

**VIKING HERITAGE SITES IN RUSSIA AS TOURISTIC OBJECTS:
SOME RESULTS OF FIELD RESEARCH 2011**

Selin Adrian

Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg, Russia. aselin@hse.ru

Looking into the question of mediation of the Viking history, or in other words – Viking – Russian contacts and exchange in the Viking Age, there are rather pronounced differences between the different sites of Viking history, and between museums visited. Some of the sites have a well developed mediation at a local or regional museum, often connected to a home page. In Staraya Ladoga, as well as in Izborsk and Novgorod, there are a well illustrated display of the Viking Age history at the museums, and connected to that an illustrative home page.

Many of these sites are directly connected and referred to the early history of Scandinavian – Russian contacts, mentioned in the Primary Chronicle, and give a good view of the Viking history in the region. They all, more or less, refer to the history of Rurik and his brothers as symbols for the early history of the towns, even if it sometimes is not explained who Rurik and his brothers were.

Other sites of Viking history are less well promoted in museums, as in Rostov (In particular about the Sarsky hill fort) and Belozersk local museum (about the earliest phase of settlement around White Lake). For instance, the extensive excavations carried out at Timerevo (more than 400 burial mound excavated, and huge areas of settlement) and at Petrovskoe in the surroundings of Jaroslavl, is to a very limited degree on display in the museum in Jaroslavl.

The museum, situated in the Kremlin, where they mainly display the history of present day Jaroslavl back to medieval time, and have very limited information about the Viking connections found in the different archaeological investigated sites in the vicinity of the town.

In Rostov, as well as in Belozersk, Pskov and Karelia, there is some information about the sites with Viking material, but they only represent a small part of the exhibitions, and have very few objects, etc from the sites in question, and give a rather limited overview of these sites.

The investigations into the question of Russian Viking routes, there are some clear positive sides of it, as well as some obvious problems in making the Viking theme into a tourist product. The two most basic strengths are first of all the rich heritage seen in the artefacts as well as in the many monuments and sites in the landscape. It should also be noted the many written sources of this Eastern Viking Route, in the Icelandic Sagas, on runic stones in Middle Sweden, as well as the Primary Chronicle. Many years of intensive archaeological excavations and research has given a clear picture of the importance and extensive contacts that existed between Scandinavia and Russia in the Viking Age.

It is also clear, that these contacts were not just casual, but could also be seen as a kind of immigration, far wider than just the main trading routes and towns. As evidenced by thousands of objects found, spread over a huge area from Kiev in the south to Lake Ladoga in the north.

The other main strengths are the many museums and exhibitions that display the Scandinavian – Russian contact in North-West Russia, even if some are at a rather

rudimentary level. But it is a basic resource on which to build a much more elaborate information on, and they exist more or less in all the places of importance. Reports and books in archaeology are a complementary source, even if in many places the information is only to a limited part published and that is mainly in the Russian language.

Another resource is the knowledge as well as interest among the responsible people in charge of many of the sites. In discussions with representatives of the museums and exhibitions, there is a keen interest in developing the sites as well as the basic information further, and at some places, like Novgorod / Gorodische and Gnezdovo, there are advanced plans for developing the sites much further into important tourist destinations along with the sites in the landscape, which is very encouraging.

Among the towns and sites connected to the history that are mentioned in the Primary Chronicle, connected to the coming of Rurik and his brothers, there is a clear image of the importance of this information, and in many places they use this history as a symbol of the town, as for example in Novgorod / Gorodische, Belozersk, Staraya Ladoga and Izborsk.

This connection of many places to the history of Rurik is a common base to build a network, as a foundation for Viking Route Russia. As mentioned earlier, in Belozersk, they are currently advertising the year 1149, meaning that 2012 will be the 1150 anniversary celebration of Belozersk, being the place for Rurik's brother Sineus, and the «beginning» of the Russian State.

In this connection, it is rather interesting that President Medvedev, and the Russian government, has decided to celebrate the year 2012 as the beginning of Russia, giving an interesting opportunity for marketing the Scandinavian – Russian common history in the Viking Age.

Looking into the weaknesses of the idea of Russian Viking Routes today, they are mainly two important ones, very much connected to each other. The basic problem is the, in general low knowledge of and, perhaps, interest in the Viking age history. Besides people directly involved in museums and exhibitions or archaeological excavations, the public have, what it appears to be, very little knowledge about that history.

And this also, on a general level, goes for the tourism industry. As far as we have experience, there is very little tourist information about the Scandinavian-Russian early history, and very few of the sites are included directly in a general tourist product, like for instance the impressive exhibition in Kirillov.

There are of course some exceptions, mainly in Novgorod / Gorodische, and to a certain degree also at Izborsk, where the public probably are more aware of the Scandinavian-Russian history. It also looks that administration of sites from municipalities or regions, are, with a few exceptions, very little devoted to protect and manage these sites in the landscape, which leads into the second main problem - the maintenance of sites and monuments.

Most of the sites are in a rather bad state of repair and there seems in general to be no plans for development or maintenance, with some exceptions like Gorodische and Gnezdovo. It is also obvious, that without an emphasis on the importance of this early history of Russia, both among authorities as well as from common people, there will be no tourist product.

Suggestions for development. From the discussion above, it is obvious that the main and basic problem of developing the Viking Route Russia into an important theme,

both for the general public and for tourism, is partly the ignorance among the public, the tourism industry and the authorities about their Viking history. This ignorance is directly connected to the rudimentary maintenance of sites and monuments in the landscape and it is probably rather difficult to spend money on maintaining of a site to which people have little connection, be it the public or the authorities. But, there is also a limited knowledge from the outside of the fascinating history of Scandinavian–Russian contact in the Viking Age, and the huge number of places as well as material found in this connection.

To achieve the goal to develop the Viking Route as an important part of historical tourism in Russia, there is obviously a rather long way to go, at least if one wants to make it into a broad theme, connecting many places in northern Russia. Some places are well on their way, like Novgorod / Gorodische and Izborsk, but for other places, there is much work to be done.

The logical first step is to create an information and educational package about the history, in as many ways as possible, and it is a golden opportunity in 2012, being a celebration year about the year 862, the year of Rurik and his brothers. Below, there are suggestions for the short and long term to turn the Viking Age history into an important part of northwest Russian tourism industry, with a connection to Viking History tourism in Western Europe.

Is this all possible or not – it is still a question. In the existing system of three-level budget with very few money in local municipalities the organizing of such a network looks very problematic. The other problem is less interest of local stockholders to immediate Viking heritage: the more interesting for them is «History of Old Rus» while even it is the same the name «Viking» could play very negative role while promoting the heritage in provincial Russia. Sometimes one could hear very serious dialogues among the stockholders (not historians of course) about the probable nationality of Rurik etc. In any case the only way to promote something, to elaborate the heritage of «Plotting Rus» or «Viking Heritage» – is private initiative. During our expedition only in Beloozero-Kirillov region we had met with the existing and working model of such private initiative. The traditional state maintenance, with very strong Soviet heritage, practically everywhere lose the initiative while following different instructions and report indicators (such as number of excursions per year etc.).

GEOTOPS OF IRAN PLAYAS: A GEOARCHAEOLOGY EVIDENCE

Sepehr A.¹, Nowjavan M.R.²

¹ Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (FUM), Iran, adelsepehr@aol.com

² Islamic Azad University-Maybod Branch, Iran

Playas are important geomorphic features of the world's arid regions and are considered to be very sensitive to hydrologic and climatic changes. Those classified as a geomorphologic unit of desert areas. Playas vary in size from very small depressions of a few tens of m² to massive tectonic basins, which may extend up to 10, 000 km². Given the range of origins and scales, these playas display wide range of variability in morphology, hydrology and sedimentology. During the last few decades, playas have received enormous attention due to their significance as indicators of climate change and palaeo-hydrological reconstruction. While the landscape and drainage in playa