

Novgorod Museum of Antiquities. The fate of one archaeological collection

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The history of Russian provincial museums and the origin of their collections are still poorly studied. Novgorod the Great is one of the small towns in the northwestern part of the Russian Empire, which had a rich historical and archaeological heritage in the Middle Ages. Many provincial Russian museums began their history in the second half of the 19th century as museums under state statistical agencies in the provinces of the Russian Empire or as private collections. Their archaeological collections were expanded slowly through sporadic donations by amateur archaeologists and the occasional acquisition of finds. The same history characterizes the appearance of a provincial museum in Novgorod in the 19th century. Today it is one of the largest museum complexes in northwestern Russia, with a rich archaeological collection.

- **Fig. 1.**
Novgorod The Great.
Library and Museum
near the fortress wall.
Photo by N.P. Liadov,
1900. Archive of Institute
for the History of
Material Culture. Neg.
II 99958.



The Museum of Antiquities at the Novgorod Provincial Statistical Committee was founded in the spring of 1865 by the initiative of Nikolai G. Bogoslovsky¹ (1824–1892). The first exhibition of the museum was opened in his own apartment (MARKINA 2005; MEDVEDEVA 2019).

The museum functioned under the jurisdiction of provincial authorities, its collections were lent to exhibitions in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but in 1878 the museum was closed, probably in absence of financial support. The most valuable items of ecclesiastic heritage were transferred to the ecclesiastic

¹ Russian spiritual writer, clergyman of the Russian Orthodox Church, Archpriest (1881), corresponding member of the Moscow Archaeological Society (1871–1892), an employee of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society and a member of the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of Arts.

archaeological museum at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, a part of the collections was returned to their former owners. In the same year, Grand Princes Sergei and Pavel Aleksandrovich, Konstantin and Dmitry Konstantinovich granted annual funding to reconstruct the Museum of Antiquities in Novgorod.

By 1889 the museum already held 2,517 items, and in 1892 the donations of private individuals provided an opportunity to construct a new museum building right in the center of Novgorod – near the Zlatoust tower of the Kremlin (**Fig. 1**).

In 1913 in addition to the Museum of Antiquities the Diocesan Storehouse of Antiquities was opened in Novgorod. Two years before that, the 15th congress of Russian academics involved in archaeology was hosted in Novgorod, and the most important issues of archaeological research and preservation of museum collections were discussed there. A special exhibition on the antiquities of the Novgorod region from the earliest times was organized contemporarily with the opening of the Congress. Pieces of ecclesiastic heritage from the 15th Archaeological Congress exhibition constituted the core of the Storehouse collection (ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONGRESS).

After the revolution, the Museum of antiquities and Diocesan Storehouse were reformed, and the State Historical and Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Ancient and New Art (or art museum) were established. In the first years after the revolution, Soviet authorities seized many valuable antiquities from private collections and churches, which were given to these museums.

In 1940 Novgorod museums contained more than 140,000 items (archaeological finds, ecclesiastic heritage, icons, paintings, etc.). Afterwards, World War II began.

At the end of June 1941, the evacuation of the Novgorod museum began, however parts of collections remained in the occupied city. When the Wehrmacht began to retreat from Novgorod in 1943, antiquities were moved first to Pskov, and later to Riga. After the end of World War II, parts of the collections were returned to the museum, but many lost their identification tags, mostly archaeological finds.

The finds from the excavations of Leonid N. Tcelepi in Luga and Novgorod districts constituted one of the most significant parts of the archaeological collection in the Novgorod Museum.

Leonid N. Tcelepi (1856–1919) was a member of the Novgorod society of antiquity aficionados, a bibliophile, a collector and publisher of old printed books and historical documents, as well as an archaeologist. His family history is quite fascinating. He descended from a Greek immigrant who was merely 10 years old in 1790, when he was taken from Smirna to the Russian Empire by Russian navy and was assigned to study at the Gymnasium of Foreign Religions.

Both his grandfather, father and brother studied in the Naval Corps and served in the Russian Navy, but Leonid was unable to continue the family tradition for reasons of health.

Leonid Tselepi studied at the Imperial Saint Petersburg University and graduated from the Faculty of Law in 1882. In the mid 1880s, he served as an assistant to a court investigator in Saint Petersburg, a court investigator in Luga, which is a small town between Petersburg and Novgorod, and later on, to an investigator in the Saint Petersburg District Court until 1894.

Leonid was the landowner of several estates in Saint Petersburg, Novgorod, Smolensk, Yaroslavl provinces, which is why he had enough money to leave service and to devote himself to history, archaeology and social activities.

As an amateur collector of antiquities, he acquired several different collections: handwritten books from the 15th–18th centuries and old printed books, acts from the 15th–18th centuries, everyday items and art pieces of ecclesiastic heritage. He also kept his familial archives.

Between 1898–1900, Leonid Tselepi studied at the Saint Petersburg Archaeological Institute. He undertook three courses in archaeology: Christian archeology, taught by the director of the institute, professor Nikolay V. Pokrovsky² (1848–1917), Prehistoric archaeology, including the antiquities of southern Russia, taught by professor Nikolay I. Veselovsky³ (1848–1918), and Artistic techniques applied in archaeology by professor Nikolay K. Roerich⁴ (1874–1947). In the spring of 1899 and in 1900 he took part in archeological fieldwork together with other students.

From 1899 till 1908 he conducted his own archaeological excavations on historic Russian burial mounds in Medieval sites in the vicinity Novgorod, and co-organised of educational excavations for the students of the Petersburg Archaeological Institute.

Leonid N. Tcelepi was one of the organizers of the 15th Archaeological Congress held in 1911 in Novgorod, which proved to be the last before the Russian revolution. He lent artifacts from his own collections to the exhibition organized for the congress (ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONGRESS 6, 19, 30).

In the summer of 1899 and 1900, he conducted excavations on historic Russian burials situated on his land and on the land of his neighbours in Luga uyezd, on the border region of Novgorod province.

Excavations

Luzhsky uyezd, a district northwest of Novgorod, was part of the Veliky Novgorod region in the Middle Ages. The remains of Novgorod peasants were observed in excavated tombs, dated to the Christianization of Kievan Rus dated to 988 A.D. and the following one and a half century.

In 1899, Leonid Tcelepi excavated 55 tumuli in four cemeteries. The discovered burials yielded ancient pieces of attire and jewelry, characteristic finds of the burial rites common amongst of the population of the Novgorod region in the 11th–12th centuries (SOBOLEV 2015). Buttons, patched plaques, buckles, earrings, remains of necklaces, bracelets and rings were common finds through excavations conducted on such burials.

² Russian archaeologist and public figure. Director of the Archaeological Institute, Professor of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy.

³ Russian archaeologist and orientalist. Professor of St. Petersburg University, Corresponding Member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences.

⁴ Russian artist, mystic philosopher, writer, traveler, archaeologist, orientalist, public figure. Academician of the Imperial Academy of Arts

It is important to note a special feature regarding the culture of Medieval Novgorod, the center of the eponymous region: all organic matter were well preserved, which bears significance for the chronology of Novgorod and its region. The streets were paved with timber, which was replaced every 25–30 years, enabling dendrochronological dating. Thus, features observed amidst layers can be related to absolute chronology to sites with disrupted stratigraphy. Such finds serve as chronological markers for

archaeological sites throughout the Novgorod region, including the burials excavated by Leonid Tcelepi.

Following the excavations, L. Tcelepi sent the results of his investigation to the Imperial Archaeological Commission (IAC) in Saint Petersburg including brief report and an inventory of finds. In accordance with contemporary laws of the Russian Empire, L. Tcelepi presented all finds to the IAC. Items were outfitted with tags and were sewn onto plates and thus prepared for display. The photographer of the commission, Ivan Chistyakov (MEDVEDEVA 2015) photographed Tcelepi's finds in Saint Petersburg (Fig. 2). Afterwards, Tcelepi requested that his finds be transferred to the Novgorod Museum of Antiquities. The report, the inventory of finds and photographs (prints and glass negatives) were registered in the archives of the IAC and presently they are stored in the Institute for the History of Material Culture RAS (Saint Petersburg).



• Fig. 2. • One of plates with sewn archaeological finds excavated in 1899. Archive of Institute for the History of Material Culture. Neg. # III 7801.

burial mounds in 14 cemeteries. The finds were also photographed in the Imperial Archaeological Commission and then sent to the Novgorod Museum of Antiquities. Field report and photographs are preserved in the archive of IAC.

Tcelepi excavations in 1900 were more extensive, he investigated 73 historic Russian bu-

One needs to note, that the results of all these excavations were never published. Finds were kept in the Novgorod Museum until the summer of 1941. During the Second World War, these finds have lost their tags and related information, and some of the finds themselves have been lost.

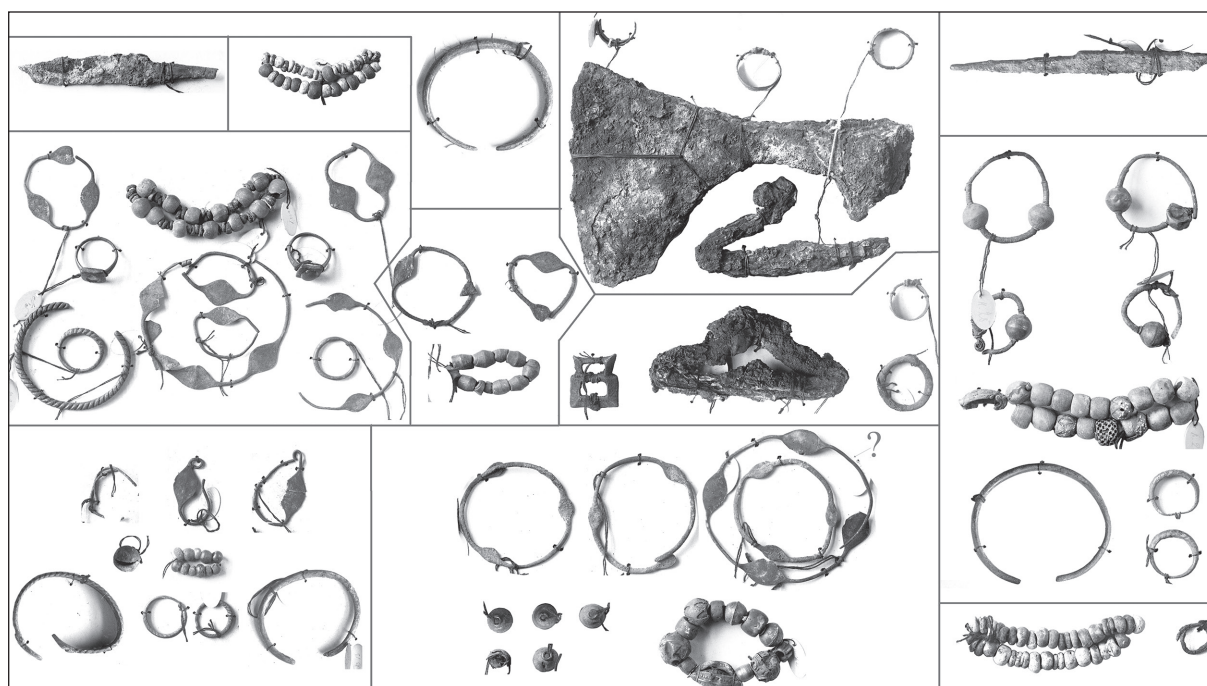
Reconstructing discoveries

Thanks to the archival photographs and materials, find matrixes from Tcelepi's excavations can be reconstructed, and the attributes and characteristics of objects preserved in the Novgorod Museum has also been restored.

Items on the plates were attached very close to each other (Fig. 2). The labels were not always clearly discernible, some were turned backwards or overlapped by other features. This made it difficult to identify burials. Furthermore, occasionally finds from a single burial were divided between two or three different plates.

Through comparing inventory numbers visible on tags on photographs with survived inventories, it was possible to reidentify some find matrixes. Identifying unique items on the photographs and tracing them back to inventory records enabled relating them to distinct burials.

The results of this research in the archives provided an opportunity to reidentify almost all the finds, and determine which burial they pertained to, as well as identifying them on photographs and excavation reports (Fig. 3). Only ten items (five items from 1899 excavation and five items from 1900) and three textile fragments remained unidentified.



• Fig. 3. • An example of the reconstructed attributes and find matrixes from Tcelepi's excavations.

As a result of his work, it is possible to study the archaeological data from Tcelepi's excavations and incorporate them into modern scientific research.

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List of abbreviations

IAC – Imperial Archaeological Commission

RAS – Russian Academy of Sciences