

Symbols of Faith or Symbols of Status? Christian Objects in Tenth-Century Rus'

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To study the Christianization of Rus' based on archaeological evidence is not something new, and such a topic has already generated a considerable amount of research.¹ This paper will deliberate some of the archaeological arguments presented in earlier works, and aims to explore the social and functional contexts in which Christian objects or symbols associated with Christianity circulated in Rus' during the Viking Age and in the tenth century in particular. Generally, two classes of archaeological evidence have been associated with the dissemination of Christianity in Eastern Europe: inhumation graves with west–east orientation and specific objects with clear Christian symbolism (most often, cross-shaped pendants) found in burials. These two types of evidence are considered the obvious markers of the deceased person's adherence to the Christian faith, while their absence, conversely, is taken as an indication that the buried person belonged to those still practicing heathen cults.

The earliest inhumation grave in early Rus' is Grave 11 in the Plakun cemetery in Staraja Ladoga. A man between 60–70 years old was buried in a wooden cist oriented west–east (northwest–southeast). Close to his feet lay parts of a wooden trough and a birch box. A number of corroded iron and bronze objects lay to the right of the body. Pieces of felt and fur were also recorded in the grave.² The timber of the chamber was dendrochronologically dated to 880–900, and there are construction traits that share parallels with sites in Denmark, such as Hede-

1 A selection of recent publications includes Aleksandr P. Mocia, *Naselenie Srednego Podneprov'ia IX–XIII vv.* (Kiev, 1987), pp. 48–80; Nikolai A. Makarov, 'K otsenke christianizacii drevnerusskoi derevni v XI–XIII vv.', *Kratkie soobshchenia Instituta archeologii*, 205 (1991), 11–21; Aleksandr S. Choroshev, 'Christianizaciia Rusi po archeologicheskim dannym', *Priroda*, 7 (1988), 68–76; Aleksandr Musin, 'Mech i krest: novoe religioznoe soznanie Drevnej Rusi po dannym archeologii', in *Rannesrednevekovoye drevnosti Severnoi Rusi i ee sosedei* (St Petersburg: RAN, 1999), pp. 134–50; Aleksandr Musin, 'Two Churches or Two Traditions: Common Traits and Peculiarities in Northern and Russian Christianity Before and After 1054 AD through the Archaeological Evidence: A View from the East', in *Rom und Byzanz im Norden*, II, pp. 276–95; Nikolai Makarov, 'Far Northern Parts of Ancient Russia on their Way to Christianity', in *Rom und Byzanz im Norden*, II, pp. 259–73; Vladimir Y. Petrukhin and Tamara A. Pushkina, 'Old Russia: the Earliest Stages of Christianization', in *Rom und Byzanz im Norden*, II, pp. 247–58; and Gali F. Korzuchina and Anna A. Peskova, *Drevnerusskie enkolpiony: Kresty-relikvarii XI–XIII vv.* (St Petersburg: Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie, 2003).

2 Vladimir A. Nazarenko, 'Mogilnik v urochishche Plakun', in *Srednevekovaja Ladoga*, ed. by V. V. Sedov (Leningrad: Nauka, 1985), pp. 165 and 168.

by.³ Most of the chamber graves in Hedeby are dated to the tenth century and are associated with the trader and warrior strata of the town's society.⁴ So far this is the only inhumation grave in Rus' that can be firmly dated to the end of the ninth century, but it is not certain that it should be interpreted as a Christian grave.

One object usually associated with a Christian milieu in Rus' is a fragmentary Tating ware jug found in a female grave in the Plakun cemetery of Staraiia Ladoga together with the remains of a cremated boat.⁵ Such jugs are well represented on the Continent, in Scandinavia and in eastern England and their dissemination is usually associated with missionary work in the area. Fragments of at least one other jug were discovered in the layer dated to the ninth and first half of the tenth centuries in the hill fort known as Zemlianoe gorodishche in Staraiia Ladoga (Fig. 3).⁶ It has been suggested that the Tating ware jugs were used for mixing wine and water, for the washing of hands during Mass, or some other liturgical function.⁷ Critics of this interpretation point out that the jugs come mainly from female graves and rarely occur in the vicinity of churches or monasteries. The grave in the Plakun cemetery also contained fragments of two vessels of locally produced hand-made pottery, about a hundred boat rivets, nails and mounts, a fragmentary gaming piece, a bronze chain with a ring with twisted ends, thirteen beads of glass and four of silver, melted pieces of silver and bronze, a whetstone and a bear tooth.⁸ Such a clear heathen context for the Christian objects is explained away by some scholars by the suggestion that the burial rite reflects the belief system of those performing the burial, rather than the deceased's own at-

3 Kirill A. Michailov, 'Skandinavskii mogilnik v urochishche Plakun (zametki o khronologii i topografii)', in *Ladoga i eio sosedi v epokhu srednevekovia*, ed. by A. N. Kirpichnikov (St Petersburg: RAN, 2002), pp. 63–68; Kirill A. Michailov, 'Kurgannye mogilniki Staroi Ladogi', in *Staraiia Ladoga – drevniaia stolitsa Rusi: Katalog vystavki*, ed. by G. V. Golubeva (St Petersburg: Izd. Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2003), p. 155.

4 Ekkehard Aner, 'Das Kammergräberfeld von Haithabu', *Offa*, 10 (1952), 61–115 (p. 99); Heiko Steuer, 'Soziale Gliederung der Bevölkerung von Haithabu nach archäologischen Quellen', in *Archäologische und naturwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen an ländlichen und frühstädtischen Siedlungen im deutschen Küstengebiet vom 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis zum 11. Jahrhundert n. Chr., II: Handelsplätze des frühen und hohen Mittelalters*, ed. by H. Jankuhn and others (Weinheim: Acta Humaniora, 1984), pp. 339–66 (pp. 353, 357, and 362); Michael Müller-Wille, 'Wikingerzeitliche Kammergräber', in *Mammen: Grav, kunst og samfund i vikingetid*, ed. by M. Iversen, Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter, no. 28 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1991), pp. 181–87 (p. 182).

5 Gali F. Korzuchina, 'Kurgan v urochishche Plakun bliz Ladogi', *Kratkie soobshcheniia Instituta archeologii*, 125 (1971), 59–64; Nazarenko, 'Mogilnik v urochishche Plakun', fig. 7.5; Musin, 'Two Churches or Two Traditions', fig. 1; and Alexei V. Plochov, 'O sviazi nizhnego Povolchovia s zapadnoi Evropoi po keramicheskim materialam', *Severnaia Rus' i narody Baltiki* (St Petersburg: Bulanin, 2007), fig. 1.5.

6 Plochov, 'O sviazi nizhnego Povolchovia', p. 25.

7 For a discussion on Tating ware jugs, see Jörn Staecker, 'Legends and Mysteries: Reflections on the Evidence for the Early Mission in Scandinavia', in *Visions of the Past: Trends and Traditions in Swedish Medieval Archaeology*, ed. by H. Andersson and others (Stockholm: Central Board of National Antiquities, 1997), pp. 419–54 (pp. 431–33); Anne-Sofie Gräslund, *Ideologi och mentalitet: Om religionskiftet i Skandinavien från en arkeologisk horisont* (Uppsala, 2001), p. 75; Plochov, 'O sviazi nizhnego Povolchovia', pp. 36–38.

8 Nazarenko, 'Mogilnik v urochishche Plakun', p. 168, fig. 5.1, 5.5, 5.9, 6.5, 6.8, 6.14–16, and 7.6.

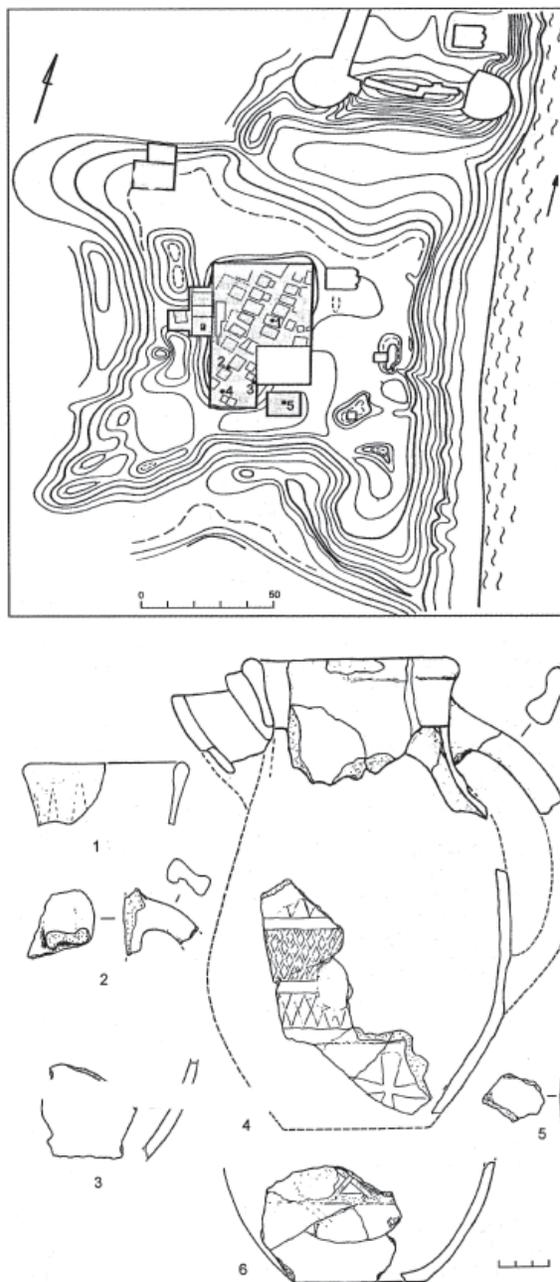


Fig. 3. Tating ware jugs from Ladoga: above – distribution of sherds in the Ladoga hillfort (after Plochov, 2007); below – a jug from a female grave in the Plakun cemetery.

titude.⁹ However, it seems that in the two graves described we still lack positive evidence that the buried individuals were in fact Christian. For a more objective interpretation we need to establish the social setting that facilitated such burials.

The Plakun cemetery is only one of several situated in the vicinity of Staraja Ladoga (see Fig. 4). In total, there are eighteen recorded mounds erected here in rows aligned to the river. The mounds measure between 4–20 m in diameter and between 0.30–1 m in height. Two mounds did not contain any graves, one was the chamber-grave, four were cremations in boats, and three were normal cremation graves. The finds include handmade pottery, beads, iron mounts belonging to wooden boxes, buckles, arrowheads, knives, gaming pieces of stone and bone, iron crampons for horses' hooves and also melted pieces of bronze and silver. In one grave a fragmentary sword was found.¹⁰

Scandinavian scholars have noted that boat graves in Sweden are associated with the local elite, whose residences were located in border areas. By contrast, in Norway they were a common occurrence and not reserved for the highest echelons of society.¹¹ The power of such members of the Swedish elite probably came from their control over raw materials such as iron, furs and elk antlers.¹²

It would seem that the situation at Ladoga fits this interpretation well enough. A settlement, or rather a group of farmsteads, was established here as a colony in an area harvested for certain resources. Judging from the finds from the hill fort and the surrounding cemeteries, the local society at the end of the ninth and into the tenth centuries was still mixed and included various social elements. Those buried in the Plakun cemetery were involved in trade and military activities and perhaps belonged to the upper layers of local society. It is important to stress that even in the tenth century some individuals of high social rank were buried in this area. From this period there is a chamber grave (placed on the top of a large mound) containing remains of a warrior and two horses (Fig. 5).¹³ Kirill Michailov has tried to justify the outlying location of the cemetery at Plakun by suggesting that there may have been a lack of available ground within the settlement.¹⁴ However, if we look at the topography of the settlement, it is quite clear that the area immediately by the riverside was dangerously exposed and unprotected; consequently it seems that the choice of site for the Plakun cemetery was not accidental. It is obvious that this section of the river was of strategic importance, and it is

9 Musin, 'Two Churches or Two Traditions', p. 277.

10 Nazarenko, 'Mogilnik v urochishche Plakun', pp. 163–65.

11 Anna Stalsberg, 'Interpretaciai skandinavskih pogrebenii s lad'ei, proischodiashchikh s territorii Drevnej Rusi', *Trudy VI Mezhdunarodnogo Kongressa slavianskoj archeologii*, IV: *Obshchestvo, ekonomika, kultura i iskusstvo slavian* (Moscow, 1998), pp. 362–71 (p. 370).

12 Björn Ambrosiani, 'Background to the Boat-graves of the Mälaren Valley', in *Vendel Period Studies* (Stockholm: Statens Historiska Museum, 1980), pp. 17–22 (p. 22).

13 Evgenii N. Nosov, 'Sopkovidnaia nasyb bliz urochishcha Plakun v Staroi Ladoge', *Srednevekovaia Ladoga*, ed by V. V. Sedov (Leningrad: Nauka, 1985), pp. 147–55.

14 Michailov, 'Skandinavskii mogilnik', p. 66.

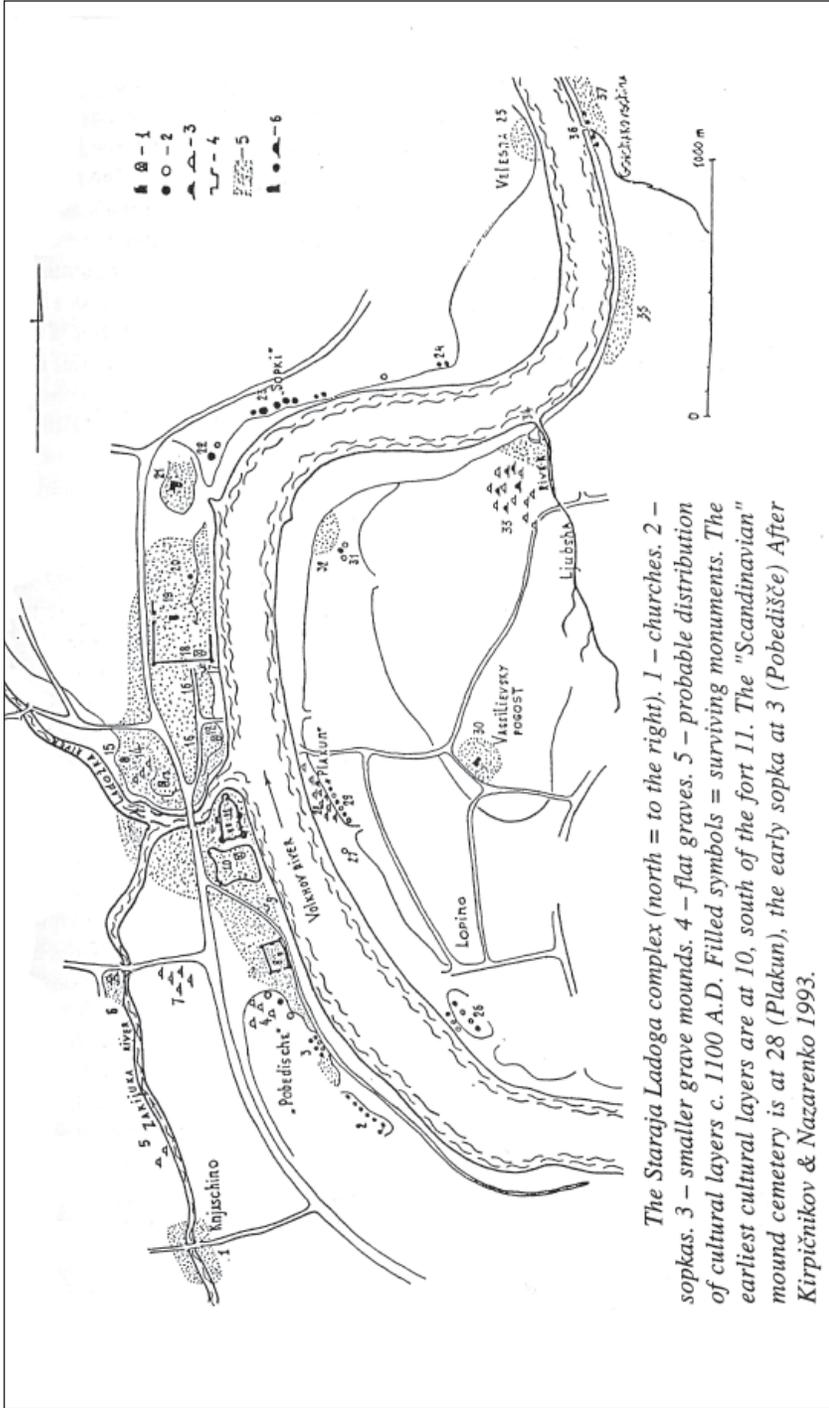


Fig. 4. The Viking Age site of Staraja Ladoga (after Jansson, 1997).

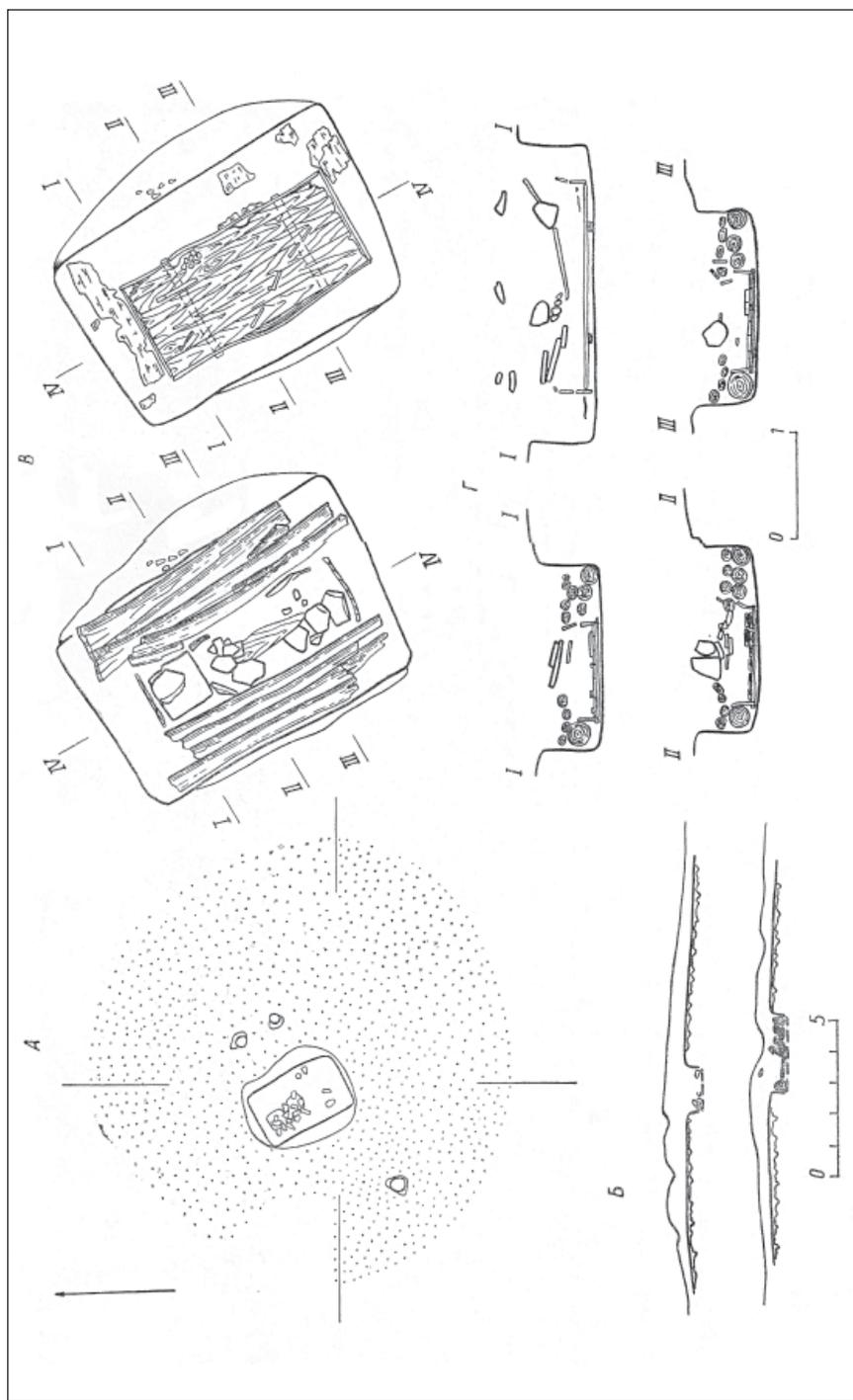


Fig. 5. A chamber grave with two horses placed under the top of a large barrow in the vicinity of Plakun (after Nosov, 1985).

quite likely that for some of those buried here, defending it was their occupation. The objects found there belonged to the inhabitants of one or several farmsteads established by the defenders. In the light of these observations, the presence of a chamber grave and a Tating Ware jug in the Plakun cemetery should be considered as a social as well as religious marker indicating its owner's prominent position in local society.

It is generally accepted that another type of find, cross-shaped pendants, are a clear marker of Christianity among the population of Viking Age Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. Their distribution is commonly used to map the spreading of Christianity in Rus' territory. In terms of the archeological contexts for these finds, they come from three main sources: settlements, graves and hoards.

Excavations of the early urban centers of Rus' produced surprisingly few finds. The earliest one is a bronze reliquary cross (*encolpion*) discovered in Ladoga in the cultural layer dated to the early tenth century. The same site also produced nutshells, cauri shells, wax, fragmentary oriental pottery and a boxwood comb.¹⁵ These items suggest that the people who lived on the site were engaged in long-distance contacts with Byzantium and hence enjoyed a prominent, high-status position in the community. However it is impossible to establish whether they considered the *encolpion* as a symbol of Christian faith or just as an isolated curio.

A silver *encolpion* from Uglich is dated to the second half of the tenth century (Fig. 6, left). It was found in a pit together with oriental coins and their imitations, glass beads, arrowheads (one of them lancet-shaped), a bronze mount decorated in the Borre style, other mounts of silver, spindle-whorls of Ovruch schist and pottery.¹⁶

Tenth-century copper-alloy reliquary crosses have been found in the Gnezdovo settlement.¹⁷ Of a similar date is a bronze *encolpion* excavated from the 'Wet Meadow' area of the Gnezdovo settlement (Fig. 6, right). It was found together with Byzantine coins of Justin I (518–27), Basil I (867–86), Leo VI (886–912) and Romanus I (919–44), one intact amphora and fragments of amphorae and glass vessels.¹⁸ This is the second find of *encolpia* in Gnezdovo,¹⁹ which along

15 Anna A. Peskova, 'O drevneishei na Rusi khristianskoi relikvii', in *Ladoga i Gleb Lebedev: Vosmye chteniia pamiati Anny Machinskoi* (St Petersburg: RAN, 2004), pp. 157–183 (p. 160, fig. 7.2–3); Aleksandr Musin, *Khristianizatsiia Novgorodskoi zemli v IX–XIV vv.: Pogrebalniyi obriad i khristianskie drevnosti* (St Petersburg, 2002), p. 98.

16 Sergei V. Tomsinskiĭ, 'Serebrianyi krestik-encolpion (iz raskopok 2001 g. v Ugliche)', in *Ladoga i eio sosedi v epochu srednevekovia*, ed. by Evgenii N. Nosov (St Petersburg: RAN, 2002), pp. 263–67, fig. 1; Korzuchina and Peskova, *Drevnerusskie encolpiony*, p. 56, no. 20.

17 Natalia I. Astashova, 'Encolpion iz Gnezdova', *Sovetskaia archeologiia*, 3 (1974), 249–51; *The Road from the Varangians to the Greeks and from the Greeks...: Katalog vystavki*, ed. by V. L. Egorov (Moskva: State Historical Museum, 1996), pp. 57–58, no. 344; and Korzuchina and Peskova, *Drevnerusskie encolpiony*, p. 54, no. 7, pl. 1.

18 Veronika V. Murasheva, Natalia P. Dovganjuk, and Alexandr A. Fetisov, 'Vizantiiskie importy s territorii poimennoi chasti Gnezdovskogo poseleniia', in *Kraevolnyi kamen: Archeologiia, istoriia, iskusstvo, kultura Rossii i sopredelnykh stran* (St Petersburg and Moscow: Lomonosov, 2009), II, pp. 530–54.

19 Korzuchina and Peskova, *Drevnerusskie encolpiony*, p. 54, no. 7.

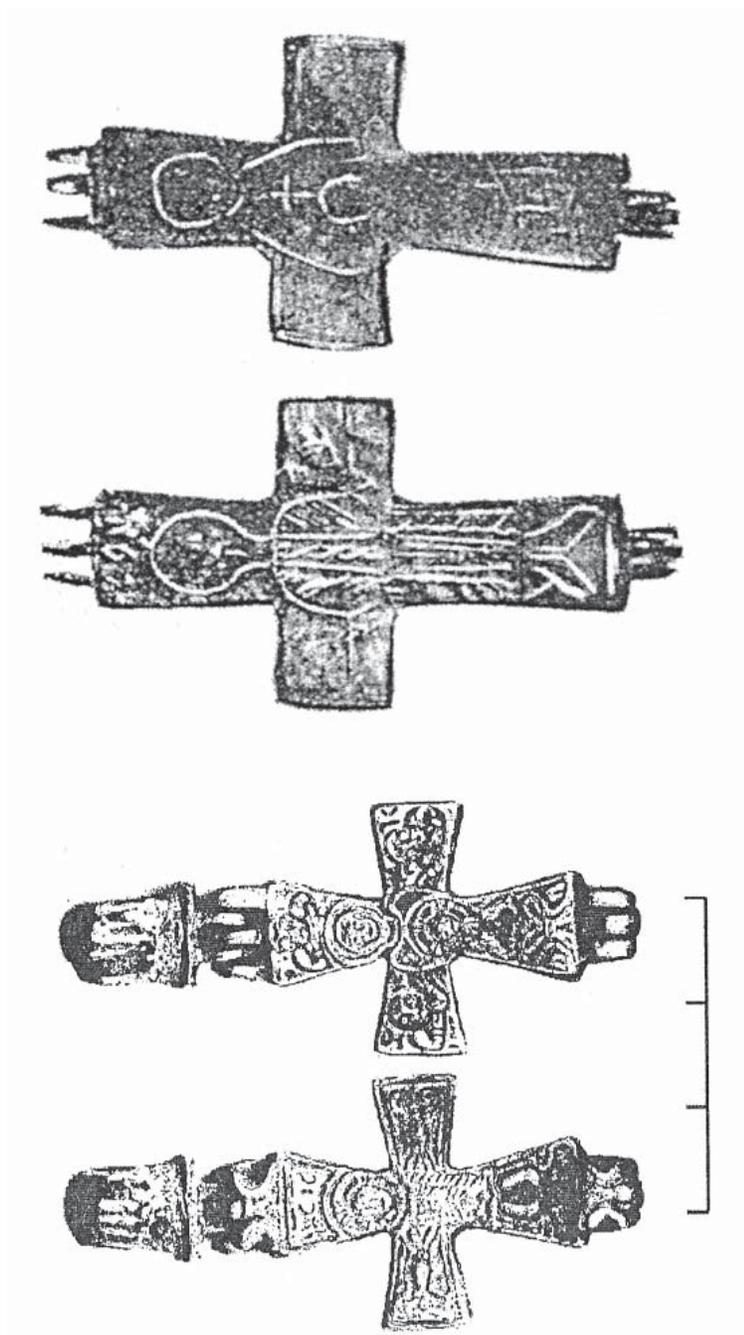


Fig. 6. Early types of cross-shaped pendants in early Rus': left – from Uglich; right – from Gnezdovo (after Korzuchina and Peskova, 2003).

with finds of candles and wax in other Gnezdovo graves provided some scholars with grounds for concluding that Christianity was known to the Gnezdovo population at that time.²⁰

Cross-shaped pendants have been found in single graves from the tenth and eleventh centuries in Gnezdovo, Kiev, Shestovitsa, Timerevo and Podgorcy and some rural cemeteries of northern Russia.²¹ The archaeological contexts of these finds have been discussed by Aleksandr Musin,²² who noted that in many cases they were registered in graves containing weapons, weights and/or scales along with Scandinavian, oriental and European coins. Musin came to the conclusion that Christianity was most prevalent within those sections of Rus' society that dealt with war, trade and administration.²³ Table 1 outlines the gender distribution of these finds.

As is evident from Table 1, cross-shaped pendants were found in twenty-two graves dated to the tenth and early eleventh centuries. Judging from the associated finds, twelve graves could be interpreted as female, four more as probably female, five were double graves and only one was a possible male grave.²⁴ Thus it can be concluded that these pendants are common in female graves. A similar situation has been observed in Scandinavia,²⁵ involving representatives of the same social strata of society.²⁶ How can this be explained? According to Aleksandr Musin, the first Christians were women, because they were 'more sensitive to such a culture

20 Murasheva, Dovganiuk, and Fetisov, 'Vizantiiskie importy', p. 545.

21 Petrukhin and Pushkina, 'Old Russia: the Earliest Stages of Christianization', pp. 249–50, fig. 1; Musin, 'Two Churches or Two Traditions', p. 279, fig. 3; and Ingmar Jansson, 'Situationen i Norden och Östeuropa för 1000 år sedan – en arkeologs synpunkter på frågan om östkristna inflyttanden under missionstiden', in *Från Bysans till Norden*, pp. 37–95 (p. 73, fig. 15–16).

22 Musin, 'Mech i krest', pp. 135–40.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

24 Mikhail Karger, *Drevnii Kiev*, 1 (Moscow and Leningrad, 1958), pp. 142, 175, 190–91, and 208–12; Hlib Ivakin, 'Excavations at St. Michael Golden Domes Monastery in Kiev', in *Kiev – Cherson – Constantinople*, ed. by A. Aibabin and H. Ivakin (Kiev, Simferopol, and Paris: Ukrainian National Committee for Byzantine Studies, 2007), pp. 177–220 (pp. 180 and 186–89); David I. Blifeld, *Davnioruski pamiatki Shestovytsi* (Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1977), pp. 160–63; Radoslaw Liwoch, 'Zabytki z wykopalisk T. Ziemięckiego w latopisowym Pleśnisku', in *Olzhyni chytania* ed(s). by B. Voznytskyi, I. Mytsko, N. Gabrel (Plisnesk, 2005), pp. 5–15; Elena V. Kamenetskaia, 'Zaolshanskaia kurgannaia gruppa Gnezdova', in *Smolensk i Gnezdovo*, ed. by D. A. Avdusin (Moscow: Moskovskii Universitet, 1991), pp. 125–173 (pp. 164, 167, and 168); Daniil A. Avdusin and Tamara A. Pushkina, 'Tri pogrebnye kamery iz Gnezdova', in *Istoriia i kultura drevnerusskogo goroda* (Moscow: Moskovskii Universitet, 1989), pp. 193–203; Nadezhda I. Platonova, 'Kamernye pogrebeniia XI – nachala XII vv. v Novgorodskoi zemle (analiz pogrebal'nogo obriada)', in *Trudy VI Mezhdunarodnogo Kongressa slavianskoj archeologii*, iv: *Obshchestvo, ekonomika, kultura i iskusstvo slavian* (Moscow, 1998), pp. 378–79; Elena A. Iakovleva, 'New Burial Finds in Central Pskov from the Time of Princess Olga', in *Historiska Nyheter: Specialnummer om Olga och Ingegerd* (Stockholm: Statens Historiska Museum, 2004), pp. 18–20; and Tatiana E. Ershova, 'Serebrianaia podveska s izobrazheniem tamgi Riurikovichei iz kamernogo pogrebeniia v Pskove', *Kraeugolnyi kamen*, 1, pp. 300–6.

25 Staecker, 'Legends and Mysteries', p. 437.

26 Musin, 'Two Churches or Two Traditions', p. 279; and Jansson, 'Situationen i Norden och Östeuropa', pp. 71–73.

as Christianity'.²⁷ Chronological analysis of cross-shaped pendants shows that the earliest of them were found in graves dated to the mid-tenth century,²⁸ which means they coincided with the time of Prince Olga's baptism in Constantinople. Records of the retinue accompanying Olga at the reception in the *Pentakoubouleion* of the Great Palace in Constantinople on October 18 (c. 957) state that she had with her sixteen female relatives as well as eighteen handmaidens.²⁹ A comparison of the payments³⁰ given to the Rus' during the receptions on September 9 and October 19 demonstrates the ranking within Olga's retinue (Table 2).

Table 1. Gender distribution of cross-shaped pendants in burials

Site (gr=grave)	Female grave	Male grave	Double grave
Kiev, gr. 14	+		
Kiev, gr. 110 (child)	+		
Kiev, gr. 117= gr.125			+*
Kiev, gr. 124	+		
Kiev, gr. 1988–89 (child)	?		
Kiev, gr. 13,1997	+		
Kiev, gr. 49, 1999	+		
Љbestovica, gr. 78	+		
Podgorcy			+
Gnezdovo, Zaol. gr. 5	+		
Gnezdovo, Zaol. gr. 27	+		
Gnezdovo, Zaol. gr. 38	?		
Gnezdovo, Centr. gr. 198	+		
Gnezdovo, Centr. gr. 301	+		
Gnezdovo, Centr. gr. 97, 1899			+
Gnezdovo, Dn. gr. 4			+
Timerevo, gr. 417		?	
Timerevo, gr. 459	+		
Pskov, gr. 1, 2003	+		
Pskov, gr. 6, 2008	+		
Udray, gr. 2			+
Ves', gr. 4	+		

27 Musin, *Khristianizatsiia Novgorodskoi zemli*, p. 124.

28 Jansson, 'Situationen i Norden och Östeuropa', p. 74, note 83.

29 *De Ceremoniis*, I, ed. by J. J. Reiske (Bonn, 1829), p. 598, ll. 9–10; Jeffrey M. Featherstone, 'ΔΙ' ΕΝΔΕΙΞΙΝ: Display in Court Ceremonial (De Ceremoniis II, 15)', in *The Material and the Ideal: Essays in Medieval Art and Archaeology in Honour of Jean-Michel Spier*, ed. by A. Cutler and A. Papaconstantinou, *The Medieval Mediterranean People: Economies and Culture, 400–1500*, no. 70 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 75–112.

30 Dmitrii V. Ainalov, 'O darach russkim kniaziam i poslam v Vizantii', *Izvestiia Otdeleniia russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti Imperatorskoj Akademii Nauk*, 1908, no. 2, 290–307.

Table 2. Comparison of the composition of Olga's retinue attending the banquets on September 9 in the Chrysotriklinos and October 18 in the Pentakouboukleion

Banquet on September 9	No.	Sum	Banquet on October 18	No.	Sum
Princess	1		Princess	1	200 miliaresia
Olga's nephew	1	30 miliaresia	Olga's nephew	1	20 miliaresia
Male relatives	8	20 miliaresia each = 160	Female relatives	16	12 miliaresia each = 192
Apokrisiarioi	20	12 miliaresia each = 240	Olga's handmaidens	18	6 miliaresia each = 108
Merchants	43	12 miliaresia each = 516	Apokrisiarioi	22	12 miliaresia each = 264
Gregorios the priest	1	8 miliaresia	Merchants	44	6 miliaresia each = 264
Olga's interpreter	1	15 miliaresia	Gregorios the priest	1	8 miliaresia
Interpreters	2	12 miliaresia each = 24	Interpreters	2	12 miliaresia each = 24
Sviatoslav's retainers	?	5 miliaresia each			
Retainers of the apokrisiarioi	6	3 miliaresia each = 18			
Total	83	1011 miliaresia	Total	107	1080 miliaresia

Differences in the sums paid to Olga's retainers indicate that her relatives received most payment on both occasions. At the reception in the *Pentakouboukleion*, Olga's female relatives received less than her male relatives had the previous month, while the ambassadors (*apokrisiarioi*) and interpreters received the same amount both times. It is important to note that the status of Olga's handmaidens was equal to that of the merchants. While the differences might reflect the attitudes of the Byzantine administration towards the various groupings of the Rus', and not necessarily coincide with the Rus' point of view, it appears that all the women in Olga's retinue held high social positions.³¹

The prevalent theory is that Olga was baptized during her visit to Constantinople. If we keep in mind the female burials with cross-shaped pendants listed above, and also the presence of female relatives among Olga's retinue, we can conclude that perhaps some of them were baptized along with Olga.³²

31 Jonathan Shepard, 'The Coming of Christianity to Rus: Authorized and Unauthorized Versions', in *Conversion to Christianity from Late Antiquity to the Modern Age: Considering the Process in Europe, Asia, and the Americas*, ed. by C. B. Kendall and others (Minneapolis: CEMH, 2009), pp. 194–95.

32 Vladimir Petrukhin expresses it more explicitly: 'It is possible that female graves with cross-shaped pendants in Kiev belonged to Olga's courtier ladies, who were, as Olga, of Scandinavian origin' ('Put' iz Variag v Greki: stanovlenie drevnerusskogo gosudarstva i ego mezhdunarodnye svyazi', in *Trudy VI Mezhdunarodnogo Kongressa slavianskoj archeologii*, iv: *Obshchestvo, ekonomika, kultura i iskusstvo slavian* (Moscow, 1998), pp. 127–134 (p. 133). Cf. also Jonathan Shepard's remark: 'There is also an intriguing parallel between the high proportion of female Rus' graves containing crosses and the ceremonial attention that seems to have been paid to the high-status women who accompanied Olga at her own court receptions' (Shepard, 'The Coming of Christianity to Rus', p. 197).

It would seem reasonable to assume that during the course of the tenth century, Christian conversions in Rus' came to be associated with holding of high positions in society. We have already noted that cross-shaped pendants are mainly found in female graves and in hoards, and it is interesting that such pendants were registered in association with other valuable objects normally kept in purses (for instance coins, finger-rings, etc).³³ In one of the graves excavated in Kiev, a cross-shaped pendant was found in a purse made of leather and silk bearing a cross-shaped decorative mount (Fig. 7).³⁴ Finds of pendants in association with beads also confirm their interpretation as symbols of wealth (Fig. 8). According to Ibn Fadlan, the wealth of the tenth-century Rus' elite was displayed by both the qualitative and quantitative composition of the necklaces of their women.³⁵ This interpretation of Christian symbols primarily as markers of high social status is further supported by their being associated with jewelry in hoards found both in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (Fig. 9).³⁶ From the Byzantine *Book of Ceremonies* we learn that small crosses of silver were used in bestowing largess to participants of the Vigil of the Feast of St Elijah, the Vigil of Palm Sunday and the Festival of Palm Sunday.³⁷ Thus they were considered to be suitable for distribution as gifts, normally done in the form of coins. It is also important to note that on these occasions crosses were graded according to the personal rank and dignity of the recipient. For instance, *magistri* and *praepositi*, *anthypatois* (proconsuls) and *patricii* received a large silver cross while the titular heads of the offices, the eunuch, *protospatharii* and all others received small silver crosses. Such offerings, already in the source culture of Byzantium, had dual meaning: they were undoubtedly Christian symbols, and yet were clearly intended primarily as a material reward marking a rank. From the same *Book of Ceremonies* we know that the Rus' were serving in the Imperial Army from at least the early tenth century. It is tempting to think that the Rus' mercenaries, while in service to Byzantine emperors, had acquired some of the archeologically discovered crosses or at least the very idea of a cross as a symbol of rank.

33 Ivakin, 'Excavations at St. Michael Golden Domes Monastery', p. 189; and possibly Karger, *Drevnii Kiev*, p. 210, grave no. 125.

34 Ivakin, 'Excavations at St. Michael Golden Domes Monastery', p. 189, pl. 6.

35 Andrei P. Kovalevskii, *Kniga Akhmeda Ibn Fadlana o ego puteshestvii na Volgu v 921–922 gg.* (Kharkov: Kharkovskii Universitet, 1956), p. 141.

36 Jörn Staecker, *Rex regnum et dominorum: Die wikingerzeitlichen Kreuz- und Kruzifixhänger als Ausdruck der Mission in Altdänemark und Schweden* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1999), pp. 436–514, nos. 42, 57, 59, 75, 80, and 113; Gali F. Korzuchina, *Russkie klady IX–XIII vv.* (Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka, 1954), p. 99, no. 52; Tamara A. Pushkina, 'Novyi Gnezdovskii klad', in *Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy, 1994 god* (Moscow, 1996), pp. 171–186 (p. 181, fig. 4.1).

37 *De Ceremoniis*, I, ed. by Reiske, pp. 114, 161–62, 172–74; Marvin C. Ross and Glanville Downey, 'An Emperor's Gift, and Notes on Byzantine Silver Jewellery of the Middle Period', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 19/20, (1956/57), 22–33; Michael F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 196.

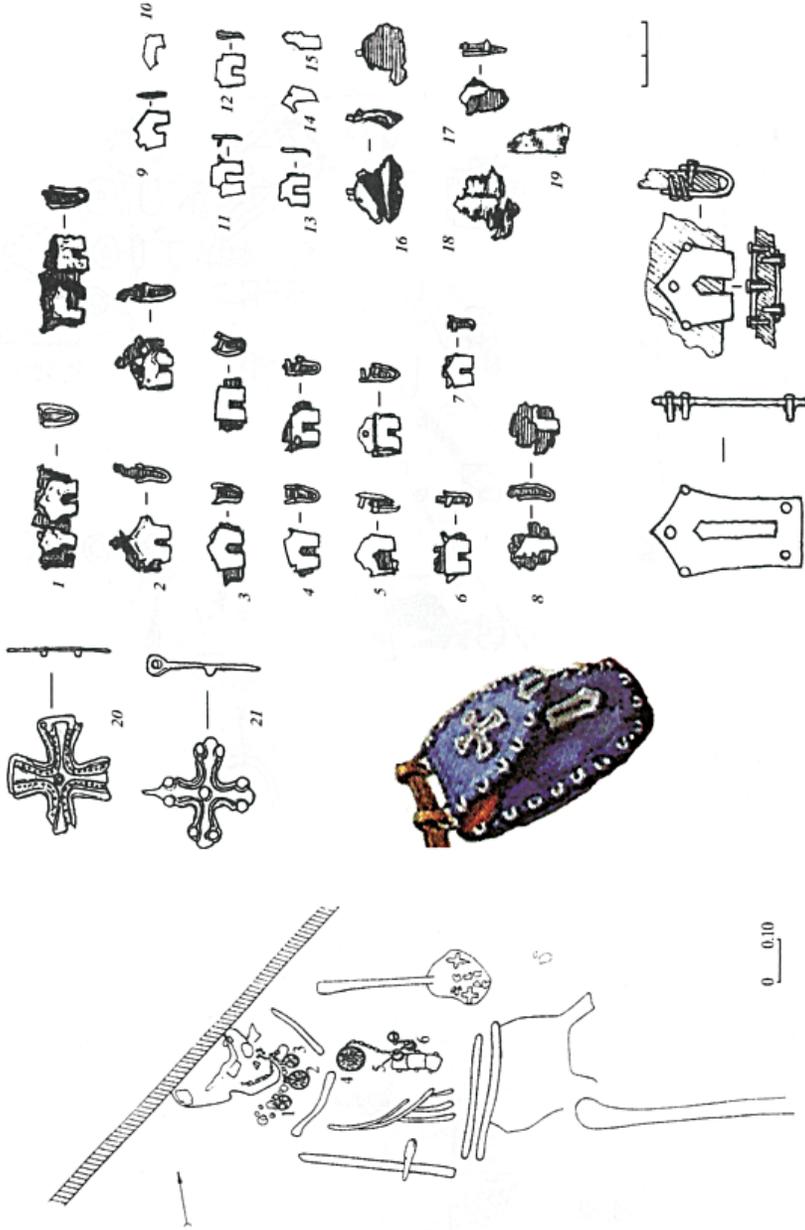


Fig. 7. Remains of a purse made of leather and silk with a cross-shaped decorative mount discovered in Grave 49 in Kiev (elaborated after Ivakin, 2007).



Fig. 8. Finds of cross-shaped pendants in association with beads (elaborated after Egorov, 1996 and Blifeld, 1977).

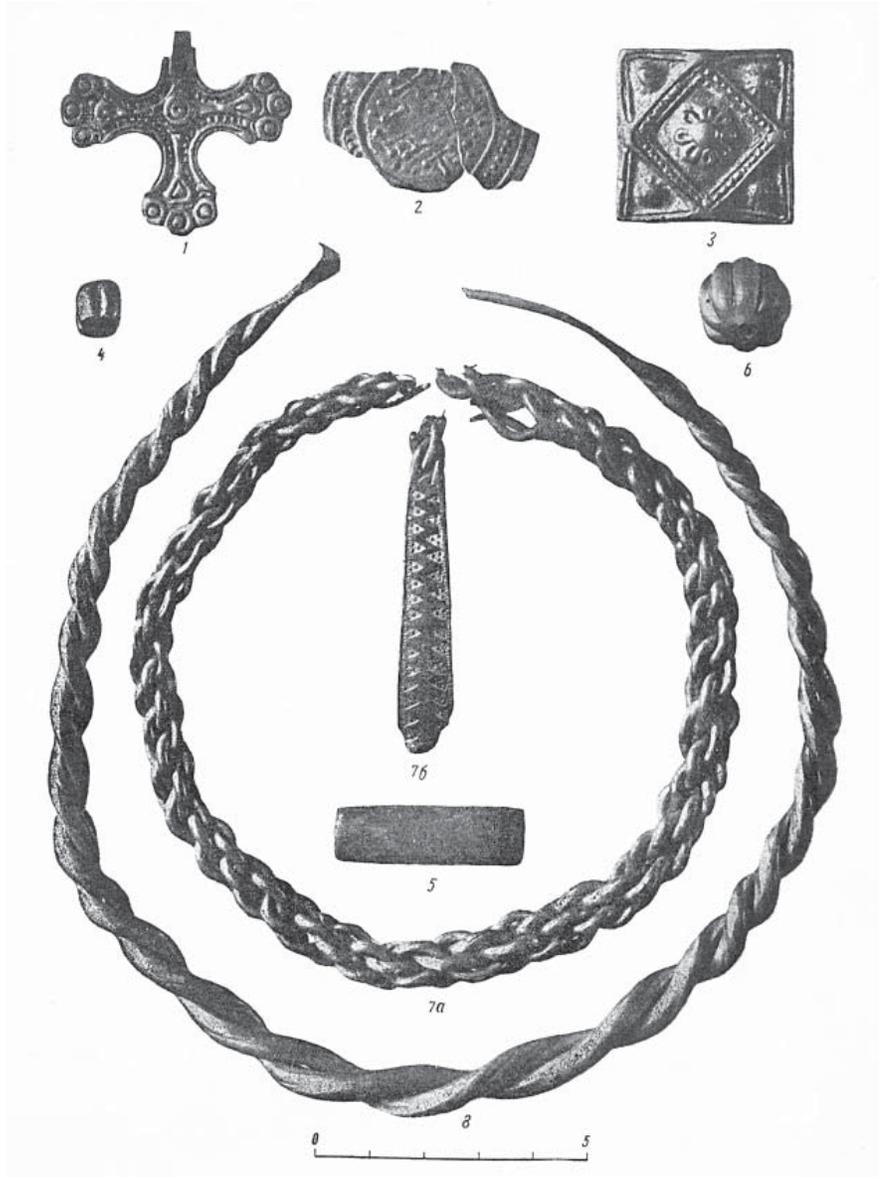


Fig. 9. A cross-shaped pendant in association with ornaments found in a hoard in Kryzhovo, former Pskov region, Russia (after Korzuchina 1954, no. 52).

In relation to the social status of the individuals buried in graves with cross-shaped pendants, one must examine one type of pendant that became a common cultural feature in both Scandinavia and Rus' in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries.³⁸ Let us now take a look at the social context of the pendants dated to the end of the tenth and early eleventh centuries. One is the pendant found in a female grave in the grounds of St Michael's monastery in Kiev.³⁹ Another sample of identical dating came with a gilt earring from a similar grave at the same site.⁴⁰ A cross-shaped pendant was discovered together with a bronze button in a child's grave in the territory of the former St Theodor's monastery in Kiev.⁴¹ Two more identical pendants along with a sword, an axe, a silver finger-ring and a silver arm-ring were excavated from a double grave in Podgorcy (Fig. 10).⁴² Finally, it is necessary to note an important find of a bronze mould for producing such pendants, which was excavated from the site of an eleventh-century farmstead in the vicinity of the Golden Gates in Kiev (Fig. 11). The high social status of the owners of the farmstead is confirmed by traces of fortifications in the form of a ditch and a rampart and also by finds of amphora, glass vessels and a princely lead seal.⁴³ The decoration on the pendants made in this mould are comparable with a pendant found in one of the Gnezdovo hoards dated to the second part of the tenth century,⁴⁴ but items associated with the mould do not allow a date before the eleventh century.⁴⁵

Thus, early finds of cross-shaped pendants are associated mainly with high-status female graves. This context allows us to conclude that these pendants, even if their Christian meaning was acknowledged, served primarily as social rather than religious markers.

I would like to sum up with a question: were cross-shaped pendants really meant to manifest exclusively, or even primarily, Christian identity? And, vice versa, does the absence of items such as these mean that a grave necessarily belong to a heathen? If this were indeed the case, we would have to exclude from among the potential Christians virtually all of the male Viking population of Rus', since their inhumation graves normally do not contain such finds. However, we learn from the written sources that a number of Rhos served in the Byzantine army, specifically its navy.⁴⁶ The navy was employed by the Byzantine emperors

38 Type 1.4.3 according to Staecker, *Rex regnum et dominorum*, p. 110–15. See also Jansson, 'Situationen i Norden och Östeuropa', pp. 69–70.

39 Ivakin, 'Excavations at St. Michael Golden Domes Monastery', p. 189, pl. 6.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 180, fig. 2.20.

41 Evhen E. Borovskiy and Olexandr P. Kaliuk, 'Doslidzhennia kyivskogo dytyntsia', in *Starodavnii Kyiv. Archeologichni doslidzhennia 1984–1989* (Kyiv, 1993), p. 9, fig. 5.

42 Liwoch, 'Zabytki z wykopalisk T. Ziemięckiego', pp. 7–11, fig. 4–11.

43 Ivan I. Movchan, Analolii O. Kozlovskii, and Mikhailo M. Ievlev, 'Lokalni oboronni sporudy verchnogo Kyeva', in *Naukovi zapyski z ukrainskoi istorii*, 16 (2005), p. 106, fig. 2.2.

44 Pushkina, 'Novyi Gnezdovskii klad', p. 179, fig. 4.1.

45 Movchan, Kozlovskii, and Ievlev, 'Lokalni oboronni sporudy', p. 106.

46 John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World 565–1204* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 125.

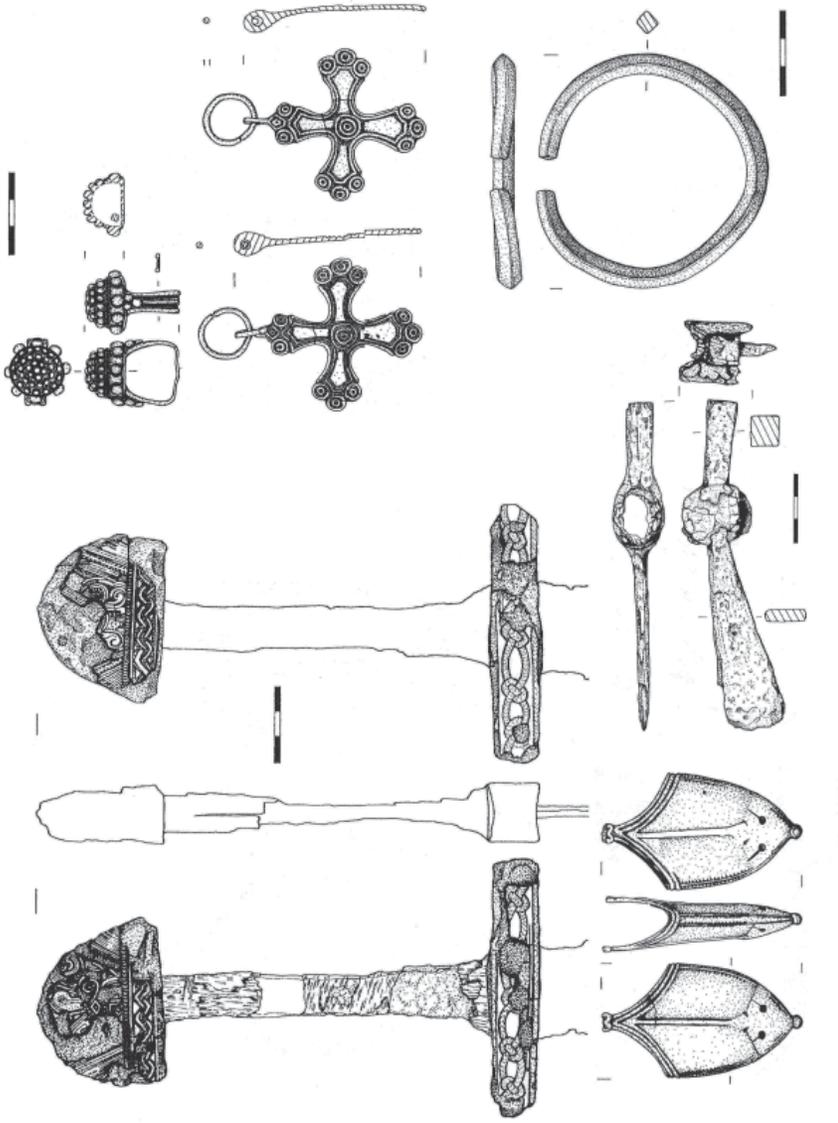


Fig. 10. Cross-shaped pendants discovered in a double grave in Podgorcy (elaborated after Liwoch, 2005).

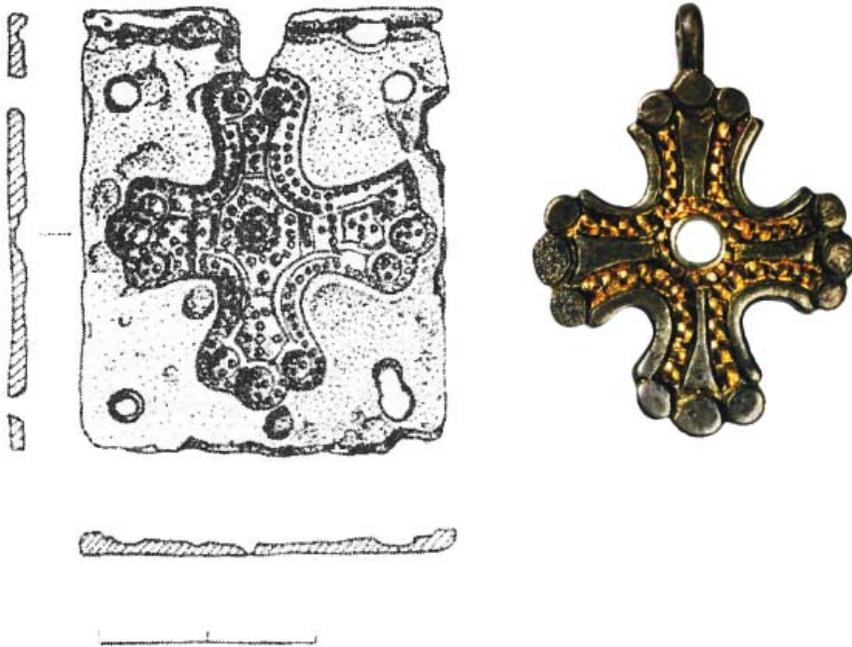


Fig. 11. Bronze mould for producing cross-shaped pendants found in Kiev
 (after Movchan and others, 2005),
and a pendant from a hoard found in Gnezdovo
 (after Pushkina, 1994).

Basil I and Leo VI for the building of various churches in Constantinople, which most certainly would have introduced those Rus' serving there to the Christian faith.⁴⁷ We also know that there were Christian Rhos among the guards of the Great Palace in Constantinople.⁴⁸ In the tenth century, military service in the Byzantine army rather encouraged one to become a Christian; it was common to hold liturgical services for the troops as well as praying for victory. Participation in the construction and restoration of churches was one possible occupation for these 'defenders of Christ', but dying for Byzantine emperors was also considered a religious feat as much as a military one.⁴⁹ Consequently, the association of the faith with the fight against the enemy⁵⁰ automatically made good Christians of the soldiers. Under these circumstances there was probably no need for soldiers to demonstrate their Christian identity by bearing small cross-pendants. In fact, the visual Christian symbols for males might have been the decorative elements of their clothes. For instance, small decorative crosses made of gold or silver wires have been found on the garments of males buried in the weapon-rich chamber graves at Birka.⁵¹ It is believed that these crosslets belonged to headgear, but their shape suggests that they represented an early variant of the so-called *phylactery* which, according to the Orthodox burial rite, must be placed upon the head of deceased laity.⁵²

Visual symbols of Christianity such as cross-shaped pendants are associated mainly with female graves and also with hoards, where they served as symbols of high status and wealth. Male burials seldom contain them. However, other evidence points to the likelihood that Christianity penetrated Rus' society through the agency of those warriors who served as mercenaries in Byzantium. It would appear that for some reason or other this most influenced segment of society did not consider the wearing or even the possession of small crosses to be an im-

47 *Prodolzhatel Feofana: Zhizneopisaniia vizantiiskikh carei*, 5.68 and 6.18, ed. by J. N. Liubarskii (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1992), pp. 129 and 151.

48 We are told that baptized Rhos 'with banners, holding shields and wearing their swords' were standing on guard outside the balustrade of the Chalke during the reception of the Tarsoite Legates in the Palace on 31 May 946, see *De Ceremoniis*, I, ed. by Reiske, p. 579, ll. 21–22; Featherstone, 'ΔΙ' ΕΝΔΕΙΞΙΝ: Display in Court Ceremonial', p. 93.

49 John Skylitzes records that Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963–69) 'endeavoured to establish a law that soldiers who died in war were to be accorded martyrs' honours, thus making the salvation of the soul uniquely and exclusively dependent on being in action on military service. He pressed the patriarch and the bishops to agree to this doctrine but some of them vigorously withstood him and frustrated his intent.' John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, transl. by J. Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 263. Concerning the concept of 'Christian warriors', see Peter Schreiner, 'Soldiers', in *The Byzantines*, ed. by G. Cavallo (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 88–89; and Vladimir V. Kuchma, *Voennaia organizatsiia Vizantiiskoi imperii* (St Petersburg: Aletea, 2001), pp. 78–80.

50 Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 21.

51 See Agnes Geijer, *Birka III: Die textilfunde aus den Gräbern* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1938), nos. 524, 542, 644, 710, and 736; fig. 27–28.6–7; Inga Hägg, 'Med textiller som källmaterial', *Saga och sed*, 2006, 116–19.

52 Dmitri Sokolov, *Uchenie o bogosluzhenii Pravoslavnoi tserkvi* (Minsk, 2002), p. 166.

portant mark of their faith. The warrior elite either chose not to express their Christianity visually or else they did so in ways as yet undetected by archeology. Therefore our traditional interpretation of those individuals buried in chamber graves with weapons — as befitted high-status warriors — as being necessarily heathens is probably not correct. Among the tenth-century chamber graves known from Birka, Gnezdovo, Kiev, Chernigov and Shestovitsa whose appearance is generally believed to denote pagan belief, there is undoubtedly a sizable number of Christian burials. However, the attempt to establish criteria for separating the two groups despite their seemingly uniform burial rituals is a task that must be attempted by future studies.