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E.V. Goldina

*Udmurt State University,
Universitetskaya 1, Izhevsk, 426000, Russia
E-mail: goldina66@yandex.ru*

Beads in the Finno-Ugric Women's Costume: The Evidence of Tarasovo Cemetery on the Middle Kama (0–500 AD)

Beads are the most frequent finds in 1st–5th century AD female burials at Tarasovo on the Middle Kama, the largest Finno-Ugric cemetery, dating to the Great Barbarian Migration era. Larger beads are common in burials of women aged 17–45, whereas seed beads were typically worn by girls and young women aged 13–29. This was probably because unmarried girls wore beanies embroidered with beads and bronze ornaments. Also, variously sized beads were attached to bands of the headdress, framing its bottom edges in one or more lines. Single beads found near the crania suggest that they were amulets. In one- and several-strand necklaces, beads alternated with bronze ornaments. Necklaces were often parts of gift sets, some of which are completely preserved, including the organic base. Larger beads were used as pendants. Some of them decorated strips, used for appending knives and other utensils to belts. All these ways of using beads are still practiced by Finno-Ugric women in the Ural area.

Keywords: *Middle Kama, beads, female costume, headdress, necklace, pendants.*

Introduction

Beads are abundant among the finds in Middle Kama cemeteries of the first half of the 1st millennium AD, including Tarasovo cemetery. The site is located in the vicinity of the village of Tarasovo, on the right bank of the Kama River, in Sarapulsky District, Udmurt Republic (Fig. 1). The site was studied for 18 years (1980–1997) by the Kama-Vyatka Archaeological Expedition of Udmurt State University, headed by R.D. Goldina. This is one of the largest Finno-Ugric cemeteries in Russia (1880 graves). The cemetery was used during the first half of the 1st millennium AD, and belonged to the Cheganda culture of the Pyany Bor cultural entity (Goldina, 2004: 3, 301, 306, 307). About one third of the total number of Tarasovo graves (611 graves; 32.5 %) yielded beads of various sizes (18,512 spec.). The beads were classified by their size into seed beads with diameter not exceeding 5 mm, and beads with larger diameters.

A.A. Krasnoperov proposed a reconstruction of the traditional costume of the Cheganda population in the Kama basin, on the basis of typical finds related to clothes from 80 cemeteries. He classified pieces of clothing by major construction elements differing by location on the body and in the grave: 1) headdress; 2) neck-chest and hand ornaments; 3) waist belt; 4) shoe ornaments; 5) details forming the appearance and cut of clothing (Krasnoperov, 2006: 11, 12, 44).

The present study addresses the bead-dispersion patterns in female burials at Tarasovo cemetery. The results of the study have been correlated with Krasnoperov's inferences, which makes it possible to establish the method of use of these ornaments in the traditional clothing of the Middle Kama population in the 1st millennium AD.

Beads were mostly recovered from graves of women belonging to two age groups: 17–29 (17.4 %) and 30–45 (6.5 %) years old (Fig. 2, 1). They were also frequently

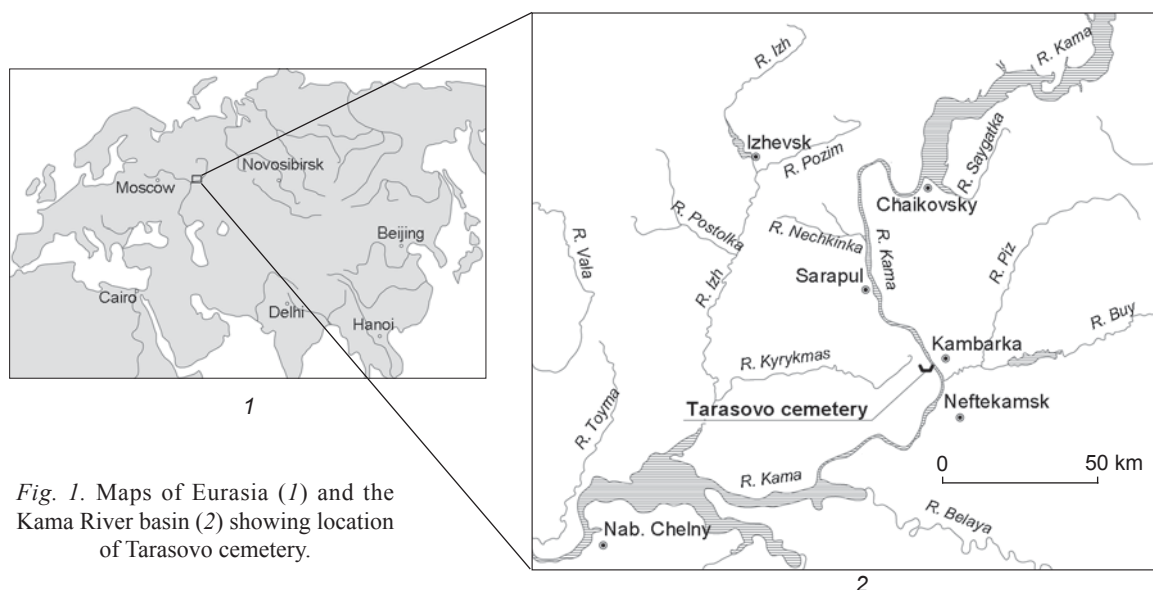


Fig. 1. Maps of Eurasia (1) and the Kama River basin (2) showing location of Tarasovo cemetery.

found in graves of men of the same age groups (6.5 and 4.2 % respectively). Seed beads were found predominantly in graves of women of 17–29 (25.5 %) and 13–16 (8 %) years old (Fig. 2, 2). The sex of one half of the total number of buried individuals has not been determined (314 graves, 51.4 %).

Use of beads in female costume

Beads were found in 253 women's graves (37.43 % of the total number of finds in this category), while seed beads were in 145 (49.15 %). Beads were mostly included in the gift set* (78 cases, 35.95 %). They were also found close to the head (48 cases, 22.13 %), sometimes both in the head area and in the gift set (10 cases, 4.62 %), and also at the hips (10 cases, 4.62 %) and chest (6 cases, 2.77 %). Three burials contained beads in the head, shoulder, and chest areas. Beads were also noted in the shoulder, hand, pelvis, knee, and feet areas; each location in three graves. Other locations are infrequent.

The most typical number of beads found in the head area did not exceed 17 (57 cases, 72.9 %); while in 24 graves, only 1 or 2 beads were discovered (30.8 %). Eight burials (10.3 %) yielded from 22 to 45 beads.

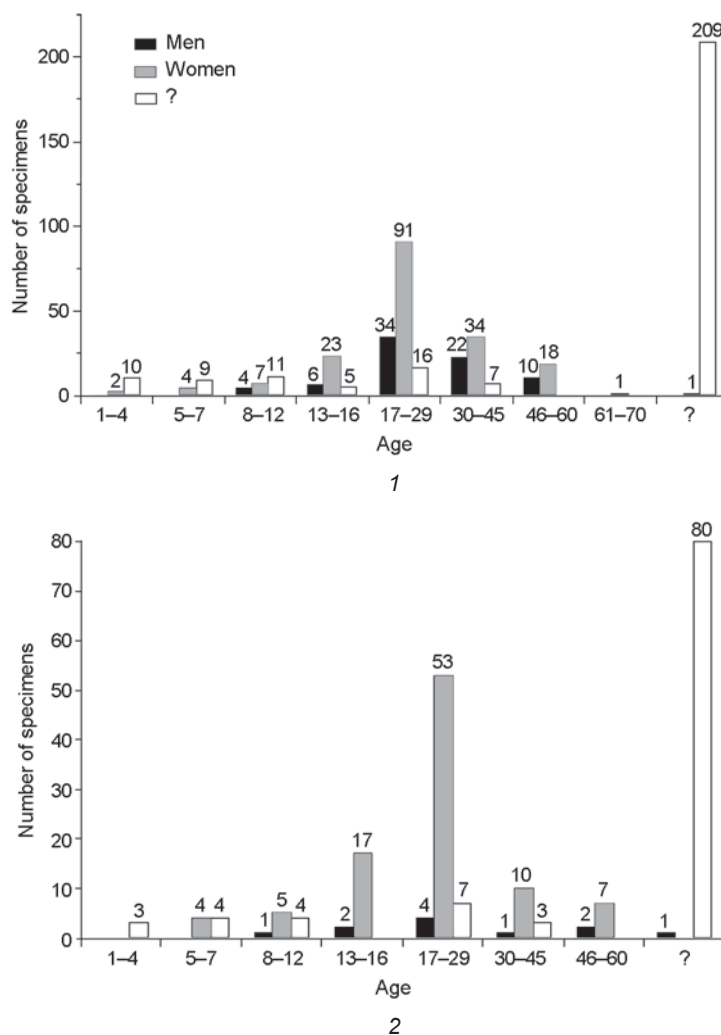


Fig. 2. Sex and age distribution of graves of Tarasovo cemetery containing larger beads (1) and seed beads (2) (Sabirov, 2011: Pl. 59, 68).

*The set of ornaments and utensils in a birch-bark box that was placed in the grave as a gift to the deceased.

It should be noted that the few graves with a large number of finds in the head area contained both larger beads and seed beads: three graves yielded 65 specimens each, six graves from 64 to 99 specimens (11.6 %), four female graves (5.2 %) yielded over 100 specimens. One grave revealed 283 seed beads located around the skull of the buried woman (grave 886b). Large sets usually consist of seed beads.

Larger beads and seed beads in the head area of deceased individuals suggest that they were used in headdress ornamentation. Krasnoperov argued that bands and beanies were the main types of women's headgear (2006: 66, 76, 81). The band represented a leather strip about 3 cm wide decorated with the sewn-on bronze onlays (grave 1762), framed in some cases with seed beads or small beads in one (e.g., graves 497, 687, 1783) or several lines (graves 1278, 1691).

The beanie consisted of a crown and a band about 3 cm wide attached to it. The remains of such headdress in grave 886b suggest that it might have been embroidered with seed beads. In most cases, seed beads were used as additional decorations to bronze onlays and pendants (e.g., graves 687, 1215, 1526, and others). Grave 1027 (a 14-year old girl) yielded remains of a beanie which base consisted of a leather band. The face part of the band was ornamented with bronze frames; the back part showed bronze pendants and pipe-shaped beads; the lower edge was framed with complex beads. Two pendants decorated the temple parts of the band. The beanie's crown was embroidered with bronze pipe-shaped beads (Fig. 3) (Goldina, 2004: 174; Krasnoperov, 2006: 78, 81).

In some cases, the headdress type was hardly discernible, yet it was clear that it was decorated with

various bronze ornaments (onlays, pendants, and pipe-shaped beads), larger beads, and/or seed beads (graves 532, 845, 1100, 1108, and others). Another category of graves revealed accumulations of beads close to the head, which purpose is not clear (graves 130, 136, 594, and others).

Beads were also used in neck-chest ornaments of women's costume: necklaces, pectorals, and torques. Necklaces were mostly represented by leather strings (less frequently, threads or thin wire), on which bronze spiral-twisted (more rarely, other types, e.g., grave 1377) pipe-shaped beads alternated with beads and sometimes with bronze pendants (e.g., grave 1189) or shell pendants (grave 1762) were drawn. There are also necklaces of this type consisting only of larger and/or seed beads; however owing to the displacement of items they are often barely identifiable (graves 136?, 1061). Only few necklaces were found on the necks of the deceased. Most often, they occur within the gift sets where they were completely preserved including the organic base (e.g., grave 1696). Necklaces were made using beads of semi-transparent light-colored glass, both larger (e.g., graves 555, 1721, 1762, 1822) and parallelepiped-shaped with truncated tops (grave 1696), or crystal beads (grave 132). Necklaces made of alternating spiral-twisted pipe-shaped beads and glass beads may be regarded as a particular feature of the Mazunino culture (Ostanina, 1997: 38; Krasnoperov, 2006: 106; Goldina, Bernts, 2010: 68). Pectorals are few at the Tarasovo cemetery. Grave 1762 yielded an oval-shaped accumulation of 2086 larger and seed beads occupying the area from cervical vertebra to lower ribs. It is possible that beads were sewn on an oval-shaped piece of textile. Over the accumulation of beads, a necklace was located (Fig. 4) (Krasnoperov, 2006: 120).

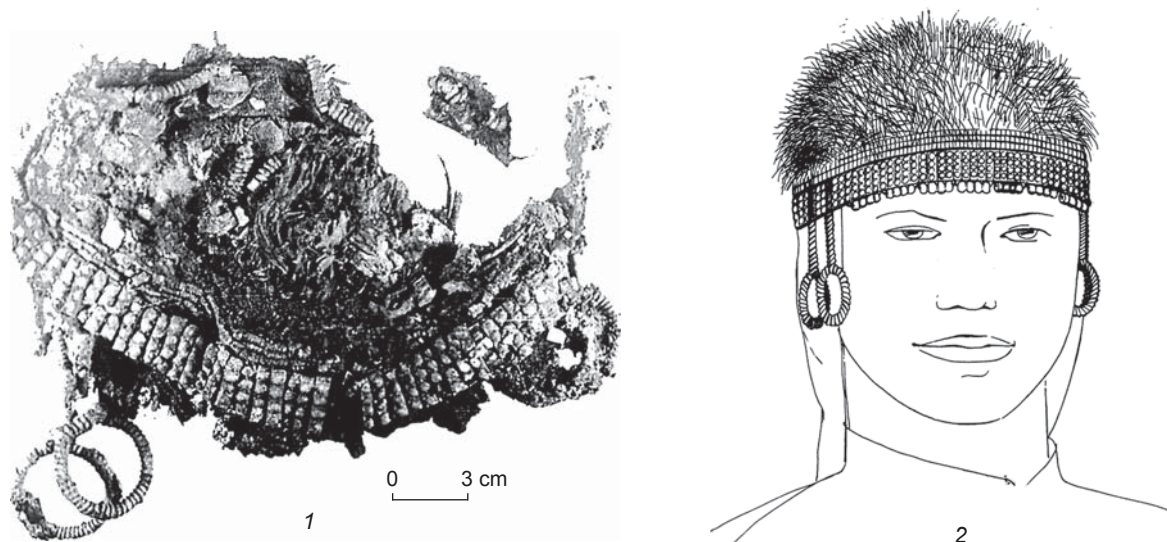


Fig. 3. Beanie from grave 1027 at Tarasovo cemetery (1) and its reconstruction by L.I. Lipina (2).

Among Mazunino materials, T.I. Ostanina mentioned finds where 1–3 large beads were strung on a torque (1992: 7, fig. 12, 1, 13, 4, 30, 4; 1997: 55). Tarasovo cemetery yielded two such artifacts: an iron torque with a bronze bead (grave 1010) and a bronze torque with a cornelian bead (grave 1028).

Beads were strung on temple pendants representing typical women's ornaments of the Cheganda culture (Gening, 1970: 142–143, pl. I; Ostanina, 1997: 33–34, pl. 11; Krasnoperov, 2006: 59; Goldina, Bernts, 2010: 66–67). Temple pendants could be attached to headgear symmetrically at the temples, or be included into the set of plait ornaments (Krasnoperov, 2006: 59), or hung on the auricle with a hanging loop (Goldina, 2004: 306). The Tarasovo cemetery yielded 827 temple pendants (Perevozchikova, 2005: 59). These ornaments were found in association with 398 buried individuals (19 % of the total number). Age- and sex-analysis was not possible for 146 of them (36.7 %). The majority of the remainder (197; 49.5 %) were mostly women of 17 to 45 years of age. Separate graves yielded from 1 to 12 temple pendants. Owing to the wearing mode, temple pendants are mostly found in pairs (159 cases) (Sabirov, 2011: 60–61, pl. 60, 62, diagr. 48–50). Temple pendants with beads were discovered in 84 graves of 398 (21 %) including 48 (57 %) women's graves, 4 (5 %) men's graves, and 32 (38 %) graves where sex was not identified. In total, 227 temple pendants were recovered, including 148 pendants with beads. The distribution of graves, containing such pendants with and without beads, by sex and age is proportional. 50 graves yielded only temple pendants with beads, while 34 graves contained such pendants with and without beads. One pendant might contain from 1 to 11 beads. Most frequently, these were small glass beads without decoration (182 cases); only six beads showed surface ornamentation. Notably, imported beads were regarded as prestigious items, and were used by local jewelers to decorate torques and temple pendants of the typical local shapes (with hollow tubes, leaf-shaped, etc.).

Seed beads were often sewn on pieces of clothing. For instance, strings of glass seed beads (125 spec.), found in grave 865 at the right and left sides of the cranium, in the chest and left shoulder areas, were possibly used as shirt embroidery, framing the shoulders and continuing over the left sleeve (Krasnoperov, 2006: 182).

Larger and seed beads are the most common items in the grave gift set. A.K. Pshenichnyuk argued that this ritual emerged among the Kara-Abyz tribes as early as in the 3rd–2nd centuries BC and developed in full by the beginning of the new era (1973: 178). T.V. Istomina believed that these sacrificial goods sets (gift sets) were typical of the Finnish cultures of the Europe forest zone (1982). Gift sets often included costume-ornaments. Such sets were reported in association with 334 buried

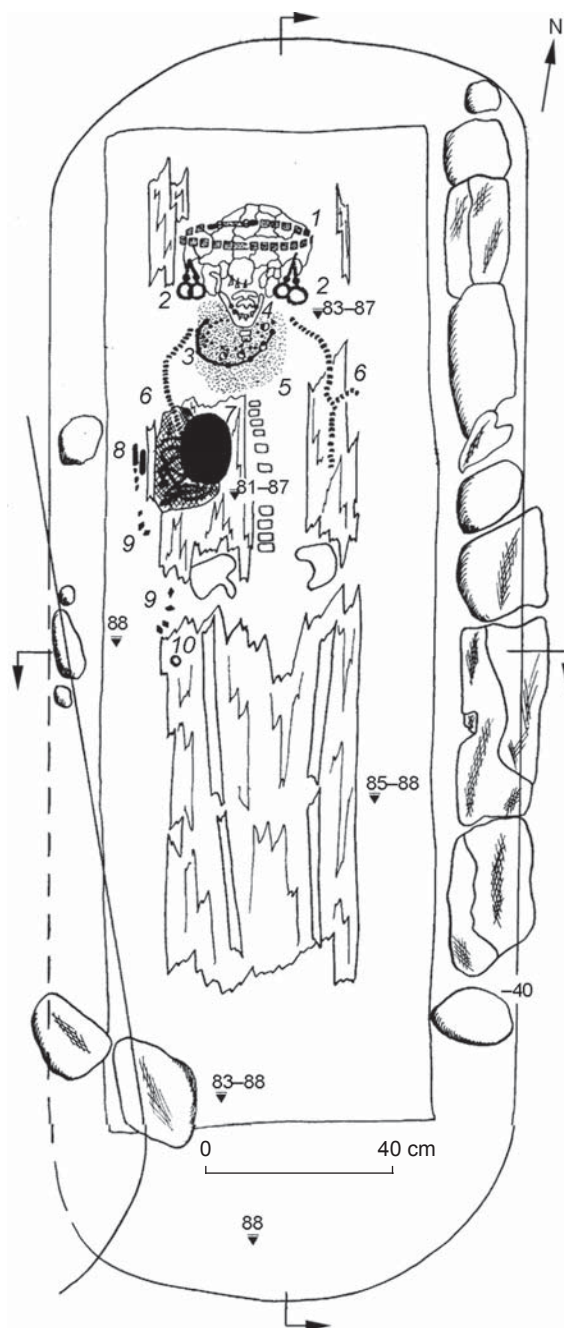


Fig. 4. Map of grave 1762 at Tarasovo cemetery.

1 – bronze onlays and buckles of the headdress; 2 – bronze temple pendants (4 spec.); 3 – a bronze pipe-shaped bead with bronze beads (13 spec.); 4 – shell pendants (4 spec.); 5 – seed beads (2056 spec.) and larger beads (30 spec.); 6 – bronze pipe-shaped beads ornamenting sleeves; 7 – a fibula with bronze pendants; 8 – a bronze buckle and a belt tip; 9 – a bronze belt onlay; 10 – a bronze ring.

individuals from 326 graves (17.3 % of the total number of graves): 145 women, 18 men; in 171 cases, their sex was not identified (Sabirov, 2011: Pl. 42–44). Larger and seed beads were included into 245 gift sets (73 %), the occurrence of them in female burials being more

frequent as compared to male ones (7.5 times and 11.5 times oftener, respectively). The women's gift sets might contain from 1 to 598 beads. More than one half of the total number of gift sets included from 1 to 12 beads (53 graves, 50.9 %) or from 13 to 21 beads (14 graves, 13.6 %). 26 graves, or 25.6 %, contained from 22 to 82 beads. Such concentrations likely represent necklaces made of one to several strands. Sometimes, gift sets also contained collections of beads numbering more than 100 specimens (10 graves, 10 %). In such cases, apparently, either headdressess decorated with glass beads or pectorals were put into birch-bark boxes. For instance, an accumulation of 494 seed beads, identified as a grave gift, located to the left of the cranium in grave 136, might have represented a decoration of a beanie (Goldina, 2003: Pl. 52).

From 1 to 4 beads located in the pelvis and femur areas were noted mostly in association with knives (graves 416, 458, 763, and others) and other utensils (e.g., with an iron hook in grave 743). Such cases were reported both from women's and men's burials and might have represented bead-decorated knife-knots and hanging strips or other utensils appended to the belt. Beads might have also been used as pendants on leather belts (graves 720, 939). Grave 102 yielded glass beads located near the feet bones, between and below them. These beads possibly represented shoe-buckle decorations. It is likely that beads were attached to the boots in the shin area (graves 113, 917).

Often, from 1 to 3 isolated beads were found at the bottom of graves without any order: in the area of pelvis (graves 551a, 939), femur (graves 143, 1188b), knees (graves 781, 788), shins (graves 625, 633, 1179), at the feet (grave 829), etc. These solitary beads were likely gifted to the deceased individual by the participants of the burial rite.

Conclusions

Larger and seed beads represent the most ample category of finds at the Tarasovo cemetery of the 1st–5th centuries AD in the Middle Kama. The number of beads in one grave varies from 1 to 2087. Larger beads were mostly found in graves of women from 17 to 45 years of age, seed beads in graves of girls and women of 13 to 29 years of age. This was probably because unmarried girls wore beanies embroidered with seed beads and bronze ornaments. The beanie apparently resembled a well-known Finno-Ugric girl's hat *takya*, which has also been reconstructed via available archaeological evidence. Beads framed the lower edge of the beanie band in one or several lines. Usually they served as additional decoration to the bronze elements forming the main motif of the headdress. Isolated beads located

in burials near the head (about one third of all finds located close to the cranium) suggest that beads were used as amulets. Also, larger and seed beads alternating with bronze ornaments were used for making one- or several-strand necklaces. Some scholars suppose that such ornaments of spiral-twisted pipe-shaped beads and glass beads were typical for the Mazunino population. Necklaces were seldom found on the necks of the buried individuals. Most often, necklaces were included in the gift sets, where they were completely preserved. The gift sets in women's graves also included headgear and/or pectorals embroidered with larger and/or seed beads. Local jewelers often used larger and seed beads as additional decorations of temple pendants and (more rarely) torques.

Few beads were found in the waist area, either in women's and men's graves suggesting that they decorated knife-knots and hanging strips attaching knives and other utensils to the belt.

Beads were also used in shoe-embroidery and were strung on straps wrapping the ankles. Sometimes isolated beads were found in various places at the bottom of graves. These were possibly gifts from the participants in the burial rite to the buried individual. The noted ways of using beads are still practiced by Finno-Ugric women in the Ural area for decoration of costumes, most typically in the Udmurt tradition*.

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*The ethnographic parallels of the traditional costume of the Kama peoples of the first half of the 1st millennium AD will be discussed in a special article.

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