The modem village of Staraia Ladoga, located near St. Petersburg in northwestern Russia, was once a large trade and craft center during the Viking Age. Through Ladoga, from eastern Europe to Scandinavia and the West, flowed massive quantities of Arab silver, various goods manufactured by eastern craftsmen, silk and glass beads. Along with such large Viking centers as Birka and Hedeby, Ladoga played an important role in the trans-Baltic trade. Ladoga’s population was multi-ethnic, consisting of Slavs, Finno-Ugrians, and Scandinavians. In the ninth and tenth centuries, Scandinavians and Scandinavian culture played a primary role in the life of the town. However, traces of a Scandinavian presence discerned in Ladoga’s archaeology are uneven. For example, only one undisputable Scandinavian necropolis, Plakun, has been discovered at Ladoga.

The cemetery of Plakun, which is located near the village of Chernavino on the right bank of the Volkhov River, directly across from Staraia Ladoga’s Zemliano gorodishche (see map), has long been held by archaeologists as the classic example of a Viking-age Scandinavian cemetery in Eastern Europe. Researchers identify Plakun’s Scandinavian burials as those of a Viking druzhina (retinue), the princes’ followers, and as members of Ladoga’s population. A detailed description of the history of the excavations at Plakun, a description of its topography and of the mound complex is found in the works of G. F. Korzukhina, V. A. Nazarenko and E. N. Nosov.

1. Prior to 1704, Staraia Ladoga was known simply as Ladoga.
3. V. A. Bulkin, I. V. Dubov, G. S. Lebedev, Arkheologicheskie pamiatniki Drevnei Rusi (Leningrad: Leningradskogo Univ., 1978), 208-09; A. N. Kirpichnikov, I. V. Dubov, G. S. Lebedev, “Rus’ i variagi (russko-skandinavskie otnoshenia domnogo’skogo vremeni),” in Slaviane i skandinavy, ed. E. A. Mel’nikova (Moscow: Progress, 1986), 194.
An early date for the Plakun necropolis predominates in the Soviet and Russian literature during the last decades of the twentieth century. It is traditionally held that the cemetery began to function in the ninth century and ceased to be used in the beginning of the tenth century. According to V. A. Dubov, G. S. Lebedev, and A. N. Kirpichnikov the cemetery dates to the period of 850-925. Lebedev asserts that the earliest burials appeared during the first half of the ninth century.\(^5\) Following the view of G. F. Korzukhina, the first scholar to assign an early date to the cemetery, V. A. Nazarenko also dated the first burials to the ninth century.\(^6\) Plakun’s early date is accepted without question in work of recent publication.\(^7\) O. I. Boguslavskii and A. D. Machinskaia, for example, suggested that the chronology of the cemetery should be re-dated based on the dates of finds from the southeast Ladoga region, such as Scandinavian arrowheads (900-950), iron rivets (890s-920s), and green transparent beads (not younger than the Zemlianoe gorodishche’s E1 layer, dating from the 860s to the 920s).\(^8\) They attributed the cemetery’s terminus to the first half of the eleventh century. In my opinion, the proposed temporal range for the cemetery, vacillating between the first half of the ninth and first half of the eleventh century, is too broad and requires revision.

\(^8\) O. I. Boguslavskii, A. D. Machinskaia, “Sias’koe gorodishche i poseleniia nizhnego Povolkhov’ia (opryt sopostavleniia),” Peterburgskii arkeologicheskii vestnik, № 6 (1993): 120.