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By Galina L. Novikova

Iron neck-rings with “Thor’s hammers” form the most thoroughly studied group of Scandinavian pagan amulets. This is explained by the fact that they are found in large numbers inside as well as outside Scandinavia, and that they are closely related to the burial rite (Ström 1984, p. 127; Gräslund 1980, p. 54; Fechner 1967, pp. 77 f.; Dubov 1970; Adu-sin 1974, p. 77; Petruchin 1975, p. 8).

Iron neck-rings made of a twisted four-sided rod usually have (in northern Europe) various pendants: so-called “Thor’s hammers” (which have given name to the whole group—torshammarringar), rings and spirals. There are also rings without pendants, however. When surveying the finds from a site, Soviet authors have usually restricted themselves to mentioning an iron neck-ring as a “Scandinavian type”. The terminology has been treated insufficiently in Soviet historical research, and this has sometimes led to factual and chronological mistakes. For example, in a lecture published in Russian by I. Jansson (1987, p.121, fig. 2) all finds of iron neck-rings were grouped together under the name “Thor’s hammer rings”, which led to a considerable enlargement of their distribution and time of existence. At present there is no consensus among the students of Old Russian antiquities as to whether the iron neck-rings with and without pendants should be grouped together (Fechner 1966, p. 101), or whether the latter rings should be treated as a separate group to which chronological, ethnical, ritual and social interpretations concerning Thor amulets cannot be applied (Dubov 1970, p. 263).

Before turning to an analysis of the Thor’s hammer rings found in the European part of the previous USSR, it is necessary to discuss some conclusions and results reached by earlier scholars.

In her fundamental articles, M. V. Fechner (1966; 1967) gives a detailed description and characterisation of this sort of neck-ornament which is typical of the Scandinavian countries, and considers its function and date in pagan tradition.
burials in Sweden. An undoubted merit is that Fechner has collected all "Old Russian" finds of iron neck-rings and has analysed, mapped and listed them in a catalogue with information about where they are kept and published (Fechner 1967, pp. 77 f). Fechner pays considerable attention to the chronology of the iron neck-rings in northern and eastern Europe and ascribes their earliest appearance to south-western Scandinavia in the 9th century, and their widest distribution to the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century (Fechner 1966, p. 104). In her analysis of the grave finds with iron neck-rings within Old Rus’, she comes to the conclusion that the majority belong to the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century and only a few to the 11th and the beginning of the 12th century (ibidem). The author considers this type of ornament to be imported from Scandinavia (the majority of the finds are concentrated along the main trade routes connecting the North and the East), but she also points out the possibility that some of them, especially the latest ones, were made locally (ibidem).

The importance of Fechner’s work, its many-sidedness and thorough argumentation must be stressed but a number of insufficiencies should also be pointed out. First of all, it does not seem correct in my opinion to heat the iron neck-rings with pendant rings and “hammers” as one group together with the neck-rings without pendants of any kind. No comparative characterisation of measurements, chronology and find-places is given. The connection of the iron neck-rings with the burial rite is completely overlooked. It is somewhat illogical that the rings with “hammers”, after having been determined as belonging to the cult of the Scandinavian thunder-god Thor, are interpreted as imported objects in Old Rus’. It seems rash to state that the female graves with iron neck-rings (without noting whether they have pendants or not) in eastern Europe belong to the local population. There are also some inaccuracies in the find catalogue.

The second work in Soviet historical research, directly devoted to the iron neck-rings, is an article by I. V. Dubov (1970), which is basically a criticism of Fechner’s narrow dating of these ornaments. At the beginning of his work the St. Petersburg author differentiates between three main variants of amulets and symbols of the god Thor: iron neck-rings with pendants, magnificent silver “hammers” from hoards, and pictures of Thor’s hammer on rune-stones (Dubov 1970, p. 262). Iron neck-rings without pendants are, as mentioned earlier, treated as a separate group. A map is presented of all these four categories in northern and eastern Europe. Dubov pays great attention to the dating of the iron neck-rings with “Thor’s hammers” on the basis of the Scandinavian material and reaches the conclusion “that in Scandinavia this group existed during several centuries—from the 8th to the beginning of the 11th century” (Dubov 1970, p. 265). He also applies this conclusion to the finds in the USSR without presenting a typological or chronological analysis of them.

In spite of its wide geographical grip and interesting collection of facts and illustrations, Dubov’s work contains obvious insufficiencies. The earliest and latest date of the iron neck-rings with “hammers” in northern and eastern Europe is, in my view, not satisfactorily discussed and not fully corroborated by the archaeological finds. Moreover, no comparative analysis of measurements, forms of pendants etc. is made between “Scandinavian” and “Russian” neck-rings. Neither is there any comparison made between rings with pendants and rings without them from the area of Old Rus’. Such an analysis would show that some rings differ markedly from other rings belonging to the same group. The author’s study is in fact, as far as the Old Russian material is concerned, restricted to the finds from the Gnëzdovo and Michajlovskoe cemeteries, which cannot be accepted as satisfactory, even if the author is concentrating his attention on the Scandinavian material. The attribution and the cultic significance of the discussed group of amulets in the burial rite is also left unconsidered by Dubov.

Besides the studies mentioned above which are directly devoted to the iron neck-rings, mention should also be made of some works...
by Soviet archaeologists and historians in which this group is discussed as part of the publication and analysis of a certain archaeological material. These works can be divided into two groups: 1) works taking up and develop­
oping problems connected with the dating and interpretation of find complexes with iron neck-rings and defining the function of this group and its ways of distribution into Rus’ (Avdusin 1974, p. 78; Petru­chin 1975, p. 8; Puškina 1972, p. 94; Puškina 1981, p. 287; Bulkin and Nazarenko 1971, p. 15; Dubov 1982, p. 51; Lebedev 1970, p. 186; Šaskol’skij 1965, p. 120); 2) works only mentioning finds of neck-rings or fragments of neck-rings at certain archaeological sites and giving refer­
cences to generally accepted analogies and datings, usually according to M. V. Fechner (Bi­
iful’d 1977, p. 108; Petegiric 1980, p. 156; Saburova & Sedova 1984, pp. 115–117; Se­

At present about 100 intact or fragmentary iron neck-rings without pendants are known in the European part of the previous USSR, coming from burials as well as cultural layers. The number of neck-rings with pendants is 36. The map Fig. 1 shows that the iron neck-rings are distributed from the south-eastern Ladoga region in Russia in the north to the vicinity of Černigov and L’vov in the Ukraine in the south, and that they are grouped into a number of areas with concentrations of finds: the banks of the rivers Sjas’, Paša and Ojat’ in the Ladoga region, the upper Volga region (the oblast’ of Tver’ and Jaroslavl), the vicinity of Moscow, the Volchov and the Dnepr.

It should be pointed out that the majority of finds originate from graves. Only 25 speci­mens from nine settlements are known. Among these are six towns and gorodišča (forti­fied sites; Staraja Ladoga, Novgorod, Goro­dišče near Novgorod, Ľarskoe gorodišče, Su­prutskoe gorodišče and the Central gorodišče in Gnězdovo) and four unfortified settlements (Tīmerēvo, Gnězdovo, Ves’ and Vaulino). The neck-rings are normally fragmentary.

The map distinguishes between sites that have yielded iron neck-rings with “hammers” and sites that have yielded iron neck-rings without pendants. It is interesting that the latter rings have been found on all sites whereas neck-rings with “hammers” in intact or fragmentary state are only known from nine sites: from the grave-mounds at Galično and Vachrušev in the Ladoga region, from Staraja Ladoga, Gorodišče near Novgorod, the necropolis of Pskov, the cemeteries of Michajlovskoe, Tīmerēvo, Gnězdovo and Šes­tovica, and the gorodišče of Gnězdovo. There are also finds of single, small, iron amulet “hammers” (appearing separately and in sets of miniatures) from Staraja Ladoga, Novgo­rod, Gorodišče near Novgorod, the unforti­fied settlements Nikol’skoe V in the oblast’ of Vologda and Ves’ in the oblast’ of Vladimir, the cemetery at Gorodišče in the oblast’ of Jaroslavl, and the cemetery and unfortified settlement of Gnězdovo. Thus cult objects with “Thor’s hammers” are connected to a restricted number of sites along the waterways of the rivers Volchov, Velikaja, Dnepr and Volga.

We shall now turn to the question of the relation between the iron neck-rings with pendants and those without pendants. As already noted, they have been put together into one group in the works of M. V. Fechner and I. Jansson. Scandinavian scholars do not con­sider the question. It is, therefore, necessary to determine whether the iron neck-rings with “hammers” and those without pendants really form a single group. If the answer is positive —how should the contemporary use of rings with and without pendants be explained? And if the answer is negative—in what way do they differ? The answers to these questions are of great importance for clarifying the distribution, the meaning, the place of manufacture and time of existence of these ornaments.

For this reason we must define the elements that characterise the iron neck-rings with pendants. The general character of the neck­rings is given on the basis of the intact speci­mens and the “informative” fragments from Eastern Europe including Scandinavian paral­lels.

The neck-rings are made of an iron rod with a square or, less often, rectangular cross­sec­tion (with small differences between the length of the sides) manufactured by way of
iron neck-ring without pendants – järnhalsringar utan hängen
iron neck-ring with "Thor’s hammers" – järnhalsringar med "torshamrar"


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forging. The rod measures 2.5–4 mm in section and is twisted, either completely or partly (at three or four places) which makes it look falsely twined. The twisted parts are 3.5–5 mm in section. According to Ström’s information (1984, p. 127), 60–75% of the rings in the Scandinavian material are twisted. The outer diameter of the rings varies between 11 and 16 cm and is normally 14–15 cm. This means that if the rings were used as neck ornaments, they fitted very tightly around the neck. The ends of the neck-rings are hooked together by means of a hook and a loop formed by the ends of the rod, or by two flat spirals formed by the ends of the rod and hooked onto each other (Fig. 2).

The result of my comparative analysis of all specimens from Eastern Europe is that the main bulk of neck-rings forms one group, whether they have pendants or not. The study of the finds from Staraja Ladoga, Gorodišče near Novgorod, the Pskov necropolis, the Michajlovskoe and the Timerěvo cemeteries and the Gnezdovo complex, has shown that the intact and fragmentary iron neck-rings without pendants found on these sites are identical with the neck-rings with hammers which are on the whole restricted to these sites. One may, therefore, suggest that the iron neck-rings were used both with and without pendants. However, in some cases—this concerns especially the neck-ring fragments found on settlements—pendants simply may not have been preserved or may have been lost on account of unsatisfactory excavation and treatment in the museum. The elements enumerated above are also found on the neck-ring fragments from Sarskoie gorodišče, the unfortified settlements at Vaulino and Ves’, the burial mounds at Kamennoe in the oblast’ of Sumy, Zaluče in the oblast’ of Tver’, Il’in and Zaozer’e in the oblast’ of St. Petersburg, and the cities of Suzdal’ and Novgorod, some of which are only known to us through pictures. The neck-ring from Novgorod is, however, in contrast to the others silvered (Sedova 1981, p. 23).

The neck-ring from grave-mound 48 at Sjazniga in the St. Petersburg oblast’ has a diameter of 18.5 cm, and its ends are flattened on a 3–4 cm long part making them 1.4 cm wide and 2 mm thick. The neck-ring is four-sided in cross-section and varies in thickness from 6 mm at the middle to 4 mm near the ends, and the rod is only slightly twisted around its own axis, not forming false twining. This neck-ring does not, therefore, belong to the group studied here.

The neck-ring from the find-concentration 6.2 at Karlucha in the oblast’ of St. Petersburg is, according to the photograph published by V. I. Ravdonikas (1934, pl. X:5), made of a round iron wire which is not twisted, 6–7 mm in cross-section at the middle and tapering towards the ends. The diameter is c. 18 cm. According to all parameters, it belongs to M. V. Fechner’s group of wire neck-rings (Fechner 1967, p. 68). The neck-ring from Zaozer’e-I is also made of a round wire but it is twisted and has a diameter of 14.5 cm. The neck-rings from grave-mound 7 at Nikol’skoe, St. Petersburg oblast’, were 17–19 cm in diameter and were made of a rectangular, untwisted wire tapering at the ends which, in two cases, form a loop. In his report about the find concentrations Karlucha 7 “A” and 7 “B”, V. I. Ravdonikas (1934, p. 31) writes about finds of iron neck-rings made of a four-sided wire. Unfortunately, these finds have remained unaccessible to us. A portion of the iron neck-rings from the grave-mounds in the south-east Ladoga region can therefore not be assigned to the same group as the neck-rings with “Thor’s hammers”.

The fragment of a neck-ring from a grave-mound at Čerkizovo in the oblast’ of Moscow (now within the city of Moscow) is heavily corroded but the main features of this ornament can, none the less, be established. A thin silver wire, at some places plaited (a two-centimeter fragment is preserved), is wound around the four-sided rod which is c. 4.5×4 mm in section. A neck-ring from grave-mound 43 in the cemetery of Zaluče consists of an iron wire with a bronze wire wound around it. Faint traces of a bronze wire can also be observed on one of the fragments of the neck-ring from grave-mound 54 in the Timerěvo cemetery. The iron neck-rings from the Maksimovka cemetery have been

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Fig. 2. Forms of clasps on the iron neck-rings. Drawings based on finds from Gnězdovo. – Låsens former på järnhalsringarna. Teckningarna är baserade på fynd från Gnězdovo.
equipped with various large bronze pendants (Al'bom 1941, p. 103). We have here a partial confirmation of V. I. Sizov’s hypothesis (1902, pp. 49 f.) that the iron neck-rings were covered with or served as a core for more intricate ornaments of embroidery. It still remains unclear whether these neck-rings were local eastern European ornaments or had come from Scandinavia and been additionally equipped with silver or bronze wire by their new owners.

The manufacturing technique for the neck-ring from burial mound 6 at Krivec, oblast’ of Jaroslavl, is of special interest and also differs from the norm that we have established for the neck-rings. In this case a thin iron wire had been tightly wound around a four-sided or round iron rod, 4 mm in section, which makes the ring 6–8 mm thick where it is covered by the winding. The construction is easily seen at the break.

The neck-rings from the burial mounds at Tagan’kovo and Besedy in the oblast’ of Moscow, and at Dudino in the oblast’ of Vologda, now consist of poorly preserved fragments. They are c. 18 cm in diameter and 7–8 mm in section. Because of corrosion, it cannot be observed whether the rings have been angular in section or twisted. It seems to me that these rings are also normal wire neck-rings according to M. V. Fechner’s classification (1967, p. 70).

The result of my comparative study of the iron neck-rings is that c. 40 specimens have been shown to belong to the normal group of thick-wire iron neck-rings of Eastern Europe, differing from the Scandinavian prototype according to a number of characteristics (larger outer diameter and section, use of a round or rectangular wire, flattened ends, lack of twisting, additional embellishment of the rod with an iron or bronze wire). It is possible that the number of such neck-rings will increase in the future through studies of rings that we at present have insufficient information about. It is interesting to note that the neck-rings that differ from the Scandinavian neck-rings come from the Moscow region and from some grave mounds in the south-east Ladoga region and were found with western European coins and Late Slavonic jewellery of the 11th–12th centuries.

This means that 36 intact or fragmentary neck-rings with “hammers” and other pendants, and 50 intact or fragmentary iron neck-rings that are similar to the former rings in all features except that they lack pendants, have been assigned to the Scandinavian group. These specimens originate from a total of 22 sites.

In spite of all the common features mentioned above, there are considerable differences between these neck-rings. The variations concern the outer diameter of the ring, the thickness of the rod, the four-sided or round cross-section of the rod, the degree of twisting (complete or partial twisting) of the rod, the two types of clasp, the presence or absence of pendants, the number, composition and type of pendants, and the method of suspending the pendants. All these features are not of equal importance. The diameter of the ring and the thickness of the wire vary within known limits and concentrate around the mean value (14–15 cm and 4 mm respectively). It is not always possible to decide whether the wire is completely or partially twisted, but among the intact specimens twisting at 3–4 places is predominant. The round rod used for making the two neck-rings from the burial mounds of Zaozer’e and Gnézdovo is probably an exception. We therefore include the use of four-sided wires in the definition of the neck-ring. It is more difficult to treat the shape of the ends, i.e. the construction of the clasp. This is the main distinctive feature used in Ström’s classification. The majority of the specimens are preserved in a fragmentary state or with one or both ends broken off and it seems, therefore, to be of little value to use this feature in the classification. It is also significant that calculations based on the specimens in which this feature can be seen gave an equal number of both types of clasp (15 each), and at one and the same site and even in one and the same grave-mound at Gnézdovo there are clasps formed by a loop and a hook as well as by two flat spirals.

A study of the composition of pendants,
their number and relation to each other is complicated by the poor preservation of iron objects. One may, however, also presume that their composition is somewhat irregular depending on the craftsman or the individual wishes of the person who commissioned the ring. The neck-rings are usually equipped with 1–5 (usually 3) “hammers” and 1–2 small rings. In the Scandinavian material the number of pendants on a neck-ring varies from one to 15 (Ström 1973, p. 108). Pendants of different sorts are either mixed, or a small ring is hanging on one side of the “hammers” (Fig. 3:3). There are cases in which only hammers or only small rings have been applied (Pskov, Zaluče), but the latter differ markedly from the Birka pendants (Arbman 1940, pl. 106:2, 107:6, 108). Spirals of iron wire, loosely wound around the neck-ring and forming between a few turns (Michajlovskoe) and 17 turns (Gnězdovo), are known from four neck-rings in Eastern Europe, two of which are also equipped with “hammer” pendants (Fig. 3:4). Thus neck-rings with a spiral constitute 11% of the total number of Thor’s hammer neck-rings there, as compared with 15% in Scandinavia (Ström 1984, p. 129).

As a starting-point for our classification we have taken the method of suspending the pendants (both the small rings and the “hammers”) from the neck-ring:

A. Direct suspension. The “hammers” and the small rings are attached to the neck-ring without an intermediate link (Fig. 3:1). This is the most widespread method represented among the finds from Gorodišče near Novgorod, from the necropolis of Pskov and the cemeteries of Michajlovskoe and Tимерево, and from the majority of the Gnězdovo mounds. There is a large number of Scandinavian parallels (e.g. Arbman 1940, pl. 105:1–3, 106:4, 107:1; Arwidsson 1942, pl. 36).

B. Suspension with a small ring as an intermediate link. Each hammer is attached to a separate small ring which is hung on the neck-ring. These small rings have a diameter of 1–2.5 cm, and the ends of the iron wire are either twisted around each other or turned back to form hooks (Fig. 3:2). This means of suspension is found on three specimens from the Gnězdovo cemetery and on a badly corroded neck-ring from burial mound No. 65 at Michajlovskoe. Beside this variant, there is also known in Scandinavia a single ring-link for several pendants (Arbman 1940, pl. 107:5, 106:1, cf. pl. 108:1–2, 4–5), and this means of suspension has been noted on a broken neck-ring from the gorodišče of Gnězdovo. It reflects perhaps the other way of carrying the “hammers”, i.e. on a separate small ring (cf. the amulet sets).

C. Suspension with a staple as an intermediate link. The “hammers” and small rings hang from a staple of iron wire which is attached to the neck-ring with loops formed by its ends. The ends are either wound around the wire forming the staple, or a few turns around the neck-ring (Fig. 3:3). The pendants of five neck-rings from Gnězdovo were fastened in this way. This method is also seen in a drawing of a neck-ring fragment from the Vladimir mounds excavated by A. S. Uvarov (Spicyn 1905, fig. 40); its find location cannot, however, be specified more closely. Parallels are known in Sweden and on the Ålands islands (Ström 1984, p. 128; Aspelin 1878, Nr 1699).

It should be underlined that the pendants were usually attached to one neck-ring in only one of the ways mentioned above. There are, however, two cases in which methods A and B had been used together: on a neck-ring fragment from a burial mound at Gnězdovo (Fig. 3:2), where it may be the result of an incorrect “restoration” in the museum, and on a damaged neck-ring from the gorodišče of Gnězdovo.

The next step in our classification is a division of the pendants into subgroups. The small rings have come to us in a badly corroded state, which makes it difficult not only to study their form but also to calculate their number. They are normally smooth or twisted (falsely twined) with the ends meeting each other, and the wire is of the same thickness or slightly thinner than the neck-ring itself (Fig. 3:2–5). The rings on the often published neck-ring from a Gnězdovo burial mound (Sizov 1902, pl. IV:13) resemble thin plates (Fig.
Fig. 3. Combination and arrangement of the various pendants on neck-rings. Methods of attaching the pendants to the neck-ring. Drawings based on finds from Gnězdovo. — Kombinationer och arrangemang samt metoder för fastsättning av olika hängen på järnhalsringarna. Teckningarna är baserade på fynd från Gnězdovo.
3:1). It seems to me to be useless to divide the ring pendants into subgroups.

The “Thor’s hammer” pendants are more diverse in shape. They are normally flat: their thickness does not change from the “hammer-head” to the “handle”, and is usually 1.5–3 mm. There is, however, among the Gnězdovo finds a number of specimens on which the lower hammer-shaped part is markedly thicker than the “handle” which makes them more similar to real hammers.

In the classification table Fig. 4 the hammers are divided along the horizontal axis into three groups according to their method of attachment to the neck-ring, intermediary small ring or staple, i.e. according to the shape of the “handle”:

I. Hook-shaped. The end forming the “handle” is bent into a hook; the length of the bent part forms between 1/4 and 1/2 of the total length of the pendant.

II. Loop-shaped. The “handle” of the “hammer” tapers off upwards and forms a loop, and its end is twisted around the “handle”; the length of the loop forms between 1/4 and 1/2 of the total length.

III. U-shaped. The rod forming the pendant thins off from both ends and is bent at the middle, thus forming a “double” (or two-sided) pendant. Such “hammers” are found on two neck-rings from Gnězdovo. The fastening method is, perhaps, also shown in a drawing published by Spicyn (1905, fig. 40 = our Fig. 4, type III: 2).

The first method of fastening was apparently the simplest and most widely used. It is represented on all sites which have yielded neck-rings with “hammers”. The second method has in our investigation area only been noted at Gnězdovo (5 neck-rings). It is remarkable that on a number of occasions there were pendants fastened with different methods onto one and the same neck-ring. In the Scandinavian material all three types of fastening are represented but the first type is dominant.

Along the vertical axis of the classification table Fig. 4 the “hammers” are divided according to their form:

1. Rectangular (type B according to Ström 1984, p. 128). The hammer may have a straight or a somewhat convex lower side. The length ratio between the sides is 1:2 or 1:3. These are the pendants most similar to hammers with handles.

2. Rhomboid (Type C? according to Ström): Shapes with diagonals of equal length occur as well as shapes with longer horizontal diagonal. There are also cases in which the lateral corners of the rhomb are cut off, making the “hammer” five- or six-sided.

3. Trapezoidal (types D and F? according to Ström). The form of the pendant has little resemblance to a hammer. The “hammers” are made with little care, the lower end simply widening into an unidentifiable shape. The lower side is comparatively short, usually three or four times shorter than the length of the pendant.

4. Triangular (Type A according to Ström). There is only one example of such a form, from Gorodische near Novgorod, but this pendant differs markedly in shape from the types defined above. It has a very long lower side (the ratio to the total length is 3:2) and almost no “handle” at all.

As far as the use of the different forms of “hammers” is concerned, our survey of the material has shown that all the three first forms have a very wide distribution, with a certain dominance for the rectangular form. It is apparent that the Birka finds also include the rectangular form. The dominant form there, however, is the trapezoidal-amorphous (type F according to Ström) and pendants of distinctly rhomboid form are lacking (Arbman 1940, pl. 103–108; Ström 1984, p. 129). It is possible that this is connected with local production or with peculiarities of different craftsmen. It should be pointed out that Ström’s type E (L-shaped) is not represented in Eastern Europe and that types A and C differ somewhat in their shape and proportions (Ström 1984, fig. 15: 1e).

The question of the relative chronology of the “hammer” forms, the method of fastening the “hammers” and the method of attaching the pendants to the neck-ring remains, unfortunately, unsolved on account of the very wide dates given by the find associations. We
can only say that the sub-rectangular form appears earlier, and also that the trapezoidal shape, and especially the most carelessly shaped specimens are probably connected with a degeneration or an ignorance of the significance of these amulets or a change in their meaning.

It should also be pointed out that all miniature "hammer" pendants used separately in sets of amulets or fastened to objects of other kinds fall into the classification given above.

Two similar iron artefacts were found, one in a household pit on the Gorodišče near Novgorod and the other in grave mound No. 138 at Šestovica (Fig. 5:1–2): iron rings with a diameter of 5.5–6 cm made of a wire twisted in three places. The clasp consists of two loops on one of the rings and a loop and hook on the other (the end of the hook is, perhaps, broken off). On one ring hangs a rhomboid and on the other ring a trapezoidal "hammer". D. I. Blifel'd (1977, p. 108) interpreted this object as part of an iron neck-ring, E. N. Nosov as an arm-ring (Koneckij & Nosov 1985, p. 60). These two objects may testify that neck-rings were not always worn around...
the neck and were in this case manufactured on a small scale exclusively for ritual purposes. A damaged iron amulet from the cultural layer of Novgorod, resembling a twisted neck-ring reduced to a quarter of the normal size and with one strike-a-light and four "Thor’s hammers" fastened to it (Gajdukov 1988, p. 61), is a parallel of its own to these objects.

An interesting and unusual find is a small penannular brooch, c. 2 cm in diameter, made of a round bronze wire, on the hoop of which is a miniature bronze “hammer” (Fig. 5: 3). This brooch from the gorodishe of Gniezdovo belongs to the most widespread group of eastern European penannular brooches with spiral ends and a round cross-section (Mal’m 1967, p. 152). Similar brooches have also been found in the Birka graves. The Gniezdovo specimen is, however, for the time being unique with its “hammer” pendant.

In the cultural layers of the unfortified settlements (Gniezdovo, Staraja Ladoga, Nikol’skoe V) single “Thor’s hammer” pendants have been found which may have been attached to neck-rings, used as separate amulets or belonging to sets that have not been preserved.

We shall now turn to the question of how the iron neck-rings were used. As noted, the majority of these neck-ornaments have been found in graves: 61 specimens from 14 sites have been noted in the course of my work. Such an apparent dominance of grave finds underlines the close relation with the burial rite.

Neck-rings of Scandinavian type (with and without pendants) have been found in 39 cremation burials and in six inhumation burials in Eastern Europe. (The burial rite is unknown in five grave mounds, and 5 specimens from Pskov have been found in a redeposited layer.) Iron neck-rings were included in the grave-goods of inhumations in mounds at Gniezdovo, Timerëvo, Vachruševo, Il’ino, Zaozer’e and the city of Suzdal’. Of six burials, five were female and one (Timerëvo, Fechner 1967, p. 63) male. In the pre-revolu-
tionary period two more grave-mounds were excavated in Gnézdovo, which probably contained inhumations with iron neck-rings (one double grave and one male grave; Bulkin 1982, p. 140 f.; Kletnova 1916, p. 39). The information about these graves is, however, not sufficient enough to include them in my study. In the burial pit of grave-mound C-241/II in Gnézdovo the dead woman had been buried in sitting position and a neck-ring with “Thor’s hammers” was found on the bones of the chest. In the other inhumations the neck-rings (normally without pendants) lay at the necks of the dead (Kočkurkina 1989, pp. 56, 180, 194; Saburova & Sedova 1984, pp. 115–117). Finds of neck-rings are extremely rare in inhumation graves on the Scandinavian peninsula and constitute in all 5%, and somewhat more in the Birka necropolis (Ström 1984, p. 130). All this suggests that the connection between this group of objects and the inhumation rite is slight. It can, none the less, be noted that neck-rings normally occur in female graves. The position of the rings at the neck of the dead is evidence of their being used as neck-ornaments in real life as well as in the after-life.

The cremations connected with neck-rings were extremely variable: cremation at the site of the grave-mound (30 times), cremation at another place than that of the grave-mound (4 times), deposition of the cremated bones in an urn, in the cremation layer and in a special pit (2), cremation in a boat (2) or with part of a boat (4), stones encircling the cremation layer (1). Among these graves 15 are female, nine male, six double graves, and two graves contained one man and two women, one grave a man with a child, and one grave a child (girl). For the remaining mounds, the sex of the buried individuals could not be established since the inventory of these graves normally only consisted of the neck-rings; it may, however, be suggested that they belonged to men.

An iron neck-ring lying on the shoulders of the burial urn or fragments of such a ring lying around and inside the urn have been noted in 13 grave-mounds at Gnézdovo (in one of these cases a neck-ring with “hammers” was placed under an urn turned up-side-down). This rite, which is characteristic for Scandinavians, forms 54% of the Gnézdovo cremations with neck-rings, which is similar to Ström's results for the Scandinavian material (53%, Ström 1984, p. 132). The rite has not been recorded at other Old Russian sites.

In 15 cases a neck-ring, or parts of one, has been found in the cremation layer of the mound (Gnézdovo, Timerëvo, Michajlovskoe), mainly on a heap of burnt bones. Twice (Gnézdovo, Timerëvo) the iron neck-ring lay on burnt bones placed in a special pit (the cremation performed at another place than that of the mound). Three Gnézdovo mounds yielded two neck-rings each (with and without “hammers”). In mound L-33 a man and a woman were burned and one neck-ring was placed on the shoulder of the urn and fragments of another in the cremation layer. A similar ritual has also been noticed in Scandinavian burials (Ström 1984, p. 132). In grave-mound Serg-14 (58) both neck-rings were found in the fill of the mound, and in Serg-18 (86) they were found in a fragmentary state in the cremation layer. Two female cremation burials, each of which contained a neck-ring, have been observed in mound Nr 7 at Karklucha, where the neck-rings were placed in the cremation layer together with other grave-goods.

Our survey shows that the iron neck-rings of “Scandinavian type” are mainly distributed in cremation graves—single burials (male and female) and double burials (with man and woman, adult and child). A rite of placing the neck-ring on the shoulder of the burial urn can be discerned—a rite symbolising the new dwelling of the dead person “risen from the ashes” (Pertruchin 1975, p. 8), with the neck-ring in its original place as a neck-ornament. It is remarkable that the diameter of the neck of the vessel is sometimes larger than that of the ring. In these cases the ring was deposited inside the pot on top of the cremated bones. This indicates that the neck-rings were not made specially for the funeral. The use of the neck-rings in daily life is confirmed by finds of intact specimens and fragments from settlements.
No less often are the neck-rings found in the cremation layer on a heap of cremated bones. These rings are less well preserved than the rings found on the urns (the latter often show no traces of having been in the pyre). Finds of neck-rings with "Thor's hammers" in burials with a boat, or part of a boat, the presence of stone structures in the mound as well as various objects of northern origin, including pagan amulets, confirm the Scandinavian origin of the buried individuals.

The small "hammers", rings and spirals (signifying lightning?) in the graves had importance as a form of defence for the dead person. They are even looked upon as symbols of immortality confirming Thor's connection with life after death (a crossing with the cult of Odin; Davidson 1967, pp. 135, 138).

The iron neck-rings with "Thor's hammers" fulfilled functions as amulets in the life of their owners. It is true that we do not possess enough information about the question of whether they were worn regularly or only served as sacral objects. The finds of fragments of neck-rings from settlements and the suggested local manufacture of some specimens may speak in favour of the first possibility, and the miniature neck-ring amulets in favour of the second.

A survey of the relative and absolute chronology of the finds with iron neck-rings is of great importance for a many-sided study of this type of ornament. The dating has been one the most controversial questions in the archaeological literature concerning these artefacts.

The earliest finds of intact or fragmentary neck-rings come from two settlements on the river Volchov (Staraja Ladoga and Gorodišče near Novgorod). Thus, a fragment of a neck-ring and an iron "hammer"-pendant from Staraja Ladoga found in the horizons E₃ and E₂ can, from the stratigraphical context, be dated to the 8th and the first half of the 9th century respectively (Davidan 1971, p. 137; Korzuchina 1971, pp. 125-127). Two specimens from Gorodišče near Novgorod belong to the second half and last quarter of the 9th century, according to information kindly given by E. N. Nosov (one date according to dendrochronology and the other according to the find association). It is important to note that on both these sites neck-rings also occur in the 10th-century layers.

The neck-rings from the other sites are very uniformly dated to the 10th and beginning of the 11th century, wherever it is possible to produce a date. It is a general phenomenon on these sites that 9th-century finds are lacking and that mounds datable to the first half of the 10th century are few. Thus M. V. Fechner assigns the mounds No. 52 and 54 in the Timerëvo cemetery to the beginning of the 10th century. I. V. Dubov (1982, pp. 51-53) dates all three mounds with iron neck-rings at the village of Michajlovskoe to the first half of the 10th century, but the leader of the excavations, N. G. Nedosîžina, maintains a later date, to the end of the 10th century (Jaroslavskoe Povol'že, p. 30). A wider date, to the 10th century, is probably preferable in this case. At Gnedzzo the find associations from the mounds Kusc-15, L-13, L-47 and C-105 belong to the first half of the 10th century, as well as a fragment from the Central gorodišče and some specimens from the unfortified settlement. Eight mounds with neck-rings can be dated to the second half of the 10th century, and the remaining mounds to the middle or second half of the 10th century. The finds from the Timerëvo settlement fall within the limits of the 10th century (Dubov 1982, p. 171). In the city of Novgorod a fragment of a neck-ring was found in the strata of the second half of the 10th century (Sedova 1981, p. 23). A date to the 10th century/beginning of the 11th century can also be given to the mounds at Karlucha (Kočkurkina 1973, p. 93), Vachrušëvo and Galično (Kočkurkina 1989, pp. 58, 182), Šestovica (Bîfel'd 1977, p. 228), the mounds No. 375 (?) and 474 at Timerëvo, the unfortified settlement at Vaulino (Fechner 1965), Sarsko gorodišče (Leont’ev 1975) and the cultural layer on the Pskov necropolis (Labutina 1987, p. 5). The latest mounds with twisted iron neck-rings are the grave mounds at Il’ino and Zaozer’e (Kočkurkina 1989, pp. 56, 195) and in the city of Suzdal’ (Saburova & Sedova 1984, pp. 115-117), dated to the 11th century.

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This means that the first single specimens of the discussed group of artefacts appear in the northern region of Eastern Europe already in the 8th–9th centuries. They are, however, only found on settlements characterised by early contacts with Scandinavians. The majority of the neck-rings from settlements as well as burials can be assigned to the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century with a predominance of finds from the second half of the 10th century. Thus, while noting the rather wide chronological limits of the existence of the iron neck-rings with “hammers” and similar pendants (8th–11th centuries), it should be admitted that their main period in Rus’ is the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century. This date comes, on the whole, close to that reached by K. Ström (1984, p. 135) for the northern European material, but it differs through the presence of finds from the 11th century and the shift in predominance from the end of the 9th/beginning of the 10th century to the middle/second half of the 10th century.

Iron neck-rings are pagan amulets and could not serve as commodities of international trade (Puškina 1972). They consequently reached Eastern Europe with worshippers of the tull or were made for them there. Graves of women and children with sacral objects as well as finds of such objects on settlements speak in favour of the idea that a number of Scandinavian families lived in Rus’. We may also conclude that the women buried with various northern European pagan amulets, especially Thor’s neck-rings, were Scandinavians, not local concubines dressed according to Scandinavian tradition and to the taste of their masters. It must nevertheless be stressed that single finds of cult objects with no connection to burial rite and burial goods cannot be used as indisputable ethnic indicators.

Translated by Ingmar Jansson

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Sammanfattning

Torshammarringar är hedniska amuletters om inte kan ha spritts genom handel. De måste ha kommit till Östeuropa med anhängare av kulten eller gjorts för dem där. Kvinnogravar och barngravar med dessa sakralla föremål talar liksom boplatsfynden för att ett antal skandinaviska familjer bott i Rus'. De kvinnor som gravlagts med sådana amuletters och då särskilt med Tors ringar måste ha varit skandinaver, inte infödda frillor klädda enligt nordisk sed och enligt deras herrar och smak. Det skall emellertid betonas att enstaka fynd av kultföremål utan samband med gravrit och gravgods inte kan användas som otvetydiga etniska indikatorer.