



the
austmarr
network



Invitation

Austmarr V. No one is an island. Islands in the Baltic Sea 500 – 1300 AD: Characteristics and networks in an interdisciplinary perspective

Swedish National Heritage Board and Gotland Museum, Visby, 15th-16th October 2015. The workshop will take place in Sävesalen, Gotlands Museum.

The Austmarr Network welcomes you to participate in the fifth network workshop. The workshop is free of charge and two lunches and a dinner is included. Participants are expected to pay for travel and accommodation. The number of participants will be limited, so please send us your abstract (approx. 500 words) as soon as possible and no later than 1st August. Each paper will be given 30 minutes of presentation and 30 minutes of discussion.

The Austmarr Network is an international interdisciplinary network of scholars investigating historical and prehistoric contacts among peoples in the circum-Baltic region. We aim to reconstruct the development of the Baltic Sea region, viewed as a trans-ethnic cultural area that played a central role in the emergence of the modern Germanic, Slavic, Finnish and Sámi ethnicities. We will focus on the pre-Hanseatic period, up to the High Middle Ages. The Baltic region has been populated by humans since the end of the last Ice Age ca 10,000 years ago. In modern times the Baltic is bounded by the states Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Poland and Germany. Both Finno-Ugric languages and the Germanic, Baltic and Slavic branches of the Indo-European family are well represented. Other languages, such as Romani and Classical written languages, have also had a presence in the region. Areal features in the languages, pre-Christian religions and folkloric traditions of the Baltic region have long been recognized, and the material cultures also show commonalities of many types and ages. The directions of influence are complex and in many cases indeterminate.

Whereas the Mediterranean has long been recognized as a *mare nostrum* of multicultural, multilingual contacts for southern Europe, we turn attention to the Baltic Sea as the *mare nostrum* of the north. Understandings of the ways in which languages and populations (separately) move and how ethnic groups form and recombine are rapidly evolving. The assumption of stable language areas and the association between aspects of material culture (e.g. pottery styles) and language groups or populations has been questioned. Improved methods in place-name studies and rapid developments in population genetics are providing new data on migrations and prehistoric language shifts. It is high time to revisit the Baltic region in an integrated and systematic way.

Each year since 2011, the Austmarr Network has organized a multidisciplinary symposium. These symposia have targeted different topics and themes relevant to understanding the dynamic history of cultures in the Baltic Sea region, and how research on the Baltic Sea region may inform approaches to historical investigation of cultures elsewhere in the world. The circum-Baltic region, with its rich (pre)history involving several well-studied groups with comparatively deep historical records, provides a robust case study for developing methods that can be applied to other cases of interdisciplinary cultural reconstruction.

The aim with this workshop is to compare the islands of the Baltic Sea in an interdisciplinary perspective. Islands generally have a certain attraction as remote and exotic places with distinctive characteristics. Access to the island might have been restricted by defence structures, law or simply by rough weather – just adding to their fascination. A common feature is that they have had a trait of marine culture and that they often lie at the crossroads for trade and political networks. Our islands have been separated as well as protected by the Baltic Sea, i.e. *Austmarr*.

As object for research, islands may seem clearly-defined and handy to study, still they have complex networks, local customs and certain problems relating to chronology. The islands constitute dynamical border zones where various interests meet, causing interaction just as well as conflicts. Nevertheless, the fluctuating connections may be more distinct here than in other places due to the distinctive characters of the islands. Changing traditions may reflect different spheres of interest and be influenced by the perpetual change of power relations, where travelling routes are closed or opened up depending on varying alliances and other circumstances.

Although often discussed, the islands have been compared to one another to a very limited extent only. Comparisons between the islands themselves and between islands and adjacent mainland regions may take its departure in for example archaeology, philology, history, religion and folklore. One subject to discuss is why there are such strong runic tradition on the islands Öland, Gotland and Bornholm, from the Roman Iron Age until the post-Reformation period, whereas Åland and Saaremaa have none – although we know for sure that Gotland had trade contacts with them and Åland was culturally connected to a region of Sweden where runic inscriptions are remarkably rich. The relations between the islands may also be discussed in the view of research about mobility and travelling. Island archaeology is yet another area, including theoretical perspectives, making research of the islands in the North Atlantic relevant as well. We also need to take into consideration that the research history on islands often seems to be heavily influenced by individual scholars who have been more or less authoritative and significantly shaped the subject and interpretations, which require critical reassessment and in some cases have proven difficult to see beyond.

We welcome proposals on the following themes:

- *From Roman gold to the rifts of Aifur – specific characteristics.* What preconditions prevail on the individual islands, how do they differ and why?
- *From island to island – relations between the islands.* The islands in the Baltic Sea have been strategically meeting points with wide range contacts. Periodically, they may have been included in different political constellations, but judging by the geographical position and the well-developed trade and shipping they may be supposed to have maintained contacts.

- *No one is an island – the islands and the world.* This theme investigates the islands in a geographical perspective including the surrounding mainland areas and also regions further away, e.g. the British Isles.

Rather than seeking conclusive results, our aim with this event is for an open-minded discussion that can lay foundations for deeper studies and future co-operations among international scholars with an interest in cultures of the Baltic Sea region.

We look forward to meet you in Visby!

Laila Kitzler and Per Widerström, Organizers

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