

Viking Women in Russia

Scandinavian female graves found in Eastern Europe and Western Russia.
Graves from Pskov, Gnezdovo, Ladoga and Kiev during the "Viking" era.

Taught By:

Baroness Rannvaeig orraärmr Eskilskona
MKA Raven Haraldson
Marche of Three Towers, Barony of Brenoken, Middle Kingdom

Contact:

rannvaeig.eskilskona@gmail.com

If you have any questions please feel free to PM me.

Handout can not be reprinted/used without expressed written permission.

Copyrighted and Trademarked

Viking Women in Russia

We know from extensive grave finds that women from Scandinavian made it to the shores of modern day Western Russia, deep down into the Slavic areas of modern Ukraine and the along the roads leading all the way to the Byzantine Empire. These women who made these long treks were among thousands of Scandinavians who expanded out from their traditional homelands of modern day Sweden, Finland, Gotland, Norway and Denmark. These women brought with them their clothing, jewelry and crafting skills to help create pockets of Norse civilization in place like Staraja Ladoga, Gnezdovo, Pskov, Novgorod, Kiev and many more locations along rivers and trade routes.

As seen below in this graph there is evidence especially from mainland Sweden that women were living and eventually buried in Russia and Eastern Europe. Where the clothing and jewelry of these Norse women different than that of the Norse that stayed behind? Did they have access to different materials? What can we learn from the grave finds that might enhance or change our recreations of eastern Norse clothing? (Image taken from Page 192 "From Viking to Crusader" 1992)

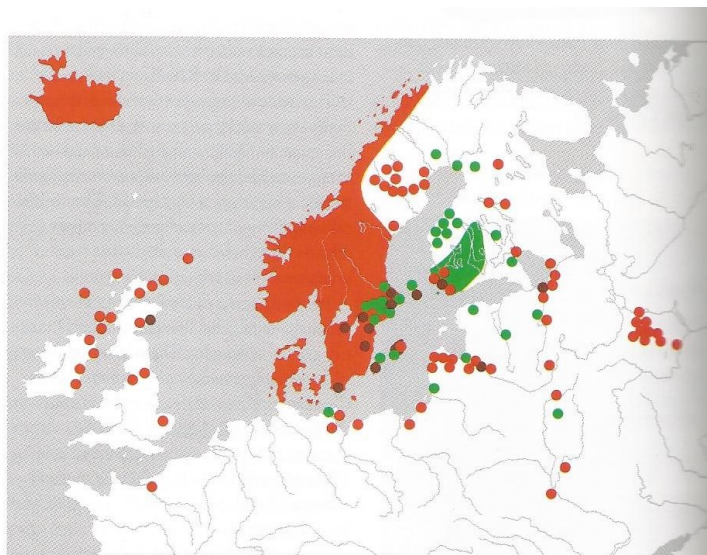
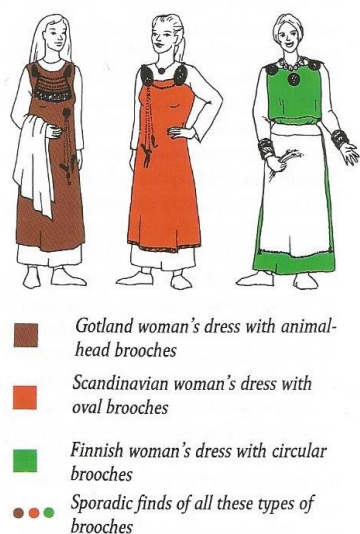
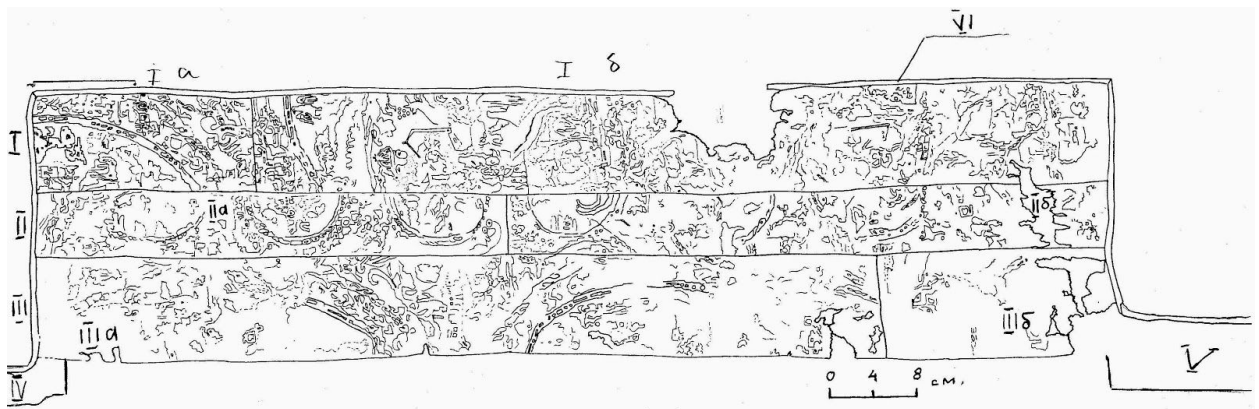


Fig. 1. 10th-cent. Scandinavian female clothing and its geographical distribution, based on finds of shoulder brooches.

The most glaringly different thing found in the graves of eastern Scandinavian or what later became the Rus women is the amount of silk and metal thread that has survived to be found in birch boxes on the floors of their graves and of course on their person in the form of fragments found on the jewelry they were wearing.



<http://usadba-psk.narod.ru/hangerok.html>

These two images are from the 2006 Pskov, Russia dig that found a pair of Scandinavian brooches wrapped up in this 1.02m long silk tapestry that was the top of a very unique apron style dress.



<http://www.amr-museum.ru/>

The jewelry found in another grave in Pskov was displayed in a local museum as “The Varangian Guest”
Varangians were the mostly eastern Swedish volunteers who would travel to Constantinople to work for 7 years in the Emperor's Imperial Guard. Below is the display of her jewelry.



http://www.amr-museum.ru/russ/exhibit/news2005/news616_r.htm

In Gniozdovo chamber graves of Scandinavian origin have been found with similar items.

INFORMATION FOUND IN Fornvännen 83

http://samla.raa.se/xmlui/bitstream/handle/raa/2614/1988_020.pdf?sequence=1

PIT MOUND C-301 AND C-306 IN GNEZDOVO RUSSIA

(PAGE 26)

The analysis of the burial equipment give reason to suppose that in the first two cases women were buried in a sitting position. As in most cases of this type of burial the vessels were placed to the right of the deceased, and the burial was probably oriented towards the west. The ethnic identity can fairly easily be defined by the set of brooches and details of the dress — a skirt with hinges, a goffered linen shirt and a dress of the tunica type. This costume is characteristic for Scandinavia from the IX to the beginning of the XI centuries (Hägg 1981).

Found on Page 22 - Pit in mound C—301

On the floor there were well preserved piéces of birch bark, especially in the northern part. Almost in the middle there were spread in disorder 50 beads of golden and silver-glass, yellow and ribbed glass

beads, a cross-shaped pendant with punched ornamentation (Fig. 4 : 1, 2), and a fragment of an equal-armed bronze brooch. To the south-west of these, by the wall of the framework, were iron hoops and a handle of wooden bucket shaped like a truncated cone, lying on its side, and a small thrown clay vessel with line ornamentations (Fig. 4 : 3). In the south-east corner there were remnants of a round birch bark box with a bundle of different textiles, in which lay small fragments of an oval bronze brooch (Fig. 4 : 4),

Found on page 28

The necklace from mound C-301 consisted of golden and silver glass beads, yellow beads and large ribbed beads, a combination which is characteristic for the second half of the X century.

The silver pendant crosses from our mounds add to the material recently described in an article by N. G. Nedosivina. The one from mound C-301 is cut out of a thin silver disc, the other, from mound Dn-4, is east. Both crosses are decorated with punched ornaments, but it looks unfinished on the pendant from the male burial. N. G. Nedosivina dates analogous finds mainly to the second half of the X century, partly to the beginning of the XI century. (Nedosivina 1983 pp. 222-225)

Found on Page 23

Pit in mound C-306

One more detail of the construction of the chamber must be mentioned, which is fairly well seen: 0.9 m from and parallel with the western wall there was a plank set on its edge, as if separating the remains of the burial from the rest of the construction. In the western part of the chamber, on the floor, were found fragments of two double shelled brooches of gilt bronze of type J P 51 b (?). Under them were preserved small fragments of silk and pieces of the shoulder-straps of the skirt (Fig. 4:9).

Found on page 28

Both oval brooches in mound C-306 belong to the type J P 51b, which is datable to the second quarter-middle of the X century. (Petersen 1928 pp. 59—67).

Found on Page 28 Fornvännan

Believed to still be discussing Grave C-306

The remains of the birch-bark boxes consisted of two discs 27 cm in diameter. Along the rim were small holes. This shows that the walls of the box — probably of cloth — were sewn to it. In the bundle of cloth found between the birch bark discs, were the remains of a red goldworked silk garment, embroidered with tapes of smooth and denser silk and of a goffered linen shirt. An oval bronze brooch was wrapped in the garment. Aside from this, fragments of brown, coarse, woolen cloth and a piece sewn of two ribbons of untinged blue linen — a fragment of a skirt, and some fragments of silk ribbons of different width were found. The fragments of silk are of Spanish and Byzantine origin. (We would like to thank M. V. Fehner for identifying the textiles and valuable consultations.)

From Page 30

From Sestovitsa (city) comes also a find of a birchbark box with sides and with a bundle of women's clothes, evidently laid as a "gift" in the couple's burial (BlifeFdt 1977 — mound 26 [1946] and mound 98)...

The examined material allows us to state that the female burials are Scandinavian and that the male burial is connected with the Varangian armed forces ("druzina"). The ritual and the mentioned analogies to the burial equipment give reason to date all three complexes to the second half of the X century.

From Page 13

Note on the danger of hard dating items from Eastern Scandinavian Graves....Objects were passed down and tended to out live their original owners by approx 25 years.

Two more questions have to be discussed. They are indirectly connected with the material under discussion. The first is the question of date of some north European objects and types in Rus'. According to Scandinavian analogies the sword and the spear from mound Dn-4 should be dated not later than the first half of the X century, as also the burial itself. Mound C-306 could on the basis of type J P 51b be dated to the middle of the X century, and the dendrodates give the last quarter of the century, which means that these objects outlive their Scandinavian parallels by more than 25 years. In this connection one can draw attention to a find of an equal armed brooch of an early type from the second quarter of the IX—end of the IX century in a mound together with a thrown vessel with a stamp (mound 85 from S.I. Sergeev's excavations), the famous "hybrid" sword of type J P D from mound C-2 excavated in 1949, is in Scandinavia dated not later than the IX century. It becomes obvious that it is risky to directly transfer the dating of the Scandinavian material] to east European finds.

Tortoise Shell Brooches and Temple Rings

It has become popular within the SCA to wear temple rings and tortoise shell brooches and I went looking for proof that either that did happen or it did not happen. Although the evidence is scant there is evidence.

Women from Scandinavia made it to Eastern Europe and Russia and this is evident by the fact that they eventually died there and were buried in Scandinavian burials. We know from both the Russian Primary Chronicle (Nestor) and much archaeological evidence that the Rus/Rhos/Rusti were Swedes (From Eastern Sweden) who came into what is now Russia by way of the river systems. It is a widely held western belief that the Rus are the very people who helped to bring order to the Slavic tribes and created what later became known as Rus-Land or Russia. Strategic places along both the Baltic Sea and many important rivers became Norse/Rus trading centers and Norse strongholds for several centuries. These places include Staraja Ladoga, Gnezdovo, Novgorod and Kiev.

During these centuries of interaction with the Slavic tribes we see clear evidence that the Swedes were slowly assimilating into a culture all their own which became the Rus/ Rhosia/ Rusiya and later Russia. We can see this slow progress of assimilation within the naming practices of the founding generations of the Kiev dynasty. The founder of the Kiev dynasty was one of 3 brother who in legend are the brothers come from Sweden to unify the tribes. This brother who was based out of Kiev was Rurik (Rörik), his successor and cousin was Oleg (Helge) and his son was Igor (Ingvar) and his wife Olga (Helga). The following generations of the dynasty have Slavic names like Vladimir and Jaroslav. During this transition we have Rus who have Slavic wives, Scandinavian women who have Rus Husbands, Scandinavian couples making there way to new marketplaces and warriors of various Scandinavian

backgrounds making their way east and south to the Byzantine Empire. All of these cross-cultural interactions could have led to a mixing of Scandinavian traditional dress and Slavic.

Jewelry from a female grave in Kiev was found by construction workers and in it was found very clear Scandinavian brooches and among other things a pair of Earrings/ Temple Rings on the same body in the same grave from the 10th Century. Below are photos of the grave find.



Fig. 2. Jewellery from a female grave in Kiev, Ukraine. 10th cent. The oval brooches are of Scandinavian type. Cat. no. 306.

Female grave from Kiev (Illustrated p. 75)

2 double-shelled oval brooches of gilt bronze; 1 Byzantine silver coin (928–944) converted to pendant; necklace of 11 glass, 3 carnelian and 1 rock-crystal beads; silver pendant cross with engraved decoration; 2 silver ear-rings with granulated pendants.

Kiev was the capital of the Early Russian State and centre of the 'Russian land'. Few archaeological remains survive in Kiev from the time of the formation of the state, probably because of the destruction of the pagan cemetery of c. 1000. This grave was discovered in building work at the end of the 19th cent. No more details are known. The assemblage, including Scandinavian brooches and ear-rings of west Slav 'Volhynian' type, illustrates the complicated processes of cultural assimilation in the Early Russian capital.

VVM

Bibl.: Golubeva 1949, 107f., fig. 2; Karger 1958, 209, fig. 45, pl. 28

These two images are from page 75 and page 306 of the book *"From Viking to Crusader"* 1992



(<http://www.svyatayarus.ru/>)

Close up of the earring/temple ring found in the grave with Tortoise Shell Brooches

Now this grave is a fantastic find but is a singularity unless other graves of the time period where the possibility arises that Scandinavian style brooches and Slavic style temple/ earrings coexisted long enough for a woman to be buried with them as her funerary jewelry.

There is evidence of other graves.

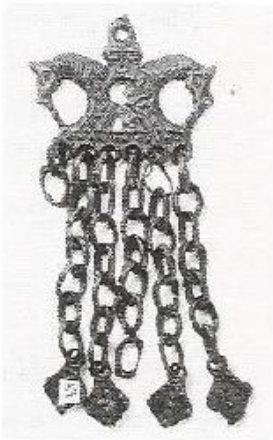
293

Bronze, iron, bone, textile.

Zaozere, mound 6, complex VIII, SE
Ladoga region, obl. St Petersburg, Russia.

10th cent. Scandinavian, Finnish, Slav.

Gosudarstvennyj Ermitaž, St Petersburg, 700/
84–87, 90–93



293



293



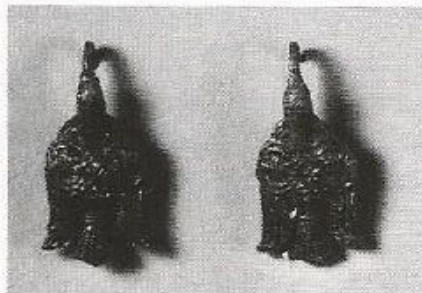
293

Female grave *(Illustrated in part)*

Oval brooch, bronze, Scandinavian (one of two from the grave); temple-ring of bronze wire with twisted ends and orange glass bead, Slav; 2 clattering pendants of bronze, decorated with animal heads and a human head, Finnish; finger-ring of decorated sheet bronze: bronze bells; knife with bone handle; fragment of wool textile.

The first person buried in mound 6 at Zaozere was probably this woman dressed in clothing decorated with Scandinavian, Finnish and Slav jewellery. This mixture is characteristic of the SE Ladoga area and makes it difficult to determine ethnic origins, Scandinavian and Finnish elements were probably present in the population. OJD/11

Bibl.: Raudonikas 1930, 45–46, 48–49, fig. 27, 29, 47–51;
Arbman 1955, 40ff., pl. 3–4



297

Taken from page 304 "From Viking to Crusader" 1992 AND clearly states that temple rings were found in this grave. (I am hunting for images and will update the handout when I find them)

The local museum in Novgorod has an entire section that is dedicated to the "Vikings" who lived in Novgorod in the 9-12th century. Below are photos from their "Viking" display and there are clearly temple rings displayed amongst the Norse finds. These images are for reference only since we do not know where they were found, on which body and thus don't know if it was a Slav grave or a Scandinavian grave or both. It is interesting to compare these images (from 2006) with the information now provided that perhaps these temple rings were worn by Scandinavian women. Perhaps they were gifts?



Labeled in the museum as "Viking Metal"



"Twisted Metal Necklace/Bracelet"



"Metal Rings to decorate

Temples. 11-12th Centuries" All images found at <http://users.stlcc.edu/mfuller/NovgorodMetalp.html>

This wonderful photo from a huge museum tour in 1992 plainly states that temple rings and brooches were found in the Gnezdovo Hoard.

— Preface— Vikings and sagas —



Fig. 4. Part of the great Gnezdovo hoard, Russia, with jewellery, a sword and 2 oval brooches. 10th cent. Cat. no. 304.

Page 20 from the book "From Viking to Crusader" 1992

(Please note in the upper right hand corner the 2 temple rings that are similar to the temple rings described previously. Write up regarding this image on the following page)

These examples and many more pieces of evidence that are slowly coming to light from recent digs as well as digs that are being reanalyzed show us that for a brief moment in history in a very select part of Northern and Western Russia as well as possibly Birka that some women were in fact assimilating between two and sometimes three distinctly different cultures and wore the jewelry of both the Scandinavians and the Slavs.

It is my opinion that these women would have probably been considered Rus and or possibly Slavs. I believe that these women would have had distinctly different clothing than the mainland Scandinavians as well as the Slavs based on textile finds in these exact same areas with this jewelry found in the same graves. Heavy amounts of silk, metal thread woven bands, construction differences as well as slightly augmented burial practices lend itself to the emerging evidence of a people in transition. The graves discussed here are the daughters and granddaughters of the “far travelers” from eastern Sweden and the Grandmothers of what later became Russia.

clattering pendants on chains; 46 beads of sheet silver, most with granulation of Slav character, others with filigree, some plain; 21 cast pendants (18 Scandinavian with open-work animal ornament or, in one case, a face-mask, 3 of Oriental or Steppe-Nomad character—2 converted from belt mounts); 21 pendants of sheet silver (1 large capsule, 7 lunulae of east Slav type with geometric granulation, 1 shaped like a female figure of Scandinavian character, the remaining 12 round—2 have Slav granulation, the remainder filigree of west European/Scandinavian type); 8 coins, most converted to pendants, 2 Sassanian, 1 Indian, the rest Islamic (the hoard contains 20 coins in all, the latest 953–4); 2 Scandinavian oval brooches of bronze; 1 iron sword, fragmentary.

perhaps they belonged to graves discovered at the same time as the hoard. OID/U

Bibl.: Arne 1914a, 42ff., fig. 21–24; Guščin 1936, 53ff., pl. 1–4; Korzuchina 1954, 87f.; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, 93; Duczko 1989

304

Silver, gold, gilding, niello, bronze, iron, glass.
Gnezdovo, near Smolensk, Russia.
10th cent. Scandinavian, Slav, Oriental.
Gosudarstvennyj Ermitaž, St Petersburg, 994/
1–7, 9–18, 20–51, 53–56, 58–67, 69–72, 74–82,
85–87, 89–104

The Gnezdovo hoard (*Illustrated also p. 20, 77–8*)

2 Slav temple-rings of silver wire with glass beads; 6 neck-rings, 1 tubular, diam. 35cm, with melon-shaped knobs decorated with gold foil and filigree; 2 east Scandinavian circular brooches, cast, with plastic animals, 1 with 3

This great silver hoard, discovered in 1868, is Russia's most famous Viking-age hoard. It consists almost entirely of jewellery, mostly of Scandinavian or Slav character but some objects are of Oriental/Steppe-Nomad type. The most prominent Slav decorations are the lunulae pendants, characteristic of the Dnepr region; the most interesting Scandinavian objects are the circular brooches with plastic animals (cf. cat. no. 305), and the many cast pendants with close parallels in the Swedish Vårby hoard (cat. no. 27). The filigree decoration on the unique tubular neck-ring (was it designed to adorn a statue of a god?) is of Scandinavian/Western character.

The bronze oval-brooches and the iron sword are unusual components of a hoard;

Taken from page 306 “From viking to Crusader” 1992

We know from period written account that Norse/Rus women were present with their male counterparts in the Rus Lands when on trading missions as well as when emissaries/ diplomats were entertained. Below is an excerpt from the journal of Ibn Fadlan who traveled into the Volga (Rus/Norse) lands in the 10th century. He wrote of his encounters with the “Rus” and mentioned the women as follows:

Each woman has, on her breast, a small disc, tied <around her neck>, made of either iron, silver, copper or gold, in relation to her husband's financial and social worth. Each disc has a ring to which a dagger is attached, also lying on her breast. Around

the small disc brooch closing the neck-slit their necks they wear bands of gold and silver. Whenever a man's wealth reaches ten thousand dirhams, he has a band made for his wife; if it reaches twenty thousand dirhams, he has two bands made for her—for every ten thousand more, he gives another band to his wife. Sometimes one woman may wear many bands around her neck. The jewellery which they prize the most is the dark-green ceramic beads which they have aboard their boats and which they value very highly: they purchase beads for a dirham a piece and string them together as necklaces for their wives

IBN FADLAN AND THE RUSIYYAH-James E. Montgomery-CAMBRIDGE (PDF available online)

We also have information regarding the Male Rus/ Varangians as evident by a grave from Gnezdovo

MALE GRAVE FOUND NEAR FEMALE SCANDINAVIAN GRAVES

Excavated in 1984. Found Under Mound DN-4

Found on Page 26

On the lower part of the blade lay a horseshoe-shaped bronze brooch with faceted heads and remains of textile. To the left of the sword was a east silver pendant cross with punched ornamentation (Fig. 6 : 3), remains of the upper chest part of a caftan which consisted of two close lines of narrow silk ribbon and 24 bronze buttons (Fig. 6 : 2). The caftan was tightly buttoned. A little to the east of the low rim of the fastening of the caftan, evidently at the belt, there was a little yellow-grey slate whetstone (Fig. 6 : 11), a strike-a-light (Fig. 6 : 15) with a piece of flint and two iron rings. These objects lay in a dark-brown, fine, spöt of rotten material measuring 18x19 cm. Inside the area there were 7 fragmented bronze badges from a belt purse (Fig. 6 : 6—9), a piece of cloth, and some hazelnuts.

The third mound contained a man, evidently buried with a horse or part of a horse.

Found on page 28

The remains of the caftan from mound Dn-4 consists of two lines rows of narrow silk ribbon forming a kind of breast-plate 36 cm long. Clothes of similar cut are known from pictures and are reflected in archaeological materials.

The necklace from mound C-301 consisted of golden and silver glass beads, yellow beads and large ribbed beads, a combination which is characteristic for the second half of the X century. The silver pendant crosses from our mounds add to the material recently described in an artide by N. G. Nedosivina. The one from mound C-301 is cut out of a thin silver disc, the other, from mound Dn-4, is east. Both crosses are decorated with punched ornaments, but it looks unfinished on the pendant from the male burial. N. G. Nedosivina dates analogous finds mainly to the second half of the X century, partly to the beginning of the XI century. (Nedosivina 1983 pp. 222-225)

Notes from:

https://www.academia.edu/12935442/Chamber-graves_as_an_International_Burial_Custom_of_the_Viking_Age_from_Old_Denmark_to_Old_Russia_Woli%C5%84skie_Spotkania_Mediewistyczne_I_Eksluzywne_%C5%BCycie_dostojny_poch%C3%B3w_w_kr%C4%99gu_kultury_elitarnej_wiek%C3%B3w_%C5%9Brednich_Ed._Prof._M.Rebkowski_.Wolin_2011_s._205-221

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

“From Viking to Crusader” Rizzoli Press 1992

“The Varangians of Byzantium” Sigfus Blöndal 1981

Article **“Studies of the Textiles from the 2006 Excavation in Pskov”** NESAT X Elena S. Zubkova et al. Pg 291-298

Webpages:

<http://users.stlcc.edu/mfuller/NovgorodMetalp.html>

<http://usadba-psk.narod.ru/vargost.htm>

http://club-kaup.narod.ru/kaup_r_rus_i_baltika.html (amazing photograph with little reference)

http://club-kaup.narod.ru/kaup_r.html (bibliography worth hunting through)

<http://www.ladogamuseum.ru/about/exhibitions/7/>

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1538&context=tsaconf>

http://www.svyatayarus.ru/reference/treasure/5_inventar_jenpog/index.php?lang=en