

RESUME

Due to field investigations carried out in 2006–2009 on the Kalmistomäki Hill, situated on the north-western bank of Lake Ladoga in the territory of the Republic of Karelia (Russian Federation), an archaeological complex exceptional in terms of its richness and state of preservation has been discovered by an archaeological expedition of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) RAS (Saint-Petersburg) in cooperation with the University of Turku (Finland).

The burial ground of Kylälahti Kalmistomäki may be characterized as a cemetery attached to a *pogost* (parochial) centre of the 14th century in the north-western Novgorod land. By now, extremely few scientifically studied sites of the same type are known throughout all of this territory. The site was the central and regularly used cemetery continued over two or three centuries.

The largest in terms of the discovered burials with diverse artefacts, is the cemetery of Räisälä Hovinsaari Tontinmäki (near what is now the village of Krotovo in the Priozersk region of the Karelian Isthmus, Leningrad oblast) in the north-eastern section of the Karelian Isthmus where, in 1886–1888, Theodor Schvindt revealed twenty burials. During four field seasons, in Kylälahti 91 graves were discovered (also two probable cremations). In c. 50 cases, different artefacts have been uncovered in them: ornaments and parts of costume. The cemetery explored is thus the largest one in the region not only as the number of excavated burials is concerned but also in terms of the graves with artefacts.

In the archaeology of funerary antiquities of mediaeval Karelia, materials of the 14th–15th centuries are for the first time represented so distinctly, allowing us to arrive at certain principally important conclusions concerned with the development of the funerary rites of the region's populace.

Throughout the entire area of the cemetery, there were distinctive stone structures on top of many the graves, assembled of large boulders. These formed frame-like structures oval or rectangular in plan and west–east in direction, often with slight deviations towards the south-west — north-east direction. At the edges, i.e. at the western and eastern periphery, larger stones were used; in some cases even rock outcrops or huge boulders which probably were not moved when building the structures on top of the graves. Before the archaeological investigations of this complex have been carried out, some similar structures had been known in Karelia at some sites. The features of the rite described are clearly distinct at the cemetery having parallels in the more southern regions of the Novgorod lands. We are dealing here with the so-called *zhalniks* — flat ground graves edged around the perimeter with stone fences of circular, oval or rectangular shape. These graves were under a small mound or, later, without any mound. Burial grounds of this type are peculiar

to the western regions of the Novgorod state: the Izhora Plateau, Lake Chudskoye area, and the Luga River. On the Izhora Plateau, the disappearance of mounds above graves is traced for the period since the late 13th century. In this connection, the rite recorded at the cemetery of Kylälahti resembles to the overwhelming majority of *zhalniks* in the north-west of the Novgorod Land.

So far, no common opinion has been established in historiography concerning this burial tradition. Of note are four major hypotheses: the first links the origin of “*zhalniks*” with the internal evolution of the barrow rite and gradual abandonment of mound-construction in the course of strengthening of the Christianity; the second hypothesis connects *zhalniks* with the mortuary rites of the local “substrate” population; the third explains their appearance by the migration of peoples from Mazovia; and according to the fourth supposition, *zhalniks* are unrelated with any ethnos being burial installations of the Christian population proper. Anyway, it seems that there had been no single source of this tradition, while in different regions of the North-West of Russia, it had its own peculiarities of the development depending on the local cultural situations. As to Karelia, the appearance of sites of this kind in the 14th century is quite expectable. The rite under consideration did not run contrary to that of the previous period demonstrated by the flat-grave cemeteries studied by Th. Schvindt mostly in the 1880s, and it was not a radical innovation, although it seems that it had not been directly evolved from the latter. At Kylälahti in the 14th century and later on, the funeral rite was controlled by the church administration, the presence of which is first recorded in chronicles for the year of 1396, concerning the burning of a church, and in birch-bark document no. 278. This is why, in our opinion, at the cemetery there is such a distinct unification of the rites in contrast to earlier sites characterized by great diversity. The rite evinced in the manner of arrangement of the deceased also attests about a later period of the use of the burial ground. By contrast to the considerable number of burials of the 12th to 14th century, taken place, though not synchronously, in a single large pit, all the graves at the cemetery of Kylälahti are individual with the exception of one or two. In the overwhelming majority of cases, here the remains of coffins in the form of bands or spots of decayed wood have been traced above and beneath the skeletons along the edges of the grave pits. All the interred were laid in the extended position lying on the back with the arms commonly crossed in the area of the chest or pelvis, the bodies oriented along the line south-west to north-east with the head to the south-west. Furthermore, the presence of ornaments or parts of costume by no means attests about “non-Christianity” of the population buried at the cemetery. The same conclusion is equally applicable to the burial grounds of the “advanced stage” of the mediaeval Karelian culture arisen in the early 13th century, so that in the case of Kylälahti and other synchronous sites, although not so expressive, we are dealing with a continuity of the tradition. The population of Kylälahti was, at least from the 14th century onwards, undoubtedly Christian with the material culture reflecting the local peculiarity continuing the traditions of the previous period.

The origins of the “*zhalnik*” tradition should be searched for beyond the limits of Karelia. In this connection, the Izhora Plateau seems to be highly promising.

Along with the rites, an important feature indicating certain parallels with that region is in the peculiar elements of female costume revealed in a number of graves at the cemetery of Kylälahti. Firstly, it is the presence of temple rings or ear rings composed of several beads. It is of note that in the preceding period, there had been no fashion for such head ornaments among the Karelian people as indicated by finds from female burials of the 13th century. In the 14th century they distinctly became an innovation in costume.

On the other hand, the continuously increasing, especially during the recent period, numbers of finds of “Karelian type” ornaments throughout the regions of the Neva River and Izhora Plateau (cemeteries of Kirstino and Ratchino) inevitability put forward the problem of studying conjugal connections among the populaces of these regions and Karelia through archaeological evidence. We are here dealing possibly with quite a particular manifestation of seemingly very stable tradition of family and marital relations among the population of the cultural areas under consideration. To what extent exactly these relations determined the dynamics of cultural transformations, which in fragmentary way are presented to us by archaeological sites, is a topical problem awaiting its solution in future.

Another impressive feature of the finds from the cemetery of Kylälahti is the North- and Central-European imported silver penannular fibulae of diverse types, pendants, a knife with silver bindings, clasps of a headdress, a clasp with a religious motif, and certain types of finger-rings. Their presence in Karelian assemblages is indicative of the preservation of stable trends in the material culture which had appeared during the earlier period and demonstrates the direction of external links. Of the material culture of mediaeval Karelia, beginning with the earlier phases of its development, certain eclecticism was characteristic where objects or, for instance, motifs of ornamentation of undoubtedly foreign provenance, either western or eastern, found their organic place among the complex of local ornaments. Either the shapes or motifs of the imports were creatively transformed defining the originality of the local culture. The same eclecticism of the culture continues into the 14th and 15th centuries, although it becomes rather smoothed acquiring the common North-European character. However the direction of external trade links, established previously, by no means was disrupted due to the military and political perturbations of the 14th century.

Finally, the finds from the graves of Kylälahti, notwithstanding the innovations in the female funerary decoration and the presence of numerous imports, quite clearly demonstrate continuity from the culture of the precedent period. Moreover, now the dynamics of its development becomes traceable. The main indication here is the female funerary decoration. In the 14th–15th centuries, it completely loses paired oval brooches with a third globular one that previously were so characteristic of the rite. Both in men’s and women’s graves, the collars of garments, which possibly already were not ceremonious but intended exactly for interment, were fixed by only a single ring brooch or by a button. As the latter, different silver objects were used. Nevertheless, the other artefacts characteristic of the mediaeval Karelian complexes are represented in the burials of Kylälahti as before. These include spiral-ornamented chain holders, (burials 54 and 59), an iron ear-spoon (burial

30), Φ -shaped spacer-beads of different types, including some unknown before (burials 30, 33, 58, 63), a bronze decorated haft of a knife (burial 59), belt spacers (burials 33, 59), a “heart-shaped” pendant (burial 61), decorated bronze chapes of the scabbard (burial 30). The costume preserves also such distinctive elements as diverse metal beads and embroidering with small bronze spirals. However the most amazing feature of female funerary suit, which here is first found among materials from flat-grave cemeteries of mediaeval Karelia, is the use of the objects enumerated above not in sets of pectoral ornaments, as in the precedent period, but in the composition of peculiar complex belt pendants. The transformation of the old Karelian costume which took place in the 14th century included inter alia the shift of the pectoral ornaments onto the belt and their fixation there by means of belt rings being suspended along the hips parallel to the knife. Moreover, the objects which earlier had a certain practical function along with the decorative one (chain-holders) now lose the former and become just ornaments finishing the set of belt pendants (burials 54 and 59). Why and in what way this “shift” of the ornamental set took place in the ancient Karelian costume is a subject for a future separate and serious study.

Thus the finds from the cemetery of Kylälahti indicate that the peculiar material culture of the mediaeval Karelian people by no means came to an end in the early 14th century. The burial grounds investigated mostly by Th. Schvindt in the 1880s and once considered in historiography as Karelian in general sense, due to the most recent information, as well as chronological studies, now can be ascribed to only a particular stage of the development of the culture under consideration. The evidence yielded by the excavations at the cemetery of Kylälahti, within the context of already known scarce data, gives us grounds to distinguish one more period of the existence of the distinctive material culture of the Karelia of chronicles in the 14th and 15th centuries.