

Temple-Ring or Ear-Ring: Various Ways of Wearing Identical Ornaments

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Slavic head-dress; temple-rings; ear-rings; ways of wearing; medical-criminal research

Introduction

The history of Russian costume of the Middle Ages is not investigated sufficiently and thoroughly enough. Obviously the analysis of Slavic clothes and ornaments represents a special interest in the genesis research both of the whole Russian dress and of its separate compounds. Temple-rings were a characteristic detail of the Slavic female costume. The researchers of these ornaments tried to determine the place and way of wearing. As a rule, archaeologists find rings at the temples of the skeleton during the excavations of numerous medieval necropolises. That is why these ornaments are considered to be an element of a head-dress. Nevertheless, the researchers have different points of view on ways of wearing the temple-rings.

The archaeologists suppose that the rings could be worn differently, the two ways of wearing are mentioned more often than others in the publications. According to some researcher's opinions rings passed through a small leather strip or were applied to a strip, textile band, woollen lace. These were worn on the head or attached to the bottom of a head-dress, which has a more complex design. Such reconstructions first appeared at the end of the 19th century and still keep their importance up to the present days (Sizov 1895, 186; Rybakov 1932, 32–33; Levashova 1967, 7; Sedov 1994, 56).

One more way of wearing rings is the following: rings were plaited into the hair (sometimes as a chain) or attached to hair with the help of fillets or small strips. Maria A. Saburova has reconstructed this type of wearing the rings in combination with different hair-do's in detail (Saburova 1975, 18–19).

Some researchers assumed that temple-rings could be worn as ear-rings and wrote about finding them in ear cochleae of the dead (Saburova 1974, 89–91; Pushkina 1987, 53). The investigators of the Bulgarian necropolis Lovech, which dates back to the 10th–13th centuries, inform us of several finds of temple-rings, decorated with metal beads, in the right ears of female and male skeletons. But they do not mention whether fragments of ears were found (Georgieva, Pesheva 1955, 541). Artemij V. Artsihovskij was one of the first authors of the hypothesis of wearing the rings in ears (Artsihovskij 1930, 46). Nevertheless, he did not consider to enter ear-rings in a separate category of possible ornaments, based on materials of excavations. He emphasised, that usually archaeologists are not capable to determine the way of the rings' use.

The researcher's statements of rings in the ears of the dead have remained practically unnoticed. They were based only on visual supervisions of the archaeologists and were not supported by special examinations. Therefore they probably caused mistrust and doubt. Some researchers assumed the wearing of only thin wire rings in the ears (Levashova 1967, 7). Others categorically denied the existence of ear-rings in Old Russia in the 10th–13th centuries (Korzuhina 1954, 59; Rybakov 1988, 521).

Thus, the point of view, according to which temple-rings were plaited into the hair or were attached to a special small leather or textile strip dominates in Russian modern archaeology.

Sources of studying

Excavations with exact fixing of artefacts in situ on a skeleton, fine arts materials and written

mentions are sources for the reconstruction of medieval metal head-dress. Unfortunately, the researchers do not always specify the source of the information about the ways of wearing rings. Therefore the reliability of reconstruction is sharply reduced.

The written medieval sources contain the poor information of ordinary ornaments. The mentions of temple- and ear-rings are extremely interesting to us. So, for example, the description of a costume of Russian Prince Svjatoslav (964–972) is well known: 'Gold ring was in his one ear' wrote Byzantine historian Lev Deacon. The rings worn in ears are mentioned in the Reading of Boris and Gleb (the end of the 11th century) and in the Ipat'jevskaja Chronicle. The word 'ear-ring' is used in Russian written sources since the 14th century as a man's ear-ornament.

Besides, some medieval pictures are known of different-shaped rings in ears. The most interesting of them are the details showed of the Christ-Child with a ring in the left ear from the church of St. Nikola (village Velmej, Ohrid region, Macedonia) which dates back to the 13th century (Maneva 1992, 39), and a metal water-carrier in the shape of a woman's head

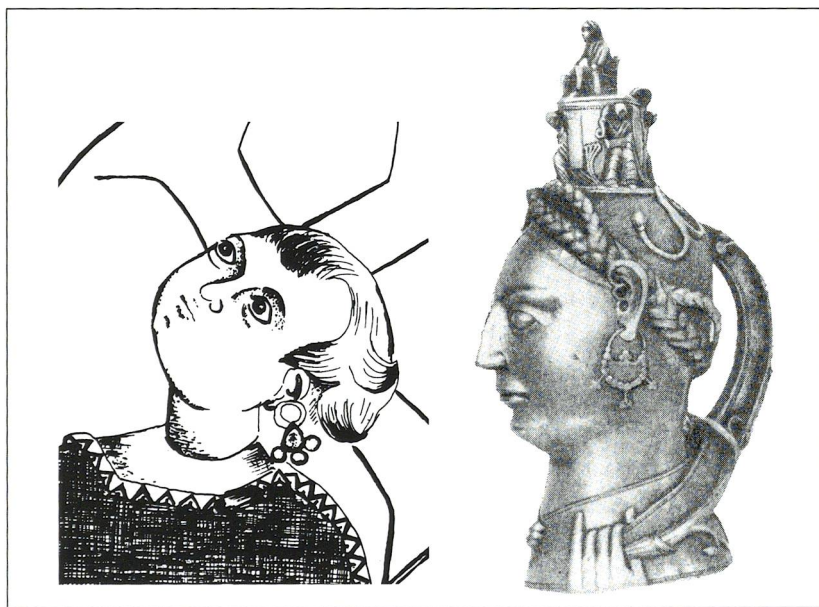


Fig. 1: Detail from the church St. Nikola; village Velmej, Ohrid region (by E. Maneva) and metal water-carrier from Budapest (by E. Lapkovskaja).

from Budapest of the 12th century (Lapkovskaya 1958, 184) (fig 1).

As the statement indicates, written and fine art sources confirm the use of rings as ear ornaments by Slavs in the 10th–13th centuries.

Certainly, this information requires objective proofs.

The researchers of the Old Russian necropolises sometimes record finds of rings, passed through leather fragments. In their opinion they are the rests of head-dresses. We carried out special research of 5 similar finds from different cemeteries in the basin of the Volga-Oka. All of them, according to burial goods, were found in female graves dating from the end of the 11th to the 13th century.

'Leather'-fragments and their examination

In the first fragment of 'leather', two shield-shaped temple-rings were passed through apertures (fig. 2). They were found during the excavation of burial mounds at the village of Stupenki near the city of Smolensk. Describing this find, the investigator N. I. Bulychov indicated that the rings were connected together on a leather strip. It hung on a round small ring, plaited into the hair (Bulychov 1913, 46). The rings of such shape are characteristic ornaments of the Slavic Vjatich tribe and date from the beginning of the 12th century.

The second find is a fragment of 'leather' with a wire ring (fig. 3). It is from the excavated mound at the village of Saltykovka near Moscow. Three wire rings were found at each side of the skull in this burial. As the author of the excavation, Alexander L. Mongajit, asserted, they were passed through leather strips and attached to a hair-dress (Mongajit 1947, 83). The date of burial is the 12th century.

The third fragment of 'leather' with a shield-shaped temple-ring was excavated in the mound at the village of Tagan'kovo near Moscow. The artefact is found on the right shoulder-blade of the dead. The rings date from the second half of the 12th century.

The fourth fragment of 'leather' with a wire ring, passed through the aperture, was found during an excavation of the cemetery at the village of Kablukovo near Moscow. The ring was revealed at the temple bone of a skull. This cemetery dates back to the 11th–12th centuries.

The fifth find-fragment of 'leather' with two wire ring, passed through one aperture (fig. 4), is from the excavated mound at the village of Pirogovo near Moscow, dating from the 12th–13th centuries. Temple-rings were found in a

nape of the dead. They were preserved in fragments.

The research of the fragments of 'leather' were conducted in the medical-criminal branch of the laboratory of Russian Centre of Forensic Medicine Examination (Moscow). The purpose of the examination was the definition of specific and regional belonging of these fragments. The visual and stereomicroscopic study of the objects before and after restoration was carried out. The restoration of the objects in a solution, consisting of water, alcohol and vinegar (7 : 2 : 1), was completed during 3,5 months.

As a result of the initial study of the objects, it was established that three finds were substantially mummified fragments of human ear cochleae. The external morphological attributes testified it: the form of the fragments on the whole, configuration of edges and the character of the surfaces relief. Strong deformation, bad safety and the significant oxides on the surface have not allowed to determine the concrete specific belonging of the objects from the third and the fourth finds on that investigation phase.

After the restoration in a solution, the fragments of 'leather' have been smoothed out; they all have an equally dark brown colouring as well as a soft and elastic consistence. They were close to the physiological consistence of human skin. During the subsequent research, the confirmation of results of the initial supervision were received and some new details were revealed.

The submitted fragment of skin from find N 1 in a restored state is a part of a left ear cochlea (fig. 2). The well-preserved individual anatomic elements of an external structure document this convincingly. In the bottom part of the fragment three oval apertures are well visible. Their sizes – 0.1–0.2 cm. Ornaments were passed through the middle and right apertures before restoration. The similar aperture is located on the top part of the fragment, in the field of the right edge.

The object N 2 after restoration represents a complex, consisting of anatomic formations of the right temple part of a human head: an oval ear cochlea with the well-preserved fragment of mumps skin and a fragment of the right temple bone (fig. 3). There are three other oval apertures in the fragment, isolated from one another. They are located on a conditional

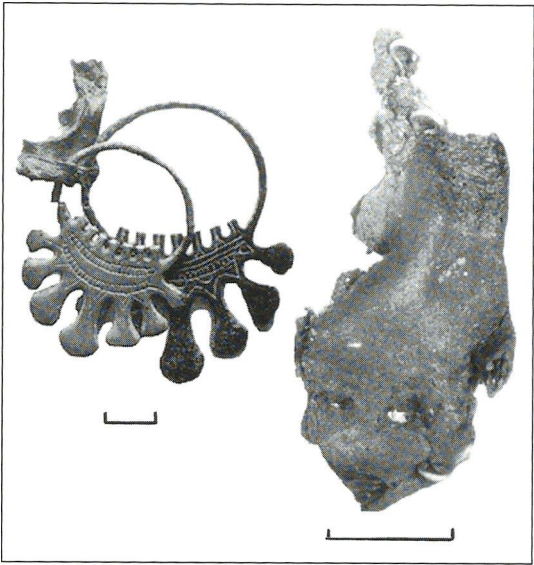


Fig. 2: Find N 1 before and after restoration.

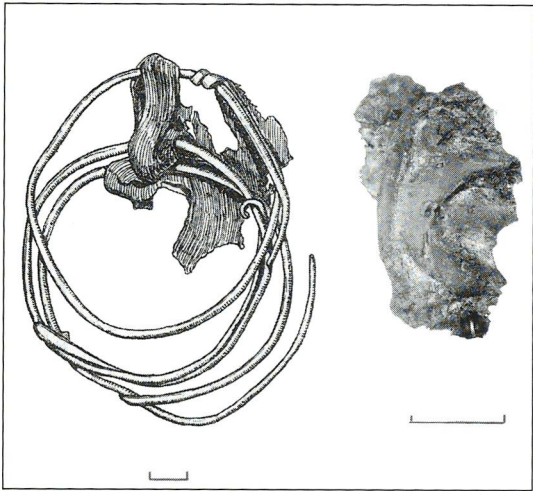


Fig. 3: Find N 2 before and after restoration.

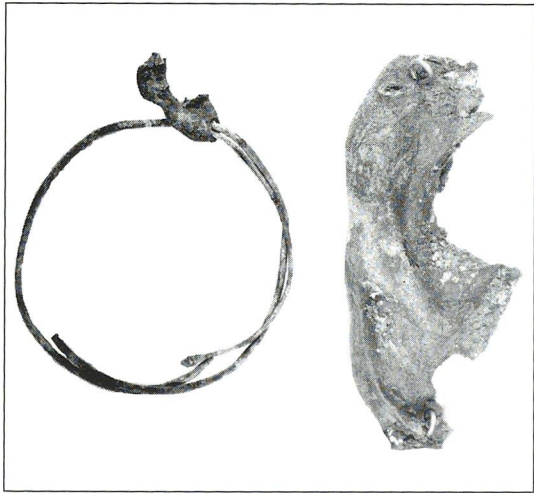


Fig. 4: Find N 5 before and after restoration.

vertical line one by one. Before restoration, the wire ornament was passed through the lower aperture. All apertures are artificially formed in the process of wearing of the similar ornaments.

Fragmented objects N 3 and N 4 also have an anthropological origin. The external and visible structural attributes of the restored skin allow us to consider that they are mummified fragments of a human left ear cochleae. One aperture was in each of them. The ornaments were passed through them before the restoration. The fragment of skin from find N 5 represents an almost completely preserved right ear cochlea (fig. 4). Two apertures are located in the area of the top and bottom edge of the cochlea.

Thus, during the examination it was established, that all investigated fragments of skin are of anthropological origin. They are fragments of ear cochleae. Four apertures for ornaments are located in the first fragment, three apertures in the second, two apertures in the fifth and one aperture both in the third and the fourth fragments. The condition of the apertures, their smoothed, callous edges testify that they are the result of a long contact with massive ornaments during a lifetime. The use of temple-rings as ear-rings is obvious in the Old Russian period.

It is necessary to note, that such medical-criminal examination on the restoration of ancient biological objects is unique.

On the basis of artefacts found earlier and investigated in the laboratory, it is established that temple-rings of various shapes (a wire with a large and small diameter, shield-shaped, rings with three metal beads) could be worn in ears. Some fragments of well-preserved mummified human ear cochleae with temple-rings passed through them were not studied in the laboratory. Besides enumerating types of temple-rings, a new shape was met among these finds: wire spiral-shaped rings.

Coexisting temple-rings and ear-rings

The researchers of medieval ornaments separate ear- and temple-rings and refer them to different categories. The division criterion is mainly the shape and size of the ornaments. Light, small rings, with a thin handle, as a rule, with

decorative elements (beads, pendants etc.) are frequently named ear-rings. The massive, large sized ornaments, especially with shields could not be used as ear-rings and were worn near temples according to some researchers. Our examination negates these judgements. Rings, passed through the apertures in ear cochleae, have various shapes and sizes; the thickness of the handles is from 1.5 mm up to 2.5 mm. These ornaments do not differ from other similar temple-rings.

All stated above do not give us automatically an opportunity to refer the ornaments found near the temples into the category of temple-rings. According to our research, some of them could be worn in ears. There are few authentic cases of wearing rings at a temple in the hair or on head-dresses as well as the use of them as ear-rings. Probably, temple- and ear-rings coexisted as two close categories of head ornaments in the Old Russian period. The shape and construction of rings promoted that they turned out to be multifunctional, transformed ornaments which could be used both as temple- and ear-rings.

Obviously the Old Russian women could wear the ornaments, traditionally named as temple-rings, on the temples, in the hair and passed through ears. Wearing them in ears, they could use either one or several in one ear. It proves that women observed the tradition of wearing several temple-rings near one temple when they used rings as ear-rings. It is interesting to note the fragment of an ear cochlea from find N 5, in which two rings were passed through one lower aperture. The similar way of wearing is known for temple-rings. Polish researcher K. Musianowicz mentions the fastening of several rings in one aperture of a leather head-band (Musianowicz 1949, 117).

It is difficult to determine a ratio of various wearing ways of temple-rings. This is explained by several reasons: various degrees of the conditions of the dead and head-dresses; the inexact fixing of artefacts during excavations at the end of the 19th to the beginning 20th century, when a great number of East European mounds were investigated. The definition of an exact place of wearing the ornaments can be the only criterion of distinguishing them as temple- or ear-rings.

The structure of East European Slavic metal ornament sets has obviously undergone essential changes since the 13th century. Temple-rings

as head ornaments were not mentioned in Russian written sources since that time. They are not known in burials either. Probably there was a gradual replacement of metal temple-rings by ear-rings under the pressure of the fashion. Further ear-rings became the most favourite and inalienable detail of a female costume. The ethnographic surveys keep evidence of wearing temple ornaments, but not metal. At the beginning of the 20th century the Southeast Russian women used ornaments attached to head-dresses (Grinkova 1955, 38). As in Old Russia, they had rather various shapes (circles, balls, rectangular), but differed in materials. Textile, threads, small beads,

tapes, fillets, goose and duck feathers and horse hair were used for their manufacturing. Gradually becoming simpler, temple ornaments eventually have become inseparable part of a female head-dress.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Alexander Agapov for the laboratory investigation. Thanks to Drs Natalia Nedoshivina, Sergey Shirinskij, Leonid Kyslasov and Julia Schapova for permission to study and publish the materials.

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