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Metal Artifacts from a Newly Discovered Cemetery in the Severnaya Sosva Basin, Northwestern Siberia

We describe artifacts from a medieval cemetery near the village of Lyulikary, in the Berezovsky District of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra. The village was first mentioned in the 14th to 15th centuries, when it was a major trade center on the route from Russia to Siberia. The place adjoining the cemetery and horizons overlying it relate to a medieval sanctuary. Some artifacts were found apart from the burials, near the surface. These include silver and copper decorations, ceremonial ware, and weaponry (a helmet, chain mail, and sabers). We describe round silver pendants representing mounted falconers, and metal shields protecting the wrist. There are also arch-shaped dangle pendants with stone inserts. Because most decorations are gilded and nielloed, and show typical decorative elements, we propose that most were manufactured in the Kama area. On the basis of comparative analysis we conclude that certain decorations, including hinged bracelets, are replicas of late 12th to early 13th century Russian prototypes. The metal ware includes fragments of a 12th century Iranian dish, fragmented goblets, bowls, and dishes, which reveal parallels with Eastern and Western European toreutics. On the basis of these parallels and characteristic features of design, these artifacts are dated to the 13th century.

Keywords: Middle Ages, Western Siberia, cemetery, jewelry, niello, filigree, grain, gilding, bracelets, iron helmet, saber.

Introduction

The set of goods described in this paper was found by local citizens in the summer of 2015. The exact location of the find is unknown. The scarce available information holds that the set of these items was found on the left bank of the Severnaya Sosva River, near the former village of Lyulikary, in the Berezovsky District of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (KhMAO)–Yugra. A cemetery with poorly preserved organic substances was situated here on the narrow conifer ridge about 2 m high above the river's level. It is possible that at the

place adjoining the cemetery (or rather on horizons overlying it) there was a medieval sanctuary, since some of the goods were found apart from the graves, in topsoil layers. Exactly here, almost on the surface, pieces of weaponry were revealed.

The cemetery was most likely associated with the Lyulikary summer yurts situated on the right bank of the Severnaya Sosva, 5 km downstream from the modern village of Igrim (Berezovsky District, KhMAO–Yugra). Lyulikar was mentioned in the Big Book of Drawing (mid-16th century) (Bakhrushin, 1935: 77). Lyulikar yurts were described in G.F. Miller's diary (1740):

“In those times when the route along the Sosva River through the Yugra Range to the Pechora River and to Russia was often used, and many traders traveled along this route from Russia to Siberia..., the mentioned summer camp of the Berezovo served as a summer customs point for inspection of travelers... (Sibir XVIII veka..., 1996: 238).

The site does not show any visible features. Its area is approximately 100 × 300 m. Judging by the location of the finds, the burials were arranged in groups of three to four graves. The locals informed us that the artifacts were deposited in the uppermost soil layer; for instance, the bracelets were found almost on the surface. But such items as weapons were “interred” far deeper in the ground. The set includes iron sabers and axes, chain mail, copper cauldrons and decorations.

Composition of the finds

I. Items of non-ferrous metal.

A. Head decorations.

1. Crown (fig. 1, 2) – lamellar item 2 cm wide; includes two fragments. The obverse side is even, slightly convex, the edges are slightly thickened. The ornamental area is divided into rectangular sections with engraved design. One section contains a schematic representation of a pair of birds with puffy tails, turned with their beaks to one another. Other sections show a network composition running along the frame’s perimeter and connected in several places of the wide side by vertical line segments. The remains of gilding are visible at the

crown’s edges. Ornaments of this type were typical of Old Russian women’s headgear prior to the Mongol invasion (Saburova, 1997: 107).

B. Neck and neck-chest decorations.

1. Torque or crown (Fig. 1, 1)—a lamellar item, decorated with gilded and nielloed engravings. The preserved part is 15 cm in diameter. Ornamental motifs are comparatively simple: stylized floral sprout, network, and knot compositions. The pattern is divided by vertical cartouches containing a nodal network motif into several sections with peculiar ornamentation: in the center, there is a floral sprout framed above and below by a twining motif; at the sides, a complex composition of intertwining bands with ordinary knots inscribed into circle. Most motifs reveal parallels in the design of the Old Russian jewelry, in particular, nielloed bracelets (Makarova, 1986: 88–89, fig. 41, 42, cat. No. 225, 232). Judging by the stylization of the motif, its rough rendering, and the replication of the main composition techniques used by craftsmen of the Kiev and Vladimir schools, the artifacts are not older than the late 12th to the first half of the 13th century.

2. Shoulder-mantle medallion, decorated with two relief cordons at the edge, round, with a diameter of 4.3 cm (Fig. 2, 1). In the center, there is an engraved image of a cross with two crossbars; the lower part of the cross is bifurcated into two sprouts. The vertical bar bears a vague zigzag or wavy motif. The sprout’s leaves are shown rather realistically. The motif’s composition is similar to those from the Old Russian silver medallions in the shoulder-mantles of the 12th to early 13th centuries (Ibid.: 108–109, cat. No. 297, 307). The stylistic feature



Fig. 1. Crown or neck decoration (1), crown (2), and a pair of pendants (3) made of non-ferrous metal.

of the motif on the described artifact (large petals overlapping the sprout) was recorded only on one medallion, manufactured in a Vladimir workshop in the early 13th century (Ibid.: 107, cat. No. 307). The medallion described here is a replica of the Vladimir products.

3. Medallions (3 spec.) with representations of a horseman, discoid, about 6 cm in diameter, with a broad plate forming a hanging loop on top, soldered to the reverse side (Fig. 3). The medallions show a standard subject: a horseman surrounded by animals, birds, and celestial bodies. On two medallions, the motif is highlighted with gilding, while the background is nielloed (Fig. 3, 1, 2). One medallion is decorated with corded filigree (Fig. 3, 1). Such items were widespread in the Cis- and Trans-Urals (Belavin, 2000: 91–93, fig. 40; Komova, Pristupa, 2012: 127, cat. No. 51, ill. 60); currently, several dozens of such artifacts are known. The medallions date to the 12th–14th centuries. Such artifacts have been studied in detail by N.V. Fedorova (2014).

4. Brooch or onlay of round shape, with a hanging loop on the reverse side (missing) (see Fig. 2, 2). The obverse side shows open-work ornament made of gilded wire in the form of a sprout; the center is decorated with an eight-petal rosette made of thin foil, with relief details of leaves. The center of the rosette is marked with a hemisphere. Two-layered jewelry became popular in Eastern Europe in the 13th–14th centuries (Sedova, 1981: 162, fig. 64, 12, 13), although, judging by the available jewelry pieces, their manufacturing techniques were known in the 12th to early 13th centuries. Examples can be found among the well-known jewelry items from the Staraya Ryazan hoard of 1822 (Rybakov, 1971: 21, 30–31, ill. 19, 29, 30). The on-laid filigree motif on several pendants (Sterligova, 2017: 584, fig. 1–4) are almost identical to the décor on the artifact described here. The technologically similar ornaments were recorded on other artifacts from Old Rus; for example, on the cloisonné icon-pendant worn on the chest, likely manufactured in Byzantium in the first third of the 13th century, and currently deposited in the Moscow Kremlin Armoury (Rybakov, 1971: 25, ill. 22). On the basis of the mentioned parallels, the artifact date to the early 13th century.

5. Two arch-shaped dangle pendants of white metal (3 × 4 cm), with cylinder suspensions on chains (see Fig. 1, 3). The suspensions, 1.5 cm high and 1 cm in diameter, are made of two hemispherical elements



Fig. 2. Medallion (1), brooch (2), and wrist-shield (3) made of non-ferrous metal.

connected with a narrow metal band fixed with double filigree “cords”, gilded and decorated with coarse granulation. The lower part of the suspension is decorated with a soldered large granulation blob. The bottom of the signet shows four through-holes, framed with filigree, where the chains are fixed.

The main ornamentation area is gilded and framed with coarse corded filigree; the interior is additionally decorated with a “pseudo-filigree” fine stamped wire. In the center, there is an arch-shaped holder with a large ornamental stone of red wine-color. The base of the holder is decorated with granulation; the granules form a triangle on top and additional rhomboids at the bottom corners. In the middle of the spare area, one more arch of stamped “pseudo-filigree” is arranged, connected with exterior and interior outlines by rhomboids of granules.



Fig. 3. Medallions representing a horseman, made of non-ferrous metal.

Such decorations are common for the Perm antiquities of the 12th century (Belavin, 2000: 88, fig. 37, 7). Their replicas have been recorded at the sites of the 12th–14th centuries in Trans-Urals (Komova, Pristupa, 2012: 85–88, cat. No. 32, ill. 38, 2; 40, 3). The abovementioned suspending beads are typical of the Kama basin and Trans-Urals (Ibid.: 54–55, cat. No. 18, ill. 19, 1, 2).

C. Arm ornaments.

1. Shield on the wrist, ovoid, curved to fit the wrist (see Fig. 2, 3). Paired through-holes are made along the long sides for attaching straps. The artifact's edge is convex. The exterior surface is decorated with an engraved geometric pattern. The composition is standard: two

ornamental bands and a central medallion, subdivided into two sections. The main motif is a network with ring or similar links, the additional one is an S-shaped motif. Sections of the central medallion are filled with uneven rhomboids decorated with inscribed arch-shaped figures, which make them look like fish-scales.

Various decorated silver shields mostly found in Western Siberia are deposited in the State Hermitage Museum and museums of Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (Sokrovishcha Priobya..., 2003: 70–71, cat. No. 33, 34; Baulo, 2007; Komova, Pristupa, 2012: 26–27, cat. No. 7, ill. 7). The shield described here belongs to the Siberian set of similar artifacts. Judging by the older prototypes, such shields appeared in the region in the 1st millennium AD and were in use here till the recent past. The chronology of these artifacts has not been established. Bone wrist-shields were in use in the Perm region of the Kama and in Volga Bulgaria in the 12th to early 13th centuries, and in the Bulgaria Region of the Golden Horde in the second half of the 13th to 14th centuries (Belavin, 2000: 112, fig. 52, 1, 2; Rudenko, 2005). These shields were most likely used as personal ornaments rather than to protect the wrist from a bow-string hit. Judging by the representation of a network with ring-links that occurs on the Old Russian bracelets of the 12th to 13th centuries (Sedova, 1981: 109, fig. 42, 10), this artifact can be attributed to the same period.

2. Hinged bracelet-rings (3 spec.) (Fig. 4), made according to the Old Russian traditions (Makarova, 1986: 64–99). The distinctive feature of these items is decoration with filigree, granulation, and gilding. In some cases, the background of the motif is roughly crosshatched. The

construction of the artifacts and most of the ornamental motifs (mainly complex knots of interweaving bands) is identical to that of the Old Russian tradition. Similar items have been recorded in Western Siberia: for example in the Saygatinsky III cemetery (Komova, Pristupa, 2012: 80–81, cat. No. 30, ill. 33, 34; Sokrovishcha Priobya..., 2003: 72, cat. 35). The artifacts date to the 12th–14th centuries. Bracelets-rings occur in the Kama basin (Belavin, 2000: 102, fig. 45), where these were probably produced not earlier than the late 12th–13th century.

D. Metal ware.

1. Goblet—shallow, cup-like vessel, 20 cm in diameter, with a tall cone-shaped stem (Fig. 5, 1, a).

The rim is thickened. The upper edge is decorated with a wavy pattern framed by two dotted lines, executed with a pointed chisel. The ornamentation-band in this part of vessel is gilded. In the lower portion of the stem and at the very base, there is also a gilded ornament in the form of joined rounded brackets, formed by a narrow strip; in the places of the brackets' joints, flowers are depicted, resembling lotus with volute-shaped leaves and hemispherical blossom. A little gilded crosshatched arch is engraved between the brackets. Traces of nielloing are notable both on the bowl and the stem.

On the reverse side of the stem, an Old Russian inscription is scratched (Fig. 5, 1, b). This can be interpreted as: "Grigor. Gri(ven) polo chotve(rte)"*, which means 3.5 grivnas. Next to it, there is a line of incisions possibly designating the number 17½. This is one half of 35, which number is spelled out in letters in the inscription.

On the tray, in northwestern Siberia, the image of a mythical animal with a lion head and possibly wings (Fig. 5, 1, c) was engraved. This suggests that the goblet was used by the indigenous people of Siberia as a cult attribute.

The shape of the goblet is standard, and typical of the European and Byzantine toreutics of the 11th to 14th centuries. Similar items have been recorded among the Novgorod wooden ware of the late 11th to 13th centuries (Rosenfeldt, 1997: 45, 280, pl. 34, 14–16).

2. Stem of a goblet (?) (Fig. 5, 2). The stem is cone-shaped and ornamented with engravings, niello, and gilding. The motifs are distributed among two levels.

The even and nielloed upper level shows alternating gilded almond-shaped medallions filled with stylized motifs; between them, cross-shaped figures are arranged, with a composition suggesting motifs of trefoil. These trefoil-like images demonstrate close similarities with the décor on some Old Russian bracelets of the late 12th to early 13th century (Makarova, 1986: 81, fig. 38, No. 224). The technique of working the background with deep crosshatching was also typical of the Old Russian bracelets.

*The interpretation of the inscription is proposed by A.A. Gippius (Institute of Slavic Studies of the RAS), who dates the inscription to the (presumably) 12th century. The authors express their gratitude to him.

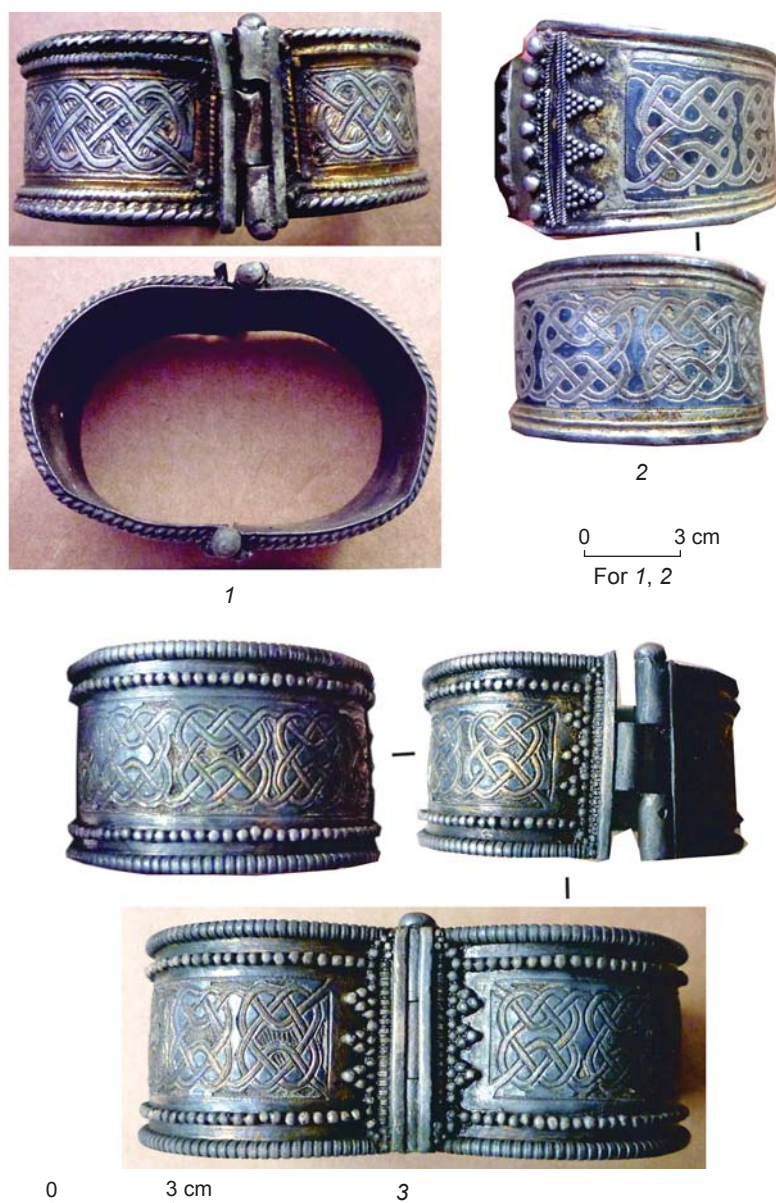


Fig. 4. Hinged bracelets made of non-ferrous metal.

The lower level is decorated with a representation of a floral sprout, the relief outline of which, highlighted with niello, is clearly visible on the crosshatched gilded background. Certain minor details, such as a miniature heart shown instead of the ordinary projection at the curve of the sprout, close to the node, or an extra trefoil at the end of the petal, are original features.

3. Bowl—deep, with a tray of hemispherical shape (Fig. 6, 1). Inside the bowl, on its bottom, an eight-rayed rosette with narrow petals is engraved on the chased background. The motif is gilded. The vessel's prototypes can be found among the wooden bowls of the 12th–13th (Rosenfeldt, 1997: 278, pl. 32, 25). The shape of such metal bowls was typical in the East in the 13th–



Fig. 5. Goblets of non-ferrous metal.

1 – goblet No. 1: *a* – general view; *b* – fragment of inscription with the word “Grigor” and incisions on the reverse side of the stem, *c* – drawing of the motif on the stem; 2 – stem of goblet No. 2.

14th centuries (Khudozhestvennaya kultura..., 2012: 277, fig. 5). The motif of the multiradiate rosette is widespread in toreutics, and has no territorial or cultural association.

4. Dish (?)—flat, round, decorated with the pseudo-spoon ornament (Fig. 6, 3). In the center, in a round medallion, a complex geometric composition of interweaving narrow bands is depicted, based on the square and star. Parallels to such composition can be found in Eastern toreutics, mostly Iranian, of the 12th century (Baer, 1983: 130, fig. 108). Judging by style and ornamentation of the decoration, this is an Iranian product of the 12th century.

5. Dish with spoon-like imprints (?), about 30 cm in diameter, with a broad edge. The edge shows Arabic inscriptions and round miniature medallions containing octapetal

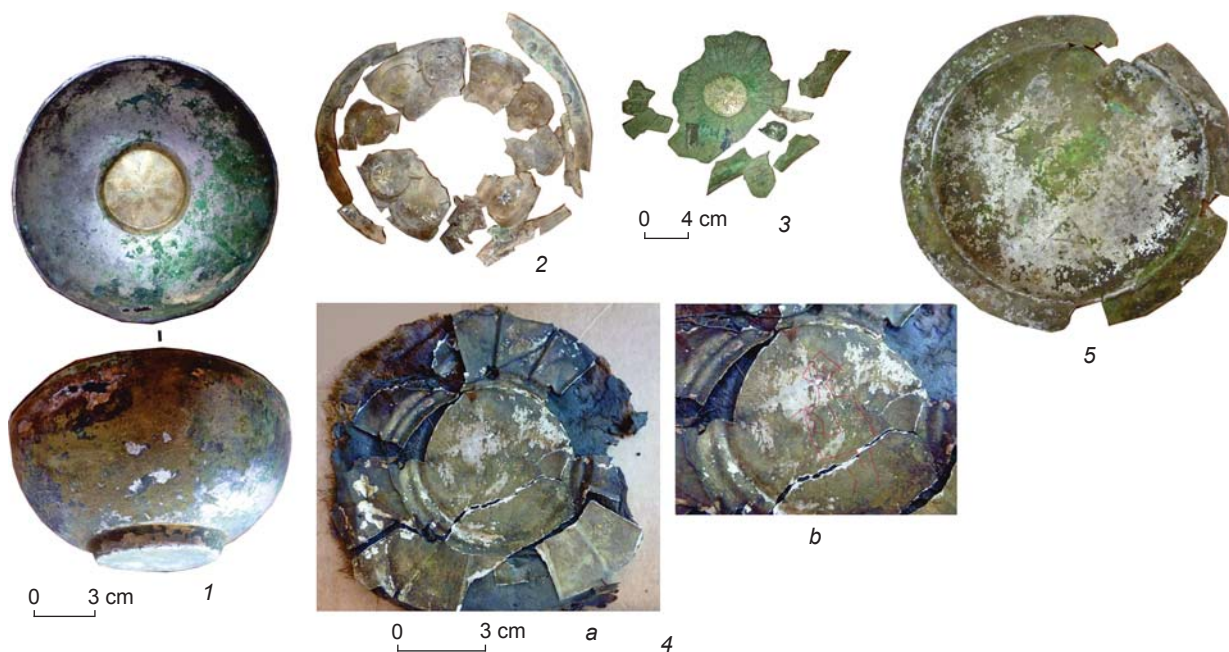


Fig. 6. Bowl (1) and dishes (2–5) made of non-ferrous metal.

rosettes with rounded petals (Fig. 6, 2). The medallions' background is nielloed. The dish's bottom shows deep spoon-imprints forming a rosette. A dish of a similar style was found at Barsov Gorodok, near Surgut, and dates to the 13th century (Sokrovishcha Priobya..., 2003: Cat. 31). Ornamentation of the dish bottom in the form of rosette was typical of metal artworks manufactured in many Muslim countries in the 13th century (Khudozhestvennaya kultura..., 2012: 80, ill. XXII).

6. Dish—flat, with a wide everted edge (Fig. 6, 5). In the center, there is a round medallion containing an engraved octapetal rosette on the nielloed background. The medallion is surrounded by three triangles with a stylized floral sprout on the nielloed background.

7. Dish—round, with spoon-like imprints, 20 cm in diameter, fragmented, sewn on a piece of fabric (Fig. 6, 4, a). On the dish's bottom, there is an image-palimpsest (Fig. 6, 4, b) representing a human. The dish was used as a cult item.

II. Iron items.

A. Armor.

1. Helmet—sphero-conical in shape, with a high finial that has a globe-shaped thickening in the middle and a loop on top, with a ring for the horse-tail (?) (Fig. 7, 2). The helmet-shell is dome-shaped. In the lower part on the obverse side, it has a nasal and near-eye hollows. The helmet was likely provided with aventail. The helmets of this type were typical of nomadic tribes of the Eastern European steppes in the pre-Mongol Period, though also occurred in the south-Russian regions (Kirpichnikov, Medvedev, 1985: 316). Helmets of similar construction are deposited in the State Hermitage Museum: finds revealed in the vicinity of the village of Nikolskoye, Orel Governorate and the village of Tangacha, Kiev Region, dating to the first half of the 13th century (Ibid.: 356, pl. 142, 2, 3; Kirpichnikov, 2009: 59, fig. 41).

2. Chain mail (3 spec.) survived in the form of amorphous oxidized aggregates (Fig. 7, 3). These were most likely rolled up during the funeral rites.

B. Offensive weapons.

1. Saber with a slightly curved blade, fuller, and pointed tip (Fig. 7, 1). Sabers of this type were in use in Old Russia in the 12th–13th centuries (Kirpichnikov, Medvedev, 1985: 335, pl. 123, 4). The earlier specimens have been recorded in the Trans-Urals, for example in Saygatinsky VI cemetery of the 10th–11th centuries (Surgutskiy kravedcheskiy musei..., 2011: 67, 125, cat. 131).

Conclusions

The majority of the artifacts from the Sosva cemetery date to the 13th century, most likely to the second part thereof. The jewelry and some other items were manufactured either by sample, or as replicas of the Old Russian



Fig. 7. Saber blade (1), helmet (2), and chain mail (3) made of iron.

products in the Kama area. This is evidenced by the traces of decoration techniques, such as gilding and nielloing, that were popular in this region. It cannot be excluded that these techniques were used by the Old Russian craftsmen who moved to the Kama area after the Mongol invasion. Almost all metal ware from the cemetery under study is either replicas or imitations produced in the Kama area. Judging by the features typical of Bulgarian jewelry (Rudenko, 2015), it is not possible to consider this ware Bulgarian products.

There are only few original imported goods. These include the Iranian bowl of the 12th century, as well as armor and offensive weapons of “steppe” appearance, which were probably brought to the Trans-Urals by the Russian merchants. This assumption is supported by the Russian inscription on one of the vessels.

Since the circumstances of the finding of the items are unknown, it is hardly possible to distinguish between the grave goods and the attributes of the sanctuary. The goblet (see Fig. 5, 1) and dish (see Fig. 6, 4), on which the northern graffiti are represented, are the items that can be confidently attributed to the objects of religious and ritual practice of the local Siberian population.

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