

## The Gorodetz sanctuary of the 12th—13th centuries on the Niznia Pechora River

In 1987 during an investigation of the environs of ancient Pustozersk, the scientific expedition of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR found a previously unknown site of the Developed Middle Ages. It is situated 3 km from ancient stronghold and settlement of Pustozersk from the beginning of the 16th—18th centuries on the second terrace of the bank of the River Gnilka not far from its confluence into a channel of the Pechora — the Gorodetz Shar.

Excavation showed that the ancient stratum, where remains of cultural layer were found occupies ca 3,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The intensity of the layer (colour and the number of artefacts) decreased further away from the edge of the terrace. It can be suggested that only a marginal part of the site has been preserved until present.

The major part of the cultural layer is covered with alluvial sand (1 m deep) and there is an alluvium during flood-times. From the layer a total of 1000 artefacts of glass, copper, iron, ivory and stone were found.

Most of the finds belongs chronologically to the epoch known as the Developed Middle Ages.

The majority of the finds are iron needles (22), knives (42), arrow-heads (16), parts of axes (11), plints (12), parts of coppers (58), copper coin-like pendants (19), copper pendants, needle-cases (6) and beads made of glass, stone and paste. The parts of iron axes belong to two different types.

Most of the latter are working pole-axes, characteristic of the northern parts of Russia in the 11th—13th centuries and are also known in Prikamje and Nyzney Priobje (some of the axes may be weapons — parts of the tops of the axes with two grips may belong to Kirpichnikov's types VI and VII).<sup>1</sup>

Only one fragment<sup>3</sup> of an axe with one pair of grips was found (according to Kirpichnikov, it is a working axe).<sup>2</sup>

Together with the fragments of the axes some iron wedges for fastening axe-handle were found. The arrowheads were two-horned with wide blades and with blades in the shape of a spade. Ones with rhomboid tips were of the haft-type and had flat, hafts without a lug. Most of them were used for hunting and date to the 10th—14th centuries.<sup>3</sup> A large number of flints were found, of 3 types. According to the Novgorod classification these are: the first type is oval-shaped (*kalatch*), dated to the 10th — the beginning of the 12th century, the second type is the most numerous with 10 finds of oval-prolonged flints dating to the 12th—13th centuries, the third type (quadrangular) dates to the first half of the 13th—16th centuries.<sup>4</sup>

In the Vimskih cemeteries these types of flints were used from the 12th to the 15th centuries. Flints of different types were used longer than shown by the Novgorod classification. For example, the flints of *kalatch* type were found at the Mangazey cemetery and at an ancient settlement on the White Sea coast of the *pomors* at Hruhmant.

Regarding the chain-mail, rings and fragments of armour made of plates, found in the cultural stratum, 150 rings and fragments (which are in a poor state of preservation) were found. The rings are of oval section, with a diameter of 10 mm. The diameter of the section is 1—1,5 mm. There were no riveted rings and they seemed to be welded. Thus, we cannot compare them to Mongolian armour, which had one riveted ring fastening 4 welded ones. Among the pieces of armour were fragments, showed define the character of the weave of the chain-mail. It is analogical to the above-described weave.

Two plates were found. One was made of iron and the other of copper. These plates may be defined as fragments of scaled armour and were partially preserved. They measure 3 × 3 cm. The description of the find can be compared with the finds of armour in the north of Western Siberia, where chain-mail, dated to the 10th—13th centuries and scaled armor are known. The spread of armour in the far north-east of Western Europe is connected to the active development of all types of chain-mail and copper in the 10th—13th centuries. Kirpichnikov notes<sup>5</sup> the spread of these inventions since the 13th century. Of the copper ornaments we may mention coin-like pendants of several types. Included are oblique latticed pendants (Fig. 1: 9—14). We can single out pendants of copper, impure silver and of pewter. Two groups of pendants were made by soldering and the pewter pendants were of an impressed shape.

These pendants are distributed in many regions of the south of Eastern Europe and date back to the 12th—13th centuries.<sup>10</sup> The second type of pendants had a cross (Fig. 1: 1—3). This is a typical find of the 12th—13th centuries. Such artefacts were spread throughout the southern regions of Ancient Russia.<sup>11</sup>

The third type of coin-like pendants is one with an eye depicting a rider (Fig. 1: 4—5).

As to regards distribution and the date of manufacture, these pendants do not differ from the first two ones. Copper pendants of different kinds were found. These were fragments of duck figures with bell pendants, the duck's feet were separate pad-like pendants and there were also tube-like transpierced pendants with bulges, which were decorated with spiral volutes as well as transpierced pendants with a wound spiral wire (Fig. 1: 7—8).<sup>6</sup> All these types are well known in the southern regions of Ancient Russia and date back to the 12—14th centuries.<sup>12</sup> The beads which were found belong to the same period: viz. beads made of glass which consisted of 3 parts, round beads, round and ribbed ribs, oval (blue and yellow) as well as faience and cornelian beads (Fig. 1: 6).

Thus the site dates back to the 12th—13th centuries. If we take into account the fact that the region is far from the place where the artefacts were made, we can say that the stock materials can date to the 14th century. The only definite fact is that the material shows the directions of cultural and trade connections of the population, i.e. the northern regions of Ancient Russia. Probably not all artefacts were acquired directly: Novgorod — North Dvina — Pechora. Part of the material could have come to Niznia Pechora from the population of the middle and upper reaches of the Pechora.

The account by Hurat Rogovich (1096) of his trip to the Pechora proves that the region of Niznia Pechora was well known to the Russians (the inhabitants of Ladoga and Novgorod). The Russian influence on the local tribes in Niznia Pechora in the 12th—13th centuries is shown by archaeological materials.

Some proof can also be found in written materials — e.g. the deed of Ivan Kalita entrusting "The Pechora Land" to fishermen in 1328—1341.<sup>18</sup> In 1333 Grand Duke Ivan Danilovich "became very angry at the townsmen of Ustug and Novgorod and they had to give him Vychehda and Pechora".<sup>19</sup> The grand duke took power over the region but he continued his military operations in Urga. In 1465 *voevoda* (commander) Ivan Skraba went with the people from Ustug and Vichehda to invade the Ugorsk Land. In 1483 there was another military operation against the Duke of Vogulsk.<sup>20</sup> Analyses of



Fig. 1. Finds from Gorodetz on the Nizenia Pechora River.



Fig. 2. Finds from Gorodetz on the Nizenia Pechora River.

finds gives an opportunity to assume that there was one more sanctuary on the Bolshoyzemelsk tundra. This can be identified as belonging to the group of the presently-known monuments, viz. a site near the Haïbid-Pedar river,<sup>21</sup> the Adaksk cave sanctuary near the Us river,<sup>22</sup> the Kaninsk cave on the western slope of the Pechora Urals,<sup>23</sup> and the sanctuary near the Vaygach river.<sup>24</sup>

Regovich wrote: "The people sent a boy to Pechora, they paid a tribute to Novgorod. The boy came there to Pechora and he went away to Ugra".<sup>13</sup> Laschuk suggests, that in this story not only the inhabitants of Pechora and Ugra and the Samoyeds are mentioned, but the author also mentions the neighbours of the inhabitants of Ugra. These lived on the shores of the Barents and Kara Seas. Thus the account is about the coastal inhabitants, who had stayed after Nentz's coming.

These inhabitants lived in remote places such as Novaya Zemlya, Vaygach and Varand until the 17th century.<sup>14</sup>

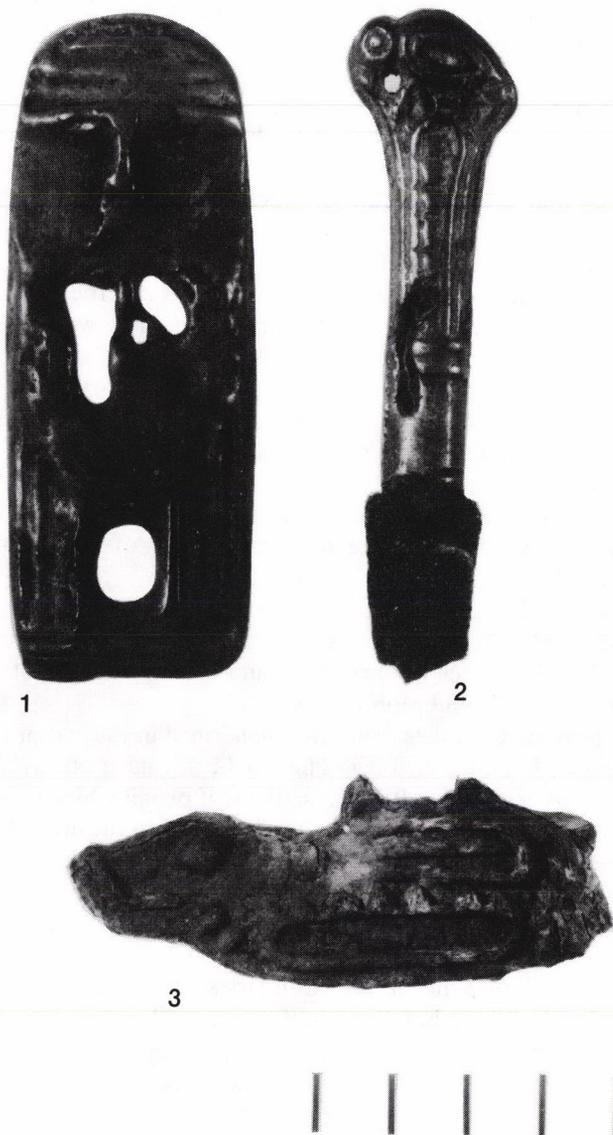


Fig. 3. Finds from Gorodetz on the Nizenia Pechora River.

Present archaeological sources do not provide suitable evidence to agree with or to refute this suggestion.

It is possible that a process of absorption of local people ("Pechorian" and "Sirtian") by the trans Ural Samoyeds began in the 12th century.<sup>15</sup>

Zherebtzov speaks about this coming, saying that it dates back to the end of the 1st millennium — the beginning of the 2nd millennium A.D. He says that the Nenetz tribes' arrival in the south of Europe marked by conflict.<sup>16</sup> L.V. Homich assumes that there were possibly two periods of coming of the migration of the Samoyeds, the second one dating to the 13th century.<sup>17</sup>

Such finds as arrow-heads,<sup>9</sup> which are characteristic of the rites of the people in the south,<sup>25</sup> copper artefacts and first of all pieces of copper (the handles; the people believed that copper had an ability to cleanse<sup>26</sup>) prove that the site which we found served a ritual purpose. Among the finds of the sanctuary are unique sacrifices in boxes, made of wound copper plates and pieces of copper (Fig. 2: 1—4).

In one of these "relics-boxes" the sacrum and phalanx of the foot of an animal was found. We may say that a ritual site in Gorodetsk near the Gnilka River dates back to the 12th—13th centuries. It is actually the third site on the Bolshoyzemlya tundra. There are also the Heibid-Pedar site (G.A. Chernetsov dates it to the 3rd—9th centuries), the Vaygachsk sanctuary of the 12th—15th centuries and the Gorodetsk site. Most of the finds date back to the 12th—13th centuries. But there were also separate, but characteristic finds which date back to previous times — a cast idol with a mask, a cast copper handle of a dagger with an ornament and with a top part in the form of a bird, a fragment of a plate which depicts an animal (or fish) which is being torn to pieces by a bird or beast of prey. Only the lower figure of the composition remained (Fig. 3: 1—3).

These finds belong to another cultural stratum. They came from Niznia Preobja (2nd—3rd centuries A.D.)<sup>27</sup> and there are some finds of the Perm animal style (5th—8th centuries).<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the Gorodetsk site contained artefacts which date back to the 12th—13th centuries. It is possible that further excavations will give more precision to the lowest chronological limit. The long existence of these sites and monuments is not connected with ethnic changes among the population concerned.

The finds show that the Gorodetsk site was abandoned in the end of the 13th century or at the beginning of the 14th century. This could not have occurred later than the second half of the 15th century. A Russian settlement or jail which existed in 1499 and is known from chronicals, was found during work in 1987 in the area of the sanctuary.<sup>28</sup>

From our point of view, the emergence of a ritual site on the south-east bank of Lake Pustoy lake near the Siversk hill is connected with the abandoning of the Gorodetsk site by its inhabitants. The site near Lake Pustoy contained several wooden idols of a later period.<sup>29</sup>

We have no facts to define the size or boundaries of the territory where the people who used the site lived and we have to study the general chronological periods of its "existence". But even now, we may speak of the great significance of this site for the study of the material culture and contacts of the local people who had strong connections with Ancient Russia in the 12th—13th centuries. Later on, these people were absorbed by warring invaders from behind the North Urals.

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