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The Background of the Early Medieval Finnic Population in the Region of the Volkhov River: Archaeological Aspects

When studying the history of settlement of north-western Russia, the crucial questions are the date the Slavs appeared, the character and extent of the colonisation, as well as the relations between the Slavs and the indigenous population are crucial. Within archaeology, the discussion has traditionally focussed on the ethnos(es) related to burial types (*Long Barrows*, *Sopkas*) and geographically, to the region cornered by Lakes Peipus (Čudskoe), Il'men' and Ladoga.

To put it simply, one may say that the archaeological study of the region south of the Neva and Lake Ladoga has mainly concentrated on two topics: (a) burial mounds (*sopkas*, *kurgans*) protruding above the surrounding surface and the artefacts discovered, and (b) the cultural layers of fortresses and the ancient Russian urban centres mentioned in the annals. Yet very little attention has focussed on the unfortified open settlement sites, the non-Slavic settlement pre-dating the *sopkas* and *kurgans* in particular. This situation is apt to distort the view. In addition, as non-scientific procedures were used earlier to excavate numerous burial mounds, the available information is imperfect.

Chronological frames

Before I continue, it is necessary to clarify the terminology and datings relative to the periodisation used in this paper. The periodisation and chronology used in Finland differs somewhat from that followed in the archaeology of the North-West Russia. There, both the names of the periods and their dates appear to be unstable.

Adapting in part the periodisation presented by Juškova (2004) I adopt the following chronological framework for this paper: (1) Early Metal Age (*èpoxa rannego metalla*), including the Bronze Age (*èpoxa bronzy*) 1900–500 BC and

Early Iron Age (*rannij železnyj vek*, 700 BC – AD 300). This overlap is ambiguous and depends on the shape of the reference curve used for the calibration of ‘raw’ radiocarbon dates; (2) Iron Age (*železnyj vek*) AD 300–750 followed by (3) the Viking Age which ends in the latter half of the 11th century. In Russia, the Viking Age is characterised as being Early Medieval (*rannee srednevekov’e*).

Slavic expansion – burial mounds and connections

There has been a general agreement that before the Slavs appeared, the lands south of the Neva and Lake Ladoga (in the 8th century) were settled by a Finnic-speaking population (e.g. Sedov 1982: 11, map 1). However, burials of the 1st half of the 1st millennium AD have not been reported from the Volkhov River region – and other archaeological evidence is likewise very scarce.

The *sopka* barrows found in the surroundings of Staraja Ladoga and date from the 8th – 10th century AD are of a special interest (Sedov 1982: 48, 60 maps 8–9; Sedov 1995: 209–238, 230 map Fig. 65; Petrenko 1985; 1994). Even though elements pointing to Finno-Ugrians (such as stone constructions and animal offerings) have been noticed (Bulkin & al. 1978: 64–67), the burials have mainly been identified as those of the immigrated new population, Slavs (*slověne*). On the other hand, it has been admitted that the artefacts discovered in the *sopka* barrows do not provide adequate evidence for ethnic determination (Sedov 1979; 1982; 1995: 238–246).

The discussion culminated in the 1990s, when the paradigm supporting a massive colonisation of the Slavs was seriously questioned (e.g. Selirand 1992; Ligi 1993; 1994, and discussion in *Fennoscandia archaeologica* XI). The criticism focussed on the traditional stereotype of the “active Slavs” and “passive Finns”. It was suggested that instead of a massive colonisation, an immigration of a Slavic trader elite had occurred, in fact, an infiltration which initially caused language shift and acculturation among the indigenous population only in the urban centres of the North-West Russia.

According to present views, the Slavs appeared along the lower reaches of the River Volkhov in the 8th century simultaneously with the emergence of Staraja Ladoga, which is dated to the 750s AD (Kirpičnikov 1985). The oldest strata of Novgorod only date from AD 925–950 (Janin 2004: 70), while the settlement of the nearby Rjurikovo Gorodišče dates back to around AD 850 (Nosov 2001). Here the Scandinavians played a central role in the development of both Staraja Ladoga and Rjurikovo Gorodišče?

Staraja Ladoga and later Novgorod were the most important urban centres in north-western Russia. However, the River Volkhov appears to drop out when talking about archaeological ‘cultures’. Usually this river is not included in the south-eastern Ladoga region (*jugo-vostočnoe Priladož'e*), a region with its numerous burial mounds that is considered to have been the homeland of the ‘Priladožskaja Čud’ or Ancient Ves’ (the terminology varies, see e.g. Rjabinin 1997: 82–83). At the same time, by AD 800, on the opposite side of Lake Ladoga, as a result of infiltration of new settlers from western Finland (Uino 1997: 174–179), important settlements developed on the Karelian Isthmus and the northern coast of Lake Ladoga. It is noteworthy that the Slavic expansion never spread north of the Neva, namely the Karelian Isthmus.

The distance between the outlets of the Vuoksi and Volkhov rivers is no more than 150 kilometres and thus it has not been an obstacle to connections between the populations of the two areas. In fact, ample documentary and archaeological evidence has been found on the connections between Karelia and Novgorod in the annals from the 12th and 13th centuries (e.g. Uino 1997: 186–195; Saksa 1998; 2002; Pokrovskaja 2001; 2003). However, archaeological evidence on the contacts between Karelian Isthmus and the Volkhov River valley from preceding centuries is rather scarce.

Yet, old Slavic loan words exist in the Finnish language. From the point of view of archaeology, it would be plausible to assume that the oldest loans would have been acquired in the 8th century and in part, this seems to concur with linguistic views (see Plöger 1973; Uino 2000; Bjørnflaten 2006). Even so, the issue appears to be more complicated and some linguists support a much earlier date such as the 5th century or even earlier as noted by Kallio (2006). Archaeological support for connections with Slavs before the 6th century is difficult to find along the Volkhov line.

However, whatever the dating of the Slavic loanword horizon, it reflects tight connections in many spheres of life (agriculture, buildings, Christianity, clothes, fishing, foodstuffs, society, tools, trade, weaving, etc.). And since many important goods are archaeologically invisible (foodstuffs, furs, many artefacts of organic raw materials), the connections are revealed only by the acquired loanwords. The Volkhov zone is of central importance when discussing where the Slavs, who settled south of Lake Ladoga, met the indigenous Finnic population and also where the Karelians met local Finnic inhabitants as well as Slavic settlers.

Questions and sources

Several open questions arise concerning the early history of settlement of the Volkhov River. From the viewpoint of our current topic, the most important are the following:

- (1) On what criteria is it possible to recognise, in the archaeological material of the Volkhov area, the indigenous population presumed to be Finnic, which lived in the region before the Slavic expansion (before the 8th century)?
- (2) Which ethnos and language did this indigenous Finnic population represent and speak? What kind of society and economic basis did they have?
- (3) Was there continuity in the settlement history of the Volkhov River region from the Early Metal Period to the Middle Ages?
- (4) Which was the significance of the indigenous Finnic population in the origin and development of urban centres such as Ladoga and Novgorod?
- (5) Which populations built the burial mounds (the *kurgans* and *sopkas*) along the Volkhov River? What kind of religious traditions did the indigenous Finnic population support?
- (6) What was the character and chronology of the Slavicisation in the Volkhov valley?
- (7) When did the connections between the Volkhov Slavs and the populations of the Karelian Isthmus and western Finland begin and what were they like?

Some of these questions require ethnic markers to be found in the archaeological material. Nevertheless, it is methodically difficult to distinguish 'Finnic' elements from 'Slavic' elements. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that certain materials have, or are thought to have, a stronger indicative power than others. The role of the Scandinavians, in particular, has been stressed without doubts with reference to the markers distinguished in the archaeological material.

Although it is possible to examine these questions solely from the viewpoint of archaeology, it is, in the end, necessary to combine various types of evidence in a multidisciplinary study connected to the history of settlement:

- (1) archaeology (fixed monuments, artefacts)
- (2) historical sources (written documents, birch-bark texts)
- (3) linguistics (toponyms, hydronyms, ethnonyms, historical grammar)
- (4) ethnography and folklore (ethnographic material, oral tradition)
- (5) physical anthropology (skeletal material) and molecular anthropology (DNA)
- (6) palaeoecology (pollen and other cultural indicators in the sediments of lakes and bogs)

Archaeology offers excellent opportunities to study social structure and religious traditions and it is particularly well suited for the study of continuity and change in the history of settlement and the economic basis of societies. These studies are well supported by palaeoecological investigations. Unfortunately, I suppose that the environs of the Volkhov River have not been the object of intensive palaeoecological research. Drawing parallels between languages and archaeological cultural entities poses several methodological problems but it is not possible to go into details here (see Carpelan 2006). I do not refer to the results of physical anthropology (Sankina & Kozincev 1995; Nosov & Ploxov 2002: 176, and literature cited there); I am somewhat sceptical about the obsolete stereotypes of these results.

Precisely here it is possible to examine only some selected points concerning the indigenous population (question 1 above): what criteria have been used to recognize, in the archaeological material of the region, the pre-Slavic (before 8th century AD) indigenous population assumed to be Finnic? I do not consider here the contents of the concepts *ethnos* and *ethnicity* (see Carpelan 2006). Primarily, I focus on the lower reaches of the Volkhov and Staraja Ladoga, but for the sake of comparison, I briefly present the situation in the Novgorod area.

Although I have participated in the excavations of Ladoga many times in the 1980s, my knowledge of the investigations and the discovered materials is mainly based on publications, not on the study of the original material. The facts presented here may thus turn out to be incomplete but at the same time, this presentation will reveal the kind of impression it is possible to obtain working through the relevant literature.

Linguistic evidence

Finnic ethnonyms quoted in the Annals (beginning from the 850s), Finnic hydronyms (*Ladoga*, *Il'men'*, *Neva*, *Msta*, *Luga*, *Svir'* etc.) provide linguistic evidence pointing to the existence of a Finnic indigenous population in North-West Russia. The etymology of the name Volkhov is not apparently unambiguous. Furthermore, a Finnic substrate in the local Russian dialects of the Novgorod Land supports the picture provided by toponyms (Popov 1981: 55–60; Ageeva 1989: 209–234, and cited literature).

The ethnohistory of the region between Lake Il'men' and Lake Peipus is poorly understood, and the Čud' of the annals have often been connected to the unnamed population of this area (Nosov 1990a: 47–57; Selirand 1992: 537; Grünthal 1997: 160–164; see also Korpela 2004: 23–24). The question of the

Čud' remains open and is linked to more speculations than secure conclusions. It has been possible to use the name Čud' of (i) the predecessor of a Finnic people known at present (Estonians, Vodians, Vepsians), (ii) an early Russianised and disappeared Finnic "tribe" or (iii) as a broad collective name of any Finnic speaking population.

However, the ethnic interpretations of this population vary widely, as can be seen when comparing maps describing the distribution of different populations. In the maps of Finnish researchers, the surroundings of the Volkhov River have been populated by Finnic people as late as about AD 1000 (e.g. Kirkinen 1983: 17). By contrast, the ethno-cultural maps of Russian researchers indicate that the *slověne* had completely Slavicised the Volkhov River valley by the end of the 1st millennium AD, probably already in the 9th century (e.g. Rjabinin 1997: 4, Fig. 1; Sedov 1987: 8–9, map 1; 1995: 362, Fig. 110; Pokrovskaja 2001: 86).

Linguistic interpretations derive all eastern Finnic languages spoken today in one way or another from an ancient language called *East-Proto-Finnic* (also called *Proto-Ladogan*, Sammallahti 1977), which is thought to have been spoken south of Lake Ladoga (Leskinen 1999). Linguists have constructed models describing the development of hypothetical ancient Finnic dialects, including among other things, *Ancient Vepsian*, *Ancient Karelian* (Salminen 1998), and even *Ancient Čudian* (Koponen 1991). The coverages of those ancient dialects have been indicated in broad terms and usually without maps.

Russian scholars have proposed that Saami (*lopári*) would have formed an indigenous population in the Volkhov River region (i.a. Rjabinin 1997: 69 with references; Kirpičnikov 1984; 2002: 11). This notion is based on the name *Lop-skij pogost* found in written sources. Furthermore, the village of Lopino is found on the Volkhov. However, neither archaeology nor onomastics provide evidence in favour of the prior existence of Saami in the Volkhov region (see Popov 1980: 108–110).

Dwelling sites – pottery as ethnic marker?

What is the archaeological evidence of the indigenous Finnic population? During the Early Metal Age, the region south of Lake Ladoga – as a matter of fact, the whole area between Lake Il'men' and Pskov – was part of the wide *Textile Ware* complex. In general, this particular type of Textile Ware is attributed to Finno-Ugric populations (Sedov 1995: 211). Since the population of this region did not have metal artefact types of their own, ceramics provide the

only ethnic marker indicating the distribution of the Early Metal Age Finno-Ugrians in this region.

Before the adoption of the potter's wheel in the Iron Age, the hand-shaped *Lepnaja Ware* is not as such suitable for use as an ethnic marker, because later the Slavs also produced this kind of pottery. Only *Lepnaja Ware* made before the 8th century AD but after the 4th century could be used as an ethnic marker of the indigenous people in the area but so far, very little pottery of this period has been identified in the Volkhov River valley. The earliest wheel-thrown pots in the material of Staraja Ladoga and Rjurikovo Gorodišče date from the 10th century and by AD 1050 the wheel thrown ceramics replaced hand-shaped *Lepnaja* pottery in the area. For a short time, both types of pottery were in use simultaneously (Gorjunova & Lapšin 2004: 55). However, the concept of wheel-thrown pottery is not unambiguous, because different techniques have been applied (for example, fast wheel, slow wheel, imitation; see Tvauri 2005: 151, 166).

Lepnaja Ware has been discovered at settlement sites along the Volkhov, dating broadly from the latter half of the 1st millennium AD (Gurina 1961: 165–168; Nosov 1990a: 49). Often the layers also have contained ceramics having a textile-impressed or hatched surface. While several Medieval settlements appear to have been established right on the top of preceding settlement sites (Petrenko 1984: 88, Fig. 1 p. 81), the continuation from the Early Metal Age to the Early Medieval Period is a more or less open question because a hiatus in the ceramic sequence occurs at several sites around the beginning of the Common Era.

Let us now have a look at the catalogue of protected Ancient Monuments of the Volkhov District (*Volkhovskij rajon*) or the lower reaches of the River Volkhov. This catalogue, which is not quite up to date, includes 91 items (Lapšin 1995: 132–143). Of these, more than 20 (25%) are open or fortified settlement sites which have been the source of Early Metal Age ceramics (e.g. *Textile Ware*) or some other kind of hand-shaped ceramics (e.g. *Ladoga Ware*). The varying level of information available at these sites makes dating a difficult task. Nevertheless, the contexts with *Lepnaja Ware* should predate AD 950, while the Early Metal Age and Early Iron Age contexts fall between 1900 BC and AD 300. In addition, the catalogue includes a site (in the Ljubša River area) with stone cairns (No. 1489, Černavino-9) which is interpreted as an offering site of Finnic “tribes”.

The current archaeological maps of the Volkhov River region concerning the Early Metal Period settlements are presented in the articles of Juškova (2004; 2006). More than 20 dwelling sites of the Early Metal Age are known from the

lower reaches of the Volkhov, which represent two chronological groups. The earlier ceramic group (Textile Ware) dates from between the mid-second millennium and early first millennium BC, while the later group dates from the 8th to 5th centuries BC (Juškova 2004: 234–241, map Fig. 1). According to the terminology proposed by Juškova, these dwelling sites represent the ‘Volkhov type’ or ‘Volkhov culture’. However, a definition of the distinctive characteristics of this type or of the culture is not presented.

The dwelling sites of the earlier group (e.g. Izsady 1–2, Pod Sopkoj) are found in the north on the lower reaches of the Volkhov, whereas most of sites representing the later group are found southwards, namely upstream (e.g. Gorčakovščina, Ljubša, Lopino, Staraja Ladoga / Kamennaja krepost’, Pobedišče, Škurina Gorka and Porogi 2; Juškova 2004: 235–236, map Fig. 1).

Indications of settlement dating to around the beginning of the Common Era are very scarce over a large territory in the surroundings of Lake Ladoga and the Volkhov valley provides no exception. It appears that no sites dating from the period 500 BC – AD 500 are known from the lower reaches of the river, i.e. from between Gostino Pole and the mouth of the Volkhov River. Dwelling sites are rare up to the 8th century AD. Nevertheless, this situation probably can be attributed to the lack of radiocarbon dates for the ceramics. Indeed, a similar situation occurs in the Karelian Isthmus, where comparatively few archaeological remains have been discovered from the Iron Age preceding the Viking Age. The finds in that region include coarse Iron Age ceramics which, lacking chronologically indicative traits, have not attracted interest. Radiocarbon dates of charred crust adhering to the inner surface of such ceramics point to the 6th and 8th centuries AD, thus filling the hiatus (Uino 1997: 109–111). Using the radiocarbon method to improve the chronology of the phases of settlement along the Volkhov River region is a challenge for future study.

Trying to sort out the ceramics of the River Volkhov region based on publications, I cannot avoid the impression that the current state of study as well as the proposed typology and also terminology leave much to be desired. Although lengthy articles on Staraja Ladoga ceramics have been published (beginning with Stankevič 1950; 1951; and recently Seničenkova 2002a; 2002b), the study of Lepnaja Ware, in particular, appears to remain in a “grey zone”. The question is, whether ceramic studies have been carried out with the same intensity and precision as the study of some other groups of artefacts.

I would also like to focus on one factor which could have had an effect on views supporting a findless period somewhere between the Bronze Age / Early Iron Age and the Early Middle Ages. The archaeologists studying the Bronze

Age / Early Iron Age approach the Iron Age and Early Medieval Age from “below”. In other words, they may instinctively try to increase their corpus by adding those ceramics difficult to identify and date (but which really would belong to the Iron Age). Medieval archaeologists, on the other hand, may do the same in an opposite direction. This would unintentionally lead to the formation of a findless period and to establish a virtual archaeological hiatus.

Škurina Gorka and Ljubša – key sites

From the current point of view, the most important excavations on the Volkhov are probably those conducted at the dwelling site of Škurina Gorka (located 6 kilometres south of Staraja Ladoga) and the gorodišče of Ljubša (1.5 kilometres north of Staraja Ladoga). Since the cultural layers at both sites have been preserved unusually well and extensive excavations have been carried out at them, precisely these sites are particularly informative “key sites” on the lower reaches of the river. Rjurikovo Gorodišče (located 3 kilometres south of Novgorod) is a corresponding key site upstream the Volkhov.

Judging from published illustrations, the ceramics from Škurina Gorka represent Early Metal Age Textile Ware of a regional variant referred to as *Kalmistomäki* Ware. Corresponding ceramics are known from other sites on the Volkhov and elsewhere in the Ladoga region, such as in the Karelian Isthmus (e.g. Kalmistomäki in Räisälä / Mel’nikovo). This type of ceramics is generally thought to indicate Early Proto-Finnic settlement. According to radiocarbon datings of charcoal, Škurina Gorka dates from 8th – 5th calBC (Timofeev 2000; Juškova 2004: 240). In Finland, several radiocarbon dates of charred crust sticking to the ceramics suggest the period 1900–500 calBC for Textile Ware in general.

It has been suggested that on the gorodišče of Ljubša, the first wooden fortress was built by ‘Finns’ (more precisely the Čud’ of the Annals) in the 6th century AD. The stone paved fire places, large number of fish bones and scales in addition to ceramics would all indicate a community of fishers and their ritual feasts. The bone and stone objects in addition to women’s ornaments (sic!) would indicate the presence of ‘Finns’. By the early 8th century at the latest, a new population (Western Slavs) would have replaced the old fortress with a new one built of stone. Ljubša has been described as the predecessor of Ladoga, the guardian of the water route (*Velikij Volžskij put’*, *iz Varjag v Greki*). The settlement at Ljubša ended by AD 900 (Rjabinin & Dubašinskij 2002; Rjabinin 2003: 16–19).

The ceramics from Ljubša are more or less identical to the Lepnaja Ware of Ladoga. However, the finds include also Textile Ware of the kind found at Škurina Gorka in addition to Luukonsaari Ware with asbestos fibres mixed in the ceramic paste (Rjabinin 2003, the caption of the figure p. 182, says: “decorated Lepnaja ceramics”). The general dating of these ceramic wares to 1900 BC – AD 300 indicates that the first settlement at Ljubša belongs to the Early Metal Age and Early Iron Age but not to the 6th century AD. Without scrutiny of the original material, the extent to which the period AD 300–700 is represented among the ceramics from Ljubša remains unclear. The flint blade pictured in the book indicates that the site had already been settled in the Stone Age.

Furthermore, it has, on the one hand, been claimed that the ‘Ladoga Ware’ of Lepnaja ceramics (found at Staraja Ladoga, Rjurikovo Gorodišče, Novgorod as well as in sopkas) would represent an innovation brought to the region by the *slověne* (Ploxov 2002). On the other hand, the use of this type of ceramics as an ethnic marker has been criticised (Ligi 1993: 35; Petrenko & Šitova 1985: 188; Davidan 1994: 165). Hand-made ceramics of similar shapes are found on the wide area reaching from central Russia to Sweden, as well as in Finland (Ploxov 2002, with references) – in different ethno-cultural contexts. Similar carinated pots have been made in the Baltic Sea region as early as the Bronze Age (for Finland, see e.g. Meinander 1954).

Our knowledge of the settlement on the Volkhov River predating the Viking Age is insufficient to outline the development. Even though of the fact that the search for and investigation of settlement sites apparently has not been very intensive, the available material includes sufficient proof of the existence of a pre-Slavic settlement. This information of cultural layers including Lepnaja Ware discovered under sopka barrows (Lapšin 1995: No 1416, 1476) are eloquent indications of a Finnic settlement predating the sopka phase. So far, few if any of finds exist from the period 400 BC – AD 500.

Staraja Ladoga – an early urban centre

It is often said about Staraja Ladoga that it originated in a territory settled by ‘Finnic’ or ‘Finno-Ugric’ tribes. Discussion on the ethnic character of the inhabitants of the town has been going on since the beginning of the excavations. One assumption concerning the oldest stratum of Staraja Ladoga was that this layer probably was created by a Finnic population. Some scholars preferred to emphasise a Slavic origin for that layer, however. Before long, the view gained support that the lowermost layer of Staraja Ladoga is almost void of Finno-

Ugric material (for research history, see Petrenko 1984: 83–85; Kirpičnikov 1985: 3–4; Uino 1989: 218–219). In spite of the fact that the settlement of the surrounding territory has been thought to have been Finno-Ugric, it has been puzzling to find that the oldest strata of Staraja Ladoga contain so little material that unambiguously indicates the presence of a Finno-Ugric population (Davidan 1986: 103).

Recently, the notion of ethnically identifiable layers has been abandoned and a multi-ethnic composition of the population is emphasised instead, but even here preferences have varied. According to a more or less established view, the population of the community during its first century (c. AD 750–850; AD 753 is the oldest dendrochronological date so far) consisted of Slavs and Finnic, after which the Scandinavian influence began. Lately, a tendency to emphasise the close connections between Slavs and Finnic peoples has occurred (Kirpičnikov & Sarab'janov 1996: 63; Kirpičnikov 2002: 9–12; 2003: 42; Kirpičnikov & Saksa 2002: 134–137; see also Staraja Ladoga 2004).

Ethnic arguments have also been used to explain the differences seen in the technical solutions applied to buildings. The large corner-timbered houses with post constructions and a central fireplace have been usually linked to the Scandinavian building tradition, whereas the small corner-timbered houses with a fireplace in the corner of the room have been seen as an indication of a Slavic population (e.g. Kirpičnikov & Sarab'janov 1996: 82). Nevertheless, the changes in the building tradition are not undisputable indications of this kind of ethnic composition.

In the urban centre of Ladoga, the visibility is poor of the indigenous population of the Early Metal Period and Iron Age. Early Metal and Early Iron Age Ware has been found in the area (Lebedev & Sedyx 1985: 15–24; Juškova 2003: 16; Davidan 1986: 103). Although the establishment of the town is dated to the 8th century, there are finds dating from the 6th and 7th centuries both from Staraja Ladoga itself and from the sopka burials (i.a. a small Finnish equal-armed brooch: Petrenko 1984: 89, Fig. 4). These finds raise the question of whether there was a continuity of settlement and at the same time, challenges the validity of the ceramic chronology.

Reference has been made to certain Finno-Ugric metal objects found in the oldest layers of Ladoga and in the sopka mounds (Petrenko 1984: 85–86, Figs. 2–3; Davidan 1986: 99–105, Fig. 1; 1994; Kirpičnikov & Saksa 2002: 135–137). This is a mixed collection of artefacts from the Finno-Ugric territory in general and which find parallels through the huge area reaching from south-east of Lake Ladoga to western Siberia. It is interesting to note that part of these objects

are clearly older than the establishment of Staraja Ladoga, as i.a. the belt fittings of the Nevolino-Lomovatovo type whose origin is found as far east as the Kama River (see Carpelan 2004; 2006). Because these objects are imported, their significance vis-à-vis the overall problem is minor as an indicator of the local indigenous settlement. Indirectly, however, these finds may point to the existence of an indigenous population which maintained eastern connections.

The Staraja Ladoga material is not published in its entity. In general, the publications concentrate on presentation of the most impressive and thus most “interesting” objects. From the substantial archaeological literature on Staraja Ladoga, it is difficult to find information on the extent of traces indicating the presence of a Finnic indigenous population from the Iron Age. Especially the coverage of ceramics is inadequate – concerning chronology in particular, but also for terminology. If it is assumed that nothing more than certain ceramics is clearly local and that the rest of what was left by the indigenous population lacks particular identifiable characteristics. Thus, the identification of the ethnic markers of this population is a difficult methodological problem.

At any rate, the Ladoga region has provided an important economic region for Staraja Ladoga. The connections with Finnic populations have stimulated the livelihoods of this community, especially the crafts and trade. Correspondingly, the abundant metal objects of the kurgans in the south-east Lake Ladoga region bear witness to trade connections (Boguslavskij 2003: 158–170). In the same way, the societies of the Karelian Isthmus have belonged to this trading network since the 8th century (Uino 1997; Saksa 1998).

Even if Staraja Ladoga itself may have been a multi-ethnic community where the number of local indigenous was comparatively low, the local population acted in the surroundings and provided local products to the town market, including fur and fish. Yet this kind of activity seldom leaves archaeological evidence. The finds with a provenance in western Finland and dating from the 7th and 8th centuries, discovered at Orešek (Schlüsselburg), Rjurikovo Gorodišče, Staraja Ladoga and in the south-eastern Lake Ladoga region, probably reflect western connections (Uino 2003: 368–369; Volkovickij & al. 2003: 139, Fig. 311).

The Novgorod Čud’?

Recent investigations have revealed several rural settlement sites in the surroundings of Lake Il’men’ and particularly in the Poozer’e area, and these pre-date Novgorod (Nosov & Ploxov 2002). Often located at the sites of modern

villages, cultural layers of these rural settlements are badly damaged. Publications give the impression that the sites include Early Metal Age Textile Ware or early Iron Age Ware – or both – in addition to later Lepnaja ceramics (Ladoga Ware). The claim that palaeobotanic observation (pea replaces bean in the cultural layers) would indicate the arrival of the Slavs (Nosov & Ploxov 2002: 177) calls for credible argumentation.

On the other hand, the earliest strata of Rjurikovo, dating from AD 800–1000, have given a number of finds considered by the investigators as being Finno-Ugric. For instance, part of the metal ornaments dating from the 12th and 13th centuries is particularly characteristic of the Karelian cultural range of the Karelian Isthmus and the north-western coast of Lake Ladoga. In Rjurikovo, as in Staraja Ladoga, the Finno-Ugric selection of objects is mixed and includes material produced within a zone reaching from Finland all the way to the Kama (Nosov 1990b: 81–86; Nosov & Xvoščinskaja 2004: 125–133).

Recently, a typology for the Rjurikovo ceramics has been presented (Brorsson & Håkansson 2001: 52–53). Four main types have been distinguished based on the shape of the rim, the decoration and the surface treatment, which can be dated from the 9th to the 10th centuries AD. These types are given geographical or ethnic connotations, namely ‘Ladoga’ pottery, ‘Local’ pottery, ‘Scandinavian’ pottery and ‘Finno-Ugric’ pottery.

It is interesting to note that the pottery, labelled by the Swedish author as Finno-Ugric, represents pottery typical of Finland and Estonia, which came in use by AD 700 (Lang 1991; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982: 76–84; Tvauri 2005: 81–112). The same kind of Finnic pottery is found at Birka and other sites in Middle Sweden, as was well attested by the publication of Dagmar Selling’s large monograph on Viking Age and Early Medieval ceramics in Sweden (Selling 1955). But Rjurikovo is certainly not the only place in the western Novgorod land where this type of ceramics has been in use (and possibly made). The excavations carried out by Xvoščinskaja at the cemetery of Zalaxtov’e on the eastern side of Lake Peipus brought to light many pots of this type (Xvoščinskaja 2004: 107–109, Plates XIV: 9, XVI: 26, XVII: 6, 10, 11, XVIII: Б, XXVII: Б, XXXI: 1, XXXVIII: 2, 3, XLII: 29, L: 28, 29, CXXIII: 11). This may indicate the ethnic dependence of the Čud’ living in the western Novgorod land. This topic is worth further elucidation.

Based on raw material, the Rjurikovo ceramics fall into seven groups, three of which include ceramics of the Finno-Ugric group (Brorsson & Håkansson 2001: 53–56). According to the study, it is characteristic for the Finno-Ugric group that a slow potter’s wheel was used in producing ceramics. As stated before, it is

nevertheless useless to consider the ceramic sequence and chronology in the light of the ambiguous terminology and confused classification. Questions are answered only when a substantial number of radiocarbon dates of charred crust samples from ceramics are available.

During recent decades, the excavations at Novgorod have produced an overwhelming amount of material of which, for obvious reasons, no more than a fraction has been published. However, the question remains as to what point of view and criteria have directed the study and publication of this material. After all, the indigenous population of the Lake Il'men' region has not been the focus of lively discussion, although linguistics provide evidence on the early connections between Finnic and Slavic.

The 'Finno-Ugric' metal ornaments discovered at Novgorod, mainly dating from the 13th century, have attracted interest (Pokrovskaja 2001; 2003: 304–314; in all 164 items). Women's ornaments characteristic of the Karelian Isthmus are common but also those of the Finno-Ugric peoples which were under the domination of Novgorod from the 11th to the 14th century. Such ornaments have been found especially in certain urban manors located in the *Nerevskij*, the *Ljudin* and the *Slavenskij* 'ends'. Based on the 'Karelian' objects and 'Karelian' birch-bark documents, it has been inferred that these finds not only indicated connections to Karelia but that Karelians actually lived in that town (Saksa 2002: 89–90).

The 'Finno-Ugric' ornaments provide too broad an angle to study the role of the Finnic in the town. It has been thought that during the formation of Novgorod, the neighbourhood had "different ethnic groups" which rapidly assimilated to the Slavs. For example, Janin (2004: 24) inferred that Novgorod had formed as a result of the merger of three separate centres. Initially, the *Nerevskij* end would have been settled by the Čud'. In addition the medieval name of one of the streets, *Čudincevaja ulica*, would refer to the ancient population of the Lake Il'men' region (Nosov 1990b: 84). Support for this is found in the fact that Finnic language traits, place names and personal names are found in birch bark documents discovered within the town borders (Janin 1998: 71–87, 259–266).

The finds of Finno-Ugric type discovered at Rjurikovo have been explained – not with reference to the presence of a Finno-Ugric population – but alleging that the objects had been in the possession of Slavs who were stingy in their use of metal ornaments. In contacts with Finno-Ugrians, Balts and Scandinavians, the Slavs would have adopted the use of these metal ornaments. The same explanation has been given for Novgorod as well, where the owners of urban manors are assumed to have had contacts with Finno-Ugrians (Nosov & Xvoščinskaja 2004: 131–132 with references). The Finno-Ugric ornaments would

have been introduced into the urban costume and so lost their ethnic significance (i.a. c. 60 discovered plastic horse and bird pendants) (Pokrovskaja 2001; 2003: 313). Even if the Finno-Ugric – not only the Finnic – ornaments would not represent a local indigenous population, this sounds somewhat preposterous and does not fit well with the casting proposed by the same scholars, in which the Slavs are the active players compared with the passive Finnic indigenous population.

Concluding remarks

The surroundings of the River Volkhov are part of a large region within which the picture of the (Early) Iron Age settlement is badly incomplete. Generalising, it appears that in addition to the surroundings of Lake Ladoga, the archaeological picture of the centuries around the beginning of the Common Era is also poor of Ingria and eastern Finland. If a temporary break in the continuity of settlement appears unlikely, other reasons have to be found, for instance, a change in the economic basis, and or a lack of metal or factors not (yet) reached by archaeology.

The question of an ethnic character is really irrelevant as long as the archaeological evidence of the early and developed Iron Age settlement south of Lake Ladoga remains as scarce as it is. It will not be possible to solve the history of settlement before a detailed analysis is carried out of relevant ceramics (Lepnaja Ware). Furthermore, radiocarbon dating is indispensable in order to build an independent chronology. It is also necessary to examine the question of continuity of settlement through palaeoecological research.

On the other hand – if we had to make an estimate of the medieval settlement of Novgorod merely on the basis of burials, archaeology could not shed much light on the topic. It is a fact that the early history of Novgorod is well known precisely because the archaeological record is so well preserved in the cultural layers.

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