

## Traces of Finno-Ugrian Culture in Novgorod

Judging by the latest archaeological data the region of the upper flow of the Volkhov River and the north-west coast of Lake Ilmen was the population centre of the northern group of Slavs, the Ilmen Slovens, who came there at the end of the 1st millennium A.D. Their chief heathen sanctuary was situated here, in Peryn, on a hill at the outlet of the Volkhov River. Most of the Slav settlements belonged to the Ryurik Gorodishche, a significant trade, craft, military and administrative centre in the residential area of the Novgorod princes, well known from the Russian chronicles. Ryurik Gorodishche was one of the main predecessors of Novgorod. Another group of people who appeared on the Volkhov came from Scandinavia in the middle of the 8th century almost simultaneously with the Slavs. They called the capital of North Russia Holmgård.<sup>1</sup> Before the arrival of the Slavs, the Ilmen region was populated by a rare Finno-Ugrian people from whom the Slavs derived a number of local geographical names. Thus, the name of Lake Ilmen is convincingly explained by scholars as stemming from the Finno-Ugrian Ilmajärvi — "a lake determining the weather".<sup>2</sup> Finnic in origin are also such names as Msta, Vishera, Tigoda and others.

We do not know what Finnic tribe or tribes had lived in the Ilmen region before the Slavs. Russian chronicles speak of Finnic peoples living on the outskirts of the Novgorod land but "remember" nothing of the autochthonous population of its centre. This must be connected with the fact that the process of assimilation of the local Finns by the Slavs was fully completed by the 11th century when the first chronicles were written. The available materials give us enough ground to state that intensive colonization of the Ilmen lake region by the Slavs began at the latest during the 8th century in the period of the peculiar high burial mounds (so called "sopkies") which were widely spread in the Novgorod land at the end of the 1st millennium A.D.

In 1925 K. Viklund put forward the assumption, with which H.A. Moora agreed on the whole, that in ancient times the territories bordering on Lake Ilmen were populated by a Baltic-Finnic people, the "Chud", whom the Slavs met.<sup>3</sup> Originally the word "Chud" was applied to some definite tribe and later it was extended to other Baltic-Finnic tribes.<sup>4</sup> One of the lakes on the lower Msta is still called "Chudinskoye". As regards archaeological materials, the settlements on the outskirts of Novgorod of the Early Iron Age of the first half of the 1st millennium A.D. have not yet been sufficiently studied. In recent years we have discovered about 10 sites with network, stroked and smoothwall ceramics. Excavations have begun on one of them, on the Veryaze River near the village of Vasilievskoye.

Before the arrival of the Slavs the Finnic population of the Ilmen basin pursued a complex economy, based on settled husbandry and agriculture of slash-and-burn type, with hunting and fishing playing a significant role. By the end of the 1st millennium A.D. the tribal commune system of the Finnic tribes was in a stage of decay.

The success of Slav colonization, as correctly noted by H. Moora, was preconditioned



Fig. 1. Finds of Finno-Ugrian type from Novgorod (1—4, 6—9, 11), Rurik Gorodishche (5) and the Derevyanit-sy cemetery (10).

by the fact that "the more advanced methods and tools of farming (plough farming as the basis of economy in the first place — Y.N.) and a higher level of development of the forces of production in general gave the Slavs a clear advantage over the local tribes. Accordingly, having also a more advanced social structure, the Slavs gradually assimilated the native population".<sup>5</sup> In the 9th—10th centuries, it was the Slavs of the Ilmen basin who constituted the socially active group of the population and determined here the process of class formation, consolidation of statehood and the emergence of towns as trade, craft, military and administrative centres. An active part in this process was played by the Scandinavians who appeared in the Volhov region as far back as the middle of the 8th century. The Finns became involved in various relations with Novgorod after it had emerged and become a major trade, craft and cultural centre of North Russia. Various finds have been discovered in the cultural layer of Novgorod, mainly





Fig. 2. An oval tortoise brooch of the Karelian type from the Ryurik Gorodishche (1) and bottle-shaped pendants from Cholopy Gorodok (2—3).

jewelry articles connected with the Finno-Ugrian world. Credit for their classification should be given to M.V. Sedova.<sup>6</sup> During the 10th—11th centuries various types of pins appeared in the town. They had triangular, cross-shaped and double-spiral heads (Fig. 1:1, 2). The cultural layer features about 150 pennular brooches and ring-like fibulas many of which have parallels in various regions populated by Finns. Mention should be made here of two oval tortoise brooches of the Karelian type (layer of the second half of the 13th century). One more brooch of this kind was found at the Ryurik Gorodishche (Fig. 2:1). Of interest are the zoo-morphic amulet pendants which were relicts of heathen times and served as talismans. 5 flat fret-work duckling figures and two "horned" ducklings having wide parallels are among these. A pendant of a horse figure found in the layer of the 12th century is an indication of Baltic ties with Novgorod (Fig. 1:6). Novgorod's links with the territories lying to the east and north-east (from the Ladoga to the Kama basins) are indicated by the finds of a flat duckling pendant with a relief ornament in the form of crosses and stripes on the body (layer of the 12th century), three flat double-headed pendants from the layers of the 12th—14th centuries (Fig. 1:9), a hollow pendant of a duckling (layer of the 11th century), a cone-shaped pendant with loops along the edge (layer of the 13th century), two pendants in the form of the letter "Ф" (layers of the 13th—14th centuries), Finally, several dozen of hollow horse pendants stem from Finnish antiquities of earlier times (Fig. 1:11) and are dated to the end of the 12th—14th centuries. Typical Finnish decorations are

two pendant chainbearers from the layers of the 13th—14th centuries (Fig. 1:7) and pendant needle-cases, four of which have been found in Novgorod in the stratifications of the 12th—14th centuries and one in the burial ground at Derevyanitsa near Novgorod in a grave of the 11th- the first half of the 12th centuries (Fig. 1:10). A bracelet-shaped temple ring, one end of which is blurred and has a hole (layer of the 11th century), is of the Upper Volga Miryan type. Four bottle-shaped pendants widely spread among the antiquities of the Finno-Ugrian peoples during the second half of the 1st — the beginning of the 2d millenium A.D. were found during excavations in the settlement of Cholopy gorodok near Novgorod (Fig. 2:2). They are most characteristic of the Finno-Ugrian population of the Volga-Oka interfluvial. The closest parallels to our find are in the burial mounds of the Michailov cemetery near Yaroslavi on the river Volga.<sup>7</sup>

A rare find was also made at the Rurik Gorodishche. A fire-steel was discovered here with a bronze hilt depicting two horsemen with long ears and noses, one of them bearded (Fig. 1:5). Such fire-steels are usually dated as the second half of the 10th — the 11th centuries.<sup>8</sup> There are precise parallels to the Gorodishche find in Finland.<sup>9</sup> One fire-steel with a figured bronze hilt but bearing another design (a schematic depiction of two bear's heads with open mouths) have been found in Novgorod.

The relations of Novgorod with the Finno-Ugrian world were diverse. Some of the articles listed above came into the town together with those Finns who wore them, others — as a result of trade and still others were manufactured there by local craftsmen.

That some Finns lived in the town is supported by the fact, noted by A.B. Varenov, that certain Novgorod homesteads tend to feature the influence of elements connected with the Finno-Ugrian culture in one way or another.<sup>10</sup> The name of one of Novgorod's streets — Chudintseva — indicates that it could have been populated by people from "Chud". It cannot be excluded that this street acquired its name not from the people as a whole but from a *Chudin* (*Chudinets*) who had built here.

Some scholars (V.L. Yanin, M.H. Aleshkovsky, D.A. Machinsky, Y.S. Vasiliev) assume that the names of the three most ancient parts of the town — Nerev, Lyudin and Sloven quarters — reflect the ethnic structure of its citizens: Meryas or Nerovs, Karelian-Lyudians and Slavs.<sup>11</sup> But apart from the names themselves, there is no evidence of a clear multi-ethnic partition of ancient Novgorod. The reasons for the appearance of this or that name of a town quarter may be diverse. Thus, it is quite probable that Nerev quarter was named after the ancient Novgorod road to the Narova river. The topographical position of this area in Novgorod is in full compliance with this assumption.

Quite unique among the finds of Novgorod was a birch bark record written in Karelian (layer of the middle of the 13th century). It proved to be almost 600 years older than any early Karelian text known hitherto.<sup>12</sup> The translation of the record by Y.S. Yeliseev indicates that it is a typical exorcism against lightning in the form of a heathen prayer.<sup>13</sup> It was a Karelian who came to Novgorod on some business who was the owner of the record for, to a person not knowing the language, it would mean just nothing. Novgorod maintained close relations with Karelia. During excavations, 8 records were found with Karelian names and "Karelian pots", 6 of them belonging to the one and the same homestead whose inhabitants for 150 years kept up close ties with Karelia, acting there as tax collectors.<sup>14</sup> A dictionary was even found — a piece of birch-bark containing several Baltic-Finnic words and their Russian translations.

Novgorod finds of the 10th — 11th centuries of Finno-Ugrian origin should be looked upon first of all as objects lost in the town by people coming from the Chud land or as articles of trade and exchange. Beginning with the 30s of the 12th century, when the Novgorod craftsmen turned from commissioned work to work "for the market" with the manufactured goods intended for sale, articles of Finno-Ugrian nature were already



made in significant quantities in the town itself. This is vividly illustrated by the example of the hollow zoomorphic horse pendants which are found in the layers of the end of the 12th century and upwards and had their widest distribution in the 13th—14th centuries. Such ornaments are considered to be of Finno-Ugrian origin (their discovery in the north-west of the Novgorod land is linked by some scholars with the Vod of the chronicles). About 60 pendants of this kind as well as fragments were found during excavations in different parts of Novgorod and at the Rurik Gorodishche. The pendants were undoubtedly made in the town itself. This can be proved by both the homogeneity of the bronze used to cast them and three defective castings found from various parts of the town.

Numerous Novgorod pendants of the 12th—13th centuries which were made by the town craftsmen and worn by the Novgorod women (among the finds are pendants with inserted leather laces) were no longer strict ethnic indicators. While being Finno-Ugrian in semantic terms, the period of mass standartization of handicraft production made them part of the attire of the Medieval Novgorod women, characterized by an abundance of various pendants, connected with heathen notions, but no longer carrying any direct ethnic weight. The town craftsmen had no idea of the real iconography of the pendants, but were sure of the traditional benevolency of their images. The town with its wide ties, developed crafts and trade melted the heritage of different peoples into new forms. The international character of Novgorod material culture and the presence of elements stemming from the Finno-Ugrian world is substantiated by the analysis of materials of other categories. As suggested by M.V. Sedova, the composition of the alloys of the jewelry articles does not exclude the possibility that the Baltic jewellers took part in the formation of the Novgorod crafts.<sup>15</sup> Some articles of Baltic origin served as prototypes for Novgorod to work out patterns of its own. Thus, in the layer of the end of the 12th — the beginning of the 13th centuries three pins were found with double-spiral heads which are imitations of Baltic models which, were widely spread in Estonia in the 12th—13th centuries. 17 pins with heads in the form of three blades and 18 pins with cock-comb heads found in the layers of the 13th — the beginning of the 14th centuries were a development of pins of this type but of a distinct Novgorod pattern.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, as shown by the data of the Novgorod excavations, the Finno-Ugrian population did not take an immediate part in the foundation of the town at the outlet of the Volkhov. At the same time, the Medieval culture of Novgorod, connected primarily with the production of jewelry ornaments absorbed some elements of Finnish material culture. Finns visited the capital of North Russia. A group of them may have lived there permanently, while goods produced by the Novgorod craftsmen were distributed over vast territories populated by Finns.

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