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REPORT ON THE PROJECT

**RESEARCH of CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS**

**between OLD RUS AND SCANDINAVIA**

**in the LATE VIKING AGE (X-XI<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

(on materials of collections of objects from organic materials)

*Stockholm, Sigtuna, Uppsala, Lödöse*

*March – May, 2018*

## **Introduction**

The Sverker Åström Foundation is the unique organization contributing to the establishment and development of Russian-Swedish relationships in fields of science, art, culture, technology, ecology and so on. Collaboration with this Foundation allows receiving new experience, learning up-to-date methodic and striking up new acquaintances with specialists and colleagues for many young researchers.

This project is devoted to the investigation of Russian-Swedish contacts in the Late Viking Age (10 – 11th centuries) basing on the analysis of archaeological sources.

## **Concept**

Old Rus and Scandinavia are two huge regions, which played an extremely important role in the history of Europe during the Middle Ages. It is well known from writing sources that there were very firm contacts between these territories in the Early Middle Ages, which were reflected through dynastic matrimonies, trading, martial co-operation etc. All these things left their traces in material culture. The problem of relationships between Old Rus and Scandinavia in Early Middle Ages and the problem of archaeological evidence of these contacts is of current importance for many decades. Writing sources (chronicles and sagas), burial rites, weapon, jewellery, and diverse household utensils were under consideration during this period, but despite the long-time research, this problem is not used up. The great part of the material culture, first of all consisting of artefacts made of organic materials (bone and wood), was out of the attention of scholars. But exactly these things filled everyday life on our ancestry.

In this connection is necessary to investigate how the penetration of the Old Russian and Scandinavian (mostly Swedish) cultures was reflected in the collection of artefacts made of bone, antler, and wood.

Since organic materials decay in a cultural layer, as a rule, there is a short list of sites with a possibility to investigate this source. This circumstance determined the agenda of working in museums in Sweden.

One of the central tasks was the research of the collections of the Swedish historical museum and the museum of Sigtuna because this town played a very important role in Sweden at the end of the 10th century – 11th century. Then the working was shifted to the store-rooms of the ethnographical collection of Nordiska museum, where I deciphered materials received in Sigtuna. The third stage of my investigation of artefacts dealt with the collection of the museum of Lödöse. This town was established at the beginning of the 11th century and then it was one of the most important partners of the Hansa Union. At the same time, I was consulting to specialists from Riksatntikvarieämbetet, Stockholm University, Uppsala University and also I was working with archaeological literature at libraries in Stockholm and Uppsala.

## **Work Timeline**

*Working at museums.* The top-priority task of my research work was the investigation of archaeological objects in Sigtuna, which were made of wood (about 1500 items) and bone (about 500 items). The research has been lasting from the 8th



The store-room of wooden objects in Sigtuna

of March until the 10th of April 2018. The whole assemblage of artefact can be subdivided into several groups: fishing tools, ship's details, barrel's details, household utensils, and other objects. Each item was measured and photographed for the preliminary scientific treatment,

and also there were taken six samples from objects for the definition of the tree species. Among bone artefacts, the majority consists of objects of personal use, textile tools etc. The prior analysis of these materials allows concluding that there were a lot of common trends and specific features in the material culture of Middle Sweden and North-West Rus. The row of objects found in Sigtuna testifies to direct contacts between Novgorod and Sigtuna in the 10-11th centuries that is also born out by the findings of specific Scandinavian objects in Novgorod. But at the same time, it became obvious to investigate the Sigtuna's collection of objects made of organic materials more deeply, because the great part of them is still unidentified.



Working process in Sigtuna museum

For this purposes, I was working in the Nordiska museum from the 12th until the 23rd of April, where I researched ethnographical collections in store-rooms. Ethnography is traditionally one of the most useful tools for analysis of archaeological artefacts, because ethnographers deal, as a rule, with objects of known destination. In this museum I have scrutinized the huge collection comprising more than 10000 exhibits, but only part of them was relevant for my research. Due to the studying of fishing and hunting tools, agricultural tools, small household objects it was a success for me to throw light on the series of unidentified artefacts from

Sigtuna's collection. But simultaneously it became necessary to investigate ethnographical materials more intently for finding out functions of archaeological objects exactly.

At the beginning of May, I continued my project at the museum of Lödöse in

Västra Götaland. It was one of the most important trading towns in West Sweden, which has been existing from the beginning of the 11th century until the



17th century. This place is

Lödöse museum

noticeable with its cultural layers of the Late Viking Ages, which have well preserved organic materials important in the comparative investigation. The collection of Lödöse museum comprises about 1000 objects from wood, which were researched in details and also there were taken one sample for a definition of tree species. The main conclusion of this investigation was that the material culture of Lödöse differs from the East Sweden's one. There were more objects reflecting everyday life of medieval citizens and the character of their material culture was closer to West Europe, but also there were found some objects indicating connections with East Europe and probably with Novgorod.

The last part of my study took place in Uppsala in the middle of May. The main task of it was in acquaintance with objects relating to the Viking Age from assemblages of Gustavianum museum and Uppland museum. Despite the small size of collections, it was a success to investigate interesting materials from Valsgårde and some other sites of Uppland. The most important for my research were artefacts from bone and antler from the storages of these museums.

*Working at Libraries.* Besides the immediate research of archaeological materials, the significant part of my project was in working at Libraries. Simultaneously with the studying of collections in Sigtuna, I was visiting the Riksanikvariämbetet library, where the main emphasis was in the comparative investigation of sites comprising organic materials in Sweden, Germany (Freiburg, Freiberg, Schleswig, Haithabu) and Poland (Wolin, Szczecin, Mikulcice). The other important facet of this work was the study of theoretical approaches to an excavation of wetland sites, where the main contribution belongs to Irish and British scholars.

During my study in Uppsala I was using Karolina Rediviva library, where the general task was in acquaintance with material culture of the Viking Age sites of other regions of Sweden and adjacent territories, which included sites from Denmark (Mammen, Ribe), Norway (Trondheim, Gjermundbu) and Sweden (Lund, Tuna in Alsike, Tuna in Badelunda). Due to this work, it was possible to combine the additional comparative materials for my research.

### **Consultations with colleagues**

Another important part of my study was in consultations with specialists in interesting me fields of research. The problem of the relationships between Sigtuna and Novgorod was discussed with Anders Söderberg and Lisen Tamm. The question of the communication of East Europe's settlers with Birka was the subject of meeting with Björn Ambrosiani. During my working with collections of Nordiska museum Per Larsson helped me with a definition of many objects. The problems of the material culture of Lödöse were of particular interest in discussion with Sonja Jeffery and Katarina Kåhre. And finally, it would be impossible to imagine the generalization of the gathered materials without prof. Ingmar Jansson, who kindly offered me to discuss many problems of contacts between North-West Rus and Sweden in the Viking Age.

## Results of the research work

As a result of my research, it was gathered really great material, including both unpublished materials from the museum's store-rooms and many publications of archaeological monuments. This amount of data allows resolving the majority of the posed problems. The observation of these sources has demonstrated that there were firm contacts between Middle Sweden and North-West Rus, represented first of all by artefacts. There were found round carved wooden discs in Sigtuna, which were also met along trade routes in East Europe, crucibles particular for Novgorod, rose-coloured spindle-whorls and so on. At the same time, there were decoratively carved bone objects and combs of the "Sigtuna type", which have a lot of analogies in the material culture of Novgorod. All these facts coincide with data of writing sources about dynastic matrimonies between Novgorod and Sigtuna in the XI century. At the same time there Novgorod's traces in Lödöse, reflected by the find of the double-side comb, made of box tree.

The second key attainment of the investigation was the definition of many archaeological objects from assemblages of Sigtuna and Lödöse museums that was possible due to ethnographical sources. There were identified gaming boards for halatafel, pillow-blocks, mirror frames, wooden hobbles, rare types of floats, sticks for a gathering of nets and so on.

All these discoveries are significant for Swedish archaeology, but at the same time, there were raised new issues, which should be resolved in the future.



The gaming board from Sigtuna

## **Further aims and plans**

During the study of Sigtuna's and Lödöse's collections it became obvious that these materials have a great potential, and that they are badly known in the archaeological community, therefore these sources should be scientifically analyzed, described and then published. It is also necessary to extend the circle of using materials through the investigation of metal objects from Sigtuna, which can show other connections to East Europe and bone objects from Lödöse. Furthermore, it seems to be important to look through the collection of bone and wooden objects from Lund, Skara and underwater excavations at Birka, that can provide valuable materials of the 10 – 11th century for comparison with data of East Europe. It can allow us introducing of Swedish bone and wooden artefacts to the archaeological community on the high science level.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to our colleagues from Sweden and The Sverker Åström Foundation for the good time and the great opportunity to acquaint myself with Swedish culture and the world of Swedish antiquity. I have got a lot of new knowledge and experience, which will help me in my research work of the Russian-Swedish relationships in the Early Middle Ages. I suppose that this project is the start of the long-term cooperation with our dear colleagues from Sweden.



Mounds of Old Uppsala