

Events

Conference Report – Historical Infrastructure of the Baltic Sea: Ways, Reason and Consequences: 3rd Meeting of the Austmarr Network

5th–6th April 2013, Härnösand, Sweden

Karolina Kouvola, University of Helsinki

The third meeting of the Austmarr Network continued and developed the interdisciplinary discussions of the meetings in previous years. The Austmarr Network was organized to be a meeting place for scholars interested in the comparative and interdisciplinary study of the Circum-Baltic region before the 16th century. The first Austmarr Network meeting, “Cultural Exchanges across the Baltic Sea in the Middle Ages Symposium and Workshop”, was held at the University of Tartu in 2011 (see further Kuldkepp 2011). The second meeting, “Transcultural Contacts in the Circum-Baltic Area”, was held at the University of Helsinki in 2012. For the third meeting, “Historical Infrastructure of the Baltic Sea: Ways, Reason and Consequences”, the Austmarr Network crossed to the western side of the Baltic Sea to Mid-Sweden University. Once again, the event brought together international scholars to discuss research projects and other studies in a multidisciplinary environment. The model for paper presentation and discussion followed the workshop model developed by the Viking Age in Finland project: 20 minutes for papers and 40 minutes for discussion (see Aalto 2011). Maths Bertell (Mid-Sweden University) did an excellent job organizing the event and making sure that everything ran smoothly. The event was made possible thanks to the support of Mid-Sweden University.

Lauri Harvilahti (Finnish Literature Society) was the first keynote speaker of the conference on Friday morning. Harvilahti’s paper was titled “Ethnocultural Poetics, Etymologies and Mythical Models: Pre-1500 Contacts around the Baltic Sea” and he spoke of the impact of National Romanticism on the study of ‘Teutonic’ peoples and how this area

of study has directed academic studies. Instead of looking for something unique and original for each culture and people, Harvilahti emphasized the need to look at sources that describe contact between folk belief and Christianity as presentations of the continuous interplay of coexisting syncretistic traditions which go back to interactions between different folk beliefs around the Baltic Sea.

Kendra Willson (University of California, Los Angeles / University of Helsinki) kept up the lively discussion with her presentation “Ahti in Nydam?”. Willson spoke about some runic inscriptions in Elder Futhark discovered at the Nydam bog site in the southwestern corner of Jutland. A bronze strap ring dated to ca. 300 A.D. bears the inscription **harkilaz•ahti** and a silver belt-tip dated to ca. 400 A.D. bears the inscription **rawsijo**. Willson argued that despite the search for the Finno-Estonian origin of these words, it seems more likely that they are Germanic words and personal names. The Finnish names Ahti, Rausio and Harkkila seem to be far-fetched interpretations.

Karolina Kouvola (University of Helsinki) then offered the paper “How and Why Should Kalevalaic Epic Poetry and Old Norse Poetry Be Compared?”, in which she surveyed the possibility of the knowledge-based *tietäjä* tradition’s background in an Old Norse tradition of Óðinn. Kouvola focused on the methodological challenges of comparing traditions represented in two very different types of sources separated by a period of centuries.

After lunch it was time for the second keynote lecture, “Finno-Ugric and Scandinavian Notions about the World Axis and the Cosmic Quern” by Eldar Heide

(University of Bergen). As the title promised, this paper discussed the concept of the magic hand mills *Grotti* (of *Grottasǫngr*) and the *sampo* of Finnic rune songs. Heide considered the connection these mills have to the world axis or world pillar motif. Heide drew attention to the Icelandic word *hjarastjarna* as implying the existence of a world pillar in Scandinavian sources. According to this interpretation, the eddic poem *Grottasǫngr* would have cosmic significance connected to this worldview.

Alexander Podossinov (University of Moscow) presented his paper, “The Northern Part of the Ocean in the Eyes of Ancient Geographers”, on notions concerning the northern portion of the Ocean in the works of authors in antiquity. These authors understood that the whole inhabited world was encircled by an ocean. The eastern and especially the northern parts of this ocean remained unknown. Podossinov’s paper was an interesting addition to themes handled by the Austmarr Network, expanding its geographical borders.

Tatjana N. Jackson’s (Russian Academy of Sciences) paper, “Austmarr on the ‘Mental Map’ of Medieval Scandinavians”, focused on the mental geography represented in medieval Scandinavian sources. According to these sources, the world was understood to consist of four quarters: eastern, southern, western and northern. The paper concentrated on the eastern quarter, which consisted of the Baltic lands and the territories beyond the Baltic Sea. In the sagas, the directions change according to where the center was thought to be. This explains why in some cases the protagonist makes journeys which in reality cannot be made as they are described in the saga. Jackson highlighted that this was not because the author was ‘wrong’; it was because the author was evaluating directions from a particular point of view that did not always subscribe to the same concept of ‘center’.

The final keynote speaker of the day was Wladyslaw Duczko (University of Uppsala) with his paper “Scandinavians of the Viking Age on the Southern Coast of the Baltic and in Eastern Europe: Approaching Problems of Identification”. This fascinating paper

addressed the regional identification of settlers of the Pomerian and Curland coasts.



the austmarr network

This identification seems to imply that these settlers came from Scandinavia. Duczko outlined archaeological evidence showing a continuity of Scandinavian settlers along the coastline, enhancing our understanding of cultures in the region.

One of the key elements of the Austmarr Network has been its ability to gather scholars from different fields together to discuss their work and exchange ideas. The day’s papers provided a fine background for lively interdisciplinary discussion, discussion which continued through dinner at St. Peter Logen. All were looking forward to the second day’s papers.

The second day started with a keynote presentation by Kristel Zilmer’s (University of Bergen), “The Sea of Contact: The Baltic Sea and Its Narrative Representation in Old Norse Sources”. The narrative sources, such as the sagas, tell of well-established sea routes. Zilmer spoke interestingly about how by studying geographical details one can better understand routes described in saga

sources and ways in which these routes could have been navigated. Jackson's paper emphasized the importance of Baltic sea routes and made the geographic descriptions of the sagas more comprehensible.

In her paper, "Runestones on Gotland and the Swedish mainland", Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt (Swedish National Heritage Board / University of Stockholm) introduced 3D-scanning as a method for analyzing the carving technique of runestones. This technique helps to identify individual carvers and to understand the development of the carving of runestones as practice. Kitzler Åhfeldt uses 3D scanning as a method in her postdoctoral research project, "The Dynamics of Rune Carving: Relation between Rune Carvers in a Regional and Chronological Perspective".

Marge Konsa (University of Tartu) then presented the keynote paper "Violent Contacts: Maritime Warfare in Pre-Viking Age", in which she presented information about the extremely interesting Salme I and Salme II excavations on Saaremaa island, Estonia. In these excavations, two boat burials with altogether at least 40 men were found. The origins and background of the burial remains obscure, yet it bears some potential resemblance to the account of the raid of the Swedish king Ingvar, as told in the *Ynglinga saga*. At the second Austmarr meeting in 2012, Daniel Sävborg (University of Tartu) gave a keynote lecture on Salme findings as well. Sävborg discussed a possible connection between Salme findings and the aforementioned account of Ingvar. The saga and the findings can be dated to approximately the 8th century. Although the connection is difficult to prove, the evidence shows that at that time battles were fought at this scale in the Baltic area (see Kuldkapp 2012: 66).

After lunch, Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson (National Historical Museums, Sweden) gave the paper "Alliances across the Baltic: Sword Chapes as Indicators of Military and Political Alliances in the Baltic Region". Jonson's presentation centered around two distribution patterns of chapes: the first, a stylized falcon, and the second, an anthropomorphic figure parallel to the image

of Christ on the Jelling stone. The stylized falcon image has been interpreted as the mark of a military group associated with movement around the Baltic Sea region. Although they have been found across a more extensive geographic area than the falcon symbol, the anthropomorphic image has been interpreted as a symbol of the rank of officer of the Danish court.

Sirpa Aalto's (University of Oulu) paper "Changing Alliances: Jómsvikings, Danes and Wends" focused on *Jómsvikinga saga*. Even though the saga might have a historical core, it should not be forgotten that the saga is also a literary work. *Jómsvikinga saga* portrays a wider shift of independent chieftains and supra-regional elite networks into parts of royal *hirðs* of the kings. The Jómsvikings could have been any mercenary group which had settled on the coast of the Baltic Sea. Aalto emphasized that even though the saga is not an account of any authentic political situation, the events it describes may reflect general social changes that took place historically.

Leszek Ślupecki (University of Rzeszów) followed with the paper "Polish Noble Families and Noble Men of Scandinavian Origin in the 11th-12th Century: The Case of Awdancy Family: By Which Ways They Did Come, Why, and What Consequences It Caused?". Ślupecki surveyed the origins of the Polish noble family Awdancy and how this family arrived in Poland from Scandinavia. The use of the name Magnus/Michael, which was popular in Scandinavia in the 11th and 12th centuries, implies a Scandinavian background. It appears that the Awdancy family was only one of 30 powerful Polish noble families with a Scandinavian background – offering a fascinating area of investigation.

The final paper of the meeting was "The Baltic Sea and the Northern Crusades: A Case Study and Main Problems" presented by Remigiusz Gogosz (University of Rzeszów). The familiarity of the Baltic region made it more appealing to crusaders from northern kingdoms than those of the Mediterranean Sea. A bull given by pope Eugenius in 1147 made the crusaders on the Baltic Sea equal to those on the Mediterranean. As an outcome of

these crusades, the eastern and western parts of the Baltic region developed closer ties. In turn, this provided essential conditions for the development of the Hansa trade networks a few centuries later.

The third Austmarr Network meeting offered a unique meeting place for scholars and a chance to discuss the Viking Age and medieval Baltic area with colleagues from different institutes and countries. The meeting was successful. One has great expectations for the network's future meetings. The fourth meeting is planned to take place in Rzeszów, Poland in 2014. In addition, on the basis of themes and selected papers presented during

the three Austmarr Network symposiums, two peer-reviewed publications are in preparation.

Works Cited

- Aalto, Sirpa. 2011. "Conference Report – The Viking Age in Finland Seminars". *RMN Newsletter* 3: 38–42.
- Kuldkepp, Mart. 2011. "Conference Report – Cultural Exchanges across the Baltic Sea in the Middle Ages Symposium and Workshop: First Meeting of the Austmarr Network". *RMN Newsletter* 3: 43–44.
- Kuldkepp, Mart. 2012. "Conference Report – Transcultural Contacts in the Circum-Baltic Area: 2nd Meeting of the Austmarr Network". *RMN Newsletter* 5: 65–68.

Conference Report – The 2nd Meeting of the Old Norse Folklorists Network: "Encounter with the Otherworld in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*", Symposium and Workshop

29th November – 1st December 2012, Tartu, Estonia
Mart Kuldkepp, University of Tartu

The Old Norse Folklorists Network, founded in 2011 by Daniel Sävborg (University of Tartu) and Karen Bek-Pedersen (University of Southern Denmark), is a loose circle of scholars associated with the Retrospective Methods Network, dedicated to bringing closer together the fields of Folklore and Old Norse Philology.¹ The latest step taken in this direction was the second meeting of the network, again organized by Bek-Pedersen and Sävborg with the help of Kait Lubja as secretary. The symposium and workshop took place at the Department of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Tartu, Estonia, 29th November – 1st December 2012.

The organizers stayed true to the already proven and successful format of the first meeting as held back in December 2011. This meant a limited number of keynote lectures interspersed with longer discussions in smaller groups, and – last but not least – numerous coffee breaks to encourage further discussion and individual conversations. The main innovation this time was that the members of the discussion groups rotated more often, while still maintaining a mixture of more experienced and younger scholars, as well as philologists and folklorists, in each

separate group. A more significant departure from the first meeting was the fact that while the first workshop was dedicated to more overarching and abstract questions of continuity, reconstruction and source criticism, this time the focus was squarely on a single, relatively short text, *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, usually classified as one of the so-called post-classical sagas of Icelanders.

The four keynote lectures looked at the saga from different perspectives. Annette Lassen (University of Copenhagen) gave a talk on "The Supernatural Motifs in *Bárðar saga* in an Old Norse Context", focusing on the textual connections of the saga to other Old Norse literary works. Particularly numerous parallels exist with *The Great Saga of Ólafr Tryggvason* and the Melabók version of *Landnámabók*, but the whole list of works that the saga author (probably a cleric) seems to have used is so long that *Bárðar saga* must be regarded as a very learned text indeed. Camilla Asplund-Ingemark (Åbo Akademi) approached the saga as a folklorist in her talk "The Trolls in *Bárðar saga*: Playing with the Conventions of Oral Texts", discussing some of the basic plots in *Bárðar saga* in light of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index of folk tale