

Three Early Russian Coins in Helsinki

In Russia, as in several other newly Christianized countries in northern and eastern Europe, the minting of coins with native rulers' names began in the late tenth century. Eleven gold coins, known as *zlatniki*, and some 330 silver coins, *srebreniki*, mostly struck in Kiev, are known today. The majority of them bear the name of Prince (St.) Vladimir (978–1015) and, as they all display Christian symbols, they must belong after his conversion in 988. There are also coins in the names of Vladimir's sons, Svyatopolk (1015–19) and Yaroslav (Prince of Novgorod 987–1015, Kiev 1019–54). Yaroslav's *srebreniki* are believed to have been struck in Novgorod during his father's rule in Kiev; they are very rare but – in contrast to the crudely struck Kievan coins – extremely well-made and attractive.¹

The earliest Russian coins have been objects of interest since they first became known in the closing years of the eighteenth century. The most recent and also the most comprehensive work on them is *Tsyacheletiyе drevneishik monet Rossii. Svodny katalog russkikh monet X–XI vekov* by M. P. Sotnikova and I. G. Spasski, published in Leningrad in 1983. An English version, with the title *Russian Coins of the X–XI Centuries A.D. Recent Research and a Corpus in Commemoration of the Millenary of the Earliest Russian Coinage*, had already appeared in print in 1982.²

The millenary referred to in the title of the work, taken strictly, is still a few years ahead, but in 1982 one hundred years had passed since a pioneering study of the same subject by I.I. Tolstoi was published,³ and the authors wished to pay tribute to the work of their renowned predecessor.

All the *zlatniki* known today are in public collections in the U.S.S.R. Of the *srebreniki* the authors have succeeded in tracking down twelve specimens in foreign collections. When visiting Helsinki in the 1960s Dr Spasski ascertained that there were none in the National Museum of Finland. However, it was not then known that a collection owned by the Bank of Finland includes no fewer than three *srebreniki*, all of which seem to be from previously unknown dies. It is the purpose of this note to put them on record.

The coins are illustrated twice enlarged. All three have the same die-axis, 180°, which is typical of the later *srebreniki*.



Figs. 1–3. Three srebreniki of St. Vladimir (978–1015) in a collection in the Bank of Finland. Scale 2 : 1.

Vladimir, type II

1. *Obv.* The prince on throne, facing, with a cross in right hand and left hand on chest.
Rev. The princely emblem in the form of a trident.
Cf. Sotnikova–Spasski 70–8. Partly double-struck. Weight 3.64 gm.
2. As last but with a cross on the chest of the prince.
Cf. Sotnikova–Spasski 107–10. Weight 1.92 gm.

Vladimir, type III

3. *Obv.* The prince on a throne with a tall back, facing, wearing a cloak with a round fibula on the chest and holding a cross with both hands.
Rev. The princely emblem in the form of a trident.
Cf. Sotnikova–Spasski 124–48. Weight 3.64 g.

The legends of the coins are, as usually, fragmentary. Only a few disconnected letters are recognizable of the words *Vladimir na stole* – *a se ego srebro* ('Vladimir on throne – and this is his silver').

1. <i>Obv.</i>	MP4EP	<i>Rev.</i>	EE O MO
2.	BA M		CP EMO
3.	B/14A'I'		P)EE PO

The provenances are unknown, but it seems likely that the three coins come from the same find. Finds of Russian coins of this period are quite unknown from Finland, and there is reason to suppose that the coins reached Finland through the numismatic trade or in some other way during the last hundred years or so.

The largest known hoard with coins of these types was the 1852 find from Nezhin, Chernigovskaya oblast in the Ukraine. Nearly 200 *srebreniki* are known from this find, but a part of it was dispersed.⁴ It is not impossible that the coins in Helsinki come from it – but there is no evidence for this, and they could as well derive from some unknown find.

My thanks are due to the authorities of the Bank of Finland, who have permitted me to publish the coins, and to Drs. M. P. Sotnikova, of the Hermitage Museum, who after seeing photographs of them encouraged me to write this note.

NOTES

¹ There are also crudely made coins of the Novgorod type. Their origin is disputed, but it seems probable that they are Scandinavian imitations. Some of the miliaresion imitations published by Brita Malmer in *Studies in Northern Coinages of the Eleventh Century* (København, 1981, see Pl. IV) are stylistically similar.

² *British Archaeological Reports, International Series*, 136, Oxford. Translated by H. Bartlett Wells.

³ I. I. Tolstoi, *Drevneishiye russkiye monety Velikogo knyazhestva Kievskogo*. St. Petersburg 1882.

⁴ Sotnikova–Spasski, find no. 12.