

THE UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE OF NORTH-WESTERN RUSSIA

The eastern part of the Finnish Gulf (St. Petersburg and Leningrad Regions) and waters in the south-eastern part of the sea (Kaliningrad Region) are the two districts belonging to Russian territorial waters in the Baltic Sea. During the last ten years maritime archaeological activities have been carried out mainly in the first district.

From the point of view of geographical location, north-western Russia has been included in political, economic and cultural processes in the Baltic region since the Viking Age. According to the archaeology and written sources it is possible to distinguish several periods wherein the north-western waterways have been exploited.

The Russian-Viking period started from the middle of the 8th century and continued to the end of the 11th century. Vikings inhabited Staraya Ladoga and local Finnish tribes controlled part of the international waterways (the Finnish Gulf from the mouth of the Narva to the Lower Volkhov).

During the Russian-Hanseatic period (from the 12th century until the end of the 15th century) trade routes came through this area. The active development of the Novgorod's navigation on the Baltic Sea, plus trade with Gotland and the Hanseatic League started from the 12th century. There is a distinct tendency of gradual colonisation of the shores of the inner waterways during the Middle Ages. The forward bases of Russian vessels were transferred from the remote districts of the region closer to the coast as a result of this process. The important prerequisites for the development of Russian navigation on the Baltic Sea were formed here. The north-western territories of Russia were occupied by Sweden in the 17th century.

Following the building of St. Petersburg, this region became the most important centre for the Russian navy and maritime trade. The human influence on the natural environment increased significantly. Tens of thousands of cargo boats sailing from Central Russia to the new capital were shipwrecked in the southern part of the Ladoga Lake during the first 15 years following the foundation of St. Petersburg. For this reason the Ladoga Canals were built around the shoreline. The naval fortress and systems of military defenses were built on Kotlin island (Kronstadt) and at Vyborg Bay.

The Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences started a programme

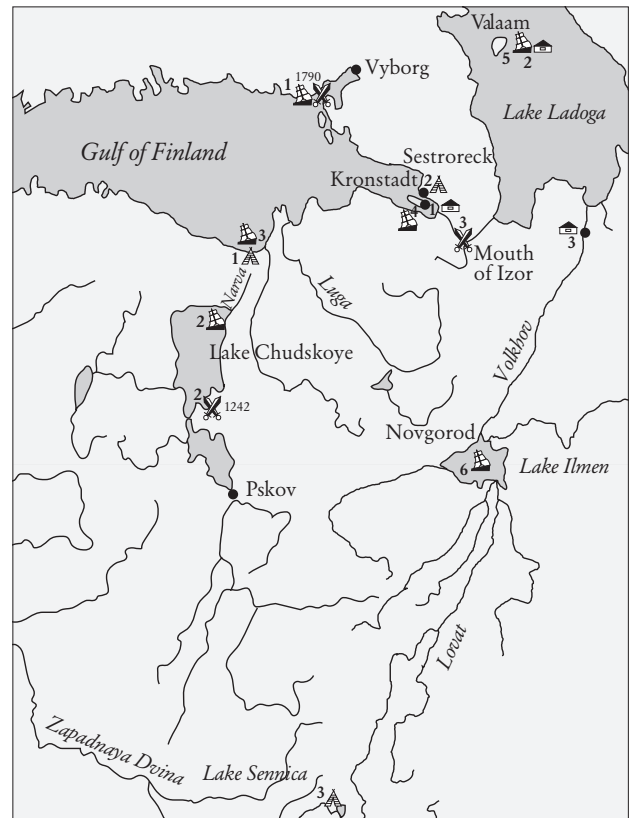


Fig. 1. The investigated marine archaeological sites in north-western Russia: 1. Neolithic sites, 2. Shipwrecks, 3. Old harbours, moorings and other historical sites, 4. Battle sites.

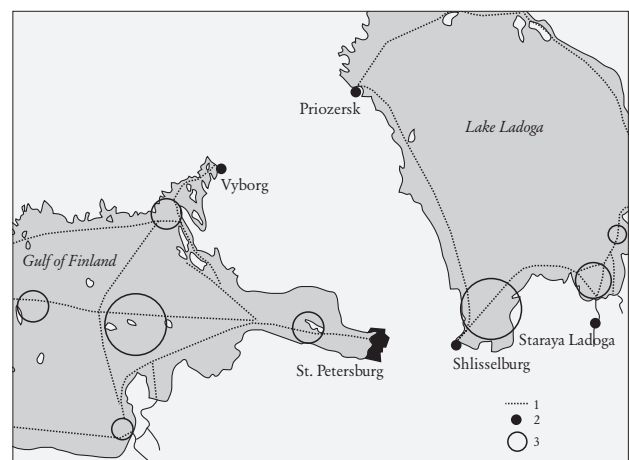


Fig. 2. Ships' cemeteries in north-western Russia. 2.1. Historical waterways. 2.2. Historical centres. 2.3. Ship cemetery sites.

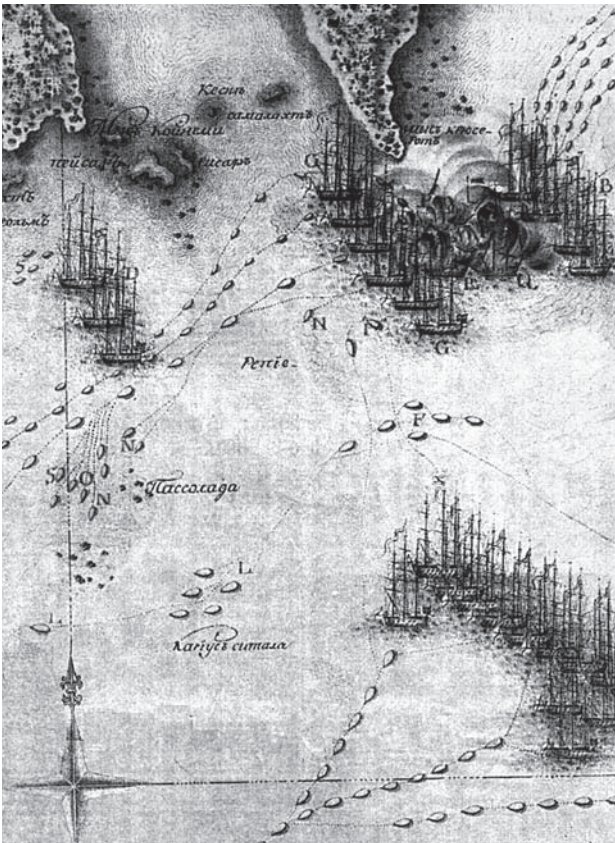


Fig. 3. Russian map of the Vyborg Bay Battle 1790.

of underwater archaeological investigations in the 1980s. Vyborg Bay, Narva Bay, water around Kronstadt, the islands of the central part of the Finnish Gulf and also some places in the Ladoga Lake and Thudskoe Lake were the areas under investigation (Fig. 1-3).

The “Legislation for objects of Cultural Heritage of the Peoples of the Russian Federation”, which includes a point about submerged objects of cultural heritage, was established for the first time in 2002. Potential historical monuments must be at least 40 years old.

How does this law function in reality? Unfortunately there are no special mechanisms for the protection of submerged historical objects. The majority of them are unknown, which can lead to their destruction. The Russian Navy and Coastguard maintain a strong monopoly on visits to the Russian part of Finnish Gulf for any divers, as well as for archaeological investigation. But there is not any system of cooperation between them and the Board of Antiquities for the protection of sites and monuments.

Because of this there are groups of black-market archaeologists looking for treasures on the seabed. Some museums use these finds for their exhibitions. The list of archaeological monuments – six shipwrecks and five submerged Neolithic sites – was the result of a scientific inventory of underwater archaeological objects carried out by the Institute of the History of Material Culture, Russian Academy of Sciences. This includes three Swedish shipwrecks at the site of the

Vyborg Bay Battle from 1790, two Russian Cargo ships 18/19th centuries and the battleship “Gangut” sunk in 1897 (Fig.4-6). Neolithic sites, dated 3000-1000 BC, are located in the Sestrorecko Lake. They were submerged at the beginning of the 18th century after the building of a dyke on the Syster River.

A bad example in this field is the exhibition of maritime archaeology by the Naval Association “Pamiat’ Baltici”, opened in Vyborg’s historical museum. It has artefacts lifted from different historical sites with neither scientific documentation nor suitable conservation. The protection of the Navy and Vyborg’s museum allows this association to destroy historical objects (Fig.7).

In the last few years the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Science has included a search for and the preliminary documentation of several submerged and coastal objects: shipwrecks, moorings, old harbours. Four volumes entitled “The Study of Monuments of Maritime Archaeology”, were published by the Institute of the History of Material Culture.

In 1990 research into the Vyborg Sea Battle of 1790, between the Russian and Swedish fleets was started by the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Science (head V. Tulenev). The naval battles of the 18th and 19th centuries that took place in the eastern part of the Baltic were of a significant scale and entered European naval battle history. Still, the majority of them left no traces behind. One of the exceptions from this rule is the Vyborg Battle of 1790, which judging from the number of ships that participated in it, is considered to be one of the biggest in the whole history of the Baltic. Considering this battle in its historical context it is possible to say that it became the turning point in the Russian-Swedish war of 1788-1790. This war concluded a hundred-year fight between Russia and Sweden for domination of the Baltic. As a result of naval battles at Vyborg and Rochensalm several ships remained at the bottom of the north-eastern part of the Finnish Gulf. At present they represent important historic and cultural heritage and are in need of research and preservation.

Archive materials provide evidence to show that several Swedish ships, amongst which: ships of the line “Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta”, “the Eighteen” and “the Lovisa Ulrika”, frigates “the Upland” and “the Zemira”, and also several small ships were sunk in Vyborg’s bay.

The study of the site of the Vyborg Battle of 1790 has been going on for 12 years. As a result of these works significant amounts of material have been accumulated and collections of archaeological finds have been gathered.

The Russian-Swedish and Russian-Italian (with “Marenostrom” participation) archaeological expeditions into Vyborg’s Bay made surveys of several shipwrecks in 1994-98. The site of the Vyborg Battle, with a concentration of sunk ships near Krestovy Cape is an

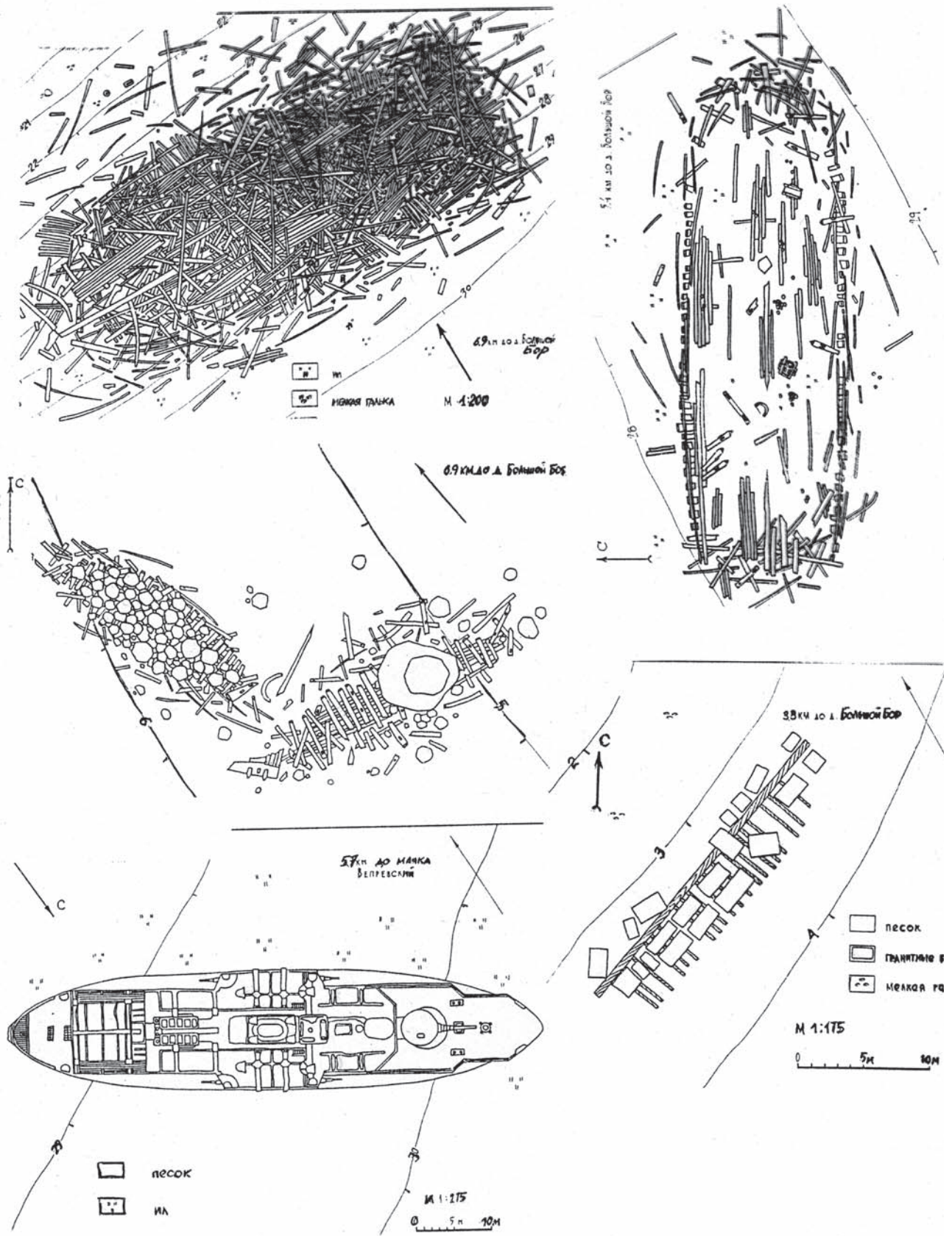


Fig. 4. Shipwrecks – archaeological monuments.

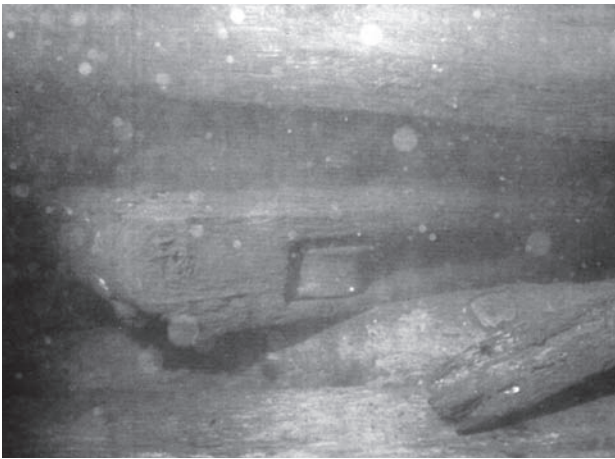


Fig. 5. Remains of the shipwreck "Hedviga Elisabeth Charlotta" 1790.

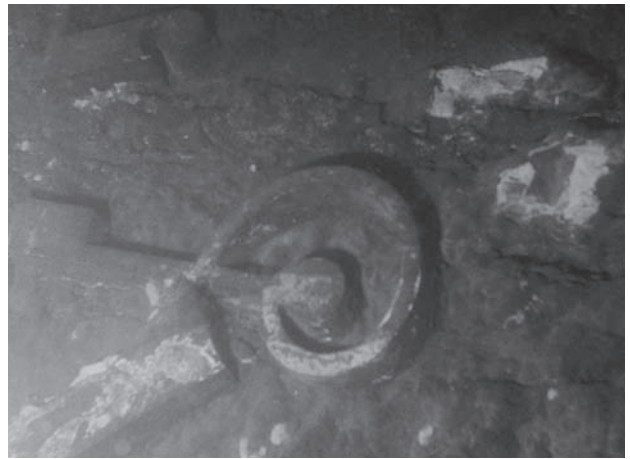


Fig. 6. Parts of the name of the battle ship "Gangut".



Fig. 7. The cannon carriage from the shipwreck "Lovisa Ulrika". Vyborg Museum.



Fig. 8. Artefacts from the shipwreck "Hedviga Elisabeth Charlotta".

interesting and important area of underwater archaeological heritage in the Baltic region (Fig. 8). It is one of the most likely sites for the establishment of a future underwater archaeology park.

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