

**THE PHENOMENON OF MEDIEVAL “EASTER EGGS”:
TYPES OF ARTIFACTS, PROBABLE WAYS OF THEIR
DISTRIBUTION AND FUNCTIONS
(BASED ON FINDS FROM THE TERRITORY OF BELARUS
IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT)**

**FENOMEN ŚREDNIOWIECZNYCH „PISANEK”:
RODZAJE ARTEFAKTÓW, PRAWDOPODOBNE SPOSOBY
ICH DYSTRYBUCJI I FUNKCJE (NA PODSTAWIE ZNALEZISK
Z TERYTORIUM BIAŁORUSI W KONTEKŚCIE EUROPEJSKIM)**

Viktoryia Makouskaya

Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw
ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28, Warsaw
v.makouskaya@uw.edu.pl

ABSTRACT: The paper is devoted to such type of artifacts as “Easter eggs”, also known in the scientific literature as egg-shaped rattles or pisanki. The study considers such problems as the provenance of these artifacts and their function and meaning. In addition to glazed ceramic egg-shaped rattles, imitation eggs made of other materials are considered as part of the same phenomenon. The artifacts from the territory of Belarus were mostly found in towns and do not have a specific context. The majority of the finds dates back to a later period in comparison with the neighboring territories of Old Rus’. The distribution and occurrence of egg-shaped objects in towns and villages corresponded to the period of active spread of Christianity and church building, which indicates that it will be more appropriate to consider these finds in the context of Christianity.

KEYWORDS: Easter egg rattles, pisanki, Middle Ages, Europe, Belarus

Egg-shaped clay glazed artifacts with a ceramic ball or small stones inside are well known in the archaeology of Eastern and Central Europe. In archaeological literature these artifacts are known as egg-shaped rattles, Easter egg rattles or pisanki (Ślusarski, 2004, p. 80; Pankiewicz, Siemianowska, 2020, p. 54; Makarova, 1966, p. 141).

Pisanki usually have a dark background with yellow geometric ornamentation. Finds of Easter egg rattles have been common across a large part of Europe (fig. 1), but not all areas have been equally studied. This paper aims to systematize and introduce into the scientific discourse the finds of Easter egg imitations from the territory of modern Belarus (a part of the historical Old Rus' territory), and also to analyze how these finds contribute to ongoing discussions concerning similar artifacts.



Fig. 1. The map of the finds of ceramic glazed egg-shaped rattles in Europe

HISTORY OF RESEARCH AND CURRENT ISSUES

Early medieval glazed ceramic egg-shaped rattles were first mentioned in ethnographic publications of the second half of the 19th century (Sumcov, 1891, p. 2–3) in connection with traditional painted Easter eggs. However, as the main object of research in the archaeological context pisanki appear in the article by K. Bołsunowski, in which he describes the exhibits of the museum in Kyiv and connects them with pre-Christian beliefs (Bołsunowski, 1906, p. 530–532). J. Kostrzewski, describing several finds from Poland, attributed them to imports from Rus' and considered them as indicators of trade and cultural contacts (Kostrzewski, 1920, p. 44). These points of view can also be found in modern publications. With the accumulation and synthesis of the material from the middle and second half of the 20th century, some studies systematizing the finds from Europe and separate regions appeared. It is important to outline the key stages of the formation of the corpus of sources and highlight some of the central ideas.

The first systematizing paper was written on finds from the territory of Poland. Z. Hilczerówna pointed out 17 places where ceramic glazed egg-shaped rattles were found and emphasized the main questions that have been actively discussed since then: the deposition of ceramic “eggs” in burials as a characteristic feature, pisanki as an object of cult and magical rites, pisanki as rattles (Hilczerówna, 1950, p. 15, 16). She also pointed out that findings of egg-shaped rattles mark some trade routes, especially from the Rus’ to the Baltic Sea (Hilczerówna, 1950, p. 20).

In 1966, T. Makarova introduced the first classification of these artifacts, dividing them into two main groups based on style and production technology: items with a brownish-black glaze and those with yellow or brown glaze (Makarova, 1966, p. 143–144). She associated the first group with production centers in Novgorod or Staraya Ryazan, and the second group with Kyiv and its surrounding areas (Makarova, 1966, p. 144).

In 1980, H. Šovkopļāš expanded the collection of sources by publishing materials from the State Historical Museum of the USSR, which included finds from various regions of Ukraine (Šovkopļāš, 1980). Later, V. Sedov synthesized information about these artifacts across Europe, linking their origins to Slavic regions where pagan beliefs persisted long after Christianization. He noted that ceramic “eggs” were not found in the Balkan, Adriatic, and Danube regions (Sedov, 1998, p. 83). However, recent research and finds from these areas, reported by scholars (Perhavko, 2006, p. 136; Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023, p. 383) challenge Sedov’s earlier assertions.

The second typology of glazed egg-shaped rattles was introduced by K. Ślusarski. The researcher considers Easter egg rattles in the context of other types of ceramic rattles known from the Polish territories, categorizes them as type I and distinguishes 4 types of ornamentation (Ślusarski, 2004, p. 81). He also suggests a possible evolutionary connection between decorated egg-shaped rattles and simpler, undecorated spherical rattles (Ślusarski, 2004, p. 84), that was also mentioned by T. Makarova (Makarova, 1966, p. 144), although current evidence remains insufficient to confirm it.

In 2020, several significant papers were published that focused on Easter egg artifacts from Poland. A. Pankiewicz and S. Siemianowska published glazed clay eggs found in the towns of Wrocław and Opole (Pankiewicz, Siemianowska, 2020, p. 58–59). K. Kajkowski provided a detailed catalogues of finds from both burial and settlement contexts across Poland (Kajkowski, 2020, tab. 1, 3).

The latest systematization of egg-shaped finds is dedicated to the Dobruđa region. It could be described as the first study that considers both ceramic “eggs” and imitations of eggs made of other materials in the same context. B. Szmoniewski and A. Stănică divided the material into two types – limestone and brick imitations without glazing and glazed ceramic egg-shaped rattles (Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023, p. 375). It is important to mention that the existence of at least ceramic and wooden “eggs” on the Old Russian territories was mentioned in several studies, starting with H. Šovkopļāš (Šovkopļāš, 1980, p. 98; Suško, 2011, p. 51; Gurănov, Čibur, 2022, p. 132), but never became the object of special attention.

As mentioned above, pisanki have been found in both settlement and burial contexts, and some researchers have considered the finds exclusively in the context of funerary culture. In addition to the studies already mentioned, it's worth highlighting a few more relevant contributions. Prior to K. Kajkowski, finds of glazed ceramic "eggs" in burials on the territory of Poland were catalogued and analyzed by J. Wawrzeniuk. The main concern of this research was the role and symbolism of eggs in children's graves, and the author connects the finds of remains of real eggs in graves and finds of ceramic rattles into one phenomenon of placing eggs in graves (Wawrzeniuk, 2004, p. 147). The same parallel was also drawn in the research considering the remains of real eggs in graves in Estonia in particular, but also in the Eastern Baltic region in general (Jonuks, Oras, Best, Demarchi, Mänd, Presslee, Vahur, 2018, p. 117). In 2007, the first review of ceramic "egg" finds in burial contexts from the Old Russian territories appeared. The authors noted that these finds predominantly were placed in children's burials (Makarov, Zajceva, 2007, p. 178). This observation was also confirmed by the later study of V. Guryanov and A. Chubur (Gurānov, Čubur, 2022, p. 131), in which the authors systematized information on 13 finds in the Old Russian burial context.

Despite the considerable amount of research conducted on ceramic glazed 'eggs' in various contexts, several unresolved issues persist regarding these artifacts. These include issues related to determining the chronology of the artifacts, identifying their production centers, as well as understanding their function and symbolic meaning.

In general, the chronology of pisanki can be situated within the 10th to 13th centuries, though it can be further specified based on their peak popularity and regional variations. For the territories of Old Rus', a chronology for pisanki was established some time ago. Based on materials from Novgorod, B. Kolčín defined the period of pisanki's prevalence as the second half of the 10th to the first half of the 12th century (Kolčín, 1958, p. 106). T. Makarova determined that the period of popularity of the first group (according to her classification) is the middle of the 11th – the 30s of the 12th centuries, and for the second group – the 11th century (Makarova, 1966, p. 144). However, since the 1960s many new finds have been discovered both in Russia and Ukraine, which could potentially have an impact on chronology. The finds from Dobruđa can be dated from the second half of the 10th century to the first half of the 12th century (Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023, p. 383–384). According to the catalogs of the finds on the Polish territory it is possible to notice that they could be generally dated to the second half of the 10th – the beginning of the 13th century, but the chronology of the majority of the finds fit in the framework of the second half of the 11th–12th century, or even 12th century in Silesia (Kajkowski, 2020, tab. 1, 3; Siemianowska, Pankiewicz, Sadowski, Pawlicki, 2023, p. 263–264). However, a more region-specific study is required to draw more precise conclusions about the chronology of pisanki in Poland. Less information is available about finds from other areas of Central Europe or Scandinavia, where glazed clay "eggs" were dis-

covered sporadically, making it challenging to generalize information about their chronology.

Undoubtedly, *pisanki* are a product of advanced craftsmanship. Various research papers have identified potential production sites, including Kyiv (Rybakov, 1948, p. 362; Makarova, 1966, p. 144), Belgorod (Rybakov, 1948, p. 362), the Cherkasy and Volyn regions of Ukraine (Tkačenko, 2018, p. 334), as well as Novgorod, Staraya Ryazan (Makarova, 1966, p. 144), Smolensk (Kameneckaja, 2019, p. 94) in Old Russian territories. Additionally, sites in medieval Poland such as Kruszwica, Wolin, and Wrocław in Silesia have also been suggested as possible production centers (Olczak, 1968, p. 133; Siemianowska et al., 2023, p. 259). However, archaeologists currently agree on only one production center, which is Kyiv (or, more possible, Vyshgorod). The question of production centers is closely intertwined with other issues, such as production technology and distribution routes.

Two main ways of modeling clay "egg" were proposed and illustrated by an experiment: hand modeling by pressing a mold from a spherical fragment of clay (Suško, 2021, p. 184) and using a wax model to create a form (Kaczmarek, 1998, p. 553; Siemianowska et al., 2023, p. 259). There are also some studies explaining the process of glazing and decoration of clay egg-shaped rattles (Rybakov, 1948, p. 361; Makarova, 1966, p. 141; Kaczmarek, 1998, p. 555; Suško, 2021, p. 186). The newest and the most detailed study of the technology of the production of clay "eggs" was carried out by Polish scientists and includes the analysis of the clay structure, chemical analysis of glazes, modeling and firing experiments (Siemianowska et al., 2023). The latest glaze chemical analysis conducted on the finds from Silesia (Pankiewicz, Siemianowska, 2020; Siemianowska et al., 2023, p. 251) and Kyiv (Suško, 2021, p. 187) showed that glaze was based on PbO and SiO₂ with variations of proportion of components what could be defined as production of these objects in different manufacturing places (Siemianowska et al., 2023, p. 252).

Finds of *pisanki* outside the territory of Old Rus' have primarily been interpreted in the context of trade and cultural contacts. In addition to J. Kostrzewski and Z. Hilczerówna, E. Siemianowska further explored this topic, supporting Hilczerówna's idea regarding the distribution of *pisanki* along the route from Rus' to the Baltic Sea region and Scandinavia through Polish territories (Hilczerówna, 1950, p. 20). Siemianowska also proposed the possibility of overland distribution of these artifacts, not solely reliant on river routes (Siemianowska, 2008, p. 69). V. Perhavko examined finds of glazed clay "eggs" as indicators of trade contacts between Rus' and West and South Slavic territories (Perhavko, 1987, p. 34, 36). Focusing on distribution in Central and Southeastern Europe, Perhavko created a map showing the spread of these artifacts (Perhavko, 2006, p. 141). He was the first to note that the second highest concentration of Old Russian glazed clay "eggs" after Poland is in the Lower Danube region, linking it with trade contacts between Old Russian merchants and Dobrudja (Perhavko, 2006, p. 136, 143). The presence of *pisanki* in Baltic and Finnish territories (such as Sambia and Latvia) is attributed to active trade con-

tacts with Rus' (Širouhov, 2014, p. 393). Additionally, finds of ceramic "eggs" are considered evidence of Scandinavian countries' contacts with Rus', as the broadly understood Byzantine world (Müller-Wille, 1997, p. 420; Duczko, 1997, p. 294), highlighting not only trade but also significant cultural interactions (Müller-Wille, 1997, p. 420).

The function and meaning of glazed egg-shaped rattles remain one of the most discussed issues in research. One hypothesis suggests they were toys for small children, serving as rattles due to their similarity in form. This idea was first proposed by K. Bołsunowski in 1906 (Bołsunowski, 1906, p. 529). However, most researchers have since moved away from this interpretation (Ślusarski, 2004, p. 92).

Because of the characteristic of producing sound, although very quiet, Easter eggs as well as rattles of other shapes are sometimes considered in the context of musical culture (Povetkin, 2008, p. 112; Tatoń, 2020, p. 14; Popławska, 2020, p. 44). Nevertheless, some scholars still associate these artifacts with children's toys, particularly based on finds from children's graves (Makarov, Zajceva, 2007, p. 179), or uphold the traditional viewpoint, considering them as both rattles and objects used in magical rituals (Tkačenko, 2018, p. 331; Volodina, 2016, p. 154; Suško, 2011, p. 49).

The most widely accepted interpretation of glazed ceramic "eggs" is that they were objects used in pagan rituals or associated with pagan beliefs, a viewpoint that also traces back to K. Bołsunowski's article in 1906 (Bołsunowski, 1906, p. 531). This interpretation is often rooted in the universal symbolism of the egg as a symbol of new life, rebirth, and fertility, recognized across different cultures and epochs (Rybakov, 1981, p. 33; Sedov, 1998, p. 81; Ślusarski, 2004, p. 92; Suško, 2011, p. 50; Gurānov, Čubur, 2014, p. 88; Kajkowski, 2020). Finds of pisanki in graves have been explained as objects mediating between the world of the living and the world of the dead (Wawrzieniuk, 2004, p. 144; Kajkowski, 2020), or as symbols of protection for children who died young and of rebirth (Gurānov, Čubur, 2022, p. 131). Some authors have even suggested connections between the ornamentation of ceramic "eggs" and ornamental patterns known from Slavic mythology and ethnography, such as the "tree of life" or "pine tree" motifs (Kaczmarek, 1998, p. 558; Wawrzieniuk, 2004, p. 146; Gurānov, Čubur, 2014, p. 89). However, this connection may be questionable, as similar patterns are known from ancient Egyptian glassware decoration (Makarova, 1966, p. 142), suggesting a more probable interpretation within the context of craft tradition rather than mythology.

An intriguing aspect of interpreting pisanki is their appearance during the Christianization process. Some researchers noted finding these artifacts in Christian contexts but still interpreted them as remnants of pagan beliefs or mentality (Duczko, 1997, p. 293; Kontny, 2020; Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023, p. 396).

Recent studies have explored the possibility of these artifacts having Christian or pagan interpretations based on their context. For example, in Estonia, a painted eggshell found in the 12th–13th centuries grave of an elderly woman (on her body) was seen as a symbol of Christianity, while an unpainted shell found at a distance from the body in another grave was interpreted as reflecting pagan traditions of placing

food in graves (Jonuks et al., 2018, p. 118). Similarly, in Dobrudja, a limestone “egg” inscribed with Christian symbols was considered a symbol of Christ’s resurrection (Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023, p. 388).

In 1891 N. Sumtsov suggested that pisanki came to the modern Russian territories together with the Christian religion (Sumcov, 1891, p. 12). However, this interpretation did not prevail in the later scientific circle, and at this point we can mention only a few studies where pisanki are attributed as symbols of Christianity. For example, in 1997 M. Müller-Wille explained the finds of clay glazed “eggs” on the territory of Sweden by the presence of Christian Orthodox travelers there (Müller-Wille, 1997, p. 420).

Overall, none of the explanations for the meaning of clay glazed egg-shaped rattles appear entirely satisfactory thus far.

Finds of Easter egg rattles in Belarus. Ten finds of glazed egg-shaped rattles, originating from seven archaeological sites, are known from the territory of Belarus.

The majority of these artifacts were found at the Old Castle of Hrodna, a citadel of the Old Russian town situated on the western border of Rus’. These finds were uncovered during excavations conducted in the 1930s by J. Jodkowski (1932–1937)

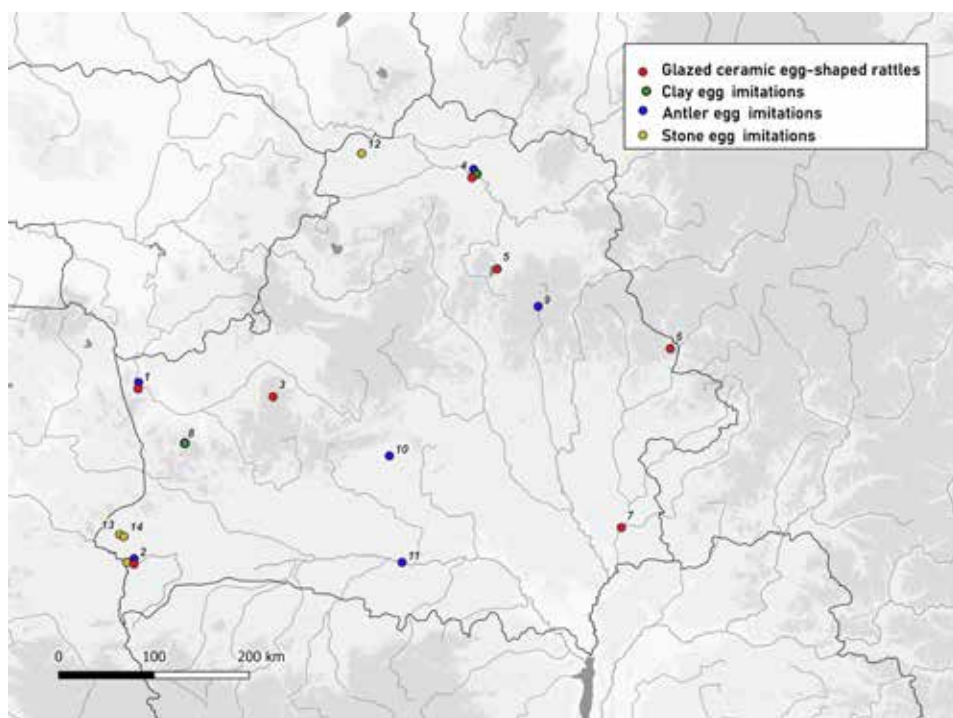


Fig. 2. The map of the finds of ceramic glazed egg-shaped rattles and egg-imitations made of different materials found on the territory of modern Belarus: 1 – Hrodna; 2 – Brest; 3 – Navahrudak; 4 – Polack; 5 – Lukoml; 6 – Mscislaŭ; 7 – Homiel; 8 – Vaŭkavysk; 9 – Druck; 10 – Sluck; 11 – Turaŭ; 12 – Maskavičy; 13 – Hacinava; 14 – Trascianica

and Z. Durczewski (1937–1939) in the vicinity of the ruins of the Lower Church, constructed in the mid-12th century (Golubovič, Cegak-Golubovič, p. 37) and destroyed by fire in 1183 (Voronin, 1954, p. 22, 127).

One fragment was found in 1937–1939. It has a brown background with bright yellow bracketed decoration and was made of red clay (fig. 3: 1). Z. Durczewski attributed it to the “wood 6” layer and suggested a dating to the first half of the 13th century (Durczewski, 1939, p. 13). However, subsequent research by V. Voronin proposed that this layer, situated above the church’s destruction layer, could be dated to the late 12th century to the early 13th century (Voronin, 1954, p. 32).

The second egg was also found in 1937–1939 and reconstructed from two fragments. Its surface is almost completely destroyed by the fire, so that one can only say that it was glazed (fig. 3: 2). It comes from the “wood 10” layer (Golubovič, Cegak-Golubovič, p. 66), at the depth of 7.4 meters, which was connected with the fire that destroyed the “first settlement” of Hrodna and could be dated to the end of the 11th – the beginning of the 12th century (Voronin, 1954, p. 45).

Another find also comes from the excavations in the 1930s, but we have no precise information about the years of discovery. The egg has a brown background with bright yellow bracketed ornamentation and most of its surface was destroyed by fire (fig. 3: 3). The egg can be attributed either to the fire of the first settlement or to the fire that destroyed the Lower Church. Therefore, it only can be dated from the end of the 11th to the end of the 12th century.

The “egg” was found in 1974 on the citadel of Brest, another town on the western borderland of Rus’ (excavations conducted by P. Lysienka). The egg has an elongated shape, dark, almost black, glossy glaze background with yellow ornamentation (fig. 3: 7). It was found in the 22nd mechanical layer of the 4th construction layer and dated by the author of the excavations to the 12th century (Lysenko, 1985, p. 384), but according to his own scheme of stratigraphic layers this date could be narrowed down to the first half of the 12th century (Lysenko, 1985, p. 54). The “egg” didn’t have a specific archaeological context, it was found in a cultural layer in the area near a residential building (Lysenko, 1975, p. 22, fig. 54).

A small fragment of the Easter egg was found in roundabout town of Navahrudak. This find is not stored in any of the Belarusian museums, so the only information we have is contained in the publication by T. Makarova. According to her, the fragment had a dark glossy background with yellow ornamentation (Makarova, 1966, p. 143). It could be dated to the 12th–13th centuries (Gurevič, 1981, p. 154). This egg fragment was not described in the archaeological report, so we have no detailed information about its context.

Two glazed eggs have been found in recent excavations in Polack, the capital of the Old Rusian Polack Principality. One of them comes from the excavations in 2021 at the Upper Castle (western excavation pit, conducted by I. Mahalinski). The egg

was made of red clay, it has a brown background and ornamentation in the form of irregular yellow horizontal lines spiraling around the egg (fig. 3: 6). Found in the cultural layer beneath the flat cemetery of the 11th–13th centuries (Haponava, Kots, Lucas, Both, Roberts, 2022), it can be dated to the first half of the 11th century. Presently, it stands as the earliest discovery from the discussed region.

The second find was discovered during the excavations in the area of the Lower Castle (Great Settlement at the medieval times) at 2023 (Vialiki Pasad) (area of the modern stadium “Spartak”, excavation pit 5, conducted by A. Kots). The egg has brown background and regular yellow ornaments (fig. 3: 5). It could be dated to the period of 12th–13th centuries, perhaps even to the 13th century.

Another significant find is from the hillfort of Lukoml, an Old Rus’ town in the Polack Principality. It was discovered during archaeological excavations carried out by H. Štyhaŭ in 1966–1969, 1971, 1973, and 1974 (Štyhov, 2014, p. 16). This egg also features a brown background with regular yellow ornamentation (fig. 3: 4). It was found in the cultural layer without any specific context (layer 6) and could be dated to the first half of the 13th century (Štyhov, 2014, p. 62, 22).

Intriguing artifacts were found on the citadel of the town of Mscialaŭ, the easternmost place in the region of interest. Near the building of unknown function two ceramic glazed objects were located – an egg and a figure of a water bird (probably a duck) (Alekseev, 1995, p. 159). Both the egg and the duck have a dark glossy background and regular yellow ornamentation (Makarova, 1972, p. 10, table VI). The author of the excavations, A. Alekseev, dated the construction layer B, where the objects were found, to the 50–60s of the 14th century and connected it with the fire of 1359 (Alekseev, 1995, p. 122, 159). However, the lack of traces of being in the fire and so impossible late date according to the chronology of the Easter eggs allows us to suggest that these items could have appeared in this layer due to mixing from earlier layers. Therefore it is only possible to date them to the period from to the earliest chronology of the town to the date of construction layer B – 12th – the first half of the 14th century.

We also have information about a fragment of an Easter egg found in the Homiel roundabout town in 1987 (excavations conducted by A. Makušnikaŭ). This fragment, made of red clay, features a dark background with yellow ornamentation (fig. 3: 8). It was discovered in a pit containing traces of pole construction and artifacts dating from the 11th to the early 13th century (Makušnikov, 1988, p. 14).

Aside from glazed ceramic eggs, several other types of egg-shaped artifacts are known from European archaeological sites, although they are often scarcely mentioned in publications. Within the territory of modern Belarus, egg-shaped artifacts made of clay, antler, and stone have been identified. It is likely that we can consider such artifacts within the same context as Easter egg rattles, potentially as their imitations.

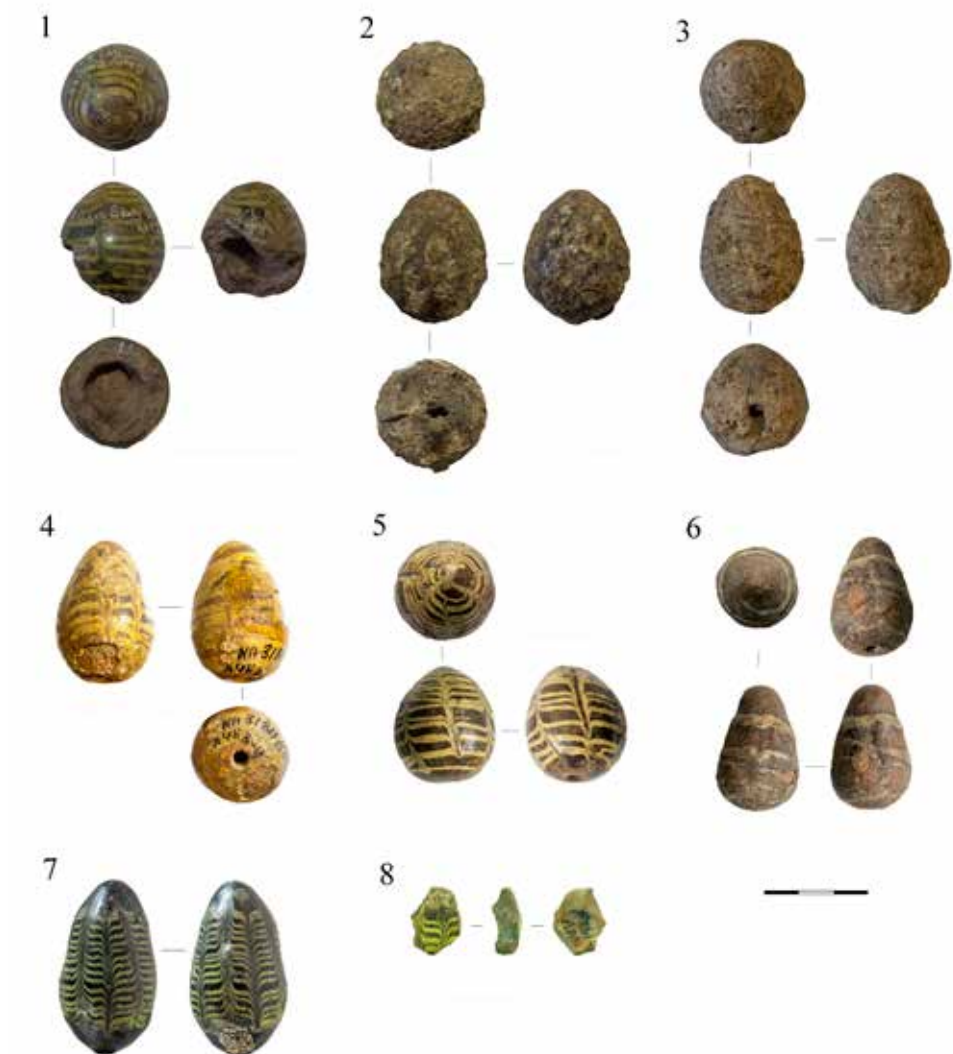


Fig. 3. Finds of ceramic glazed egg-shaped rattles from the territory of modern Belarus: 1–3 – Hrodna; 4 – Lukoml; 5, 6 – Polack; 7 – Brest; 8 – Homiel

Tbl. 1. Finds of egg-shaped glazed rattles on the territory of Belarus

№	Archaeological site	Dating	State of preservation	Museum	Literature	Figure
1.	Hrodna (Old Castle)	The end of the 12 th – the beginning of the 13 th centuries	Fragment	GSMHA	Durczewski, 1939, p. 13	Fig. 3: 1
2.	Hrodna (Old Castle)	The end of the 11 th – the beginning of the 12 th century	Reconstructed from two fragments	GSMHA	Golubovič, Cegak-Golubovič, p. 66	Fig. 3: 2
3.	Hrodna (Old Castle)	The end of the 11 th – the end of the 12 th century	The whole item	GSMHA	–	Fig. 3: 3
4.	Brest (citadel)	The first half of the 12 th century	The whole item	BRMLS	Lysenko, 1985, p. 384	Fig. 3: 7
5.	Navahrudak (roundabout town)	12 th –13 th centuries	Fragment	–	Gurevič, 1981, p. 154	–
6.	Polack (Upper Castle)	The first half of the 11 th century	The whole item	–	–	Fig. 3: 6
7.	Polack (Great Settlement)	12 th –13 th centuries	The whole item	–	–	Fig. 3: 5
8.	Lukoml' (hillfort)	The first half of the 13 th century	The whole item	NHMRB	Štyhov, 2014, p. 62,	Fig. 3: 4
9.	Mscialaŭ (citadel)	12 th – the first half of the 14 th century	The whole item	–	Alekseev, 1996, p. 122	–
10.	Homiel (roundabout town)	11 th – the beginning of the 13 th century	Fragment	GPPE	Makušnikov, 1988, p. 14	Fig. 3: 8

We have information about two clay eggs from two Old Rus' towns – Polack and Vaŭkavysk. Both lack glazing, are solid without empty space inside, and were evidently not intended as rattles. The egg from Polack is adorned with dot ornamentation, which, at first glance, may appear irregular, but in certain areas, a pattern of vertical rows can be discerned (fig. 4: 1). Discovered on the Great Settlement (Vialiki pasad) in 1988 (during excavations led by S. Tarasaŭ), this egg lacked specific archaeological context, having been found in cultural layer (mechanical layer 11) (Tarasov, 1989, p. 43). According to S. Tarasau's layer chronology, this stratum could be dated to the 12th century (Tarasov, 1989, p. 3, 13). Considering pottery types III and IV, classified by H. Štychaŭ and dated to the period of the 12th – the first half of the 13th century (Štyhov, 1975, p. 81–82), the find could be dated to the 12th – the beginning of the 13th century.

‘Egg’ from Vaŭkavysk has on the bottom part an encircled stamp with a mark that looks very similar to the marks of a princely dynasty of the Old Rus’ – Ryurikovich (fig. 4: 2, 2a). However, due to the poor quality and preservation of the stamp, it is not possible to identify it with any particular Ryurikovich mark. This egg was found in 1956 on the Castle Hill (Zamčyšča) (excavations conducted by H. Peh and V. Tarasenko)¹. However, this find was never published, nor was it mentioned in the archaeological report. Therefore, due to the lack of precise information, we can only date it to the period between the 11th and 13th centuries.

Finds made of antler are the most numerous, for now we have information about 9 egg imitations from six archaeological sites. All antler imitations of eggs were found in towns: Polack, Druck, Hrodna, Brest, Sluck, Turaŭ. These finds usually have a regular egg shape and polished surface; they are slightly larger than clay glazed eggs, measuring approximately 5–5.4 cm high and 3.3–4 cm in width (fig. 4: 3–8). In most cases, when we have information to date these finds, they could be generally dated to the period of 12th–13th centuries (table 2).

But it is important to note that some finds could be dated to the later period. A Polack ‘egg’ found in 1959 on the Upper Caslte (excavation pit II, conducted by A. Mitrafanaŭ) was located in the construction layer, that could be dated to the 17th century (Mitrofanov, Štyhov, Tarasenko, 1961, p. 22, 50). It is also possible that the egg found in 1987 in the Great Settlement (Vialiki pasad) (excavations conducted by S. Tarasau) could also be dated to the later period. This find is stored in the Polack National Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve, where it was handed over by the author of the excavations with the information that it dates back to the 15th–17th centuries. But the details about this find are not published and the archaeological report is lost, so we have no possibility to verify this information. In cases where we have information about the context, such eggs were found outside buildings in the cultural layer, for example, under the wooden street in Brest (Lysenko, 1972, p. 10). It’s also worth mentioning that the artifact from the citadel of Hrodna has a scratched cross-mark on its side (fig. 4: 5).

The category of stone egg-imitations is of considerable interest. These objects were discovered not only in urban areas, such as Brest or Maskavičy (a fortress on the western border of the Polack Principality), but also in burials. Currently, there is information about four stone eggs from the territory of modern Belarus. These eggs have a polished surface and could be with or without ornamentation. In general, they could be dated to the period between the 11th and 13th centuries (table 2). An unusual find was made at the Maskavičy hillfort. It is an irregularly shaped limestone with scratched geometric ornamentation covering its entire surface (Dučyc, 1991, p. 45). The ornamentation consists of diagonal lines that create triangles and pine tree fig-

¹ This find is stored at the Vaŭkovysk War and Historical Museum n.a. P.I. Bagration, where it was given by the H. Peh.

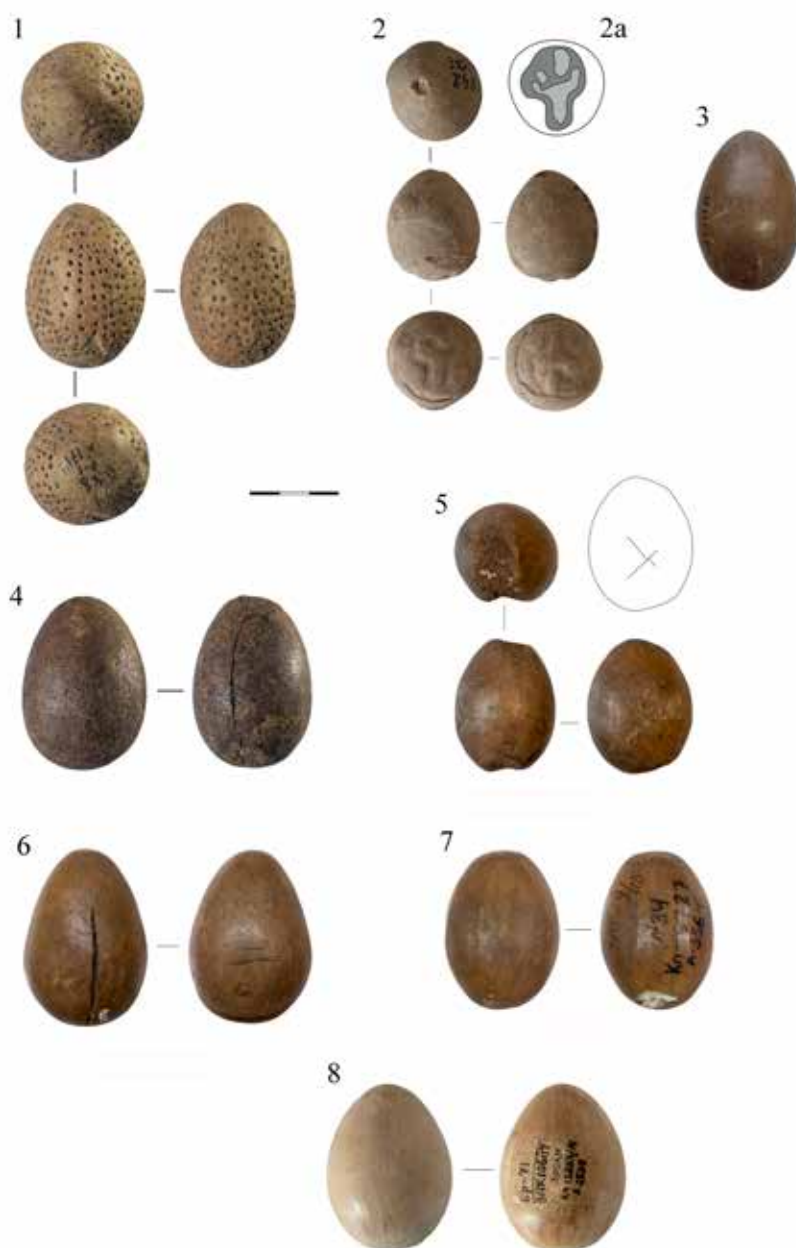


Fig. 4. Egg-shaped imitations made of clay (1, 2) and antler (3–8) from the territory of modern Belarus: 1, 3, 4, 6 – Polack; 2 – Vaŭkavysk; 5 – Hrodna; 7 – Sluck, 8 – Brest

ures, as well as a few cross-shaped figures (fig. 5: 2). The egg was discovered within the filling of the fortification wall and located at the foot of the slope, as a result of the destructive process (Dučić, 1984, p. 12, 56). The only means of dating this find is through the construction of the wall, which is estimated to have occurred between the 11th and 12th centuries (Dučyc, 2011, p. 62).

Two stone egg-imitations were discovered in burial contexts. One (fig. 5: 3) was found on the Hacinava barrow cemetery (barrow 20), in the burial of a young woman in a coffin. The egg was discovered near the woman's head (Korobuškina, 1984, p. 32, 102). The burial can be dated to the 11th century (Korobuškina, 1993, p. 92). One stone egg from these excavations is stored in the Hrodno State Museum of the History of Religion, but it is not possible to attribute it to a specific burial. In the archaeological report, T. Karobuškina mentions two other burials with stone 'eggs': barrow 17 in the Hacinava cemetery and barrow 18 in the Trascianica cemetery (Korobuškina, 1993, p. 45). However, no information about these finds is provided. The egg from Brest (fig. 5: 1) was discovered in a cultural layer between residential buildings and out-buildings (Lysenko, 1972, p. 25, il. 14).

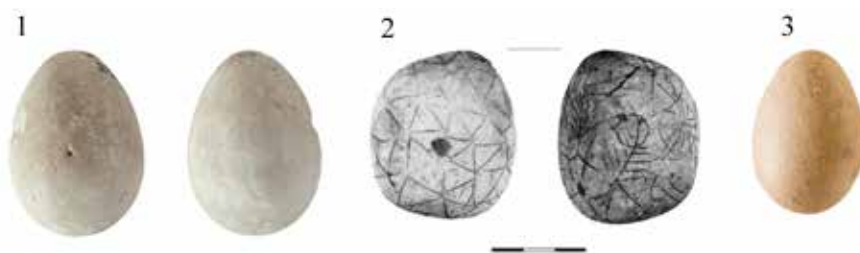


Fig. 5. Egg-shaped imitations made of stone from the territory of modern Belarus: 1 – Brest; 2 – Maskavičy; 3 – Hacinava

Tbl. 2. Finds of egg imitations on the territory of Belarus

№	Archaeological site	Material	Dating	Special features	Museum	Literature	Figure
1.	Polack (Great Settlement)	clay	12 th – the beginning of the 13 th century	dot ornamentation	PN-HCRM	Tarasov, 1989, p. 43	Fig. 4: 1
2.	Vaŭkavysk (Castle Hill)	clay	11 th –13 th centuries	stamped mark of Rurikovich (?)	VWHM	–	Fig. 4: 2

3.	Polack (Great Settlement)	antler	15 th –17 th centuries (?)	–	PN-HCRM	Tarasaŭ, 1998, p. 158	Fig. 4: 4
4.	Polack (Upper Castle)	antler	17 th century (?)	–	NHMRB	Mitrofanov, 1960, p. 22, 50	Fig. 4: 3
5.	Polack (Upper Castle)	antler	The end of the 13 th century	–	IH NASB	–	Fig. 4: 6
6.	Druck (citadel)	antler	12 th century	–	VRMLH	Medvedeva, 2014, p. 442	–
7.	Druck (citadel)	antler	12 th century	–	VRMLH	Medvedeva, 2014, p. 442	–
8.	Brest (citadel)	antler	13 th century	–	BRMLS	Lysenko, 1972, p.10	Fig. 4: 8
9.	Hrodna (Old Castle)	antler	?	scratched cross-mark	GSMHA	–	Fig. 4: 5
10.	Sluck (citadel)	antler	12 th –13 th centuries	–	SMLH	Kaladzinski, 2006, p. 151	Fig. 4: 7
11.	Turaŭ (citadel)	antler	Not earlier then the 12 th century	–	TLSM	Lysenko, 2004, p.68	–
12.	Brest (citadel)	stone	The end of 12 th – the beginning of the 13 th centuries	–	BRMLS	Lysenko, 1972, p.25	Fig. 5: 1
13.	Maskavičy (Hillfort)	stone	11 th –12 th centuries	scratched geometric ornamentation	–	Dučyc, 1991, p. 45	Fig. 5: 2
14.	Hacinava (barrow cemetery, barrow nr. 20)	stone	11 th century	–	HSMHR	Korobuškina, 1984, p. 32, 102	Fig. 5: 3
15.	Hacinava or Trascianica (barrow cemeteries)	stone	11 th –12 th centuries	–	HSMHR	Korobuškina, 1993, p. 45	–

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

Upon an analysis of the map of the distribution of ceramic glazed eggs, several concentrations can be observed. These include the Kyiv and Middle Dnieper region, the headwaters of the Dniester and Western Bug rivers, the right tributaries of the Prypiac River in the Ukrainian regions of Galicia and Volyn, the Greater Poland region, the Lower Oder basin region and the nearest Baltic coastline, the Lower Danube and west Black Sea coast region in Dobrudja. It is also evident that these finds clearly identify the main riverine trade and communication routes, including the Dnieper, Volga, Dniester, Daugava, Western Bug, Vistula, and Oder. As previously stated, these finds may also mark several land trade and communication routes (Perhavko, 2006, p. 136; Siemanowska, 2008, p. 69; Hilczerówna, 1950, p. 20). It can be observed that the finds indicate the basic directions of contacts between Rus' and the major administrative and trade centers during the 11th to 13th centuries.

The number of finds from the modern territory of Belarus is relatively small in comparison with the neighboring Slavic territories. It is evident that Old Rus' towns and settlements on the territory of modern Belarus were not a significant production center or an important export destination of Easter eggs. It is more probable that in relation to Easter eggs, this territory was a region of transit, during which some items were deposited in major towns. The map illustrates the principal transit routes on the rivers Nieman, Soż, the Western Bug, and the Western Dzvina (Daugava), the main contact arteries of this region. In comparison with other regions, Easter eggs were found here only in towns, not at rural settlements or cemeteries.

Based on ten finds, it is impossible to assume when the transit through these lands began. However, it is notable that glazed ceramic eggs appear in local towns quite late, with no artifacts dated to the beginning of the production and distribution of Easter eggs. The majority of the finds have relatively late dates, closer to the end of the production period (table). As it was noted earlier the chronology of this type of artifact was established a while ago (Kolčín, 1958, p. 106; Makarova, 1966, p. 144) and should be revised to take into account new material. However, even if the period of greatest artifact distribution shifts towards a later date, some finds from this region will still stand out for their late dating. We will attempt to provide a possible explanation for this feature in the following topic.

The finds of glazed ceramic eggs or egg-imitations lack a specific context. In cases where contextual information is available, the finds were discovered in the cultural layer situated outside closed complexes or in proximity to houses. It is important to highlight that the imitations of glazed ceramic eggs are known not only from our region of interest, but also from different regions of Easter egg distribution. However, due to their lack of attractiveness in comparison with glazed ceramic ornamented 'eggs', these objects have received much less attention. They very rarely appear in publications, and even more rarely have researchers associated them with the phenomenon of Easter egg rattles. In a very limited number of publications, researchers have proposed a potential connection between these objects and the phenomenon of Easter egg rattles (Hilczerówna, 1950,

p. 11; Šovkoplās, 1980, p. 98; Kamińska-Koj, Koj, 1981(2016), p. 210; Pankiewicz and Siemanowska, 2020, p. 65; Sergêeva, 2010, p. 120; Tarasenko, 1957, p. 240), and the first paper to consider different types of egg-imitations in the same context as glazed ceramic egg-shaped rattles was published recently (Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023).

Clay egg-shaped imitations can be divided into two groups: clay egg-shaped rattles without glaze, that feature engraving ornamentation, and solid clay egg-shaped objects, that were never designed to be rattles. As previously stated, the collection of analogies from across Europe is an impossible task for present time, as a significant proportion of the material is likely to be unpublished. However, there is information about the discovery of egg-shaped rattles without glazing in Ukraine and Poland. The rattles from the Ternopil region in Ukraine feature an ornament that divides the surface of the egg into quarters filled with linear patterns, including parallel, perpendicular, and diagonal lines. Four rattles could be dated to the 12th–13th centuries (Âgodins'ka, Pigulák, 1998, p. 160). A rattle from the Myśliborskie Lake District in Poland has a cross ornamentation pattern. As it was an accidental find, it could be dated only to the 11th–13th centuries (Kontny, 2020, p. 192). At present, the only information available relates to a single solid egg-shaped clay object, crafted from a Roman brick, discovered in a 10th–11th century grave in the Brăila city area (Romania) (Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023, p. 376).

There isn't much information on antler egg-imitations. However, beyond Belarus, several have been documented in Ukraine, specifically in Kyiv, Vyshhorod, and Bila Cerkva. The archaeological context and dating of the find from Bila Cerkva are provided. It was discovered in a building dating back to the 12th–13th centuries (Sergêeva, 2010, p. 119). One antler 'egg' is known from the Ekimaucy hillfort in Moldova, potentially dating to the 11th century. A notable find is an example discovered near the fortification wall of the Vilnius Lower Castle, possibly dating to the late 15th to early 16th centuries (Blaževičius, 2014).

It can be assumed that antler egg-shaped artifacts resemble the antler weight of the flail, an early medieval impact weapon (Kirpičnikov, 1966, il. 12). It is possible that egg-shaped artifacts were workpieces of this weapon. However, this type of flail was not in use after the 13th century (Plavinski, 2013, p. 42). The late date of some finds of the antler egg-imitations from Belarus and Lithuania provides a possibility of admitting that they were completed products with a different meaning than the weapon. At the same time, this late date also poses a question about the period of ending of the Easter eggs phenomenon. It can be observed that at least one type of egg-imitations exists not only during the 11th–13th centuries, but also in the late medieval times.

There is a paucity of information regarding egg-imitations of stone, which can be a result of the non-obviousness of these artifacts. Stone eggs that lack ornamentation can be erroneously attributed to grinder stones or mistaken for a natural object. Artifacts of this kind are known from southwestern Poland (limestone ornamented artifacts from Opole hillfort) (Pankiewicz, Siemanowska, 2020, p. 58) and southeastern Poland (limestone non-ornamented 'eggs' from hillforts of Old Rusian towns Săsiadka and Czermno) (Chudzik, 2013, p. 124; Kamińska-Koj, Koj, 2016(1981), p. 210), the Middle Dnieper region (Old Rusian town Voin') (Dovženok, Gončarov, Ūra, 1966, p. 196).

In addition, the Lower Danube region (chalk undecorated and decorated ‘eggs’ from Murfatlar-Basarabi and decorated one from Isaceea-Lutarie, Romania) (Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023, p. 376) and Pskov are also worthy of mention. The aforementioned finds can be placed within a chronological framework of the 10th to 13th centuries.

As with the clay egg imitations, these artefacts can be divided into two groups: those with ornamentation and those without. While the function of some non-ornamented artefacts is open to debate, ornamented examples are often quite original and interesting within the context of egg imitations. It is also noteworthy to mention glazed ornamented limestone “eggs” from Opole hillfort, which have been dated to the 3rd quarter of the 11th century (Pankiewicz, Siemanowska, 2020, p. 59). The ornamentation of these eggs is comparable to that of clay rattles from the Ternopil region of Ukraine, which exhibit a similar pattern of dividing the surface of the egg into four sectors, each filled with geometric ornamentation. This similarity suggests that these eggs may be part of a shared phenomenon.

It is equally important to discuss the function of the various types of egg-imitations. As previously stated, the majority of research associates Easter eggs with pagan beliefs. Nevertheless, some finds have been identified as having a Christian context. For instance, egg-imitations with Christian inscriptions (crosses) have been discovered in Hrodna (Belarus) and the Myśliborskie lake area (Poland) (Kontny, 2020, p. 195). Furthermore, the archaeological complex in Isaceea-Lutarie (Romania) (illustration) can be dated to the 11th century (Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023, p. 379). In the context of Romanian finds, it is also significant to mention that three finds of 10th century chalk egg imitations were discovered in a cave church complex (Szmoniewski, Stănică, 2023, p. 376).

The absolute majority of the finds of ‘eggs’ that were located in graves were discovered in inhumations (Makarov, Zajceva, 2007, p. 178; Gurănov, Čubur, 2022, p. 131), as it was highlighted several times earlier (Wawrzyniuk, 2004, p. 145; Makarov, Zajceva, 2007, p. 178) ‘eggs’ more likely occurred in children’s graves, which is caused their mistakenly interpretation as children’s toys. It is important to note that the occurrence of Christian objects of personal piety is also more prevalent in the burials of children than in those of adults.

In regard to the finds from the territory of modern Belarus, which are the primary focus of this paper, it is significant to highlight that all finds there comes from towns – administration and religious centers, or from 11th–12th centuries inhumation burials. The majority of the finds, ether ceramic glazed rattles or egg-imitations made of other materials can be dated as far back as the 12th century. The 12th century is the time of active establishment of Christianity and development of stone cult architecture in this territory. The exception is 11th century find from Polack – the center of Old Rusian principality and important culture, religious and trade center.

It is also important to consider the pagan contexts of such finds. Information exists regarding the locations of glazed ceramic eggs in cremation burials: on the Sambian Peninsula (Povarovka) in the grave that could be dated to the end of the 11th–12th centuries (Širouhov, 2014, s. 393), and in Yotvingian cremation burial ground in

Krukówek (Suwałki County, Poland) from the burial object of the same date². However, it is just a few finds that belong to the territory of the pagan Baltic tribes. From the Slavic territories we have only one example of undoubtedly pagan context – child's cremation burial of the first half of 11th century in Eliseevichi (Bryansk district, Russian Federation) (Gurānov, Čubur, 2022, p. 131). Nevertheless, it is evident that this single example does not represent a general trend.

It seems like some traditional historiographical perspective exists, according to which researchers of early medieval Slavic archaeology automatically associate some types of artifacts and some elements of burial culture, that are not fit to the Christian rules, to the remains of pagan beliefs. This tradition could have deep roots, that's beyond the scope of this paper, but to take the case in point one example should be mentioned. In 1997 R. Rozendfeld in a chapter of a book, devoted to the Old Rus' material culture observed that:

The widespread use of pisanki coincides with the spread of amulets in the form of zoomorphic pendants and miniature household objects. According to the established opinion among specialists, pisanki were related to pagan beliefs. Therefore, it is very likely that the simultaneous disappearance of amulets and pisanki is most likely a consequence of the intensification of the struggle between Christianity and paganism in the 12th century. (Rozendfeld, 1997, p. 118)

However, recent studies have presented a very different interpretation of these amulets. Miniature spoon-shape pendants can also be interpreted as symbols of Eucharist spoons (Spirgis, Kuznetsova, Sobolev, 2022, p. 275). While the image of zoomorphic pendants has been associated with the image of a leucrota from medieval bestiaries (Spirgis, 2013, p. 409), the simultaneous disappearance of these objects could be interpreted not as the supplanting of pagan beliefs with Christianity, but rather as a result of the processes of changing material culture that took place on the territory of Old Rus' at the turn of the 13th century. Contemporary chronological information indicates that Ester-egg rattles were still in use in the 12th century, although they were at their most popular in some territories at this time.

One additional example of coexistence can be observed in the presence of Christian symbols in the same grave with an egg. On the grave of the previously mentioned wealthy woman from the 12th–13th centuries Estonian cemetery, apart from the painted egg, cross pendants had also been placed. The authors noted that cross pendants were discovered only in graves of the elite (Jonuks et al., 2018, p. 119).

It can be postulated that as further discoveries are made and published, both glazed egg-shaped ceramic rattles and other egg imitations will contribute to the corpus of archaeological sources on Christianity in the Old Rus' period.

² The author would like to thank PhD Martin Engel for providing information on this find.

CONCLUSIONS

We can summarize the results by highlighting the main features of the studied finds. From the territory of modern Belarus 10 glazed egg-shaped ceramic rattles and 15 their imitations made of clay, antler and stone are known. These artifacts were found mostly in towns and do not have a specific context. In cases where contextual information is present, they were found in the cultural layer outside closed complexes or near houses. The territory of modern Belarus was a transit region in the distribution of Easter egg rattles, and the majority of the finds dates back to a later period, in comparison with the neighboring territories of Old Rus'. The distribution and occurrence of egg-shaped objects in towns and neighborhoods corresponded with the period of the active spread of the Christianity and church building, that indicates that it will be more appropriate to consider these finds in the context of Christianity. The region's transit role and the small number of glazed ceramic 'eggs' here led to the production of a wide variety of imitations, reflecting the needs of the newly converted population.

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FENOMEN ŚREDNIOWIECZNYCH „PISANEK”: RODZAJE ARTEFAKTÓW, PRAWDOPODOBNE SPOSOBY ICH DYSTRYBUCJI I FUNKCJE (NA PODSTAWIE ZNALEZISK Z TERYTORIUM BIAŁORUSI W KONTEKŚCIE EUROPEJSKIM)

Streszczenie

Gliniane artefakty w kształcie jajek, zazwyczaj szklione i z ceramiczną kulą w środku, są dobrze znane w wczesnośredniowiecznej archeologii Europy Wschodniej i Środkowej i są zwykle nazywane „Easter egg rattles”, „grzechotkami w kształcie jajek” lub „pisankami”. Choć podobne znaleziska przyciągają uwagę badaczy od drugiej połowy XIX wieku, wciąż pozostaje kilka ważnych kwestii do rozstrzygnięcia, takich jak funkcja i rola takich „jajek” w średniowiecznych

społeczeństwach, ośrodki produkcyjne, gdzie wytwarzano gliniane jajka oraz chronologia tych artefaktów w różnych regionach.

Generalnie chronologia pisanek mieści się w okresie X–XIII wieków, choć można ją doprecyzować w oparciu o ich szczytową popularność i różnice regionalne. Znaleźiska z terenów Rusi najczęściej występują od około połowy XI do lat trzydziestych XII wieku, z Dobrudży – od drugiej połowy X do pierwszej połowy XII wieku, na terenach Polski największa liczba znalezisk może być datowana na okres drugiej połowy XI–XII wieku. Opracowanie chronologii pisanek dla różnych regionów ich występowania jest ważnym kierunkiem w dalszych badaniach nad tego rodzaju zabytkami. Jako ewentualne miejsca produkcji pisanek były rozpatrywane miasta, zarówno na terenie Rusi, jak i wczesnośredniowiecznej Polski, ale na dzień dzisiejszy badacze są zgodni tylko co do jednego miejsca – Kijowa (czy, prawdopodobnie, Vyszgoroda).

Aktywnie dyskutowaną kwestią jest funkcja i znaczenie ceramicznych „jajek”. Pisanki są postrzegane jako zabawki dziecięce czy przedmioty kultu pogańskiego, służące do obrzędów magicznych. Jednak ostatnio przypuszcza się także możliwość rozpatrywania ich w kontekście chrystianizacji ludności Europy Wschodniej i Środkowej.

Z terytorium dzisiejszej Białorusi znanych jest 10 szkliwionych ceramicznych grzechotek-pisanek, które zostały znalezione w siedmiu miastach okresu staroruskiego: Grodzie, Brześciu, Nowogródku, Połocku, Łukomlu, Mściśławiu, Gomelu. Jednak poza pisankami z tego obszaru znane są również znaleźiska imitacji jajek z gliny, rogu, kamienia w ogólnej liczbie 15 przedmiotów, część z których ma ornamentację, znaki władzy lub znaki chrześcijańskie. Przedmioty te, podobnie jak pisanki, najczęściej pochodzą z miast, ale są też znalezione w kilku pochówkach szkieletowych. Ogólne datowanie zarówno pisanek, jak i innych przedmiotów w kształcie jajka, znajduje się w okresie XI–XIII wieku (za wyjątkiem kilku „jajek” z rogu), ale można stwierdzić, że na większą skalę takie przedmioty pojawiają się dopiero w XII wieku.

Niewielka liczba znalezisk szkliwionych glinianych jaj na terytorium Białorusi i ich lokalizacja wzdłuż szlaków handlowych sugerują, że tereny te służyły jako region tranzytowy w dystrybucji pisanek, zwłaszcza w kierunku zachodnim i północnym. Pojawienie się przedmiotów w kształcie jaj w miastach i okolicach miast akurat przypada na okres aktywnego rozprzestrzeniania się chrześcijaństwa i rozwoju kamiennej architektury sakralnej, co wskazuje, że najprawdopodobniej należy rozpatrywać te znaleźiska w kontekście chrześcijaństwa. Tranzytowa rola regionu i niewielka liczba szkliwionych ceramicznych „jajek” doprowadziły do lokalnej produkcji imitacji z różnych dostępnych materiałów, odzwierciedlających potrzeby nowo nawróconej ludności.