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Strongholds and Power Centres East of the Baltic Sea in the 11th–13th Centuries

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Compiled and edited by Heiki Valk

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About the Status of Pskov and Izborsk in the 10th–11th Centuries: a Comparative Analysis

Nikolai Lopatin

The article compares the status of Pskov and Izborsk during the early times of their history, providing a survey of opinions presented by different researchers and setting also an agenda for further investigations. The historically leading role of Pskov is clearly expressed by comparing the size parameters of the two centers in different time periods.

Artikkel käsitleb Pihkva ja Irboska suhete probleemi nende varase ajaloo vältel, andes ülevaate eri uurijate arvamustest ja esitades kava edasiseks uurimistööks. Kahe keskuse erinevate ja eriaegsete suurusparameetrite võrdlemisel väljendub selgesti Pihkva ajalooline juhtpositsioon.

Keywords: Pskov, Izborsk, power centres, 9th–14th centuries

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The presence of two outstanding north-west Rus 10th–11th centuries' fortified centres – Pskov and Izborsk – in the immediate vicinity of each other (in the distance of 30 km) unavoidably raises the question of their status, position and primacy, also as administrative centres of the district.¹ The views of Rus-

¹ The article reflects the research situation of 2011. (Editor's comment)

sian historians since Vassili N. Tatischev until Boris A. Rybakov on this question have been discussed by Valentin Sedov (Седов 2007, 7–9). They all were based on the analysis of the 'Legend of Calling the Varangians' and the following letopis evidence that formed a rather narrow basis of sources for possible solutions. For a long time there prevailed a trusting attitude towards the letopis data that lead to the recognition of historical primacy of Izborsk (as one of the tribal centres of the Krivichi) before Pskov. The achievements of the historians making research into Rus letopis writing (Aleksei Shakhmatov and others), including the critical treatment of the 'Legend', in fact, reduced the potential of written sources for comparing the status of Pskov and Izborsk in the initial period of their history to zero. It was shown that the 'Legend' in itself is a complicated research object that contains disputable and contradictory data.

Essential possibilities for getting complementary information on the topic can be provided by archaeological sources. Just those yielded the necessary material for discussions about the beginning of Pskov: “The long dispute in the question, did Pskov exist before the Princess Olga or was it founded by her, was solved in favour of the first opinion. After excavations in the Pskov Krom² there are no doubts that the settlement located there had a long history by the 10th century already” (Лабутина 1983, 24). But the attempts of ingoing analysis of archaeological data about Pskov and Izborsk in the 9th–11th centuries led to serious differences in the conclusions of researchers (see: Лопатин 2005).

V. Sedov, the initiator and supervisor of the excavations of Izborsk hill fort (Truvor's hill fort) came to the conclusion about the continuous development of the settlement in the 8th–13th centuries, about its proto-urban character in the early period of its existence and of its following transformation into Old Rus stronghold (*gorod*)³ (in the 2nd half of the 10th century) (Седов 2007). Sedov observed similar processes also when studying the materials from

² Krom is the local name of the *kremlin*, fortified centre of Pskov and the location of the prehistoric hill fort, situated on a promontory between Velikaya and Pskova rivers. (Editor's comment)

³ The Russian word *gorod* that means an urban settlement, i.e. town in the present-day language, designates in the context of Old Rus and later Medieval Periods a stronghold with administrative functions in the state system, mostly accompanied by adjacent non-fortified settlement (*possad*). (Editor's comment)

early Pskov that was regarded as a proto-urban settlement in the 8th–9th cc. and transforming into early medieval town (*gorod*) in the 10th century. He claimed that both hill forts – Pskov and Izborsk – were administrative (tribal) centres of the Krivichi (Седов 2003, 14–15). Inga Labutina also supported the idea that gradual development of the settlement in the area of the Pskov kremlin turned it into early urban settlement in the 10th – early 11th century (Лабутина 2003, 25).

Sergei Beletski especially sharply pinpointed the question about the closest vicinity of two large centres, accenting that there exists no other similar case in the whole territory of Old Rus (Белецкий 1996, 22–23), and analysed the early periods of Pskov and Izborsk in the frameworks of a joint historical-archaeological study. As a result, the two objects of research merged (during a considerable time span) into one. Questioning, after Dmitri Machinsky, the identity of Izborsk, mentioned in the 'Legend', and Truvor's hill fort in present-day Izborsk, S. Beletski created an original concept that included the idea of deserting Izborsk hill fort in the late 9th – early 11th century, the localization of the Legend's Izborsk (*Isuborg*) of 862 on the Pskov hill fort, destruction of this early urban formation in the first half of the 11th century (by Yaroslav the Wise) and the departure of a part of its population to present-day Izborsk, with related transfer of the toponym (Белецкий 1996). In the newest version of presenting his concepts, S. Beletski does not name the stronghold/town (*gorod*) on Velikaya River (i.e. Pskov) Izborsk, but reproaches his opponents in "carelessness": "It is evident that after the perishing of the early urban formation [on the site of Pskov – N. L.] in the fire in the first half of the 11th century (before 1044) an Old Rus town (*gorod*), consisting of *detinets* (fort) and *possad* (settlement) emerges on its site. There is no doubt that this town is identical with Old Rus Pskov whose historical fate is reflected in the written sources, first of all, in the letopises. However, the relations of Pskov of the 2nd half of the 11th century and 12th century with the early urban formation of the late 9th – first half of the 11th century continuously remain an object of discussion (Седов 2003; Белецкий 2003; Дискуссия 2003, 262–264). In any case, to regard these two settlements as two stages of evolutionary development of one and the same settlement seems, for me, at least a careless approach" (Белецкий 2009, 48). Here it remains to ask from S. Beletski: how does his own concept correspond to the principle of carefulness?

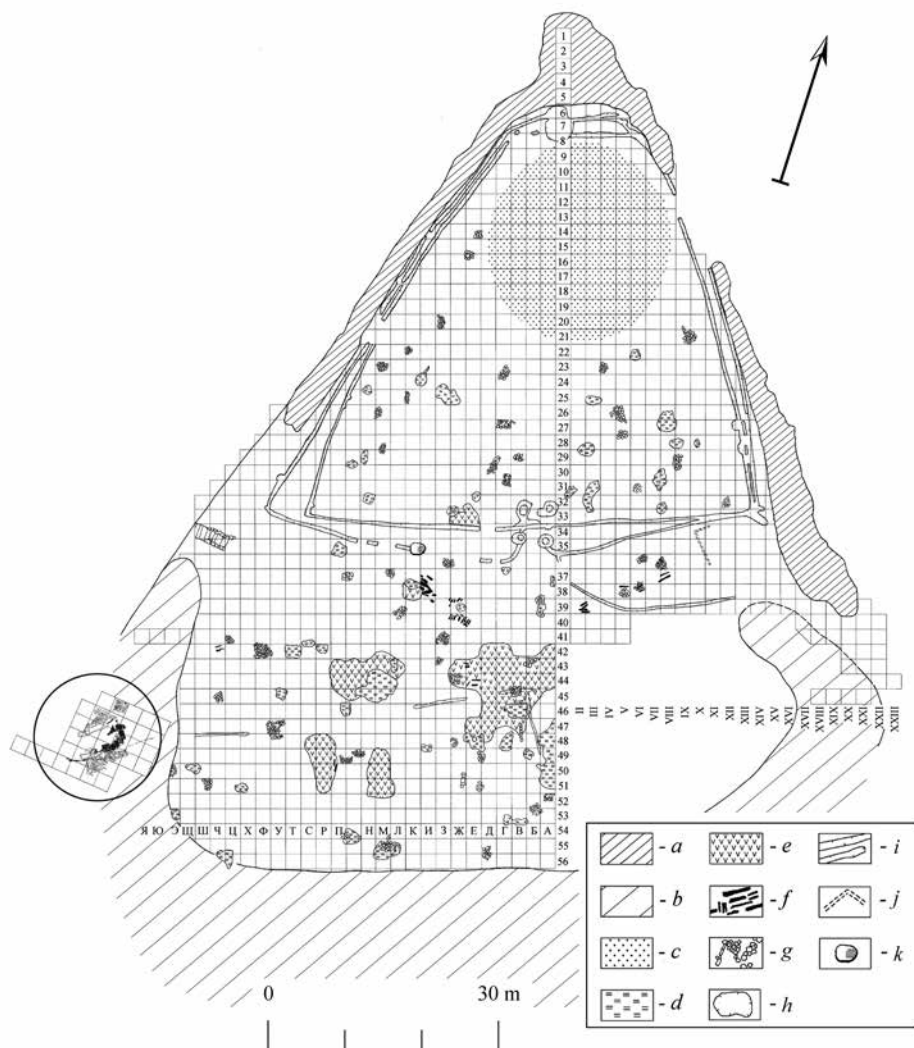
It is necessary to go further with a more detailed historical and archaeological study of both sites in the period under discussion. The comparative study of Pskov and Izborsk has a row of aspects

First, the aspect of written sources: a) formal priority of Izborsk before Pskov, emerging from the earliest letopis data (Legend of Calling the Varangians), b) data about Pskov and the Izborsk region in the 10th–12th cc., c) Izborsk as a frontier outpost of Pskov (sources from the 13th century and later).

Second, the archaeological aspect: a) periodization of both monuments; b) their characteristics in all stages (structure, area, complex of constructions and finds, social-economical and ethnic features), c) synchronization of archaeological periods of these centres, d) comparing these two centres with each other during all chronological units.

We analyse here only some points of this programme drafted here. As the construction of S. Beletski seems not convincing for me, I stop, firstly, on the justification of the “parallel” existence of both fortified centres in the 10th–11th cc. To prove the continuity of Izborsk in the 10th–11th centuries, of great importance are data from the excavations of the rampart in 1987–1992 where a well-preserved stratigraphy in the area of entrance constructions was observed (see more: Лопатин 2005, 60–63). The trench was located in the south-western end of the rampart (Figs 1, 2; after: СеДов 2007, Fig. IX, 212). Fortifications close to the gates, re-constructed at least for five times (some of the construction horizons can be divided into smaller units more exactly), and a part of the road (Figs. 2, 3) were studied. These constructions belonged to the two-part system of the stronghold that emerged approximately in the

Fig. 1. Plan of the third stage of Truvor’s hill fort in Izborsk after V. Sedov (2007, Fig. IX). The circle designates the trench on the rampart in 1987–1992. *a* – remains of 11th–13th cc. stone fortifications (cultural layer under them is not investigated), *b* – rampart, *c* – “the *veche* square”, *d* – remains of clay stoves, *e* – brand layers of burnt buildings, *f* – remains of burnt logs and planks, *g* – remains of stone stoves, *h* – pits, *i* – ditches from fences of vertical logs, *j* – parts of building reconstructed on the bases of limestone foundations, *k* – cult stone.



Jn I.

Irboska Truvori linnuse kolmanda etapi hoonestus V. Sedovi järgi (2007, tahv IX). Ringjoonega on eristatud 1987.–1992. a kaevand vallil. *a* – 11.–13. sajandi kivikindlustuste jäänused (kultuurkiht nende all uurimata), *b* – vall, *c* – “veetševäljak”, *d* – saviahjude jäänused, *e* – põlenud ehitistest pärinevad söekihid, *f* – põlenud palkide ja plankude jäänused, *g* – kerisahjude jäänused, *h* – augud, *i* – püsttarade kraavid, *j* – paevundamentide põhjal rekonstrueeritavad hooneosad, *k* – kultusekivi.

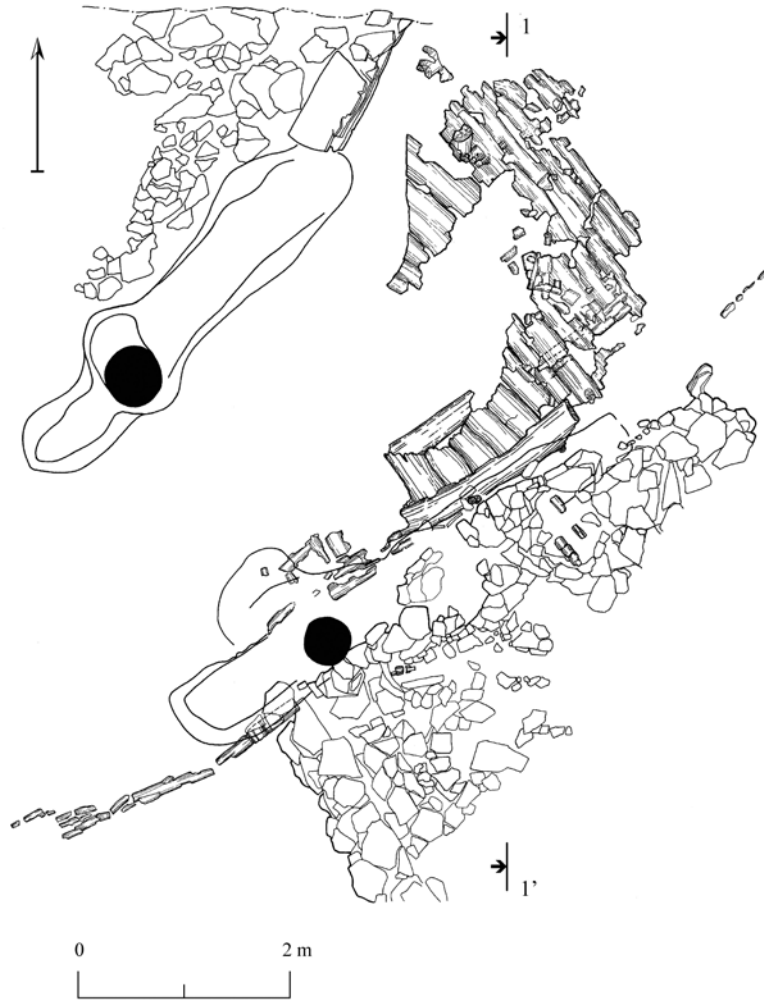


Fig. 2. Izborsk hill fort. Plan of constructions of the horizons II and III of the south-western gateway (location see Fig. 1), the line of profile: 1-1' see Fig. 3.

Jn 2. Irboska linnamägi. Edelvärava (asukoht vt jn 1) II ja III horisoni konstruktsioonide plaan. Profiil joonel 1-1' (vt jn 3).

mid-10th century. Later they were a part of the stone fort, constructed at the border of the 11th and 12th centuries (the dates of the periods are here presented after V. Sedov).



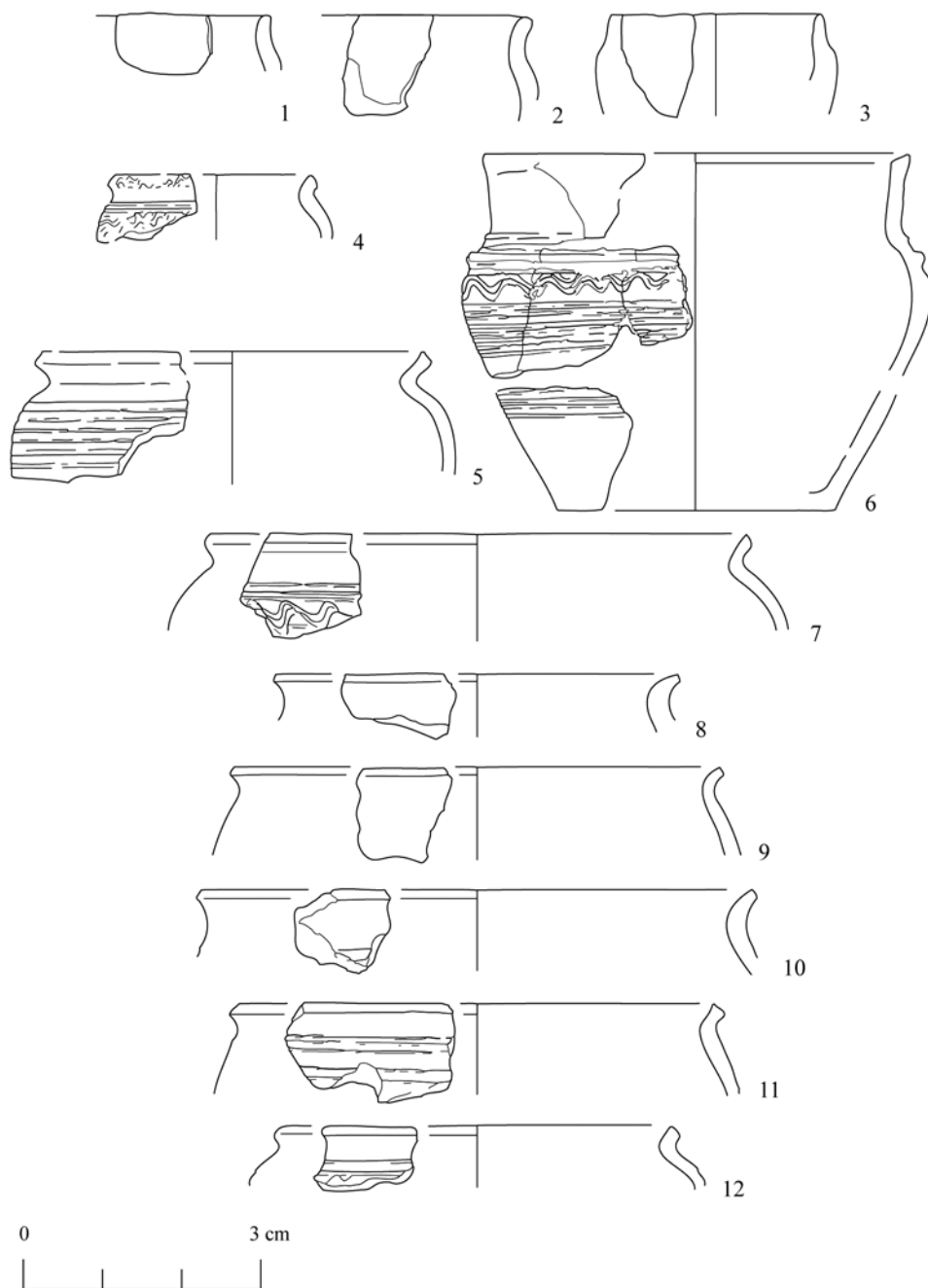
Fig. 3. Izborsk hill fort, south-western gateway. Profile on line 1-1' (see Fig. 2). Roman numbers designate the lowest levels of main construction horizons I–VI.

Jn 3. Irboska linnuse edelavärv. Profiil joonel 1-1' (vt jn 2). Rooma numbritega on tähistatud peamiste hoonestushorizontide I–VI alumised tasandid.

Special attention must be paid to horizons II and III, bound with the first and second period of stone fortifications. Here, close to the entrance, stone constructions belong to earlier time than the stone wall that surrounded the plateau of the hill fort.

The following sequence of events can be observed 1) construction of the wall of the first period, 2) its repairing, 3) construction of the wall of the 2nd period and a wooden pavement, 4) the emergence of wheel-thrown pottery. With period (2) is bound the summed calibrated radiocarbon date, based on a row of 4 samples: 970–1040 AD. The burnt timber pavement from period (3) has the summed calibrated date 1020–1160 AD (based on 4 samples).⁴ The wheel-thrown pottery (Figs. 4: 4–7), including “the richly ornamented group” (after S. Beletski) appears and predominates higher than the level of

⁴ Dating and calibration by Sergei Popov in the Laboratory of the Institute of History of Material Culture at the Russian Academy of Sciences.



- Fig. 4. Izborsk hill fort. Pottery. 1–7 – trench on the rampart, horizon III, 8–12 – trench in the moat (1988), lower horizon. 1–3 – hand-made, 4–7, 11, 12 – wheel thrown, 8–10 – “pre-wheel-thrown and primitive wheel-thrown”.
- Jn 4. Irboska linnamägi. Keraamika. 1–7 – vallikaevand, horisont III, 8–12 – kaevand vallikraavis (1988), alumine horisont. 1–3 – käsitsikeraamika, 4–7, 11, 12 – kedrakeraamika, 8–10 – protokedrakeraamika ja primitiivne kedrakeraamika.

the pavement; in that layer there exists (10%) also hand-made pottery (Fig. 4: 1–3).

The absolute age of the timber pavement can hardly be identified with the time of the emergence of wheel-thrown pottery in Izborsk as a whole. In the archaeological collection from the hill fort some archaic items can be dated to the late 10th – early 11th century (Fig. 4: 4, 11, 12), but also rare fragments of “pre-wheeled and primitive wheeled” (after S. Beletski) pottery (Fig. 4: 7–9) can be distinguished. The appearance of similar types in Pskov should, probably, be moved from the 9th towards the direction of the mid-10th century (Горюнова 2005, 118). It appears that the delay of the pottery chronological scale of Izborsk in comparison to that in Pskov is not so big, and must far not obligatorily indicate to a chronological gap. The attempt of Yuri Lesman to justify the presence of this gap on the basis of artefact chronology (Белецкий & Лесман, 2006) can also not be regarded as successful, as I have had to pay attention to it already (Лопатин 2007, 222–223).

No matter how the date of transition from the absolute predominance of hand-made pottery to wheel-thrown pottery in Izborsk would be corrected – to that period corresponds the construction and renovation (twice) of one and the same stone wall. We can suggest that the gateway existed on the same place also earlier, for in the lower construction horizon there was a trench cut into natural intact mineral ground in the area of the gateway. All presented data contradict to the hypothesis about a chronological gap of the 10th – early 11th century in the archaeological record from Izborsk. Consequently, comparative (parallel) study of the two monuments should be regarded as correct and justified.

A somewhat preliminary imagination about the status and power relations of the two centres is provided by the comparison of the area of their forti-

fied and not fortified parts (Table). Three chronological sections have been studied: the 10th, the 11th and – for checking, the 14th century (in Izborsk the stronghold of 1330 on Zherav’ia hill, in Pskov – the area protected by the town wall of possadnik Boris from 1309). The numbers in the table are somewhat conventional in calculation methodology and synchronization. Data about Izborsk have been gained by measuring corresponding areas according to plans, published in V. Sedov’s book (2007, Figs. II, VII, IX). Data about the distribution of cultural layers of Pskov have been summed up by different researches. Here they are based mainly on the most thorough plans from the article of Sergei Stepanov (2003).

Table. The size of structural parts of Pskov and Izborsk (in square metres).

Tabel. Pihkva ja Irboska struktuuraalsete osade suurus (ruutmeetrites).

Century Sajand	Izborsk / Irboska		Pskov / Pihkva	
	Stronghold Linnus	Open settlement Asula	Stronghold Linnus	Open settlement Asula
10.	8.500	?	20.000	20.000
11.	2.500+6.000	70.000	20.000	125.000
14.	22.000	?	20.000	162.500

V. Sedov has presumed in several publications that in the original phase the outer rampart of Truvors’ hill fort, protecting it from the land side, was located closer to the end of the promontory (Семенов 1987, 14, Fig. 1). The following analysis of materials lead him to the conclusion that fortifications on the land side existed practically on the same line in all periods (Семенов 2007, Fig. VI) whereby it appears that the area protected by the rampart was bigger on the early stages, since the rampart itself occupied less space. The construction of wooden *detinets* did not increase the fortified areas in Izborsk, but complicated its structure. The distinguishing of a special, rather small defensive element within the fortified area evinces about the change in the functions of the object, or, first of all, about adding some new, additional function to it.

Nothing is known about the possad of Izborsk in the 10th century. The cultural layers of the 11th–13th cc. from the outer side of the fortifications of Truvor's hill fort, evidently belonging to the possad, have been fixed by Grigori Grozdilov (1965, 71–72) and later they have been studied by Liubov Grushina (1992). In all, they expand here on the area of over 70 000 m², when excluding other spots of cultural layer distant from the hill fort (Харлашов 2002, Fig. 3; Семенов 2007, Fig. II; Valk 2009, 132, Fig. 9). But these cumulative data were gained on the basis of stray finds from the 11th–13th cc. and for the 11th century this number must be regarded as strongly overestimated. According to the estimation of Aleksandr Artem'ev, the area of the possad, both in the time of Truvor's fort, likewise of the fort on Zheravia hill, is even more impressive – ca. 100 000 m² (Артемьев 1998, 17, 23, Table 1; in the text, there stands, erroneously, ca. 100 hectares). Comparing the data of Late Medieval land census books (*писцовые книги*) with archaeological data, B. Kharlashov came to the conclusion that a considerable part of the medieval cultural layer on the territory of present-day Izborsk is left not from the possad of urban character, but from villages around it. It cannot be excluded that in the 14th century Izborsk had no possad at all and that it reached its largest extent (68 000 m²) only in the 16th century (Харлашов 2002, 43).

Concerning Pskov, the situation is different and, in some way, the opposite. Data about the fortified areas for the 10th and 11th centuries are approximate. Fortifications of the early period on the land side have not been found archaeologically. It is only known that the southern part of the Krom was not included in the original stronghold that was located on the highest part of the area. The cultural layers in the southern part of the Krom and on the territory of Dovmont's Stronghold (*Dovmontov gorod*) were formed since the late 9th century, and in our calculations for the 10th and 11th centuries this zone has been added to the possad. There are no data about any functional division of the fortified part of Pskov of that time. On the other hand, data about the possad are much more exact when compared with Izborsk, as they are based upon the materials of many years' excavations.

What concerns the numeric data, we can observe the supremacy of Pskov, when compared to Izborsk, in all stages and on the basis of all indicators, even if including the above-mentioned (probably, overestimated for the 11th century) area of the possad of Izborsk. It must be noted that according to data

summed up by Andrei Kuza (in fact, cumulatively for the 10th–13th cc.) the hill fort of Izborsk, belongs, judging by its small area, rather to the group of monuments which have transitional position between “real towns” and fortified settlements of other social and economic functions, i.e. with feudal manors or military forts (Куза 1996, 43).

Thus, we can make a conclusion about the parallel functioning of Pskov and Izborsk in the 10th–11th centuries and the original supremacy, considerably increasing in the course of time, of the first-mentioned site over the second one. Definite suggestions about the correlations of socio-economical and other features of both centres, which would give explanation to their vicinity in different time periods, should be made after the fulfilling of the research programme drafted above. Then the date and hidden logics of the *Legend about Calling the Varangians* which promoted Izborsk to the foreground in the early history of Old Rus in a retrospective way should become more evident.

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Pihkva ja Irboska staatusest ning vahekorrast 10.–11. sajandil. Resümee

Nikolai Lopatin

Loode-Venemaa 10.–11. sajandi kahe silmapaistva linnuse – Pihkva ja Irboska – olemasolu üksteise vahetus läheduses tõstatab küsimuse nende omavahelistest suhetest, sealhulgas piirkonna administratiivsete keskustena. Teaduses valitses kaua usalduslik suhtumine leetopisside andmetesse (“Lugu varjaagide kutsumisest”), millest tulenes Irboska (kui ühe krivitšite keskuse) ajaloolise esmasuse tunnustamine Pihkva ees. Hiljem on näidatud, et kaugeltki kõik selle allika teated ei ole usaldusväärsed.

Olulisi võimalusi lisateabe saamiseks selles küsimuses võivad pakkuda arheoloogilised allikad. Samas on nende analüüsi katsed viinud tõsisele lahknevusele eri uurijate järeldustes. Valentin Sedov arvas, et nii Pihkva kui ka Irboska linnus olid krivitšite administratiivsed (hõimu-) keskused, arenesid järk-järgult ja muutusid 10. sajandil aolinnalistest asustusüksustest varakeskaegseteks linnadeks (*город*). Sergei Beletski lõi kontseptsiooni Irboska linnuse 9. sajandi lõpust 11. sajandi alguseni väldanud ajutisest mahajäetusest, leetopissides 862. aastal mainitud Irboska (*Isuborg*) paiknemisest Pihkva linnamäel, selle varalinnalise moodustise hävingust 11. sajandi alguses ja osa

elanikkonna lahkumisest praegusesse Irboskasse, sealjuures koos asustusüksuse nime vastava ülekandumisega.

Möödapääsmatult vajalik on jätkata mõlema muistise ajaloolist ja arheoloogilist uurimist. Irboska ja Pihkva suhete probleemil on mitu aspekti: 1) kirjalike allikate aspekt: a) Irboska formaalne esmasus Pihkva suhtes, mis rajaneb vanimatel leetopissiteadetel; b) 10.–12. sajandi teated Pihkvast ja Irboska piirkonnast; c) Irboska kui Pihkva piirilinnus ja eelkindlustus (13. sajandi ja hilisemad allikad); 2) arheoloogiline aspekt: a) mõlema muistise periodiseerimine; b) nende iseloomustamine igal perioodil (struktuur, pindala, ehitiste ja leidude kompleks, sotsiaalmajanduslikud ja etnilised tunnusjooned); c) perioodide sünkroniseerimine; d) kahe keskuse omavahe-line võrdlus igal ajalõigul.

Irboska katkematu ajaloo tõestamiseks 10.–11. sajandil on väga tähtsad kaevamistulemused 1987.–1992. aasta vallikaevandist, kus väravarajatiste juures fikseeriti hästi säilinud stratigraafia (jn 1, 2). Käsitsikeraamikalt kedrakeraamikale (jn 3) ülemineku perioodile Irboskas vastab kivimüüri⁵ ehitamine ja (kahekordne) uuendamine. See on tõendiks varalinnalise keskuse katkematust arengust Irboskas 10. ja 11. sajandi piiril.

Mõningast ettekujutust kahe keskuse suhetest annab nende kindlustatud ja kindlustamata osa pindalade võrdlus (tabel 1). Võetud on kolm kronoloogilist lõiget, mis esindavad 10., 11. ja 14. sajandit. Arvud näitavad Pihkva ülekaalu Irboska ees kõigi etappide vältel ja kõigi näitajate osas. Seega võib teha järelduse Pihkva ja Irboska paralleelsest funktsioneerimisest 10.–11. sajandil ning esimese algsest, aja jooksul märgatavalt kasvanud ülekaalust. Konkreet- sed järeldused kummagi keskuse sotsiaalmajanduslike ja teiste tunnusjoonte kohta saab esitada pärast ülal esitatud uurimisprogrammi täitmist. See peab tooma enam selgust dateeringusse ja “Varjaagide kutsumise loo” varjatud loogikasse, mis on retrospektiivselt tõstnud Irboska esiplaanile Vene varja- ses ajaloos.

⁵ Silmas on peetud linnuseala piiravat kuivmürtehnikas vooderdusega ja kivi- tükkidest sisetäitega valli. (Toim. märkus)