

On the study of ancient Karelian craft centres

Among a number of articles found in the Karelian graves of the 12th—14th centuries the so-called "Karelian ornaments" stand out as most vividly characterizing the Karelian material culture of the Late Iron Age. Silver penannular and bronze oval-convex or tortoise brooches, sheaths and bronze hilts of knives, "earspoons" and other objects were carefully manufactured and artfully decorated. Covered with a rich vegetable and "braided" ornament, they strike one's imagination by their indubitable artistic value. These original decorations have drawn the attention of many archaeologists. After T. Schwindt published the results of his excavations they were specially dealt with by J. Ailio,¹ C.A. Nordman,² R. Strandberg,³ O. af Hällström,⁴ P.-L. Lehtosalo-Hilander,⁵ E. Linturi⁶ and, to a certain extent, other scholars as well.

This article chiefly concerns objects with engraved ornament: silver penannular brooches, knife sheaths and earpoons. The author had the opportunity of studying them thanks to the help of the Finnish colleagues of the working group on Soviet-Finnish cooperation in archaeology during his visits to the National Board of Antiquities of Finland in 1984 and 1988. This study is based on the analysis of both the ornamentation as such, which is in agreement with the results of the authors mentioned above, and the method of design application. The latter allows us to reveal the individual peculiarities of the manner of ornament application and, by comparing this evidence, perhaps even to single out a range of articles belonging to a single "art school" or master. It is also possible to establish the area of distribution of these objects, their correlations and the probable centres of their production. Using the results of the studies on cast oval-convex brooches, among which whole series of identical artefacts have been revealed, it is possible, in theory to distinguish a set of decorations which were in use concurrently. This allows us to reveal the burial-grounds of one generation of ancient Karelians and the relative chronology of all Karelian graves when the heathen culture was at its apex.

The suggested typology of part of the Karelian decorations is based on the differences of the artefacts with respect to their form and ornamentation, with the form determining the type and the ornamentation motifs — i.e. the variant concerned. The silver penannular brooches are traditionally divided into two types: flat (laminated) with a rib in the middle of the curve and convex ones. Further variants are:

Type I, var. 1 — laminated fibulas with ornament in the form of interlaced bands; var. 1a — the same, but with bands ending in curls forming a complex composition of X-shaped figures at their fastening points.

Type I, var. 2 — laminated fibulas with ornament in the form of interlaced bands with curls imitating sprouts or leaves.

Type II — convex fibulas with ornament in the form of a chain of "heart-shaped" or "lyre-shaped" figures.

Knife sheaths with bronze bindings are subdivided into four types:

Type I, var. 1 — with the longitudinal plate (tip) of the sheath gradually expanding

from the fastening point towards the belt in the direction of the lower end. It is decorated by a braided line ending in curls imitating sprouts or leaves. There are also transverse ring-like bindings decorated sometimes by a "pearl" ornament.

Type I, var. 2 — the sheath tip is ornamented by an engraved design in the form of interlaced ribbons with a curl at the end. The transverse ring-like bindings are decorated in a similar way.

Type I, var. 3 — the tip of the sheath is also ornamented by a "braid", while the sheaths have no ring-like bindings.

Type II — the tip of the sheath has a widening in its lower part with a wave-like upper edge. The leather on the sheath is decorated, as a rule, by a bronze wire. The tip is ornamented by an engraved design in the form of a braid, ending in curls imitating sprouts or leaves.

Type III — an azure metal tip embraces the entire lower part of the sheath.

Type IV — an azure bronze facing embraces the entire surface of the sheath.

The ear spoons have the same ornamental motifs as the ones cited above:

Type I, var. 1 — with an ornament in the form of an S-shaped curl.

Type I, var. 1a — the S-shaped curl ends in a leaf of bear's breech.

Type I, var. 2 — with an ornament in the form of "heartshaped" figures.

Type II — with an ornament in the form of a fretted S-shaped curl.

The decorations discussed are divided into types and versions as follows:

Penannular brooches:

Type I/1 — 4 specimens: Mikkeli — Tuukkala (2581:88, 91), Kekomäki, gr. 5 (2595:7), Hovinsaari — Tontinmäki, gr. 1/1886 (2491:28).

Type 1/1a — 8 specimens: Leppäsenmäki, gr. 4 (2494:32, 46), Patja (10817:26), Kekomäki, gr. 1 (2489:232), gr. 6 (2595:108), Kulhamäki (2596:5), Hovinsaari, gr. 1/1886 (2491:32), gr. 1/1888 (2592:2).

Type 1/2 — 5 specimens: Kilpola (3641:3), Kekomäki, gr. 1 (2489:104), Sipilänmäki (10663:7), Tuukkala, gr. 16 (2481:194), and (2481:90) a stray find.

Type II — 8 specimens: Kekomäki, gr. 2 (2489:274), gr. 3 (2489:326), gr. 5 (2595:11, 80), gr. 6 (2592:135), Patja (10817:31), Rantue (8121:2), Kulhamäki, gr. 2 (2596:7). Two bronze brooches from Hovinsaari-Tontinmäki (2592:150, 170) also belong to this type.

Knife sheaths:

Type I/1 — 9 specimens: Kekomäki, gr. 2 (2489:261), gr. 3 (2489:371, 372), gr. 5 (2595:40, 41), Hovinsaari, gr. 3/1986 (2491:60, 61), gr. 5/1888 (2592:95, 96), Leppäsenmäki, gr. 4 (2494:11, 12), Pajamäki, 1931 (9415:17, 18), Tuukkala (2481:32, 33 (2 specimens)).

Type I/2 — 4 specimens: Kekomäki, gr. 5 (2595:70), gr. 6 (2595:143), Hovinsaari, gr. 6/1888 (2592:164, 165), Patja (10817:38).

Type II — 4 specimens: Kekomäki, gr. 1 (2489:32, 33, 57, 58), Hovinsaari, gr. 1/1886 (2491:8, 9), Leppäsenmäki (2494:7, 8).

Type III — 3 specimens: Suotniemi, gr. 3 (2487:53), Kekomäki, gr. 1 (2481:169—174), Tuukkala, gr. 9 (2481:167).

Type IV — 4 specimens: Tuukkala, gr. 16 (2481:195), gr. 26 (2481:231), stray find (2481:31), Patja (10817:45).

Ear spoons:

Type I/1 — 4 specimens: Tontinmäki, gr. 1/1886 (2491:11), Leppäsenmäki, gr. 4 (2494:15), Pajamäki, 1931 (9415:13), Särkisalo (2298:156).

Type I/1a — 3 specimens: Ivaskanmäki (1922:425), Patja (10817:43), Tuukkala (2481:80).

Type I/2 — 5 specimens: Kulhamäki (2596:13), Hiitola — Kokkola (3247:11), Kekomäki, gr. 1 (2489:35, 66), gr. 1/1888 (2592:9).

Type II — 9 specimens: Tontimäki, gr. 7/1888 (2592:425), gr. 9/1888 (2592:192), gr. 13/1888 (2592:244), Hiitola-Kokkola (with ears) (3247:12), three specimens were found in the Tiversky Gorodok (Tiurin Linna) (one with ears) and two from Mikkeli-Tuukkala (2481:81, 160).

Some ear spoons (Kekomäki, gr. 5 (2595:39), Tontinmäki, gr. 5/1888 (2592:110), Patja (10710) have no ornament or it cannot be observed.

Summarizing the data cited above and applying the typological schemes to the oval-convex bronze brooches together with the analysis of the areas where other materials were distributed (they could not be dealt with here in detail because of the restricted volume of the report) makes it possible to separate three groups of female burial grounds with a definite set of metal decorations:

1st group: Leinikylä, Patja — 1937, Pajamäki — 1931—1917.

2nd group: Tontinmäki — 3/1886, 1/1888, 5/1888, Leppäsenmäki — gr. 4, Kekomäki — gr. 1, 3, 5, 6, Suotniemi — gr. 3, Kulhamäki — gr. 2 (1888).

3rd group: Tontinmäki — gr. 1/1886, 6/1888, 7/1888, 9/1888, 13/1888.

Each of the above groups is characterized by a set of decorations of definite types and variants. Thus, graves of the 1st group contain oval-convex brooches of type C3 and variants of type H/IIB2, transpierced pendants, type I:2B (with ears between two end thickenings, ornamented by a wave-like convex line), chainbearers, type II/1 (cross-shaped with loop-like ears at opposite ends) and II/2 (the same but the ears are turned perpendicularly).

Graves of the second group are the richest as regards the quantity and range of the attire decorations: hair pins and so-called sykerö ornaments, silver breast brooches and medallions, neck bands, oval-convex brooches, type C2/3a, b, H/II B2a and F1; Karelian silver penannular brooches, type I: IIa (flat) and II:2 (convex-concave); chainbearers, type I:3a, (double-spiral azure with a decorative figure framing the lower part); transpierced pendants, type I/1 (undecorated with ears on the central thickening) and I:2a (ornamented by a spiral with ears between two end thickenings); ear spoon, type I/1 and I/2; sheaths, type I/2 and III as well as rings, silver beads, sickles and spring shears.

The female attire of the third group of burial-grounds is not so indicative or indivisible. Among them one can find oval-convex brooches, types H/11B1 and H/11A1; penannular brooches, type II/1a, and bronze fibulas with a twisted curve, transpierced pendants with two pairs of ears, type II, cast double-spiral chainbearers, type I/2 (complex variant) ear spoons, types I/1 and II, and sheaths, type I/2. This division into groups of graves resembling one another with respect to the grave-goods is undoubtedly based on the differences of the time of burial. Age and social factors may be excluded as the set of artefacts found in different graves does not appreciably change. Nor can the differences be of local character, as there are graves from different burial grounds within the same group.

This definition of groups close to one another with respect to the time of burial and, accordingly, to the artefacts which were simultaneously in use is an indispensable condition for revealing as far as allowed by the contemporary research level of the sources—the centres of Karelian craft when it was at its apex.

Let us summarize the above data on the location area of artefacts from the Karelian graves and on the methods by which the designs was applied (engraved) on part of the decorations. Articles with band ornamentation were most widely spread in areas bor-

dering on Lake Vuoksa (table 1) in the burial grounds of Kekomäki, Kulhamäki and Tontinmäki where seven penannular brooches of type I/1 and I/1a, six knife sheaths of types I/2 and II and two ear spoons of type I/1 were found. Two penannular brooches of type I/1 were found in Mikkeli in the Savo region. Three brooches of type I/1a were found in the village of Olhovka (Lapinlahti) on the Karelian Isthmus. Two knife sheaths of types I/2 and II were also found there. Ornamentation motives based on the use of vegetable sprouts and leaves could be seen on artefacts from Tuukkala (two brooches of type I/2 and two knife sheaths of type I/1), Kekomäki (a brooch of type I/2 and three knife sheaths of type I/1), Tontinmäki (two sheaths of type I/1), Ivaskanmäki (one ear spoon of type I/1a), Kilpola (Hiitola) (one brooch of type I/2 from a hoard), Sipilänmäki (Sakkola) (one brooch of type I/2, from a hoard), Lapinlahti (two sheaths of type I/1, and an ear spoon of type I/1a).

These artefacts are found in larger or smaller quantities among finds from the entire territory where the so-called Karelian artefacts were distributed. A similar phenomenon can also be observed when mapping the serially made oval-convex brooches.⁷

Let us now consider the design application manner as such. In one case it was a straight engraved line, in others — a zigzag line, a zigzag with a straight longitudinal line in the middle, a line imprinted with frequent shallow depressions, a herring-bone pattern and a denticulated line. If we put these characteristic features of ornamentation on the map it will become obvious that, for instance, the cutter trace in the form of a zigzag line is predominant in brooches from Kekomäki (a brooch of type I/1; two brooches of type I/1a and a brooch of type I/2). Only one brooch of type I/2, ornamented in this way has been found outside this burial ground in a hoard on the island of Kilpola. A version of such ornamentation — a zigzag with a straight line drawn over it — is noted on artefacts from Tontinmäki (two brooches of type I/1a) and Kulhamäki (a brooch of type I/1a). Herring-bone and denticulated ornaments are rare. The most common method — a line imprinted with frequent shallow depressions — is predominant on brooches from Mikkeli-Tuukkala (types I/1 and I/2), on penannular brooches with a convex curve (type II), on knife sheaths of all types and on some penannular brooches of type I/1a from the Karelian Isthmus (two specimens from Tontinmäki and Patja). Linear ornament was used predominantly on ear spoons and to some degree on knife sheaths.

Before drawing any conclusions we must find out how these data agree with the groups of female graves. Zigzag-line designs can be found only on objects from graves of the second group (Kekomäki, gr. 1, 5, 6; Hovinsaari—Tontinmäki, gr. 1/1888); this is also true of designs drawn by a zigzag and a straight line (Leppäsenmäki, gr. 4; Tontinmäki, gr. 1/1888 and Kulhamäki, a disturbed grave of the 12th century). Ornamentation in this manner is found only on penannular brooches with flat curves.

Summarizing all available data on Karelian decorations of the Crusade period, cited in this paper makes it possible to conclude that the larger part of articles made by the Karelian craftsmen was spread just outside the immediate region with some clusters of finds which may point to the locations of workshops as is the case, for instance, with Koverila—Kekomäki (Bogatyri settlement). Close analogues to the artefacts from this burial ground were found close by, at the neighbouring burial ground of Kulhamäki and on the opposite shore of Lake Vuoksa at Hovinsaari—Tontinmäki. It is not excluded that some decorations were intendedly made for a more restricted group of people. Thus, silver penannular brooches with a flat curve, a narrow longitudinal rib and decorated by means of a special technique with a well-detined design have been found only at the burial ground of Kekomäki and n.b.: in the richest graves containing silver medallions, decorative spiral-ended chainbearers, silver pins or sykerö ornaments, rings

and a group of serially made oval-convex brooches (C2/3a). These graves also contained silver penannular brooches with a convex curve of type II. Finally, a few words about the burial ground of Mikkeli-Tuukkala in the region of Savo where artefacts of Karelian types have also been found. This material, despite its homogeneity and Karelian image, if studied in categories, differs from that of Karelia proper on the Karelian Isthmus. Thus, Tuukkala features few silver penannular brooches with a laminated curve, while brooches with an oval-convex curve are completely lacking. There were no earspoons and sheaths with a longitudinal binding occurred singly. Predominant among chainbearers are crossshaped ones with perpendicularly positioned riveted ears. The decorative spiral-ended chainbearers, common on the Karelian isthmus, are absent altogether. As already mentioned above, there are also differences in the ornamentation of objects.

The chief reason for this difference lies, most probably, in the differences of women's costume with respect to their details. This circumstance had the most direct effect on craft production, and it would, therefore, be quite natural to assume that these localities had their own handicraft centres.

The problem we have chosen is extraordinarily complex and far from being solved. To study it successfully in the future will require additional material from the burial ground settlements, use of new technical procedures and further elaboration of chronology.

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