

II. AUFSÄTZE ÜBER DIE GESCHICHTE DEUTSCHLANDS, WEISSRUSSLANDS UND ANDEREN LÄNDERN IM MITTELALTER UND IN DER NEUZEIT / СТАТЬИ ПО ИСТОРИИ ГЕРМАНИИ, БЕЛАРУСИ И ДРУГИХ СТРАН В СРЕДНИЕ ВЕКА И НОВОЕ ВРЕМЯ

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**CULTURAL SITUATION ON BELARUSIAN TERRITORIES
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**КУЛЬТУРНАЯ СИТУАЦИЯ НА ТЕРРИТОРИИ БЕЛАРУСИ
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***Abstract.** The work aims to show cultural situation on Belarusian territories in the 9th-13th centuries, i.e. in the time from the formation of the first states on Belarusian territories till the formation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the lecture medieval rural settlements and towns arising and structure are explained; main findings, characterizing material culture of the period are described; the monumental architecture of the lands in focus is shown as the highest achievement of the period. The non-material culture is paid attention to as well. It's revealed that the described period was the time when pagan beliefs were gradually replaced by a single state Christian religion, writing and literacy were actively spread on the Belarusian territories.*

***Key words.** Belarusian territories, material culture, monumental architecture, literacy, paganism, Christianity, Euphrosyne of Polotsk*

During the 9th – the 13th centuries the Slavic tribes of the region – Krivichi (кривичи), Driegovichi (дреговичи) and Rodimichi (родимичи) – spread throughout the territory and assimilated the remnants of the previous local population (mainly Baltic and Finno-Ugric). As for political situation, there were the first states on Belarusian territories from the mid-9th century – tribal reigns

(headed by princes, relying on the squads of warriors). Gradually, in the late 10th century they were placed under the rule of Principality of Kiev (Kievan Rus' – Киевская Русь). But there were complicated relationships between local principalities (of Polotsk, Turov) and Kiev. A process of their fragmentation into fiefdoms followed. As well in the 11th -12th centuries there was confrontation between local principalities themselves: Polotsk, Novogrudok, Grodno, Minsk principalities. The formation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania completed this period in the 13th century. As for the worldview, this was the time when pagan beliefs were gradually replaced by a single state Christian religion, which contributed to overcoming tribal fragmentation, to cultural growth, to the spread of writing, to strengthening of international relations.

An important source of knowledge about this era on Belarusian territories were the finds made during archaeological excavations. Mainly they evidence the bright and original material culture that existed on Belarusian territories in the 9th -13th centuries.

For the beginning, we'll talk about medieval rural settlements and towns.

The study of non-fortified rural settlements on the territory of Belarus began in essence after 1940s [1, p. 110-133]. In the Dnieper there are a lot of settlements disposed along the river banks which sprang at the end of the 9th -10th centuries. The area of the biggest settlements is up to 4 –5 hectares.

At the excavations the remainders of burdeis (half-dugout shelters) were revealed and of ground houses with clay stoves and stone stoves [18, p. 12].

The overwhelming majority of fortified settlements in Belarus are closely connected with protective properties of the natural relief of surroundings (located on river islands or capes: called insular and promontory). The only completely investigated fortified settlement on the territory of Belarus is Khotomelsk (Stolin district). It is dated by the 8th – 10th centuries. Also large in scale works have been carried out in Vishchyn (Rogachev district). Here the numerous and various collection of artefacts have been obtained, the outstanding to its artistic value trove of expensive jewelry decorations and pay silver bars have been found [10].

The word “gorod” (town) comes from the word “ogorazhivat” (build a fence around something), as each town was surrounded by fortifications. The core of the city, the most fortified part of it – “diedinets” – was gradually overgrown with adjacent settlements – a roundabout city.

Towns on Belarusian territory did not arise simultaneously, but in different circumstances. First of all, there were towns in economically developed areas. Polotsk and Turov grew up from earlier tribal centers. Minsk, Grodno, Volkovysk, Brest – emerged as military-strategic centers on the borders with neighboring principalities. Izyaslav (Zaslavl), Borisov emerged as administrative centers (around castles). During subsequent development the towns began to turn into the centers of handicrafts and commerce. In the 11th – 12th centuries near the fortified centers there appeared handicraft-commercial roundabout town in which artisans and merchants settled [14, c. 17-27].

For example, the town of Polotsk arose on the basis of the tribal center of Polotsk Krivichi of the 8th – 9th centuries in the process of its “overgrowing” in the 10th – 11th centuries with new settlements. At the beginning of the 11th century, “Dedinets” (the central fortified part) was transferred to a more comfortable plot (the Upper castle). Not far from the old and new fortified centers there appeared city ends. Polotsk was the largest in area (80 ha) town in Polotsk principality in the 11th -12th centuries, which corresponds to the chronicle data, writing about him as major (senior) [1, c. 172].

Bieriestye (modern Brest) was the center of Dregovichies’ colonization on the river Zapadnyj Boug. This town was mentioned in the chronicle of 1019. It was dug out in 1968-1981 under the leadership of Professor P. F. Lysenko. The unique structure of the ancient town was exposed. The archaeological Museum «Berestye» was created. The main exhibit of the Museum is an archaeological excavation. There are 28 small wooden residential and commercial buildings of the 13th century, 2 wooden bridges, a palisade. Among the most rare finds of the settlement it is necessary to mention: a comb with the alphabet (the beginning of the 13th century), a bone figure of the chess king, skis, and many other interesting finds, as a bronze cross-encolpion, writing implements: “pisalo” (medieval stylus), wax tablet for writing, jewelry, including a gold ring (the beginning of the 14th century), various children’s toys, leather goods and many other subjects [3].

The remainders of dwelling were revealed in 17 ancient towns of Belarus. Most of them are onechamber log houses. Dwelling buildings usually had square form. Their dwelling space was 11–12 m². They were built of conifer trees with thickness of 16-18 cm. Sometimes the lower rows of logs were made of oak. The condensing material was moss. Sometimes for later building the remainders of the previous ones served the base. The floors in the buildings were of boards laid on logs. The roof was made of boards, as well leaned on perches and was retained with wooden “hooks-hens”. The stoves were clay, since the 13th century builders began using brick at constructing them.

The main element regulating buildings were streets. They were revealed in the excavations of Grodno, David-Gorodok, Minsk, Polotsk, Vitebsk, Slutsk, Slonim, Mstislavle, Berestye, Drutsk, Pinsk. Made of planks boards flooring of the street leaned on longitudinal logs. The buildings were placed close to the street road way. Mutual disposition of streets defined the planning of towns as right-angled (Grodno, Slonim, Vitebsk, Drutsk, Mstislavle), fan-shaped (Minsk) or radial (Pinsk). Building and planning of the town had a stable character: streets, yards and buildings occupied the same place during centuries [1, c. 342-370].

The most numerous group of finds is ceramics. In Belarus pots began to be made on the porter’s wheel about the middle of the 10th century. The second group by the number of finds is formed by objects of metal (iron). Among them there are blacksmith’s, metal and woodworking instruments, economic and domestic inventory, decorations and articles of clothes, arms and objects of a horse harness [20, c. 288-299].

The population of Belarus in the 9th–13th centuries made main and vitally necessary articles independently out of local materials (instruments, armament, and domestic articles). Exceptionally seldom objects of gold are found (rings, bracelets, temple rings etc.). Local jewelers used lead, tin, brass, bronze. Undoubtedly, many of articles of religious cult were imported, among them there were amber and metallic crosses for wearing on the chest, bells, and icons. The imported things from the Baltic countries were horseshoe fastenings, star-shaped clasps, cross-like pins, amber. In towns one may find fragments of clay amphorae from the Black Sea coast and Greece. One of most frequent finds are fragments of famous glass bracelets that are of Kiev production. Various glass beads, rings are also of importing production. Frequently one may find fragments of glass vessels from Byzantine and from the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean sea coast. The finds of importing articles shows commercial connections.

All the mode of life of Slavs was connected with plastic art, beginning with carving on domestic utensils and finishing with various amulets – guards in the form of small horses, birds, different animals, spoons, axes. The decorative art of eastern Slavs of the 9th–10th centuries reflected pagan magical views. For example, jewelry-amulets “lunnitsy” (in the shape of moon) found in Minsk, Druck; flat figures of horses - in Vitebsk, Minsk can be mentioned. A lot of pendants with solar symbolism (Polotsk), that is, reflecting pagan beliefs as well.

And with the adoption of Christianity jewelry-amulets have not disappeared, but supplemented with new species. The formation of fine arts in the towns after the adoption of Christianity was influenced by Byzantine, borrowings of Oriental motives appear. So in the 12th century there spread specific urban decorations: colts (metal hollow pendants attached to the headdress), hollow ornamented beads, wide sash bracelets. They are decorated with floral, geometric and teratological ornament.

Popular were the compositions with figures of birds and animals - the keepers of the “tree of life” (colts from Vishchyn). The birds on the sides of the tree are considered as an echo of the Byzantine tradition (a frequent motive in Byzantine and Eastern Slavic art of the 10th – 12th centuries).

Wonderful examples are small carved icons with images of saints. For example, a double-sided image of the turn of the 12th – 13th centuries from the Minsk castle. On one side – the Apostle Peter, a half-length image of the praying Mother of God on the second. Such iconographic type is defined as hagioloritissa (in turn three quarters with a prayerful gesture of hands). This is not the most common type, so we can assume that this is a feature of the carving on Belarusian territories. An artefact of this type – a stone icon with images of St. Constantine and St. Helena found in Polotsk. Its artistic style resembles the images on Byzantine monuments of the 11th – 12th centuries, so it is a processing of Byzantine samples on the local soil. A similar type of artefacts – images found in Pinsk (early 13th century, Christ Emanuel), Volkovysk (bone plate, part of the triptych of the 12th century).

Another type of artefacts – bronze crosses-enkolpions (or fragments) – (found in Drutsk, Minsk, Polotsk); they were made either in Kiev or by local craftsmen on the Kiev samples.

In Polotsk principally there were works of fine art with images of Boris and Gleb, this is due to the influence of Kiev as well. For example, a pendant bronze icon from Kopys (Orsha district of Vitebsk region), where the saints are depicted in height and have portrait differences (Boris's mustache, curly locks from Gleb).

A special group of artefacts are coin-like pendants (or round foldings) called "zmeevik" (it means with snakes) (used in the 11th-14th centuries). Usually on the outside of the pendants there were images of Christian symbols (Christ, the Mother of God with the child, saints). On the reverse side there was a circular inscription – a spell against diseases and a "snake's nest". It was believed, that they protect against disease. Such an artefact was found in Chechersk, Volkovysk (bronze medallion-serpentine with the inscription, on one side – the image of the Archangel, on the other – snakes), Zaslavl, Brest. These findings confirm that for a long time after the adoption of Christianity among the population of the Belarusian territories the dual faith was preserved (paganism and Christianity) [5, p. 101-121].

In addition, archaeological research has shown that on the Belarusian territories in the 12th-13th centuries chess were a part of the culture: chess pieces were found during the excavations in Polotsk. For example, the figure of a chess horse from the settlement on Menka (the river in Minsk region) of the 11th century is the oldest in Eastern Europe. Chess pieces of the 12th – 13th centuries were found in Drutsk, Minsk, Polotsk, Vitebsk and other towns. Most of them are abstract symbolic figures. But there are anthropomorphic figures (taking into account the images of the shipbuilders there are 6 of them)

An exceptional place in the history of fine art is the cross of Euphrosyne of Polotsk, made by master Lazarus Bogsha in 1161 for the Transfiguration Church of the convent. Judging by the text of the "Life of Euphrosyne of Polotsk", she did not leave Polotsk (only at the end of her life she made a trip to Jerusalem). She appears to offer a sketch of the cross, then, a master made it in Polotsk.

The placement of images of saints on the work has its own characteristics. On the trunk of the cross there are images of patrons of the family members of Euphrosyne-father George, mother Sophia and the Euphrosyne. Valuables were usually made of the customer's materials: gold, silver, precious stones, wooden base, which were laid the relics of the saints brought to Polotsk. Unfortunately, in 1941 the cross disappeared from the Mogilev regional Museum and its location is not known. A modern master from Brest M. Kuzmich made an exact copy of the cross [11, c. 54-92].

The monumental architecture is in close connection with the growth of towns. The oldest partially preserved monumental building in Belarus is St. Sophia Cathedral in Polotsk (mid-11th century). In the 11th century in the East Slavic lands only the cathedrals of Kiev, Novgorod and Polotsk were awarded this name. During the excavations in Polotsk there were found signs of a large

fire that destroyed the wooden building where it was then built a stone one. The construction masonry of Polotsk Cathedral (and Kiev Cathedral as well) is mixed (as in Byzantine), i.e. from alternating rows of stone and bricks. The size of the temple was 26, 4 meters wide, about 31.5 long with apses (without apses length is equal to the width). In the 12th century, a complex of brick buildings appeared near the Cathedral. In particular, the foundation of the building, the lower parts of the walls and the remains of the column, as well as burial in a stone sarcophagus were excavated. This is a unique phenomenon in the Slavic architecture of that time. In the southern part of the building there was a tomb of the Polotsk princes, which is confirmed by numerous sarcophagi made of plinths. Summing up the data on the Polotsk Sofia, one can say that it has much in common with the cathedrals in Kiev and Novgorod, while it has a number of unique features [2, c. 132-154].

Until the early 20th century there was (though already in ruins) the building of the former Borisoglebsky (Belchitsky) monastery (Belchitsy near Polotsk were presumably the country residence of the Prince of Polotsk). In 1928 archaeologists managed to explore the remains of the foundation of the Great Cathedral of this monastery (dated the beginning of the 12th century). Three annexes gave the building a cross-shaped appearance. The peculiarity of this construction was an attempt to change the usual system of cross-domed church with six pillars by transferring the dome space to one division to the West. Further development of this construction led to the appearance of the temple tower-shaped structure. The study of the remains of this temple, as well as two other religious buildings of the complex speaks of their connection with the southern Kiev architecture tradition: in particular, a single type of construction masonry with hidden rows. But the transfer of the dome space on one division to the West became the basis of the original local construction, and by the middle of the 12th century Polotsk has its own architectural school.

The school gave an example of processing the cross-domed system of the temple, as a result of which the building looked stepped and pyramidal. This is illustrated by the Transfiguration Church (Spasskaya) of Saint Euprosyne monastery (the second survived building in the district of Polotsk). The Church was built in the mid 12th century by a Polotsk architect Ioann (presumably a monk of the monastery in Belchitsy). Its important feature is the first pattern of “kokoshniks” (semicircular or keel-like exterior decorative element) on the sides of the pedestal at the base of the “tholobate” (drum).

The entire volume of the Church in its original form was divided into parts of different heights. The building was completed with a drum with elongated light windows and a helmet-like dome, which gave it the appearance of a finished step composition.

This described construction (processing the cross-domed system of the temple into the tower-shaped structure) began to spread in other towns: Smolensk, Chernigov, Pskov. Since the end of the 12th century already Polotsk masters are invited, in particular in Smolensk for the construction of cathedrals.

Thus, Polotsk architectural school had a significant impact on the architecture of other East Slavic principalities.

So the results of excavations suggest the existence of 12 monumental buildings in the 12th century Polotsk. Only two buildings have survived to our time – St. Sophia Cathedral (in the middle of the 18th century it was thoroughly rebuilt by the architect Jan Glaubitz in the style of Vilna (late Belarusian) Baroque. However, fragments of masonry almost completely preserved, as well as ancient foundation, parts of the apse, pillars and walls, as well as amazing fresco paintings of the second half of the 11th century) and the Transfiguration Church (Spasskaya) of the Euphrosyne monastery.

In Vitebsk (as well in northern Belarus) partially preserved (today reconstructed) Annunciation Church (12th century in appearance and technique of masonry). The technique of masonry is of particular interest: the walls are made of hewn local limestone (up to 0.5 m), deposits of which are in large numbers in the district of Vitebsk; between them, horizontal rows of 2-3 rows of plinths are laid, a solution of lime and various additives is used. This phenomenon is almost unknown in the buildings of Kievan Rus', but is common in the Balkans and Byzantium. It is believed, that Byzantine masters took part in its construction [2, p. 154-185].

The remains of Church with six pillars was discovered in Grodno. It is assumed that the temple was built in the middle of the 12th century but died in a fire in 1183, which is mentioned in the Ipatiev chronicle (“the same summer Grodno burned and the Church of stone from the lightning and thunder»). But in Grodno there is one of the oldest known religious buildings – The Kalozha church of Sts. Boris and Gleb (late 12th century). Its study suggests that in Grodno in the 12th century there was a previously unknown local school of architecture. Its peculiarity is the presence of decorative elements on the outside of the walls of the building (large polished pink inserts (granite and gneiss) up to 1.4 meters) and the presence of so called “golosniki” in the walls (ceramic vessels or chambers of small size, used in masonry walls, facing the necks in the direction of the internal space of the building) [2, p. 186-205].

In the 13th century, the conditions for monumental construction on the Belarusian territories changed significantly. With the fragmentation of the Principality of Polotsk and the extinction of the princely dynasty in Polotsk, monumental construction there almost stopped. But with the increasing military threats defensive buildings such as donjons (or keeps – defensive towers) were built. It is known about the existence of two such towers in Polotsk and one in Turov. In the Ipatiev chronicle under the date 1277 it's reported about the tower in Grodno “a tall stone pillar stood in front of the city gates”. As a survived example of such buildings one can note the tower in Kamianets (Brest region).

In the early 19th century around the Kamenets tower there were the remains of the medieval fortification of the castle with earthen rampart, surrounded on three sides by a defensive moat, and the fourth - protected by the river. The tower is round in plan, with diameter of 13.6 meters, with a wall thickness of 2.5

meters and a height of 29.4 meters. The foundation and walls are made of brick. The tower has 5 tiers connected by stairs. As the tower is of extremely defensive purpose, it almost has no architectural decorations. A characteristic feature of the tower is that the masonry was laid in a way, called Vendian brickwork (spread as well in Volhynia, Poland), which was a clear western influence. At the top of the tower, under the teeth, there is a “ribbon” of 4 rows of bricks, which are placed “in the corner”. This decorative ornament gives the building additional expressiveness and emphasizes the antiquity of local architectural traditions [21, p. 6-15].

Thus, material culture on the territory of Belarus in the 9th-13th centuries developed in close connection with the state-forming processes. At its core, it combined the local pagan and Greek-Byzantine tradition. Arts and crafts, architecture developed mainly under the influence of Byzantium, but artisans introduced in it local features, based on local needs. Obviously there was some penetration of the western influence (especially, in defensive constructions). Creative reconsideration of the imported cultural traditions contributed to the emergence of local forms of material culture, exerted, in turn, influence on the neighboring, especially eastern regions.

As for worldview, this was the time when pagan beliefs were gradually replaced by a single state Christian religion.

As you know, Christianity originated in the early 1st century AD, and in the 4th century it became the dominant religion in the Roman Empire, after its collapse remained the state religion in Byzantium (Eastern Roman Empire). Close economic and political ties with this state and the need for ideological consolidation of the principalities that were developing in the Eastern Slavic territories led to the purposeful policy of the Eastern Slavic princes to adopt Christianity of the Byzantine model as a state religion. In particular, the Kiev Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavovich in year 988 converted to Christianity and began the Christianization of the Kiev Principality population: from the elite to the lower strata. Soon Christianization began in the Principality of Polotsk (in 992 Polock diocese is known).

However, Christianity came to those lands where for a long time the population had so-called pagan views: the belief that there are different good and evil spirits, the deification of the phenomena of nature, plants, animals, the folding of the whole system of gods (polytheists).

Christianity and paganism were very hostile to each other: one system of views was to replace the other. This replacement was often accompanied by the destruction of the carriers of old knowledge and traditions, defenders of ancestral beliefs. The old rite was forbidden: the names of the old gods were forgotten, places of pagan prayers were destroyed [4, p. 273–287.]. It is obvious that this makes it extremely difficult to study pre-Christian religious views of the Slavic population of the Belarusian territories.

The main sources for pre-Christian religious views study are: written Christian works, sermons against paganism, which contain only the names

of the deities and a very brief description of cults (for example, Primary Chronicle or The Tale of Bygone Years) [17, p. 14-15, 50-81.]; the information of ethnographers and folklorists of the 19th-20th centuries (for example, A. G. Kirkor, A. E. Bogdanovich and others) with description of the traditional culture of the Belarusian territory population [16]; ornamented household items [9]; archaeological material (the so-called «idols» first of all) [12, p. 11–18].

Unfortunately, this information does not allow to reconstruct the picture of pre-Christian views fully. However, it is obvious that the pagan religion on the territory of Belarus, most likely, did not have time to develop into a single system: the functions of the gods were mixed, the same duties were assigned to many gods. The first known attempt to create a single Pantheon of pagan gods belongs to the already mentioned Prince Vladimir, who sought to create a centralized state. But soon he, as you know, went on the path of Christianity, so that the systematization of polytheistic views did not happen.

Archaeological material gives modest, but more objective information. In most cases, the found idols or the remnants of temples are impossible to accurately correlate with various divine personalities. In general, according to the data of 2014, in Belarus 16 suitable for study pagan idols are found, and 6 have reached us in the form of information and sketches. Among ancient cult finds, idols of several forms are most known. In particular, individual stone heads (Slonimsky), and the figures, which include a clear humanoid or more stylized ones (female figures resembling crosses or cross-shaped figures on the body – stone woman). Today, work with archaeological finds is complicated by the unsystematic treatment of archaeologists of the 19th century, when part of the idols was found: they often did not leave an accurate description of the places where the discovery was made, ignored the local folklore tradition. In addition, most of the wooden idols have not survived to the present day. The main problem that arises during the study of pagan idols in Belarus is the impossibility of accurate attribution of monuments. It is caused, first of all, by an out-of-complex arrangement of finds and the previous movements of idols. Significant obstacles are also created by insufficient description by the scientists of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries of the idols appearance, location. All this makes it impossible to determine the time of creation and worship, to correlate idols with the religious tradition of a certain population: to determine which deity they belonged to and what population they were worshipped.

Today we can only highlight a group of female idols, which is very clearly distinguished from others. The absence of similar idols testifies to the absence in the territory of Belarus of a single pictorial canon in respect of sacred sculpture, which suggests the possibility of certain regional differences in cults [6; 7, p. 88].

Thus, before the arrival of Christianity in the Belarusian territories, there obviously existed a rich pagan tradition. Its study is now extremely difficult, but is of great interest, as it is an integral part of the traditional culture of the population of Belarusian territories.

Archaeological sources allow us to judge about the beginnings of writing and literacy spreading. In particular, every year new objects with inscriptions on them are revealed, which make it possible to judge the distribution of writing among the population. Even before the spread of Christianity (at the end of the 10th century), Slavic tribes that lived on the territory of Belarus had pictographic writing [15, p. 17]. However, the sphere of such writing application was limited: they indicated ownership signs, calendar signs and the like, but for the recording of complex texts such signs are not adapted.

With the emergence of statehood there appeared a need for a coherent system of writing. Records were kept in Greek letters (Greek – the language of Byzantium, close contacts with which, the adoption of Christianity in its pattern led to its strong cultural influence). Initially, they were not very adapted to the peculiarities of Slavic phonetics.

The most ancient sample of writing of East Slavs - an inscription on a seal of the Polotsk Prince Izyaslav (the end of the 10th century): the image of a Trident and an inscription, which transfers Greek sounding of a name Izyaslav. This leaden seal of the end of the 10th century was found in Novgorod (Russia). Presumably it was attached to the parchment on which a letter sent by Prince Izyaslav of Polotsk to Novgorod was written.

The lettering on this seal is an example of Cyrillic writing (created to translate religious books from Greek into Slavic /old Slavonic). It is believed that a great contribution to its creation was made by brothers Cyril and Methodius (from the city of Thessaloniki, now in Greece). In the second half of the 9th century Cyril created the alphabet, later called “Glagolitic”, it was used for the first translations of books for the Slavic population of the Great Moravia, which existed in Central Europe in the 9th-early 10th century. At the turn of 9th -10th centuries on its basis on the territory of the First Bulgarian Empire was developed Cyrillic alphabet, from where it came to the Eastern Slavs. So for a long time the literature of the Eastern Slavs was a continuation of the old Bulgarian [4, с. 305 – 306].

In the 11th century, writing and literacy were actively spread on the Belarusian territories. Some of the oldest inscriptions were found on the stone in the foundation of St. Sophia Cathedral in Polotsk (built in 1050-1056 years), where the scrawled names of people who, apparently, built the Cathedral: “David, Touma, Mykola” and separately “Peter, Vorish”. Graffiti was also found on the wall of St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev (now Ukraine). Scribbled says: “Воинегъ писалъ Журяговиць полоцянинь”. This phrase indicates the author’s place of residence – Polotsk (Belarusian territory).

Impressive monuments of epigraphy of the 12th century in the Belarusian territories are the so-called “Boris stones”, those are large boulders, with six-pointed crosses carved on them and inscriptions “Lord, help your slave Boris”. It is believed, that the inscriptions were carved on these boulders (in pre-Christian times, former pagan fetishes) during the famine of 1128. The name Boris is associated with the name of Prince Boris of Polotsk (died in 1129). For example, a stone in the village of Podkostelcy in the Polotsk area (8 meters

in circumference, with 1.5 meter image of the cross). It is known that his son Rogvolod (after the baptism Vasily) also ordered to carve his name and the image of the cross on the stones (the stone near the village of Dyatlovo of Vitebsk region is known, but only according to the description of the 19th century, has not survived.) [15, p. 18-20].

Valuable monuments of epigraphy – graffiti of Transfiguration Church Polotsk (mid 12th century). The most interesting writing is on the wall near the altar in the genre of remembrance “М(еся)ца авоуста в 3 день пръставися Козуминая письма иконьного”. Researchers suggest that it refers to the commemoration of the dead wife of the artist Kuzma, who worked in the monastery. Another interesting example of graffiti was found in the same Church in the doorway near the altar (though on top of it there are a few strokes of later graffiti): “Маръкова жана добра”, that is, “Wife / woman (?) of Mark is good/beautiful (?)” [13, p. 311-323].

Private messages with requests, instructions were written in the considered time on the birch bark («берестяная грамота»). With bone or metal stick letters were scratched out on the side of birch bark, which adjoined to the wood. For example, the birch-bark manuscript from the 11th century, which was written by a resident of Polotsk (or Vitebsk) Gyrovit was found in Novgorod. In Vitebsk the birch-bark manuscript was found in 1959, the letter of the 13th century with the following text “from Stepan to Nezhyla. If you sell clothes, buy me rye for 6 hryvnia. If not sold, then came to me. If you have sold, my benefactor, will you buy me rye.” A similar message is on the manuscript, found in Mstislavl in Mogilev region, but it is talking about wheat, bought at a price of 4.5 hryvnia. More recently, in 2014 another birch-bark manuscript was found in Mstislavl, the content of which is interpreted as training in spelling.

Styluses found in Pinsk, Slutsk, Brest say about the spread of writing, among, above all, town-dwellers, as well as household items and their parts with inscription. In particular, the inscriptions of the 12th century are found on such household items as a spinning wheel (a weight in the form of a disk with a hole, used for weighting the hand spindle and fixing the yarn on it. Spinners were made of stone, clay, bone, pink slate). For example, “Babino Praslin” in Vitebsk, “Nastasino Praslin” in Pinsk. There are inscriptions on the knife handles. For example, on a bone handle made of one of the middle ribs of a bison, found in the town of Drogichin (in 100 km from Brest), there is a fragment of the inscription, which reads “Ezhkov’s knife. And whoever steals it is cursed..». The inscription on the amphorae: “Yaropolk’s wine” in Pinsk is also known. An interesting discovery was made in Brest: the comb of solid boxwood with Slavic letters from A to L consistently cut on it. It is believed that it played the role of “primer” for literacy [4, p. 305 – 306]. In General, archaeological research has added to the number of sources of writing.

Undoubtedly, the spread of writing and literacy on the Belarusian territories was facilitated by the activities of Greek missionaries, who brought here the first Slavic-Bulgarian translations of Greek books. Such handwritten books penetrated

here from Byzantium through Bulgaria, where they were translated from Greek into old Slavonic. It is obvious that these were, first of all, church and religious books. Over time, they began to be rewritten on the spot (by competent monks, later, by scribes-professionals), later appeared local translations. The oldest local manuscript is the Gospel, accidentally found in 1865 in the present city of Turov (now in Gomel region). This is a rather small fragment (10 sheets about 22-18 cm), which was created, apparently in the monastery, which existed there in the 11th-12th centuries [22].

That time, there were two techniques of writing: books, letters and contracts were written with a quill pen and ink on parchment (bought most often from the Greeks) – this is more expensive option; or one could scratch writing by stylus on birch bark (as mentioned earlier) or waxed boards and that was cheaper option.

The most ancient manuscript, written in Church Slavonic on parchment, from the territory of Polotsk Principality is Polotsk Gospel, created at the end of the 12th century (172 sheets, colorful illustrations, initials, ornament of old Byzantine type) [19].

On Belarusian territories only handwritten books were in circulation until the beginning of the 16th century.

Thus, these and other finds of written monuments suggest a significant spread of literacy among the population of Belarusian territories in the 11th -13th centuries. At the same time, the impact of the Byzantine Christian tradition on this process is undeniable.

However, the productivity of its impact on the local culture, of course, depended on the efforts of individual talented “educators” from the local population: copyists of books, chroniclers, writers, religious figures. Most of their names remain unknown to us. But still there are bright figures, whose activities, reconstructed by historians, make it possible to understand the ways of spreading literacy, Christian ideas on the Belarusian territories.

In particular, thanks to a preserved written source, “Повесть жития и представления святых и блаженных и преподобных Еуфросинии, игуменьи манастыря Святаго Спаса и Пречистыя Его Матери, иже в Полотысьце граде” (it means The Story of the life and views of the Holy and Blessed and Reverend Euphrosinia, abbess of the monastery of the Holy Saviour and His most pure Mother, that is in Polock) we know, though not in detail, about the life and education of this woman – Euphrosyne, – occurring in the 12th century [8].

Since hagiographic works pay more attention to the transfer of the internal state of the hero, set themselves primarily didactic tasks, it is quite difficult to reconstruct in detail the biography of Euphrosyne.

Euphrosyne was born (initially in childhood, she bore the name Predslava) somewhere in 1100-1105. She came from a princely family (her grandfather – Polotsk Prince Vseslav Brachislavich, whose youngst son George was the father of Euphrosyne). There is very little data about her childhood in the source, but it’s stressed that she was very interested in learning, aspired to literacy and showed significant ability to master knowledge.

As a representative of the princely dynasty, Euphrosyne was obviously prepared for a dynastic marriage, the most profitable, in terms of public interests. In “Life” it is specified that there came quite a lot of matchmakers, however, according to the author of the story Predslava after reflections decided to leave in a monastery. At the same time, the author emphasizes her rather young age – 12 years. There she took monastic vows and the name Euphrosyne.

In the monastery Euphrosyne continued her studies, and after a while with the permission of the Bishop settled in a cell attached to the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Polotsk and engaged in coping books at the Cathedral library. At the same time she was engaged in charity work. After a while, with the support of the Bishop, who in the presence of witnesses gave her a plot in the village of Seltso near Polotsk, Euphrosyne founded the monastery of St. Saviour. Where gradually her sisters came as nuns (and she tonsured one of them a nun secretly from their father)

After some time, thanks to donations Euphrosyne began construction of the Church of St. Saviour (Transfiguration church). The name of the chief architect is known – Ioan (the Church is preserved till nowadays, being an example of Polotsk architectural school) [2, p.171-180.]

Later, on the initiative of Euphrosyne another Church was founded and built – Church of the Virgin, – transferred to the male monastery. For it icon of the Virgin was bought in Constantinople (in the 13th century taken away in Novgorod land). Besides Euphrosyne was actively engaged in educational activities in the monastery. By the end of her life, Euphrosyne decided to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, during which, having visited Constantinople and reached her goal, she fell ill and died (in the late 60s – early 70s of the 12th century).

Thus, on the example of extant information about the life of Euphrosyne (in the Belarusian historiography known as Euphrosyne of Polotsk) it is possible to trace at the “micro-level” closely related processes of the Christian worldview spread and literacy spread, characteristic for the cultural situation on the Belarusian territories in the considered time.

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