Located 120 km from St. Petersburg, Staraia Ladoga is an important center of architectural and archaeological monuments which have attracted the serious attention of scholars for more than one hundred and fifty years. Drawn initially to Staraia Ladoga's twelfth-century architecture, Russian researchers also began close study of the town's fortress in the mid-nineteenth century. It was only in 1909, however, that archaeologists first excavated part of Staraia Ladoga's Zemlianoe gorodishche (earthen hill-fort), the archaeological and architectural site that is now known to contain occupation layers dating from the eighth to the tenth centuries. The hill-fort's waterlogged anaerobic soil had provided optimum conditions for the preservation of organic materials and the remains of wooden buildings. A detailed and ongoing study of the gorodishche has revealed a complex settlement that emerged in the lower Volkhov River several decades prior to the beginning of the Viking Age on the periphery of the Scandinavian world. Interest in Staraia Ladoga has steadily increased among both Russian and Western scholars, especially after 1991, in large part due to the yearly exactions conducted by the Staraia Ladoga expeditions of the Institute of the History of Material Culture (IIMK).

Professor Anatolii Kirpichikov has been instrumental in continuing this work, and thanks to his efforts in the 1990s excavations continued each season without interruption. The post-1991 period in Staraia Ladoga – both in the sphere of archaeology and monument preservation – has, however, encountered certain unique circumstances, which in many ways are characteristic of Russia as a whole.

The Staraia Ladoga Museum was first established in 1984, the primary function of which is the preservation of the town's historical monuments. The museum's authority concerning the protection of the monuments, despite the strengthening of such rights in the late 1990s, was limited to an advisory role in the construction of new buildings in Ladoga in order to protect sites of historical importance. The governmental body in charge of the preservation of

1. Known formerly as the Leningrad section of the Institute of Archaeology (pre-1991).
historical sites for the Leningrad region, under whose jurisdiction Ladoga falls, is the Department for the Preservation of Monuments of the government of the Leningrad oblast'. In reality, however, this organization only has the authority to grant or decline permission for construction activities. Actual control over archaeological and architectural monuments lies beyond the powers of oblast' authorities because the appropriate specialists do not work in provincial or municipal institutions.

The only institution in Russia that has the authority to grant official sanction for archaeological fieldwork (excluding the discovery of new sites by archaeological reconnaissance) is the Institute of Archaeology, functioning under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Sciences (hereafter IA RAN) or, more precisely, its subdivision, the Section for Field Research (hereafter OPI). Until very recently, the OPI's director had been Valentin Sedov, who passed away in the fall of 2004. Located in Moscow under the administration of a research organization, OPI grants permission to conduct excavations (known as the "open list") for all of Russia. Because of the specific nature of this system, only individual archaeologists, and not archaeological organizations, receive licenses to excavate. Thus, museum institutions such as Staraia Ladoga's are denied the opportunity to pursue legal action against unauthorized construction projects or other invasive earthwork in the town (both are unfortunately common activities in today's Russia). The Department for the Preservation of Monuments learns of these infractions only after they have been perpetrated, and OPI IA RAN may grant permission for projects only three to four weeks after the decision to carry them out has been made (due to the slow turnaround of Russia's postal system).

The inability of the bureaucracy to manage these problems has had an increasingly negative impact on the archaeological study of Staraia Ladoga during the last fifteen years. The decade of the 1970s was a productive one for Staraia Ladoga's archaeology. In addition to the Zemliannoe gorodishche, excavations were conducted on the area of the Varangian Street, the burial fields of Plakun and Pobedishche, and on the Malyshev Hill. As research ac-

---

2. The Leningrad oblast' is one of 89 territorial units of the Russian Federation. The title is a holdover from the Soviet period, when Saint Petersburg was officially known as Leningrad (1924-1991). It is important to note, however, that the city of Saint Petersburg does not fall under the Leningrad oblast' authorities, maintaining instead its own administration equal to that of the oblast' administration.

3. The area encompassed by the Leningrad oblast' is 83,908 square km. All governing institutions of the oblast' are located in Saint Petersburg. From the moment of its foundation, the Department for the Preservation of Monuments did not have access to transportation to visit the sites for which it was responsible.

4. The system developed in the nineteenth century, when the Imperial Archaeological Commission, also a state institution, granted excavation licenses.