the recent publications (Musin 1990; Musin 1994), we should admit that early Christianity in Rus' had a rather indistinct demarcation, and the opposition between the pagan and the Christian identity was far from being so clear and sharp as it was described in written sources. One of the reasons for such an erosion could be the introduction of the practice of deferred baptism (primsigning) in Rus' society. A similar interpretation was suggested by Jörn Staecker for the Scandinavian graves furnished with Christian symbols in Birka (Staecker 1997). However, documentary sources provide no direct evidence on the wide spread of deferred baptism in Medieval Rus'.

We can try to detect religious identity transformation by examining the funeral practice in Beloozero region, where several burial sites dated from the late 10th to the early 13th centuries underwent extensive excavations in the recent decades. Some of these cemeteries (Minino, Krokhinskie Peski) contained cremations placed in shallow pits, on the ground surface, or under the barrow mounds which are the earliest group of the burials, emerging in the late 10th century. In the other cemeteries (Nefedievo) richly equipped inhumations oriented toward the East constitute the earliest group, dating from the 11thcentury. Obviously, the earliest graves in both groups were either performed according to the pagan rites or preserved strong elements of pagan ritual. The practice of cremation at most of the burial sites ceased at the turn of the 11th century. Probably, the latest cremations in Beloozero region (Minino burial site) were performed about 1050 AD. The later transformations of the burial rites were marked by gradual reduction of grave goods, by the appearance of metal cross-pendants and small icons in the burials, and by the introduction of West orientation of the grave pits. Transformations developed slowly. In Nefedievo cemetery over 80% of the dead were buried with metal dress decorations, tools and objects of everyday use until the late 12th century, though their number decreased if compared with the 11th century burials. The earliest graves containing pectoral crosses date to the late 11th to the early 12th centuries. Burials with Christian symbols in Nefedievo cemetery constitute about 20% of the total amount, and like the rest they were mostly furnished with metal ornaments and other goods (fig. 4; 5). The other cemeteries display smaller portions of the burials containing Christian symbols (in Minino cemetery about 3%), though pectoral crosses are numerous in the cultural deposits of the neighbouring dwelling sites. Since the late 12th to the turn of the 13th centuries, West orientation of the graves became the only acceptable practice (Nefedievo cemetery presented a rare exception). A few decades later, in the early 13th century, the majority of the old burial sites went out of use, which was probably caused by the erection of parish churches in the rural areas and establishment of the new cemeteries in the churchyards.

In our attempts to obatin an adequate insight into the religious identity of the groups which practised burials in medieval cemeteries in Beloozero region, we should take into account two important observations. First, burials supplied with Christian symbols as well as burials containing no grave goods never display a solitary position within the cemeteries and never form isolated territorial groups. The topography of the burial sites produces no indications of their subdivision into pagan and Christian plots. Second, most of the burial sites in Beloozero remained in use as cemeteries in the

same place for several hundred years, in some cases from the end of the 10th up to the 13th century, with cremation graves constituting the earliest chronological groups and West oriented inhumations containing no artefacts and dated to the 12th to 13th centuries being the latest. Thus, we have clear evidences that conversion to Christianity at least in some cases did not lead to the abandonment and destruction of the old cemeteries. Krokhinskie Peski cemetery near Beloozero town is maybe the most vivid example of long-term functioning of a burial site. The location of the 12th century Christian inhumations in the circular trench which surrounded the 10th century barrow probably indicates that those who conducted the ceremony tried to preserve the pagan monument.

We may assume that change in the burial practice from cremation to inhumation in the early 11th century in Beloozero region marks either a conversion of the greater part of the local population to Christianity, or introduction of deferred laid baptism (catechumen). However, like in many other regions of Medieval Rus', a parish network had not yet been formed in Beloozero by that time. Priests could only occasionally visit local sites, and local settlers were not able to attend church services regularly. The consequence was, that the adoption of Christian beliefs and rituals lasted for about two centuries, and religious identity of the populations remained vague. The character of medieval burial monuments in Beloozero points out, that local self-consciousness in many communities was stronger than religious identity. Local social tradition, belonging to a certain local group with all its members buried in the same cemetery could signify more than belonging to pagan worship or to the Orthodox Church.

Chapter VI

A brief survey of archaeological records that may be related to identity expression in Medieval Rus', revealed that the human groups mentioned in the written sources as the main actors on the historical scene are more or less clearly visible in material remains. Exploring manifestations of status, religion and ethnicity we have obtained a more realistic understanding of the origin, the position and self-consciousness of these groups. However, the results of the above survey cannot be limited to a conclusion that the evidences of the texts and archaeology just fit and contribute to each other.

In my opinion, medieval society in Rus', as seen from the archaeological perspective, differs in certain aspects from the reconstruction created proceeding from the written sources. The picture of strong a social hierarchy, distinct boundaries between different ethnic groups, division of the society into the Christian and the pagan communities that often are met in the historiography of Medieval Russia displays no direct correlation with the archaeological evidence. Expressions of ethnic, religious and social identity in archaeological material are less clear than could be expected. Thus, archaeology produces the picture of the society with rather indefinite social and religious demarcation, with numerous groups of populations whose ethnicity and status was not strictly determined, with certain tolerances toward different cultural traditions and quests for cultural innovations and foreign loans. We can argue whether this picture is true, or whether we should search for other interpretations of archaeological data relating to identity manifestation.

Bibliography

Ilarion 1994 — Ilarion, *Slovo o zakone i blagodati*, Moscow 1994.

Ioannisian 1985 — O. M. Ioannisian, "Zodchestvo Severo-Vostochnoi Rusi XII–XIII vv.", in: I. B. Goroda Dubov, *Velichestvom siyayushchie*, Leningrad 1985.

Ioannisian 1999 — O. M. Ioannisian, "Between Byzantium and the Romanesque West: The Architecture of Old Rus' in the 10th–13th Centuries", in: *Rom und Byzanz im Norden. Mission und Glaubenswechsel im Ostseeraum während des 8.–14. Jahrhunderts* II, Stuttgart 1999.

Konetskii 1993 — V. Y. Konetskii, "Novgorodskie sopki v kontekste etnosotsial'nuikh protsessov kontsa I.-nachala II. tuisyacheletiya n.e.", in: *Novgorodskii istoricheskii sbornik b4 (14)*, Sankt-Petersburg 1993.

Makarov 1997 — N. A. Makarov, *Kolonizatsiya severnuikh okrani Drevnei Rusi v XI–XIII vv*, Moscow 1997.

Makarov/Zakharov/Buzhilova 2001 — N. A. Makarov/S. D. Zakharov /A. P. Buzhilova, *Srednovekovoe rasselenie na Belom ozere*, Moscow 2001.

Musin 1990 — A. E. Musin, "Predmetui khristianskogo kul'ta iz pogrebenii Vodskoi i Shelonskoi pyatin Novgorodskoi zemli (XI–XV vv.)", in: *Novgorod i Novgorodskaya zemlya. Istoriya i arkheologiya*, Novgorod 1990.

Musin 1994 — A. E. Musin, "Khristianizatsiya Tverskogo kraya i problema formirovaniya Tverskoi eparkhii", *Tverskoi arkheologicheskii sbornik. Vuip.1*, Tver' 1994.

Nosov 1990 — E. N. Nosov, "Finno-Ugrui i Novgorod", in: *Finnui v Evrope. Vuip.II*, Moscow 1990.

Nosov 1992 — E. N. Nosov, "Ruirik Gorodishche and the Settlements to the North of Lake Ilmen", In: *The Archaeology of Novgorod, Russia*, Lincoln 1992.

Petrenko 1994 — V. P. Petrenko, *Pogrebal'nuii obryad naseleniya Severnoi Rusi VIII–X vv. Sopki Severnogo Povolkhov'ya*, Sankt-Petersburg 1994.

Pokrovskaya 1999 — L. V. Pokrovskaya, "Yuvelirnuie ukrasheniya Novgoroda X–XI vv. (po materialam Nerevskogo i Troitskogo raskopov)", in: *Velikii Novgorod v istorii srednevekovoi Evropui*, 1999.

Ruibakov 1987 — B. A. Ruibakov, *Yazuichestvo drevnei Rusi*, Moscow 1987.

Sedov 1982 — V. V. Sedov, *Vostochnuie slavyane v VI–XIII vv. Arkheologiya SSSR*, 1982.

Sedov 1993 — V. V. Sedov, "RRuibakov 1987 B. A. Ruibakov, *Yazuichestvo drevnei Rusi*, Moscow 1987.asprostranenie khristianstva v Drevnei Rusi", in: *Kratkie soobshcheniya Instituta arkheologii. Vuip* 208, 1993.

Sedov 1999 — V. V. Sedov, *Drevnerusskaya narodnost'*, Moscow 1999.

Staecker 1997 — J. Staecker, "Legends and Mysteries. Reflections on the Evidence for the Early Mission in Scandinavia", in: *Visions of the Past. Trends and Traditions in Swedish Medieval Archaeology*, Lund 1997.

The Russian Primary Chronicle 1953 — *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text* (ed. and trans. S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor) (= The Medieval Academy of America 60), Cambridge 1953.

Voronin 1961 — N. N. Voronin, *Zodchestvo Severo-Vostochnoi Rusi XII–XV vv. T.1*, Moscow 1961.

Address

Nikolaj Makarov
Institute of Archaeology
Dm. Ulianova 19, RU–103009 Moscow
ni.ma@g23.relcom.ru