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Staraya (Old) Russa: archaeological investigations of the medieval town,

The town of Staraya Russa, named "Rusa" until the 16th c. A. D., the greatest medieval center in the Southern Lake Ilmen region (fig. 1), hasn't still got due estimation amidst the historians. Archaeological excavations in Staraya Russa have been lasting since 1939. They have been begun by A. A. Strokov and were gone on in 1966-1978 (headed by A. F. Medvedev) and in 1985-1998 (by V. G. Mironova). At present more than 1500 sq. m of ancient town territory have been researched, but in fact the materials of these excavations haven't been made into a whole and are still unpublished.

In 1999 the archaeological expedition of Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University continued the work on the Borisoglebsky excavation (general square is 225 sq. m), situated in the center of the ancient town (fig. 2, 3).

The excavation was founded here in 1988 by archaeological expedition of The USSR Academy of Science Archaeology Institute. The cultural layer 3,4 m thick (dating back to the second half of 12-17th c.) have been researched for the decade of 1988-1999 (the work was interrupted twice: in 1990 and for the period of 1993-1996).

In 1999 important data which reflect different aspects of the town life within the first half of the 12th c. were obtained. Three building stages of the wood-block pavement of the ancient Borisoglebskaya Street were investigated. The remains of eight buildings (situated to the West and to the East from the street) of the different purposes were revealed. The assemblage consists of 845 artifacts of wood, metals, bone, leather and other materials. There are four birch bark documents - the letters ## 34-36 in the collection.

In 2000 strata of the second half of the 11th c. - the beginning of the 12th c. were excavated 4-4,8 m deep. The cultural layer is deep-brown humus including splinter and other admixtures. The work results in the revealing of the Borisoglebskaya Street pavement, a descent from the wood-block pavement, palisades, paving within the homestead and a building.

A homestead lay-out in the studied strata on the whole conforms to the previously excavated one. The wood-block pavement of the Borisoglebskaya Street was traced back in the excavation's central part as before (fig. 4). Its orientation is NNW-SSE. The street construction is analogous to a novgorodian one: planking - longitudinal timbers - foundation logs - interlayer filling. There are parts of two homesteads within the excavation ("A" homestead is to the West of the street; "B" homestead is to the East from it).

At the same period traced building lay-out has changed greatly. Whereas the "A" homestead bordered with Borisoglebskaya Street pavement by its dwelling part in the later strata, in the layers being studied in 1999 there were no traces of either dwelling or subsidiary buildings. The descent to the "B" homestead observed earlier has disappeared, but remains of a log building construction (3,4 by 3,4 m) (fig. 5) were discovered in its southern part. There is a significant artifact collection that origins from this complex. It includes such remarkable finds as folding cross and European denarius (fig. 6).

An interesting feature of layers investigated during the summer of 2000 is raising quantity of wooden waste that includes broken details secondary used for paving the dumpiest parts of homestead yards. To all appearance this is connected with heightened moisture of excavated area in the studied period.

The collection obtained during the summer of 2000 consists of 929 piece-items and mass-finds (ceramics, animal and fish bones, pieces of leather, nutshells, nails, thick felt and so on). In fact all the artifacts of wood, leather, bone, metal, etc. that are typical for a Russian medieval town are met here.

234 items made of leather (footwear mainly) were found. These finds are presented by all known

groups: shoes, high boots and others (fig. 7, 8). Some new types unknown earlier could be mentioned among them. Besides, some fragments of sheath and purse (or small bag) have been found.

Metal finds form the most numerous group within the collection (293 pieces). There are locks, keys (fig. 9), a piece of spring scissors, clasps, hooks, a currycomb, a sickle (fig. 10), an axe-shaped amulet (fig. 11), brooches, etc. The group of worth notice among all the metal finds is the so called "tsrens" (fragments of griddles for salt evaporation) that marks to the presence of salt production in the medieval Rusa (fig. 12).

Artifacts of wood (the material of the most frequent use in the Mediaeval) count 257 pieces. These are different tools (rake, wooden hammers), spinning fittings (spindles), tableware (fragments of dishes made with a lathe, spoons, a trough). Some of them are decorated with carving (fig. 13) or have cut letters (on a spoon handle and outside of a bowl's bottom). Carved parts of an inner house decoration are also met. There is no exaggeration to say that the most interesting of all the wooden things are the spice-cake desk (fig. 14) and the carved animal-shaped article (fig. 15).

There were only a few finds (11 pieces) of nonferrous metals found during the summer of 2000. They are the already mentioned folding cross, so called «zmeevik» (silver amulet with the Crucifix on the one side and representation of head with a snake-like hair on another) (fig. 16), silver European dinarius, pseudo-twisted ring, a piece of the decorated bronze lamellate bracelet.

Bone items are presented with 23 pieces. There are eight combs of different types, two bone handles (one of them has a wealthy circular ornament) (fig. 17), two arrow-heads, etc. (fig. 18).

The work also resulted in the large textile collection (22 fragments). It can be preliminarily mentioned that it includes fabrics made of both vegetable and animal fibre (fig. 19). Some of the pieces have traces of the cut out.

Preliminarily the strata studied during the summer of 2000 at Borisoglebsky excavation have the date of the second half of the 11th century.

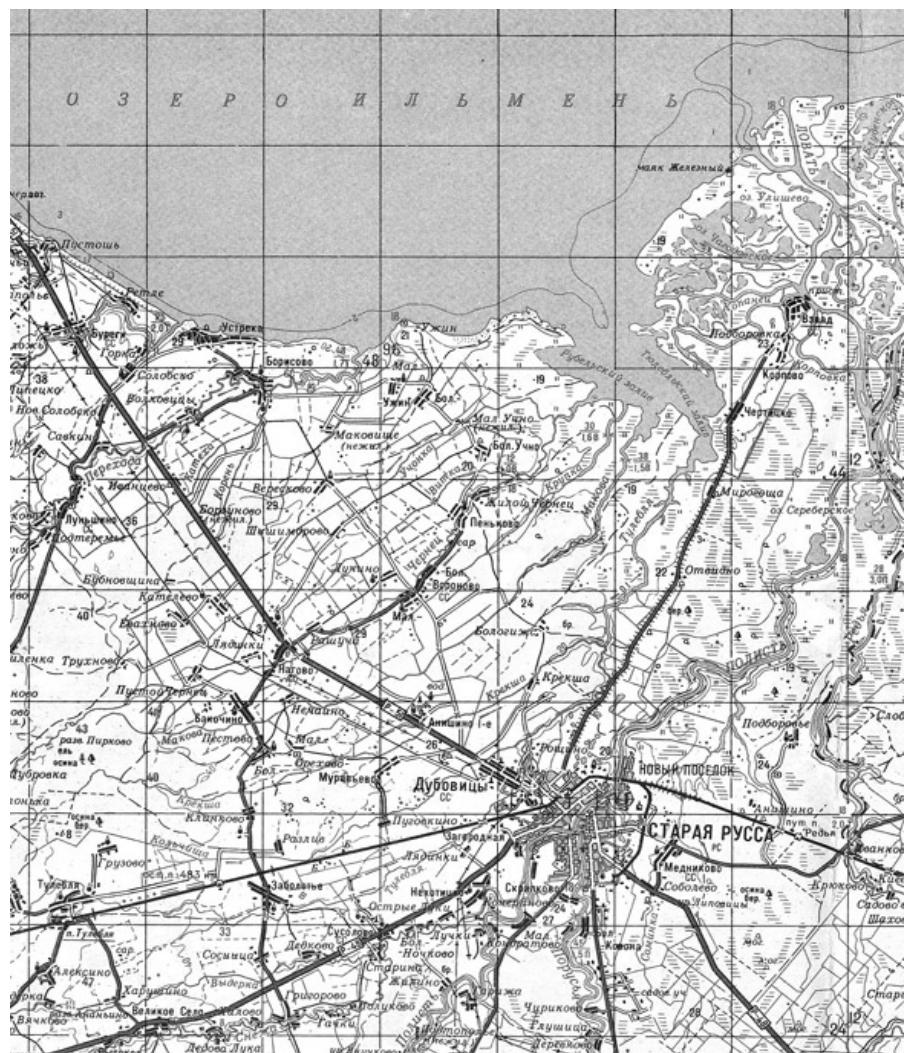


Fig. 1

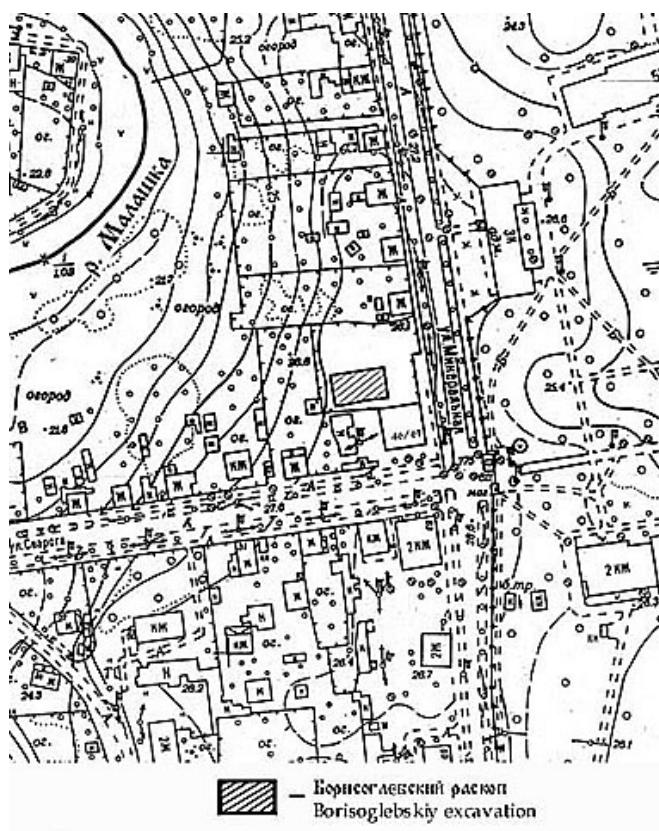


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

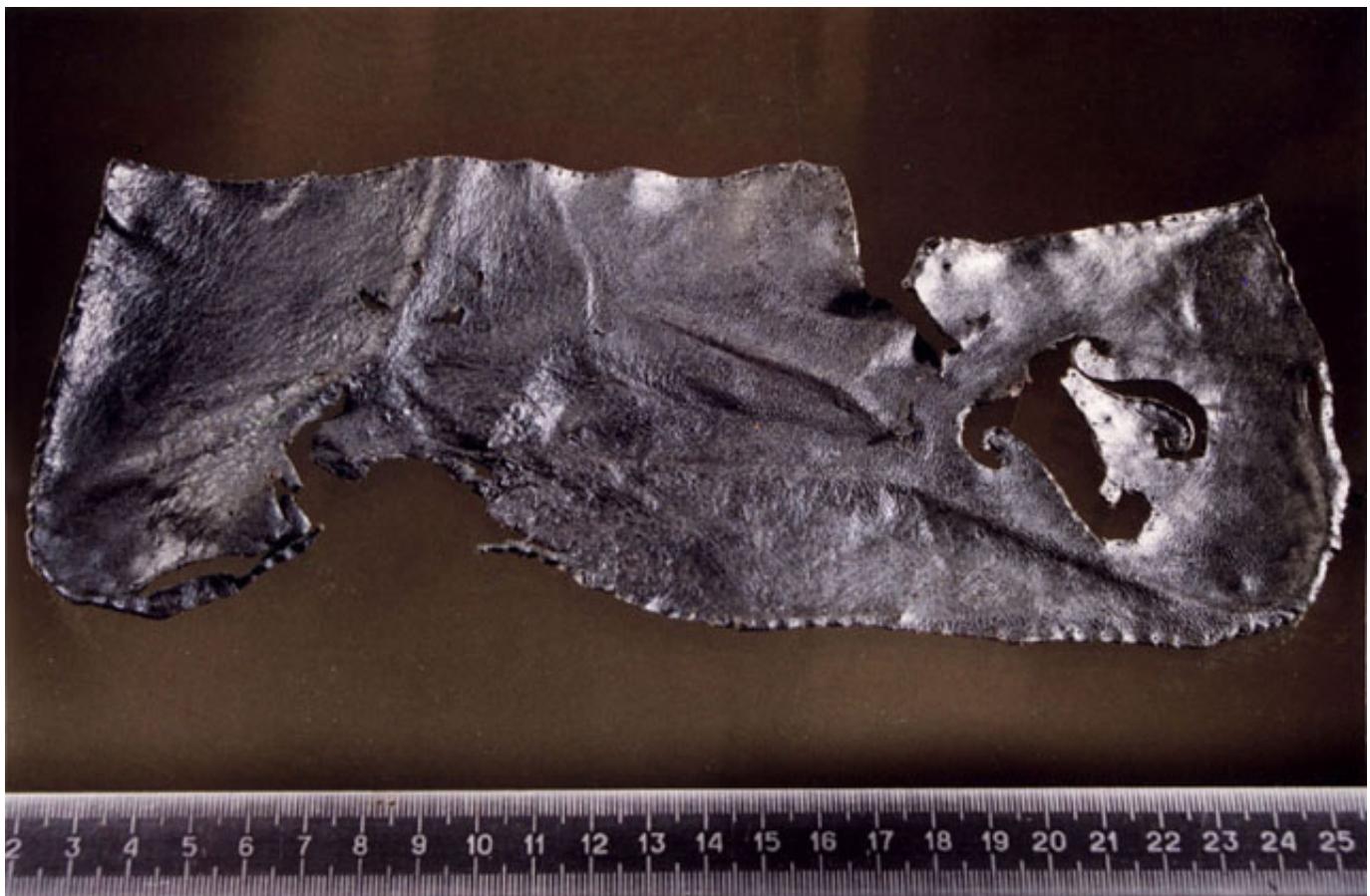


Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

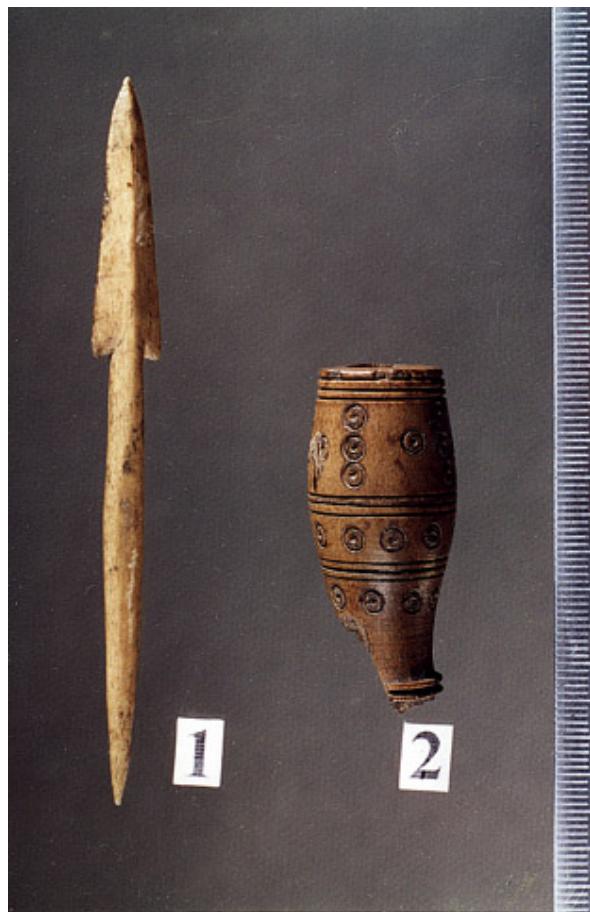


Fig. 18



Fig. 19