

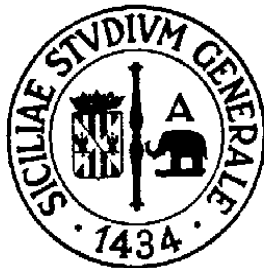
SOMA 2011

Proceedings of the 15th Symposium on
Mediterranean Archaeology, held at the
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VOLUME II

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Mediterranean Ships in the Russian Medieval Written and Graphic Tradition

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The investigations of the problems of the origin and development of medieval Russian shipbuilding were started in Russia in the 19th century.¹ Considering the geographical position of medieval Russia and its inclusiveness in the historical processes of the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea regions, researchers assumed influence on the development of Russian shipbuilding from Byzantium and Vikings. However, any such influence reflected in archaeological materials has not been well enough known until recently. Most of the evidence comes from north-western Russia, which had included contacts with Finns and Scandinavians. Consideration of this problem was based on the interpreting written sources and on the etymological analysis of ship terminology within Russian documents.²

Study of the Russian chronicles of the 12th-15th centuries allows us to determine the meaning of the different terms and their sense in the Middle Ages. To the general, basic names, which meant ships in general, or a certain class of ship belonged: 'lod'ia', 'sudno', 'korabl'. The terms 'lod'ia' and 'sudno' were of Slavic origin and usually meant all kinds of ships, but sometimes they were opposed to large ships. The appearance of the term 'korabl' among the Slavs was probably connected with the time of increasing contact with Byzantium on the Balkan Peninsula in the 6th-8th centuries.³ The basic parts of definite names has a Slavic or Russian origin.

A separate group can be specified for Baltic and Mediterranean regions. For the Mediterranean region it is the Byzantium word: 'Dromon', 'Ol'yad', 'Kubara', and also the ship of crusaders 'Galeyia' and Turks 'Katorga'. 'Olyad' and 'L'jad' refer to warships of the Byzantium fleet in campaigns to Constantinople of the Russian princes/knyazs: Igor in 941 and Vladimir Jaroslavich in 1041.

'Kubara' is mentioned twice: in 945 in the Byzantium-Russian treaty, in the article concerning wrecks. In 989 it is mentioned as the vessel that delivered the Byzantium Princess Anna to Russia to wed the knyaz' Vladimir.

'Galeyia' is also referred to as a crusader ship during storm at Constantinople in 1204.

'Katorga' is noted as one of the types of Turkish ship during the blockade of Kafa (Crimea peninsula) in 1475.

All these terms were used only for the designation of foreign ships. They never refer to Russian ships used for cruising the

Black Sea. They were called in the Russian annals by general names – 'korabl' and 'lod'ia'. The exception represents the term 'skedii', designating in 941 the Russian vessels of Igor on his campaign to Constantinople. This term recalls the name of the type of large Viking ship – the 'skeid'.

Nowadays four main categories of graphic sources for medieval Russian boatbuilding can be distinguished. Each category has its specific features and therefore needs special methods for its investigation.⁴ The graffiti on coins, birch-bark and bones are only few in number. They are very schematic and are dated from the second half of the 8th to the 11th centuries. The illustrative representations of crafts on icons, frescoes and book miniatures form the most representative category of graphic sources. Their appearance and development are closely connected with the general regularities of the development of medieval Russian culture.

The earliest representations of ships on frescoes are dated to the middle of the 11th century; the miniature representations from the books of the 14th–15th centuries also originated probably in the 11th–13th centuries. In such works of art pictures of ships are generally widespread. Other representations of vessels are connected with iconography, where they firstly appeared in 14th century and featured chiefly in illustrations of the life of St. Nicholas, and the Russian prince-saints Boris and Gleb.

According to various criteria the graffiti of vessels can be divided into three groups. The representations of all three groups existed throughout the Middle Ages. The gradual tendency of an increasing reliability of graphic sources is also traced from that period, especially in the 16th century. The investigation of representations of ships in masterpieces of medieval Russian art shows that they contain definite likenesses in terms of external appearance and construction of medieval ships. To obtain such information a special historical and artistic analysis of these representations must be made; following such analysis the elements from different times and cultures can be identified.

The first group is formed by schematic forms and symbols; they convey no information about the construction of the vessel. The second group features representations of rowing or sailing boats of medium size, with one mast and right-angled sails, and one steering oar; they are remarkable for the realistic manner of their execution and for the thorough examination of detail. This group contains representations on miniatures and also Novgorod and Pskov icons. This group reflects contemporary life and the likenesses are almost identical.

The third group relates to representations of ships that, according to some construction peculiarities, can be connected with the shipbuilding traditions neighboring countries and regions. Mediterranean, Byzantine, and Black Sea vessels are depicted

¹ Zagoskin, N.P. 1910. *Russkie wodnie puti i sudovoe delo v dopetrovskoi Rusi*. Kazan'.

² Sorokin, P.E. 1997. *Wodnie puti i sudostroenie na severo-zapade Rusi w srednevekovie*. Sanct-Petersburg. p. 7-10, 104-105.

³ Sorokin, P.E. 1997. p. 46-63, 109-110; Sorokin, P.E. 2000. 'The medieval boat-building tradition of Russia: Down the River to the Sea.' 8th International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archaeology. Gdansk. p. 43-44.

⁴ Sorokin P.E. 1997, p. 63-80, 110-111, Sorokin P.E. 2000, p. 43-44

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with distinctive riggings and triangular sails, raked masts, and twin rudders. The appearance of these representations on masterpieces of medieval Russian art are credited as the work of foreign artists; originally, until the 15th century, it was mostly achieved under Byzantine influence.

The earliest known images of ships on graffiti were found during archaeological excavations.⁵ In Viking times layers of 'Staraya Ladoga', schematic graffiti of vessels with a triangular sail, engraved on bone, was dated to the mid-8th century (fig. 1). This latter drawing, found together with a set of tools and numerous ship rivets, is of special interest. Other more detailed graffiti of a boat with a triangular sail, engraved on a brick from the Volotovo church near Novgorod was dated to the mid-14th century (fig. 2). The type of sail cannot be regarded as lateen, but it resembles rather the triangular sails represented on Byzantine miniatures as being symmetrical to the mast. The graffiti with a triangular sail is, however, too schematic and rare to allow any conclusions to be drawn on the general rigging of ships from the region under consideration.

Traditionally, triangular or lateen sails are connected with the Mediterranean. The type similar to our image existed in the Middle Ages extended across the Byzantine graphic tradition. In many representations the sail does not look not exactly like a lateen sail, because of its symmetrical position towards the mast (fig. 3.1). From around AD 800 lateen sails are known even on large Byzantine ships, and gradually becoming the standard rigging for most Mediterranean vessels. It is possible to connect an origin for this type of sail with the ship-building tradition that existed in the northern part of the Indian Ocean, from where it could have been adopted by the Romans⁶. Arabian ships also used the same triangular sails. On the north European seas the triangular lateen sails appeared late, originally in the west part (England and France), where, throughout the Middle Ages, the greatest influence of the Mediterranean ship-building tradition is seen in the imagery of this time. The best-known drawings of ships with triangular sails are on the ships of William the Conqueror, as stitched on the Bayeux Tapestry, during his campaign to England in 1066 (fig. 3.2-3.6).

However, the images of classical lateen sails are not represented, and attempts are made to show the use of rectangular sails in triangular fashion, by twisting the lower section to give the advantages and security of the traditional lateen in difficult conditions. Other versions of similar interpretations of this imagery exist. All of are connected with early cultural contacts of the populations of northern and southern Europe. Graffiti from 'Old Ladoga' is the earliest image of a Byzantine-style triangular sail known in the Baltic Region. How could it have reached here? Possibly there were contacts between the Ladoga region and Byzantium, or eastern Arabia, in the middle of 8th century. It is not impossible that an actual Arabian vessel could have made it up to the Volga from the Caspian Sea, despite the many hazards and vagaries of the winds and weather.

Another prototype for the Ladoga graffiti could have originated from the Mediterranean. According to the Byzantium chronicles, Slavic tribes from the Danube region and the Balkans were already known in 6th and 8th centuries and took an active part in military campaigns in the wider region, including the Adriatic

⁵ Sorokin, P.E. 1997, p. 63-67, 171.

⁶ Bridley, H. 1926. 'Early pictures of Lateen Sails', *Marina Mirror* XII, p.47-50; Unger, W. 1980. *The Ship in the Medieval Economy 600-1600*. London, p. 35.

and Aegean seas, where they met with local ships, perhaps even sailing in them. The movement of Slavs northwards occurred in the 7th and 8th centuries. For now the question of the prototype of this unique vessel in early medieval northern Europe has to remain unanswered.

The images of vessels on frescos appeared later. The wall paintings from the Georgievsky cathedral in the Yurevskiy monastery date to the beginning of the 12th century; in Novgorod, the images from the Spaso-Preobrazhensky cathedral in the Mirozhsky monastery (fig. 5.1-5.2) are from the middle of the 12th century; and those from the church of the Virgin in the Snetogorsky monastery (Pskov) are dated to the beginning of the 14th century.

Russian miniature illustrations of vessels appeared later. The earliest of are fixed to the period of Saints Boris and Gleb in the 14th century; in the Radzivilovsky annals from the end of the 14th century there are the images from the Illuminated Chronicle Compilation) (fig. 5.3-5.4), and from the Life of St. Nikolay from the 16th century.

Vessels appeared on icons relatively late, and always within the received styles of Byzantine painting. The earliest are known from an icon of St. Nikolay painted at the end of the 14th or beginning of 15th centuries (fig. 5.5-5.6). The overwhelming majority of iconographical images of vessels are represented hagiographic icons linked to Saints Nikolay, Boris and Gleb.

We do not find representations of Mediterranean ships in Russian territory among the medieval archeological finds, nor are there signs of them in traditional shipbuilding of the 16th to 19th centuries. Images of vessels with features from other regions—Byzantium, the Balkan countries, western Europe – originated from artistic cultural influences, and not from a direct shipbuilding tradition.

Studying images of vessels from medieval Russian art shows that they represent a topic requiring special research in a wide sphere of art-historical and cultural disciplines. Likely results from data comparisons will contribute to a variety of fields: nautical, archaeological and ethnographic. Special attention needs to be paid on the images of Russian vessels in the engravings of 16th- and 17th-century foreign travellers (fig. 6).

The Russian medieval illustrative representations of ships on icons, frescoes and book miniatures belong to a long span of time from the middle of the 8th into the 16th centuries. Their appearance and development are closely connected with the general regularities of the development of medieval Russian culture. We do not find archaeological remains relevant to the Mediterranean shipbuilding tradition within the territories of medieval Russia from the 16th to 19th centuries. The appearance of representations of Mediterranean ships on masterpieces of medieval Russian art are the results of foreign artists.

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FIG. 1. GRAFFITI OF BOAT WITH TRIANGULAR SAIL. STARAYA LADOGA, MID-8TH CENTURY

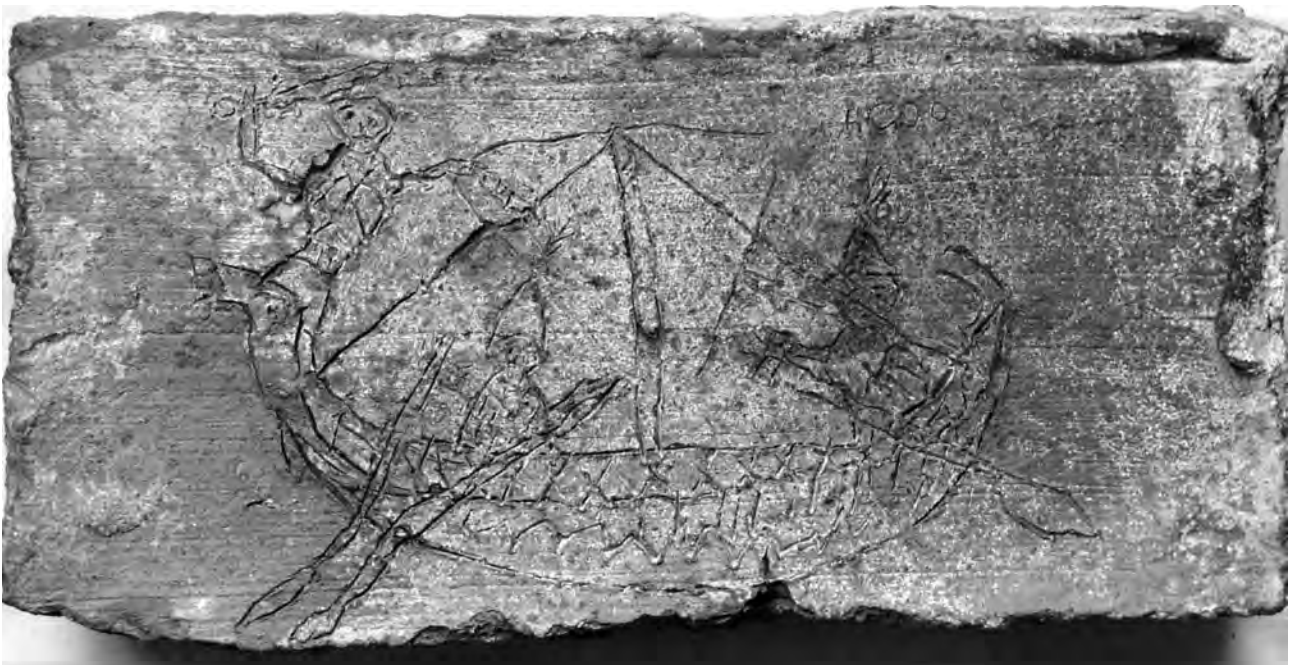


FIG. 2. GRAFFITI OF BOAT WITH TRIANGULAR SAIL. NOVGOROD, MID-14TH CENTURY

SOMA 2011

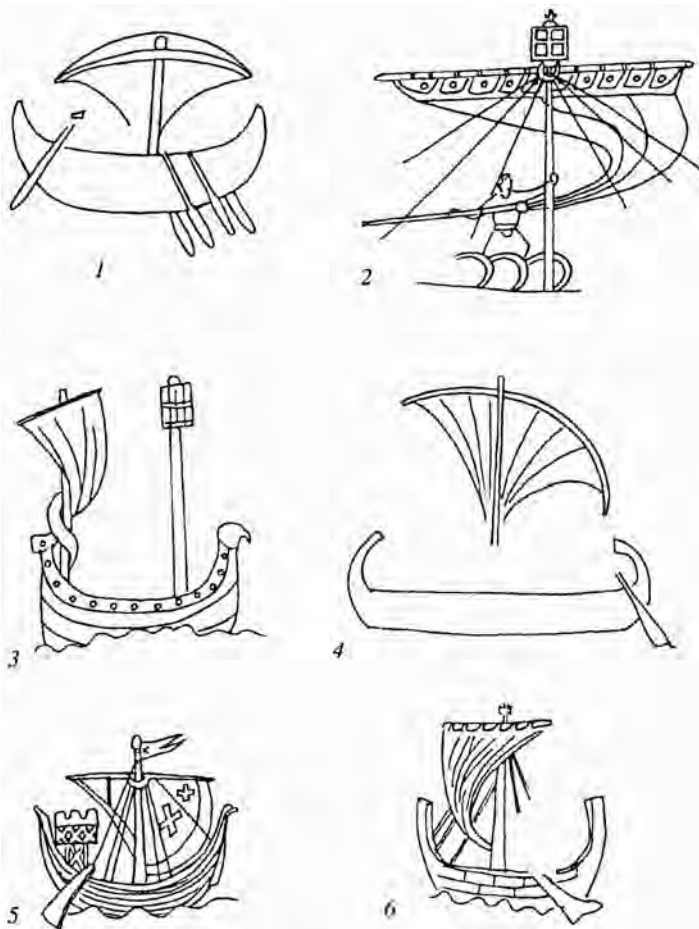


FIG. 3. REPRESENTATIONS OF BYZANTINE AND NORTH EUROPEAN VESSELS: (1) BYZANTIUM, 10TH CENTURY; (2) BAYEUX TAPESTRY, 11TH CENTURY; (3-4) NORTH-WESTERN EUROPE, 12TH-13TH CENTURIES; (5-6) ENGLAND, SOUTHAMPTON AND BRISTOL, C. 13TH CENTURY



FIG. 4. IOÁNNES SKYLÍTSSES. 'GREEK FIRE' USED BY THE BYZANTINE FLEET AGAINST RUSSIAN FORCES, AD 941

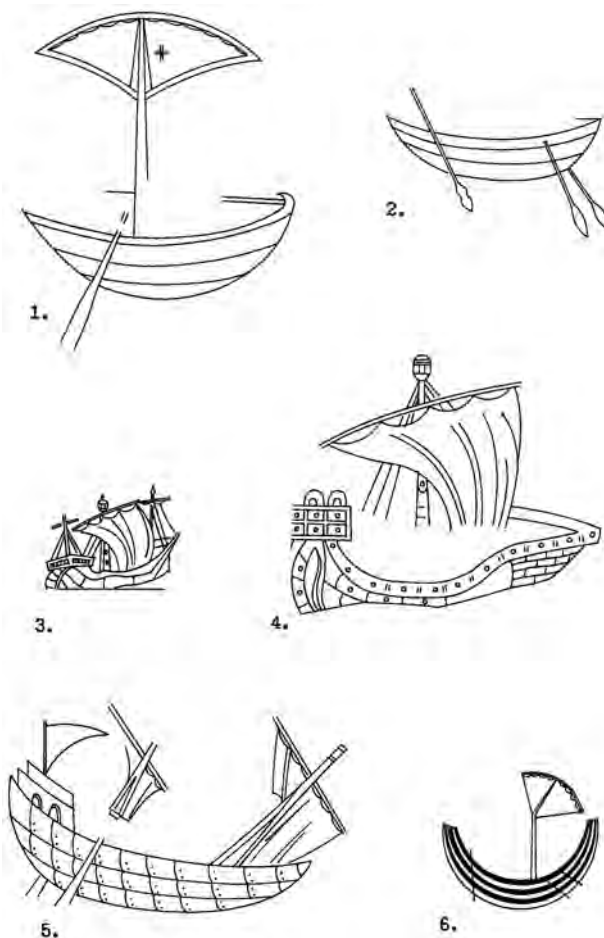
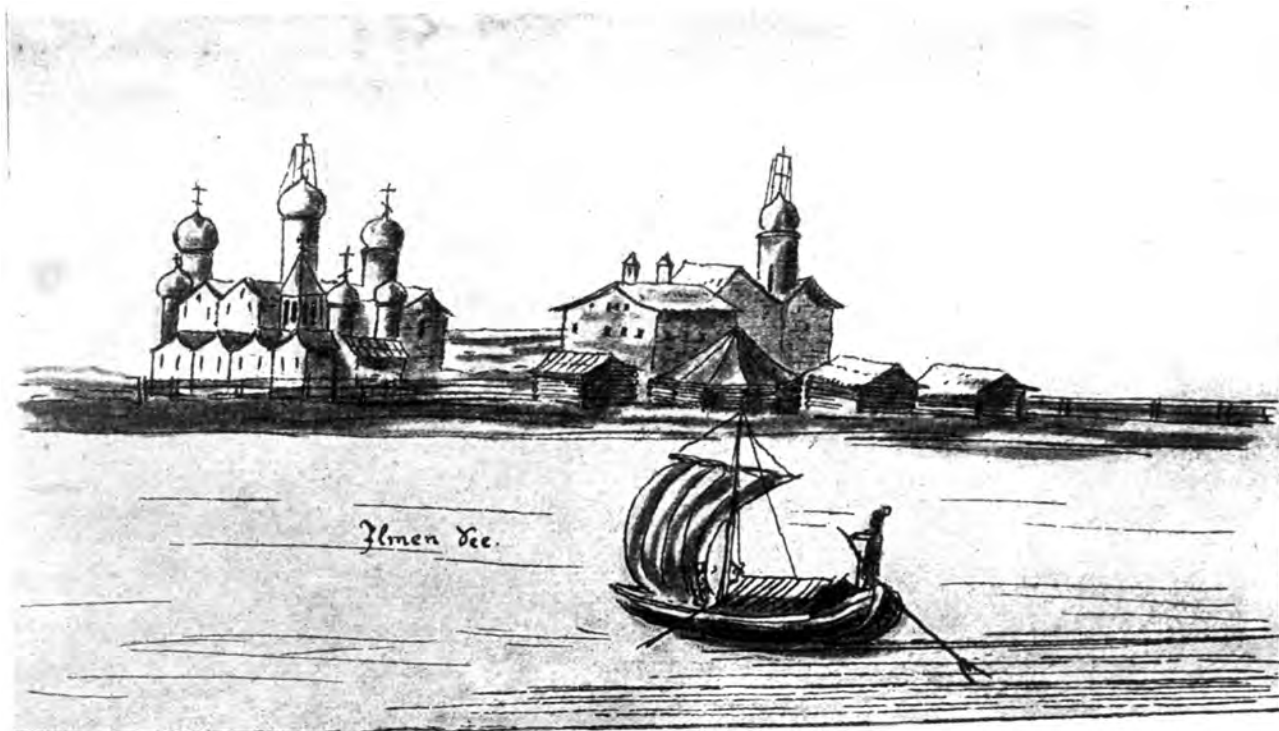


FIG. 5. MEDIEVAL RUSSIAN REPRESENTATIONS OF VESSELS WITH MEDITERRANEAN FEATURES: (1-2) FRESCOES FROM THE MIROJSKY MONASTERY (PSKOV), MID-12TH CENTURY; (3-4) MINIATURES FROM LITCEVOI LETOPISNY SVOD, MID-16TH CENTURY; (5-6) REPRESENTATIONS ON NOVGOROD ICONS (ST. NICOLAY), 16TH AND 14TH CENTURIES



Die Heilige Trinität ein Kloster in Rußland darinnen dreyßig mün.,
das ist ein Kloster von dem man zwey meilen von Großnaugarten.

FIG. 6. TRADITIONAL BOATS IN NORTHERN RUSSIA IN THE 17 CENTURY