

doi:10.17746/1563-0110.2021.49.1.078-084

N.B. Krylasova^{1, 2} and A.V. Danich¹¹Perm State Humanitarian Pedagogical University,
Sibirskaya 24, Perm, 614990, Russia
E-mail: n.krylasova@mail.ru; adanich@yandex.ru²Perm Federal Research Center,
Ural Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences,
Lenina 13a, Perm, 614990, Russia

Composite Belt Ornaments with Bear Claw Pieces in Medieval Men's Costume of the Perm Region, Western Urals

Longstanding excavations at the Boyanovo and Rozhdestvenskoye medieval cemeteries in the Perm Territory revealed a new type of belt ornament—pendants with arch-shaped pieces carved from dorsal plates of bear claws. Each piece has two drilled holes in the central third, and they were strung on two cords in a “rope ladder” fashion. Pieces made of bear claws were interchanged with bronze beads or pipes. At the ends of strings, bells or pendants were attached. Such ornaments were worn exclusively by boys and men of all ages (from two to sixty). Silver artifacts and other “elite” items, suggesting that they were markers of high social status, accompanied the ornaments. The use of bear claws might indicate an apotropaic function. The available facts point to the use in funerary costume only, but the difficulty of manufacturing such ornaments obviates the possibility of a one-off use. Previously, such an ornament was found only at Zagarye, a cemetery dating to the final stage of the Lomovatovka culture. The pendants, then, were used during the late 9th to the late 11th centuries.

Keywords: Perm Region, western Urals, Middle Ages, Lomovatovka culture, costume, men's belt ornaments, bear claw pieces.

Introduction

As we know, “the final result of research in archeology is the reconstruction to some degree of historical processes, items, and facts” (Martynov, 2002: 4). The reconstruction of costumes is of particular interest, since it allows us to picture with more clarity the appearance of the people from past eras. Such research devoted to the costume reconstruction of the medieval population of the Perm Region in western Urals on the basis of sources from the 19th – 20th centuries has been undertaken before (Krylasova, 2001). The burial complexes that formed the basis of the reconstruction provide very scant information about clothing, footwear, and headgear. The

small fragments of preserved textiles, leather, and fur allow us to evaluate only the materials from which the garments were made. In combination with a few medieval images, it is only possible to depict the basic structure of the costume in general terms. But the various additional elements of the costume made, as a rule, from inorganic materials, have been studied quite thoroughly. Their main material composition is determined, a specific place in the costume is identified, and the variety of the combination of accessories and ornaments specifically attributed to women's or men's costume outfits are traced.

For the first two decades of the 21st century, the range of sources for the reconstruction of the costume has significantly expanded owing to many years of

research on a number of medieval burial grounds. Moreover, the newly obtained information is more detailed, since the conclusions made earlier about its features prompts archaeologists to be more attentive to the slightest nuances and more accurately record the interposition of various elements during excavations. Given the objective limitations of our knowledge about medieval costume, its previously unknown elements are always of particular interest, especially those found in graves *in situ*, as a complete outfit, sometimes even on the remains of an organic base. For example, during the excavation of the Rozhdestvenskoye burial ground, in a number of male graves, the remains of textile belt bands with bronze spherical pendants along the lower edge were found. These ribbons, up to 10 cm wide, with a length reaching nearly to the knee, were attached to the belt on the left. They were probably dyed and served as a bright decorative element of the men's costume, which was significantly poorer in a number of decorations than that of the women (Krylasova, 2019). In addition, it was possible to analyze the composition of strings of metal beads, which were used as belt decorations, elements of hair braid and temporal ornaments (Krylasova, Danich, 2020). The stable traditions of assembling such strings are identified, and additional components in their composition are revealed. In particular, in women's costumes, in the composition of strings of beads, on which braid pendants were attached, besides metal beads, colored glass and stone beads are often present. In the male graves, belt pendants with elements carved from bear claws were found. This article is devoted to describing this original male jewelry, known so far only in the materials of the Lomovatovka archaeological culture.

Among the medieval inhabitants of the Perm Region in western Urals, as well as among other Finno-Ugric peoples, male costume contained significantly fewer additional details and ornaments than the female one. Among men's accessories, the most expressive was the belt. It was not only a utilitarian item, but also the most decorative detail of a man's costume. The belt, in addition to a buckle and a tip, was supplied with a set of metal overlays, pendants in the form of straps with overlays, and short strings of bronze beads with a bell at the end. A scabbard with a knife, a purse with a flint, a case with an awl, a comb, and other items, in particular amulets associated with household and hunting magic, could be attached to the belt (Krylasova, 2001: 205).

Natural amulets, which usually included various parts of animals, birds, and fish (jaws, teeth, claws, vertebrae, individual bones), as well as shells of mollusks, occupied a special place in the culture of the Finno-Ugric peoples. They were customarily used without any processing, other than the drilled hole for hanging. There are still only a few special studies devoted to such amulets, but even the available data make clear that there were certain territorial

and chronological differences in the composition of the complexes of amulets, due to the peculiarities of economic activity and the ideological views of the population. Amulets from the bones of a beaver (talus, teeth, jaws) and a bear (teeth and claws) were almost universal in all Finno-Ugric cultures.

Evidence of the veneration of the bear appears in almost all of the animal's habitats (Tyanina, 2011: 164). Among the finds, the majority of amulets are made from bear fangs, whose function was protection against evil spirits, spoilage, the evil eye, as well as the benevolent value of increasing health and prosperity. The territory of the Perm Region in western Urals was the center of the spread of this animal cult, according to L.A. Golubeva, who based on the analysis of metal jewelry-amulets featuring the image of a bear (1979: 26–28, 62). Leading researchers of the region's medieval cultures mention exactly bear fangs from the entire array of natural amulets (Goldina, 1985: 151; Oborin, 1999: 280), although in reality this type of amulet was far from the most widespread.

Unlike fangs, amulets made from bear claws occur extremely rare on settlement sites. Single finds are known at the fortified sites of Rodanovo (Talitsky, 1951: Fig. 32, 11) and Rozhdestvenskoye (Belavin, Krylasova, 2008: Fig. 194, 11) in the Perm Region, western Urals, and Idnakar in Udmurtia (Ivanova, 1998: Fig. 80, 11). A similar situation can be traced in the settlement monuments of Russia. For example, 188 natural amulets were collected in Novgorod, among which there were only two made of bear claws (Tyanina, 2011: 164). But in the grave monuments of the Slavs and their neighbors, the Finns of the Volga region, such amulets are extremely widespread. Bear claws are a typical find in female graves in the kurgans of the Ves people in Southeastern Ladoga area of the 10th–11th centuries (Golubeva, 1997: 157). E.A. Tyanina notes the semantic unity of bear claw amulets with another well-known category of cult objects—clay “bear paws”, which are known from the Finno-Ugric and Slavic burials of the 9th–11th centuries, and believes that they relate exclusively to the funerary rite (2011: 164).

Of particular interest are composite belt pendants found in nine graves of the Boyanovo (9th to the first half of the 10th centuries) and Rozhdestvenskoye (late 9th to late 11th centuries) burial grounds. They include elements made from dorsal plates of bear claws (definition by P.A. Kosintsev). These elements, obviously, cannot be unconditionally put on a par with the above-mentioned amulets of bear claws. A distinctive feature of the latter is the lack of processing, with the exception of a drilled hole, and the elements of the considered belt ornaments are carefully cut products of a standard shape. Although the choice of such an unusual material for their manufacture as bear claws suggests that they could have had a special symbolic meaning.



Fig. 1. Belt ornament from the Zagarye cemetery of the 10th century (after (Spitsin, 1902)).

For the entire previous period of archaeological research on the territory of the Perm Region in western Urals, the only similar ornament was found in the destroyed part of the Zagarye cemetery of the 10th century (Spitsin, 1902: Pl. VII, 16) (Fig. 1)*. Judging by the fact that A.A. Spitsin, describing materials from the well-known archaeological collection of the Teploukhovs, mentioned this pendant when describing neck ornaments (*Ibid.*: 32), it was found out of context, or the finder kept silent about the circumstances of the discovery. Since such a find remained unique for a long time, none of the researchers specifically focused on it. The material from which the arc-shaped bars were made was not determined either. Probably, relying on the opinion of A.A. Spitsin, R.D. Goldina used this find as a basis for her judgment that bear fangs were part of necklaces (1985: 151), although in reality all the known amulets of bear fangs in graves were found in the waist area.

*Upon closer examination of the drawing, one can notice that parts of two pendants, probably originating from different destroyed graves, are stacked here.

Characteristics of pendants with bear claw pieces

The elements of composite belt ornaments cut from bear claws represent an arch-shaped bar 0.5–1.0 cm thick and 4–7 cm long. Its outer surface retains the structure of the claw, while the inner surface has a smooth cut (Fig. 1, 2). In the vast majority of products, a pair of holes is drilled in the central third. An exception is the lower bars of some ornaments that have additional holes in the center (Fig. 2, 5, 6). These extra holes were needed for fixing the ends of the cords on which the ornament was strung.

The bars of bear claws were strung on a pair of cords like a “rope ladder” with the curved side up. The pendants were hung vertically from the belt. The number of bone bars in different decorations ranges from 3 to 12; although, given the poor preservation of bones in the medieval burial grounds of the Perm Region in western Urals, it cannot be argued that in all cases their complete set is presented. When the first such ornaments were discovered, a version initially emerged about the use of claws from two paws of one bear to make the bars (probably the front ones, judging by the length of the bars). However, the bear has five-toed paws, and the best-preserved pendants (see Fig. 1; 2, 1, 2, 7) contain 11–12 elements from the claws. Apparently, their number was determined by some special considerations. So far, owing to the limited range of sources, it seems premature to put forward any assumptions about this.

Only in two cases (graves 357 and 434 of the Boyanovo cemetery) was the main part of the ornament made exclusively of bear claws, without dividing elements (see Fig. 2, 3, 4). In all other pendants, one or two spherical bronze beads or short pipe beads with a pair of rounded bulges were strung on cords between the bone bars (see Fig. 1; 2, 1, 2, 5–9).

Judging by the most fully preserved specimens, the upper part of the pendant was shaped as follows: one or two bronze beads were strung on cords above the end bar, and upward—spiral beads (see Fig. 2, 1, 7) or a set of bronze beads (see Fig. 2, 2). The upper ends of the cords were attached to a waist belt. The pendants were usually placed on the belt at the front left (see *Table*).

In some cases, the lower ends of the cords were passed together through a hole in the center of the last bar, and then bronze beads or spiral pipe beads were strung on them (see Fig. 1; 2, 1, 6). In other cases, the ends of the cords were passed through a pair of holes in the lower bar, each one was strung with beads or spiral pipe beads, then the cords were connected and passed through several beads (see Fig. 2, 2, 4). In one of the pendants, immediately under the bar, the cords are brought together and a lunar pendant is tied to them (see Fig. 2, 8). In another, also a single specimen, the cords are not connected, each of



Fig. 2. Men's belt pendants with bear claw pieces (excl. No. 10 with a bear fang).

1–8 – Boyanovo cemetery: 1 – grave 76, 2 – grave 128, 3 – grave 357, 4 – grave 434, 5 – grave 442, 6 – grave 459, 7 – grave 468, 8 – grave 479; 9, 10 – Rozhdestvenskoye cemetery: 9 – grave 216, 10 – grave 388.

them has three bronze beads strung, fixed with bell-shaped beads in the lower section (see Fig. 2, 7).

At the end of the pendant, which was hanging vertically on the garment, some kind of fixing element was needed. In its simplest form, it could be an ordinary knot of cords tied together. But for the carriers of the Lomovotovka archaeological culture, such a primitive fastening was not typical. They usually camouflaged the fixing knot by any volumetric beads, most often bells (see Fig. 2, 7), or by tying a pendant from below (see Fig. 2, 8); in the latest grave of the second half of the 11th century, a cross-cut bell was encountered (see Fig. 2, 9). In those

cases where nothing was preserved at the end of the string, it is more logical to assume that some kind of bone or even wooden amulet was tied there, rather than to admit the presence of an ordinary knot.

Judging by the data on graves where pendants with bear claw pieces were found (see *Table*), it can be argued that this was an element of an exclusively male costume, regardless of age. These were found in graves of children (from 2–4 years old), mature men (18–30 years old), and elderly (40–60 years old).

The composition of the accompanying grave goods suggests that the pendants in question were used among

Data on graves where pendants with bear claw pieces were found

Grave	Age of the buried person	Location of the pendant of the belt	No. of image at Fig. 2	Accompanying grave goods
BC76	20–30 years old	On the left	1	Mask, two temple rings, bracelet, finger-ring, three buckles, belt with overlays, knife, fire steel with flints, axe, arrowhead
BC128	40–60 years old	On the right (?)	2	Mask, two temple rings, pendant-horseman, fragment of belt with a bronze buckle and a fragment of bag, knife, saber, three bone and two iron arrowheads, bit
BC357	18–25 years old	On the left	3	Mask, two temple rings, bracelet, two finger-rings, belt (with overlays, buckle, and belt tip), knife, flint, saber, five arrowheads, bit, fragment of a wooden vessel
BC434	? (judging by the dimensions, a young male)	"	4	Mask (coins), two temple rings, bracelet, glass bead, pipe beads, belt (with overlays, buckle, and belt tip), knife, arrowhead
BC442	15–20 years old	"	5	Mask, two temple rings, bracelet, finger-ring, buckle, belt with overlays, knife, fire steel with flints, saber, axe, three arrowheads, bit
BC459	2–4 years old	"	6	Mask, bracelet, buckle, belt with overlays, knife, two arrowheads
BC468	5–6 years old	"	7	Mask, two temple rings, pendant-horseman, bracelet, finger-ring, knife, axe
BC479	?	"	8	Mask, two temple rings, bracelet, belt with buckle and overlays, knife, whetstone, small bag, four flints, axe, arrowhead, girth buckle
RC216	Adult	"	9	Belt set with overlays, fire steel, flint, axe, awl, hook knife, whetstone, two ceramic vessels, two horse teeth

Note. All the burials are male. BC – Boyanovo cemetery, RC – Rozhdestvenskoye cemetery.

the social elite. This is confirmed by both the presence of “wealth” (a significant amount of metal jewelry, including silver), and the presence of special “status” items. For example, in all the graves of the Boyanovo cemetery, where such pendants were found, there were funerary face covers with silver masks sewn onto them. In grave 216 of the Rozhdestvenskoye necropolis, the part where the skull was located was later destroyed by a village pit; therefore, it is impossible to discern the presence of a mask here. Most of the graves under consideration were accompanied by a saber or an axe, which are typical for the graves of the social elite, or by arrowheads. Sabers were present in graves 128, 357, and 442 of the Boyanovo burial ground, in combination with arrowheads and bits, and in the latter also with an axe. An analysis of the use of sabers in the funeral rite showed that in the Perm Region in western Urals they did not belong to the popular types of weapons, but rather were a confirmation of the high status of the owner. Elements of the horse harness indicate that those buried with sabers belonged to mounted warriors (Danich, 2012: 96, 104). Two graves at Boyanovo contained silver pendants in the form of a horseman’s figure (in the literature, they are traditionally called “a horsewoman on a snake”, but the materials of the Boyanovo cemetery convincingly indicate that this was a status ornament typical of the elite stratum of mounted warriors-vigilantes,

and the pendants depict a horseman, not a horsewoman (Belavin, Krylasova, 2010)). In half of the graves, where pendants with bars of bear claws were found, there were elements of horse equipment (bit, girth buckle); in grave 216 of the Rozhdestvenskoye necropolis, horse teeth were found (see *Table*). The latter belongs to the number of male burials (which constituted 5.5 % of graves at this site), which contained special sets of household and industrial implements, usually located in the form of a compact accumulation at the feet of the interred. These burials belong to persons of special social status, possibly to the heads of families (Krylasova, Belavin, 2015).

As for the dating, at the Boyanovo burial ground, the pendants under consideration are presented in the graves of the late 9th to the first half of the 10th centuries. Grave 216 at Rozhdestvenskoye dates back to the second half of the 11th century. A similar decoration from Zagarye, as already mentioned, was dated by Spitsin to the 10th century (1902: 55, pl. VII, 16). Thus, it can be assumed that pendants with bear claw pieces were typical of the late 9th to 11th centuries. The final stage of the Lomovatovka culture belongs to this period, if we take into account the point of view of the need to transfer the border between the medieval cultures of the Perm region in western Urals from the 9th century to the turn of the 11th–12th centuries (Belavin, Krylasova, 2016). This

opinion was formed on the basis of the study of materials from the cemeteries of the 9th to 11th centuries, which were poorly studied by the time the periodization of the Middle Ages was developed, but were actively excavated in recent decades. In particular, one of the arguments in favor of extending the period of existence of the Lomovatovka culture is the consistent preservation in the funeral rite, up to the end of the 11th century, of items typical of its earlier stages; for example, wheel-shaped pendants (Demenki stage, late 7th to 8th centuries), or bottle-shaped beads (Urya stage, late 8th to 9th centuries) (Goldina, 1985: Fig. 16, 85, 122), etc.

In 2019, at both cemeteries under consideration, for the first time, lunar pendants were discovered, which are known in the Lomovatovka culture at the Demenki stage of the late 7th to 8th centuries (Ibid.: Fig. 16, 84), in the Nevolino culture they are widely represented in the complexes of the Sukhoy Log stage of the late 8th to early 9th centuries (Goldina, Vodolago, 1990: Pl. LXIX, 54), and at the I Bolshiye Tarkhany necropolis of the late 8th to early 9th centuries (Kazakov, 1992: 51, fig. 13, 22, 23). In the Boyanovo materials, such a lunula completed the pendant with bars from bear claws found in grave 479, which dates to the late 9th to 10th centuries (see Fig. 2, 8). At Rozhdestvenskoye, a similar pendant was found in the children's (2–4 year-old) grave 388. It completed the waist string of the bronze bottle-shaped beads, which became widespread in the 10th to early 11th centuries. Next to this string, there was an amulet made of a bear fang (see Fig. 2, 10); therefore, symbolically, this complex can be partially compared with pendants containing bars from bear claws. In contrast to the early stages, which materials contained such lunar pendants mainly in the inventory of female graves, here they were part of the male belt accessories.

Conclusions

Unlike bear fangs, which are often mentioned in archaeological and ethnographic literature as being used among the Finno-Ugric population on both sides of the Urals, there is almost no information about bear claws. In settlement complexes, they occur extremely rare, and this situation is typical not just for the Perm Region in western Urals. In Eastern Europe, amulets made of bear claws are widely represented mainly in grave goods, which suggests that they were primarily an attribute of a funerary cult (Tyanina, 2011: 164). Taking this into account, it can be assumed that the pendants with elements carved from bear claws belonged exclusively to the male funerary costume. However, the difficulty of manufacturing, the complexity of composition of such pendants, their certain standardization, and at the same time, the individual characteristics due to subjective

preferences of the jewelry maker, seem to be excessive for the production of a single-use item. Most likely, the rarity of these decorations can be explained by the rather limited period of their distribution (late 9th to the second half of the 11th centuries) and their use in a narrow social group.

Pendants with bear claw pieces certainly had some symbolic meaning, but it is difficult to say what exactly that was. It could have been a sign of a mythological relationship with a bear, a benevolent amulet to enhance certain qualities in a person, gain good luck and prosperity, or a talisman that protects against evil spirits, harm, and the evil eye.

Summing up, it can be argued that in the process of excavations in recent decades, a new type of belt ornaments has been identified, made according to a certain standard. These are characteristic of the final stage of the Lomovatovka culture, and were used by men (regardless of age) who belonged to an elite social group.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Perm Territory (Agreement No. C-26/1192 dated December 19, 2019), under the Public Contract, Topic Registration No. AAAA-A19-119032590066-2.

References

- Belavin A.M., Krylasova N.B. 2008**
Drevnyaya Afkula: Arkheologicheskiy kompleks u s. Rozhdestvensk. Perm: PF IliA UrO RAN.
- Belavin A.M., Krylasova N.B. 2010**
Objects with “animal and rider imagery on the base” in the medieval culture of northern Eurasia. *Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology of Eurasia*, vol. 38 (2): 79–88.
- Belavin A.M., Krylasova N.B. 2016**
Problema periodizatsii srednevekovykh arkheologicheskikh kultur Permskogo Preduralya. *Vestnik Permskogo Universiteta*. Ser.: Istoriya, No. 1: 28–41.
- Danich A.V. 2012**
Klinkovoye oruzhiye Permskogo Preduralya. *Povolzhskaya arkheologiya*, No. 2: 86–108.
- Goldina R.D. 1985**
Lomovatovskaya kultura v Verkhnem Prikamye. Irkutsk: Irkut. Gos. Univ.
- Goldina R.D., Vodolago N.V. 1990**
Mogilniki nevolinskoy kultury v Priuralye. Irkutsk: Irkut. Gos. Univ.
- Golubeva L.A. 1979**
Zoomorfniye ukrasheniya finno-ugrov. Leningrad: Nauka. (SAI; iss. E1-59).
- Golubeva L.A. 1997**
Amulety. In *Drevnyaya Rus: Byt i kultura*. Moscow: Nauka, pp. 153–165.
- Ivanova M.G. 1998**
Idnakar: Drevneudmurtskoye gorodishche IX–XIII vv. Izhevsk: UdmIYal UrO RAN.

Kazakov E.P. 1992

Kultura ranney Volzhskoy Bolgarii. Moscow: Nauka.

Krylasova N.B. 2001

Istoriya Prikamskogo kostyuma: Kostyum srednevekovogo naseleniya Permskogo Preduralya. Perm: Perm. Gos. Ped. Univ.

Krylasova N.B. 2019

Ob odnom iz dekorativnykh elementov muzhskogo poyasa XI v. (po materialam Rozhdestvenskogo mogilnika v Permskom krae). *Arkheologiya yevraziyskikh stepey*, No. 6: 80–89.

Krylasova N.B., Belavin A.M. 2015

Kompleksy orudiy v muzhskikh zakhoroneniyaх lomovatovskoy kultury kak otrazheniye osnovnykh khozyaistvennykh i proizvodstvennykh zanyatiy naseleniya. *Magistra Vitae: Elektronnyy zhurnal po istoricheskim naukam i arkheologii*, No. 6: 16–27.

Krylasova N.B., Danich A.V. 2020

Nizki iz metallicheskih pronizok i bus v srednevekovom finno-ugorskom kostyume Permskogo Preduralya. *Povolzhskaya arkheologiya*, No. 4: 50–65.

Martynov A.I. 2002

Arkheologiya: Uchebnik. 4th edition. Moscow: Vyssh. shk.

Oborin V.A. 1999

Komi-permyaki. In *Finno-ugry Povolzhya i Priuralya v sredniye veka*. Izhevsk: UdmIIYaL UrO RAN, pp. 255–298.

Spitsin A.A. 1902

Drevnosti kamskoy chudi po kollektsii Teploukhovykh. St. Petersburg: [Tip. V. Bezobrazova i K°].

Talitsky M.V. 1951

Verkhneye Prikamye v X–XIV vv. In *Materialy i issledovaniya po arkheologii Urala i Priuralya*, vol. III. Moscow, Leningrad: Izd. AN SSSR, pp. 33–96. (MIA; No. 22).

Tyanina E.A. 2011

Amulety srednevekovogo Novgoroda iz zubov i kostey zhivotnykh. *Arkheologicheskiye vesti*, No. 17: 159–168.

Received May 28, 2020.

Received in revised form September 7, 2020.