Temple Rings West and East

A history of a Slavic accessory
What is a Temple Ring?

Temple rings or temple ornaments are a type of jewelry found throughout areas of Russian, Slavic and Byzantine influence from approximately the 9th century throughout the medieval period. They are found in many female graves at the temple/head/ear area, and are often considered a marker of Slavic identity.
Functions and use in Archaeology

Temple rings are thought to have a variety of functions, including cultural marker, gender signifier, and means to display wealth. Archaeologically, their presence/absence and type are used to determine cultural identity, gender, and approximate date of other finds.

Temple rings have been classified by type and find location, and particularly in Russian archaeology, correlated with discrete Slavic tribes. The usual East Slav categories are Novgorod Slovene, Severian, Polonian, Radimichi, Krivichi, and Viatichi. These categories may provide information about migration and kinship.

The major types of Russian temple rings. 1 Krivichi, 2 Polonian, 3 Novgorod/Slovene, 4 Radimichi, 5 Viatichi, 6 Severian.
Who wears temple rings?

Women are generally the wearers of temple rings, with some finds in girls graves. The preponderance of base metals, as well as the large percentage of graves containing temple rings suggests a relatively universal accessory. Certainly finds of silver and gold exist, and are the most often photographed and published.
Dating

Trends over time within a style may be cross referenced with articles of known date and used to approximately date other finds. An example of this is in Novgorod, where cross referenced dendrochronological data from the city is used to assist with dating in the outlying areas.

Finds from Novgorod held by the Novgorod State Museum, 11-12th c.
Locations

In the West temple rings have been found in Poland, Moravia, Thuringia, former Yugoslavia and more, while in the East in Pskov, Novgorod, Moscow, Kostroma, Gnezdovo, Kiev, Smolensk, St PETERSburg, Volgoda, among many others.
East Slav tribes ca 850-950

Ryabinin states that in Vodskaya 35% of graves had temple rings, mostly bracelet style and rhomboidal/Novgorod, and that 48% of graves in the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) oblast as a whole contained them. Digs at Minino, outside Novgorod, found 49 wire temple rings, one of the more numerous types of finds for that assemblage.
Typology

Temple rings in Russia
1 - mound near the village of Zás'boye; 2 - Novgorod; 3 - a barrow near the village of Volgovo; 4 - a mound near the village of Smedovo; 5 - a barrow near the village of Pavlov Pogost; 6 - a barrow near the village of Arefino, Smolensk region; 7 - barrow near the village of Malaya Kamenka; 8 - 12 - Novgorod; 13 - Vladimir's burial mounds; 14 - Novgorod; 15 - 16 - The Zaraisk Treasure; 17-18 - Novgorod; 19 - a barrow near the village of Volkovo; 21 - a mound near the village of Gnezdovo; 22 - Belevsky y.; 23 - a mound near the village of Glubochka; 24 - Novgorod; 25 - Vladimir burial mounds, 2b - pound burial ground near the village of Malaya Kalinka; 27 - mound near the village of Gochevo; 28 - 29 - Novgorod
Pan Slav
S- Shaped

S-Shaped temple rings are found in multiple early medieval (generally 9th-13thc) East and West Slavic contexts, including Russian, Czech, German, and Polish. The name comes from the S shaped terminal on one end of the ring.
Thuringia
Some S-shaped rings are hollow, with a variant called ‘Pomeranian’ being made of stamped or engraved sheet metal. Others are made of twisted wires.
Russia
Ring/ Bracelet

‘Bracelet style’ temple rings may also be called Krivichi in an East Slav context. Simple rings, either with a ‘tied’ or butted join, they are ubiquitous, found in both East Slav and West Slav territories. Small butted rings are found in nearly all Slav contexts, in some cases upwards of ten rings per grave. The larger tied rings are most typical of the north and west.
Ring/Bracelet
Three Bead/ Kiev

A hoop with three beads, this style ranges from simple to very complex. Some of the more complicated examples feature multilayered granulated beads. Wire wraps hold the beads in place along the hoop. This type, which becomes common in the east near Kiev, in the 11th c, may also be called Poliane/Polyane, or Kiev type, particularly in Russian context.
Three Bead/ Kiev
Three bead rings are more frequently found made of gold, and are often comparatively small. Four, two, and one beads are also met with occasionally. Three bead temple rings are most typical of 12th-13th urban contexts in the east. Many examples are found in 11th c Suzdal-Rostov, and from ca 1100 to the mid 14thc in Novgorod.
Raspberry

A variation of the three bead type, these have three comparatively large hollow granulated beads. Found mostly in Ukraine, and west. Imitations of these labor intensive hollow beads are also found.
Raspberry
Raspberry
Spiky Cube

A uncommon form, examples may or may not have granulated decoration.
Coil/Curly

Found mostly in the west, there are also 2 13th c examples from Novgorod
West Slav

The Western Slavs ranged as far west as Bavaria, including Poland, Moravia, Bohemia, and the former Yugoslavia. Finds of temple rings can be used to determine the ethnicity of an archaeological site.
Ring and Bar

A common form that may be called an earring or temple ring depending on the source.
Ring and Bar
Dangling Chains

Temple rings with depending chains are met with, often in 10-11th c Poland and the current Czech Republic. The basic shape may be similar to ring and bar types.
Weismain

Landschaftsmuseum Obermain auf der Plassenburg ob Kulmbach holds two pair of ornaments in a unique style. Found in Weismain, Bavaria, in grave 53, and dated to the 9th century, they have a distinctive framework echoed in a few other, less complete finds. Two pairs were found, one more complete than the other.
Star
East Slav
Novgorod/ Slovene

Novgorod style temple rings take the form of a wire with 2-5 rhomboidal shields or flanges formed at intervals, with the whole then bent into a ring. The rhomboidal Novgorod style temple rings are found from the 10th to the 14th centuries, with some changes in design over time.
Novgorod / Slovene
Novgorod/ Slovene

Temple rings and other jewelry from variety of timeframes, found in the Novgorod region. Nos. 2 and 5 are typical of later styles.
Novgorod temple rings with pendants
Radimichi

The defining characteristic of radimichii temple rings are the seven points depending from the ring.
Radimichi

Earlier and later Radimichi temple rings. 6-7 are transitional to Viatichi styles.

Earlier (9th-10th c) examples tend toward sharp points, while later (11th-12th c) examples develop balls at the end of the points.
Vyatichi

Vyatichi temple rings also have seven projections, and are a later (11th c onwards) outgrowth of Radimichi styles. The points are now paddle or blade shaped, flatter, and often engraved.
Vyatichi
Vyatichi temple rings from the Moscow area

1-7 11th-12th c. 8 13th-14th c.
Vyatichi temple rings with filigree

A subset of the Vyatichi type merges the blades and adds elaborate filigree, in at least two cases including a pair of horses.
Severian

Wire spirals are the distinctive feature of Severian temple rings, found generally in the 10th-11th c. Silver is a relatively common material.
Severian
Multi Bead

This temple ring takes the form of a hoop threaded with multiple hollow beads.

Temple rings from the Vodskaya digs have between 4 and 9 beads per ring.
Multi Bead

The hoop generally has a spiral or loop on one end, and a pierced flattened area on the other. Most of the Vodskaya finds are bronze, with one pair found in silver. Many pairs have beads that have come unsoldered.
Metals

Bronze is most common, followed by silver and gold. Various plating combinations are also seen.
Manufacturing

Even within a type of temple rings, multiple manufacturing options appear to have been used to produce a similar result. Many types use multiple decoration techniques, such as engraving, filigree, or granulation.
Bending

S-shaped, Krivichii/Bracelet, and Severian temple rings use this process, starting from wire. Wire could be rolled or drawn, depending on timeframe and available technology.
Forging

Slovene, Viatichii, and Radimichii temple rings can all be made by manipulating the metal with hammer blows. For Viatichii and Radimichii temple rings forging is plausible, though molds have been found.
Forging markers

My forged piece shows a typical compression line at the transition between wire and flange, which is also seen on the extant temple rings.

Note the differences in thickness between flanges and wire sections, as well as the grooves and twists in the wire sections that can be explained by forging.
Casting

Viatichi, Radimichii, ring and bar, and three bead temple rings can be cast, though most three bead and ring and bar examples appear to be assembled.
Three bead, Multi bead, raspberry, Weismain, ring and bar, and more were assembled or have an assembly component. Most three bead temple rings have the beads and coils threaded on a thicker wire which is then bent round.
Combinations

Temple rings of the various types are found together, both in the same grave and same cemetery, including threaded through each other. (Beatson, Ristovska)

Bracelet/ring types are the most commonly mixed with others.

Multiple types of temple ring have been observed in the same grave in some burials, such as in Kostroma, where of 315 graves with temple rings, 27 had multiple types in the same grave. (Ryabinin & Kirpichnikov)

Novinki shows 11 of 27 graves with mixed types, while Kvetun cemetery has 2 of 13, and Bitiagovo 5 of 14.
Wearing

Extant examples include tangled in the hair, multiple piercings on an ear, leather and textile bands, and straps attached to other headdresses. Temple rings of all types were worn multiple ways.
Hair and ears

Up to 12 rings have been found together in the hair. Larger ornaments may be suspended from smaller rings functioning as hairpins. Temple rings may also be braided into the hair or threaded on the plaits themselves. All types and sizes of temple rings can be found worn in the hair.

Some finds previously thought to be worn on leather straps have now been determined to be threaded through the earlobe. Multiple rings per ear are attested, ranging from 2-8 at a time, with infrequent finds of multiple temple rings in the same piercing. Multiple types of temple ornaments are found worn through the ear.
Bands

S-shaped temple rings and other styles large and small have been reconstructed as being worn on various headbands, either fabric or leather, as seen below. This style is often found in West Slav contexts.
Suspension

Archaeological evidence also shows that these ornaments were worn suspended from a headdress in various ways. Multiple rings were found ‘stacked’ on leather and textile straps as well as suspended by interlinked metal hoops or other decorative elements. Further options include direct attachment to a hat or scarf.
Conclusion

Temple rings are an enduring and diverse Slavic feminine accessory, spanning Thuringia to Moscow and the 9th-14th centuries. The archaeological evidence supports several ways in which temple rings were worn. The presence and type of temple ring can provide useful archaeological data.