

The Character and Direction of Cultural Links in the Zone of Slav-Finno-Ugrian Contacts (Metal Plastic-Art Evidence)

In the epoch of the formation of the old Russian state a number of Finno-Ugrian tribes were involved in the complex and varied processes which were taking place within the framework of the arising East Slavonic state organization. At that time the ethnocultural seclusion of northern Chud amalgamations was gradually giving way, and the intensifying process of Slavic-Finnish interaction was attended by the expansion of ties between individual Finno-Ugrian tribes. The multilingual population of Russia was drawn into the single system of trade relations, while the Slav colonization of the forest zone led to a qualitative alteration of the ethnic map of the East European North. The principal source of information for the investigation of these major changes in the life of medieval communities is provided by archaeological material. Of particular importance in ascertaining the direction and character of the cultural links are metal ornaments of women's clothes which, reflecting certain peculiarities of tribal formations, may thus serve as ethnic indicators of the surviving or disintegrating tribal communities (Ryabinin, 1979, pp. 83–102). In the present communication I shall dwell upon some aspects of investigation into the cultural links within the zone of Slavic-Finno-Ugrian contacts, as evidenced by metal plastic-art objects of Chud origin.

At the early stage of the existence of the Kiev state two regions could be distinguished which featured clearly marked elements of Finno-Ugrian culture: one south-east of Lake Ladoga, and the other in the eastern part of the territory between the Volga and the Oka Rivers occupied by the Merya and Muroma mentioned in chronicle sources. Inasmuch as many elements of Muroma culture are similar to the remains of the medieval Mordva, account should also be taken of the possible participation of the Mordva population in such contacts in studying the ties of the Volga-Oka Finno-Ugrians with the neighbouring areas.

Tenth-eleventh centuries areas of distribution of remains peculiar to the Chud groups of the Lake Ladoga lands and the Volga-Oka region generally correspond to the reconstructed tribal territories. Of principal interest, therefore, are the few facts of the penetration of the local types of artefacts beyond the main territory of their distribution which document the early stage of the Slavic-Finno-Ugrian contacts in the statehood period of Russian history.

The first appearance of Finno-Ugrian remains in the Slav lands lying south of the Chud hydronymy area dates back to the tenth century. More than once mention has been made in the literature of the peculiar character of the grave goods from a barrow of the Gnezdovo burial ground (barrow 3 excavated by M. F. Kustinsky in 1874) (Sizov, 1902, pp. 80–81). The presence in the mound of three composite horse-shaped pendants of the tenth century, common to the monuments of the medieval Mordva (Golubeva, 1979, p. 49), suggests that the woman buried in the

barrow »came to Gnezdovo directly from the western section of the Volga area, retaining all the features of her costume» (Schmidt, 1970, p. 108). It seems quite possible that the appearance among the Gnezdovo population of a representative of the Volga Finno-Ugrians was due to the position of this protourban centre on the West Dvina-Dnieper-Oka-Volga trade route (Bulkin, Dubov, Lebedev, 1978, pp. 51–54). To some extent indicative of that route is an interesting find from the Lower Daugava – a triangular pendant pertaining to ethnically determining ornaments of the central group of the Merya of the second half of the tenth and the eleventh centuries (Snore, 1973, 62 lpp., 6. att). That is the only case of the local type of Merya antiquities penetrating west of the Volkhov-Dnieper line.

In the tenth-eleventh centuries artefacts peculiar to the Volga-Oka Finno-Ugrians appeared in the Desna and Psla basins. Some of them (an open-work buckle from the eleventh-century burial at the Gochev burial ground/Atlas, 1915, Table XLI, 8/and the zoomorphic bird-shaped pendant from the environs of Miropolie) were found on the site of the reconstructed trade route from Bulgar to Kiev which linked Russia with the regions of the Volga and the Kama (Rybakov, 1969, pp. 189–196). Aside from that route, Chud finds occur in the prehistoric remains of Podeseeme. On the site near the village of Rogoshcha, the lower layers of which date to the ninth-tenth centuries, an early variant of the triangular Merya pendant was discovered (Blifeld, 1955, pp. 15, 17, Table 17). A later variant of that ornament has been found in an eleventh-century mound of the Kvetun burial ground (Padin, 1958, pp. 216–226). It is not unlikely that such finds (especially a rustling pendant from the site near Pogoshcha) prove archaeologically the chronicle record of the activities of Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavich who »began setting up towns on the Desna, and on the Vostra, and on the Trubezheva, and on the Sula, and on the Stugna» populating them with »best men» from the northern tribes, including those »from the Chud»/Povest vremennykh let, 1950, p. 83/. In that case we not only learn of the tribal origin of some of the Chud migrants but have reason to believe that they settled in southern boundary fortresses with their families, retaining the ethnographic peculiarities of their attire.

Since the tenth century there is evidence of the penetration of the Volga-Oka types of Chud artefacts to the north and north-west. The route of infiltration of the Merya, Muroma and Mordva remains is marked with finds on the Upper Volga, on the Sheksna and in the vicinity of Lake Belye. Composite horse-shaped pendants with a rectangular plate peculiar to the Mordva have been found in late tenth-century burial mounds investigated in the Lake Ladoga area on the Pasha (Podiyelie, barrow CIII, 1) (Brandenburg, 1895, p. 125, Table I, 5) and Tikhvinka Rivers /Ovino, group I, barrow 8/1. In one of the Tikhvin barrows with cremated remains a Merya horse-shaped pendant also fashioned in composite technique has been discovered /Arkhiv LOIA, AN SSSR, f. 5, delo 374, 1. 132/. Relations between the Chud population of the Lake Ladoga area and the Volga Finns can also be indicated in the later periods.

There is reason to believe that the early route by which Finno-Ugrian ornaments were brought from the Volga-Oka territory to the Lake Ladoga area joined the northern route which linked the region with the Kama area. Considerable East Finnish influence manifested itself in the Ladoga barrow culture from the early stages of its development. The local population not only received large quantities of artefacts made in the Kama area and in the territory between the Vetluga and the Vyatka Rivers but was, apparently, beginning to make stock-produced items imitating the Kama specimens (Ryabinin, 1981, pp. 26, 27). The abundance of

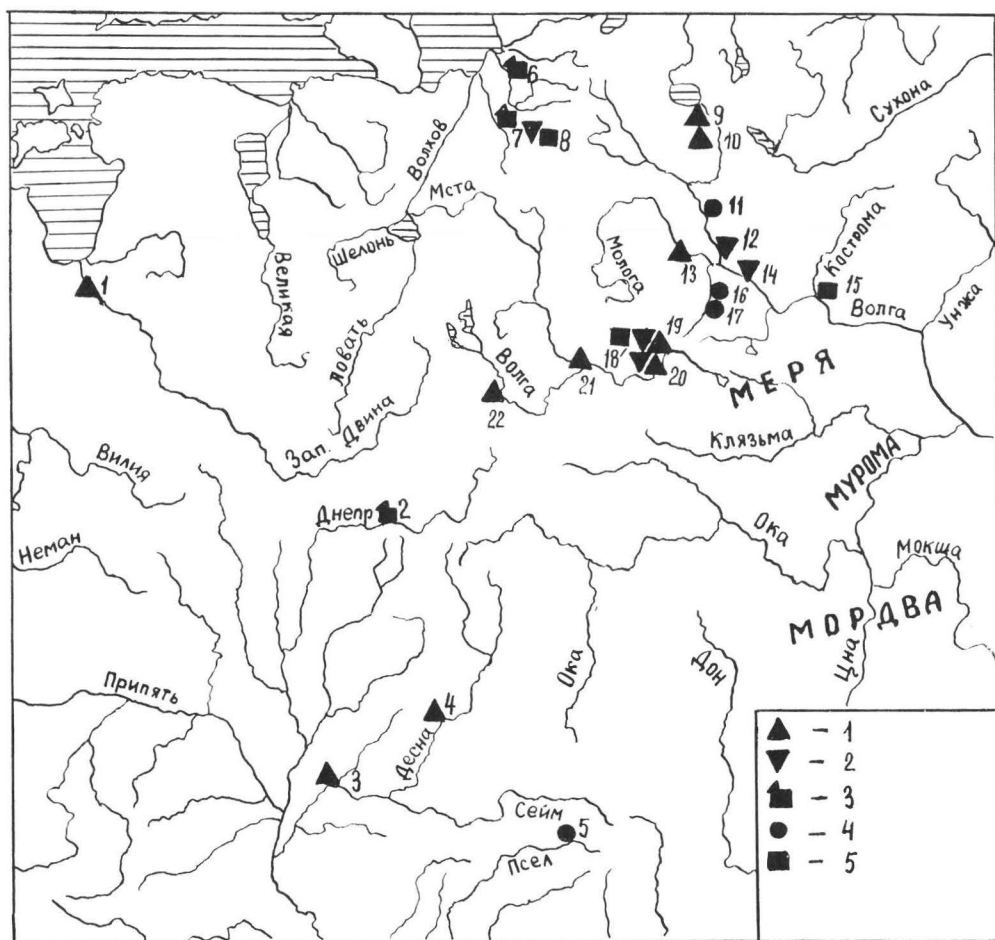


Fig. 1. Distribution in Eastern Europe of ornaments of the Volga-Oka Finno-Ugrian tribes of the tenth-eleventh centuries.

Symbols: 1-triangular pendants of the Merya type; 2-horse-shaped pendants of the Merya type; 3 – horse-shaped pendants with a rectangular base; 4 – buckles with a round openwork plate; 5 – rectangular composite ornaments with rustling pendants.

1 – Vampeniyesi-Raushi; 2 – Gnezdovo; 3 – Rogosiha; 4 – Kvetun; 5 – Gochevo; 6 – Pod’elie; 7 – Ovino; 8 – former Tikhvin district; 9 – Beloozero; 10 – Gorodische; 11 – Minino; 12 – Zubarevo; 13 – Plav’; 14 – Evchakovo; 15 – Tatarinovo; 16 – Yurievets; 17 – Zhukovo; 18 – Medveditskoe; 19 – Posady; 20 – Pekunovo; 21 – Mukhino Gorodische; 22 – Vasilievskoe.

articles of the «Perm Chud» in the Ladoga barrows was already noted by A. A. Spitsyn who suggested the existence of an intermediary link between Perm and Lake Ladoga (Spitsyn, 1895, p. 154). Unfortunately, the archaeological monuments of the late first and early second millennia A.D. on much of this «intermediary territory» are as yet unexplored. However, the topography and the character of the finds of somewhat later times recorded east of the Ladoga area are quite noteworthy. On some of the rivers of the North Dvina basin – the Sukhona, the Vaga, the Puya and the Kokshenga – distinct burial complexes and hoards have been discovered, containing remains of Ladoga and Kama origin. Such points create a kind of

encirclement, a «peripheral train», of the old trade route which, according to some researchers passed along the Vycheгда and the Sukhona (Goryunova, 1961, pp. 34–36; Golubeva, 1964, pp. 285–295). It is, apparently, via the Sukhona-Vycheгда route that articles of the Perm and Volga-Kama craftsmen reached the outlying districts of the north-west, including those in the territories of Finland, Northern Sweden and Norway². It should be noted, in the meantime, that whereas in the tenth-mid-eleventh centuries among the imported objects reaching Fenno-Scandinavia from the east there was a marked predominance of artefacts of the «Perm Chud», the material which made its way there in the second half of the eleventh century and in the twelfth century were those common in the Finno-Ugrian sphere of the Lake Beloye and Ladoga areas, i.e. the region associated with the one and same direction of ancient cultural contacts. Readily accepting traditions of their eastern neighbours, the population of the Ladoga area of the tenth-eleventh centuries did not show at that early stage any special zeal in the dissemination of their own cultural elements. The infiltration of material of the Ladoga Chud into the kindred environment of the Lake Beloye area appears to be of major significance. Individual articles from the region penetrated further eastwards, reaching the Kama area, and also appearing in the towns of Ladoga and Novgorod, as well as on the eastern outskirts of the Izhora Hills. Yet, on the whole, until the second half of the eleventh century, native Finno-Ugrian culture retained its clearly marked local character.

A fundamentally different situation was developing in the northern Slav-Chud lands of Russia in the twelfth century. By that time the peculiar and striking culture of the Volga-Oka tribal formations of the Merya and the Muroma had disappeared, and the former ethnocultural seclusion of the Ladoga Chud was clearly breaking down. At the same time the area of distribution of the Finno-Ugrian types of artefacts was expanding considerably, and new regions appeared with numerous archaeological remains containing a distinct Finno-Ugrian substratum (the Kostroma Volga area and the north-west Novgorod lands).

The intensification of cultural contacts within the zone of Finno-Ugrian and Slav-Finnish settlement has left a prominent mark on the materials of metal plastic art of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. In different regions new forms of articles appeared based not only on local ethnocultural peculiarities but also on traditions of the neighbouring tribal, or already by that time, «district» formations. For instance, interweaving in the Kostroma Merya culture were elements of the Volga-Oka, Kama and Lake Ladoga origins. In the meantime, the set of characteristic elements of the substrate Merya culture of the Kostroma area on the Volga was in no way merely a mechanical combination of diverse materials peculiar to the neighbouring Chud areas. The local population was creatively modifying the borrowed specimens, imparting to them unique originality and developing, in the final analysis, elements of its own culture.

Many varieties of Finno-Ugrian ornaments were gradually acquiring the character of stock-produced and standard objects. As a rule, neither the north-eastern, nor the north-western forms of the Chud articles of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries any longer had closed areas of distribution. All that can be delineated for that period are zones of predominant concentrations of certain classes of remains and material, which clearly do not correspond to tribal territories, but rather indicate the proximity to the centres of jewelry production as well as the dynamics and directions of interregional relations. Two zones of this kind can be distinguished within the boundaries of Russia in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries: the western zone (the western areas of the Novgorod-Pskov lands close in a number of substrate cultural elements

to the Finno-Ugrian regions of the Baltic) and the eastern zone embracing a wide strip from the Kostroma area on the Volga and the North Dvina to the Lake Belye and Ladoga coastal areas. The south-east Ladoga area occupied in the twelfth century a boundary position, being under both western and eastern Finno-Ugrian influences.

The trend of supplying mass-produced Chud ornaments to the wide external market became particularly noticeable from the late twelfth century onwards. There is reason to believe that handicraft production of these items was established at that time in some North Russian towns, primarily in Novgorod Velikii, the centre of North-West Russia (Ryabinin, 1981, pp. 51–54). Indeed, the quantity production of standard specimens in towns did not exclude the making of jewelry by rural craftsmen in regions with Finno-Ugrian population. However, the articles produced in towns on a mass scale and rapidly distributed over vast territories (zoomorphic pendants of Novgorod manufacture appear to have served as a means of exchange with the Chud population of the extensive Novgorod possessions and the adjoining regions) could not but influence the character of the substrate culture of the Russian North. In any case, it was the standard horse-shaped amulets of the «Novgorod» type that in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries appeared to be the most distinct indicators of Chud traditions in the forest zone from the Baltic to the Urals, becoming at a later stage of occurrence the leading type of Finno-Ugrian artefact. Some classes of Chud ornaments penetrated beyond the boundaries of Slav-Chud settlement, but as a whole their obvious concentration remains within the ancient Finno-Ugrian hydronymic zone.

In the thirteenth century the custom of barrow burials disappeared in the greater part of the territory under review and with it ceased the principal archaeological source for studying the direction and course of Slav-Chud contacts. In the fourteenth century the production of the Finno-Ugrian artefacts common in the North Russian territories gradually declined.

Within the framework of this communication it is not possible to cover adequately the whole diversity of the cultural links determined on the basis of a single, yet most striking, class of Chud antiquities, i.e. metal ornaments. It is hoped, however, that even this brief outline of some subjects related to the problem of Slav-Finno-Ugrian contacts gives an idea of the complexity and diversity of the processes that were taking place in the forest zone of Eastern Europe in the first centuries of the old Russian state organization.

¹ Information from V. A. Nazarenko who conducted the excavations.

² See, e.g., Kivikoski, 1973, Abb. 423, 487, 584, 596, 796, 798–800, 1080; Serning, 1956, pp. 161–165, pl. 2, 18, 41, 42; Meinander, 1979, pp. 35–40.

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