



# *The Archaeological Journal*

## Book Reviews



**THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MEDIEVAL NOVGOROD IN CONTEXT: STUDIES IN CENTRE / PERIPHERY RELATIONS.** Edited by Mark A. Brisbane, Nikolaj A. Makarov and Evgenij N. Nosov. Pp. xxviii and 500, Illus 159, CD-ROM. Oxbow, 2012. Price: £45.00. ISBN 978 1 842172 78 0.

In the wake of the first World Archaeological Congress in 1986, staff from the University of Southampton, later expanding to Bournemouth and UCL, drew up a collaborative fieldwork-based project on the archaeology of Novgorod with the Institute for the History of Material Culture within the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, in what was then Leningrad. The context is important, because it underlines the achievements of this immensely important initiative as it subsequently developed and survived through more than two decades of political and institutional change from the falling Soviet Union to the new Russian Federation.

Although a massive programme of Russian-language publication on Novgorod had long been in progress, English language works were then relatively rare. As the project continued, papers and summary volumes on Novgorod's urban fabric, historically-attested politics and sections of finds began to appear, such as a 1992 Society for Medieval Archaeology monograph, and in 2006–7, the first two formal project reports — on the pottery and wood respectively — were published. However, very little had come out to place this in context, and this has now been superbly rectified in the present volume (the third of four in the project, with the zooarchaeology forthcoming).

The book is massive, over five-hundred pages with additional electronic appendices. Over twenty-four densely-written chapters by twenty-eight contributors, the book moves from medieval Novgorod's environmental context to an exploration of its periphery in the Byeloozero region, giving us a close-up look at the rural settlements, buildings and material culture (jewellery, pottery, beads) of a portion of the 'Novgorod lands'. This is supported by a number of papers on the immediate hinterland of Lake Ilmen on which Novgorod sits, especially the early settlement of Ryurik Gorodishche and its metalworking. Moving into the town, and especially to the major Troitsky excavations, we find presentations of macro-fossils and local industry against the background of social change within the medieval city. The volume concludes with several contributions that explicitly attempt to integrate the two perspectives of centre and periphery, focussing on the fur trade, craft production — especially in leather goods — and on plant economies of the region. The texts are supported by a CD-ROM that gathers tabulated scientific data, primarily environmental in nature, together with unpublished archive sources.

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Unlike earlier publications, the focus here is not on the built environment but on the undercurrents of social and economic interaction that fuelled the development of 'Novgorod the Great'. The finds material is outstanding, and especially the care taken to place in context these aspects of Eastern material culture that do not often see Western publication. This book is obviously essential for anyone working with the archaeology of medieval Russia, but in bringing this famous but surprisingly little-known region so comprehensively to a new international audience, it will also prove a vital source for archaeologists interested in the Middle Ages and urban questions in general. The book is a triumph, a tribute to the skill and commitment of its editors, and not least to its able translator, Kathy Judelson.

NEIL PRICE