



# FROM GOTHS TO VARANGIANS

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL  
EXCHANGE BETWEEN  
THE BALTIC AND THE BLACK SEA

Edited by *Line Bjerg, John H. Lind & Søren M. Sindbæk*



*Dedicated to the memory of*

*Pia Guldager Bilde*

*(Born 11 February 1961 †10 January 2013)*

*Director of the Danish National Research  
Foundation's Centre for Black Sea Studies*

FROM GOTHS  
TO VARANGIANS

# BLACK SEA STUDIES

15

THE DANISH NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION'S  
CENTRE FOR BLACK SEA STUDIES

Comprising the proceedings of the 30th symposium organized by the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Southern Denmark, November 2009, in collaboration with the Varangian network.

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# Introduction

*Line Bjerg, John H. Lind & Søren M. Sindbæk*

*From Goths to Varangians – from the Baltic to the Black Sea*

Seen from the Baltic, the Black Sea region can appear a distant and exotic realm; yet in terms of geography the two seas are not that far apart. The distance from Gotland to Crimea is very nearly the same as that from Constantinople to Sardinia, upon which the Byzantine capital often depended for grain. It should be no surprise, then, that for much of the Middle Ages archaeology and history trace close relations along the lands and rivers, which bridged the two great inland seas of Europe.

In late Antiquity, archaeology demonstrates lively and far-flung exchange along the river Dniester, through current Poland to the Baltic. The earliest runic script emerged within this zone of interaction, examples being found from Moldavia to Scandinavia.<sup>1</sup> Magnificent jewellery, like the East Roman gold filigree ornaments found in the Brangstrup hoard or the nearby Årslev Grave in Fyn, almost certainly travelled north from South-East Europe.<sup>2</sup> So did numerous glass vessels found in graves in Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea area, along with coins and other imports.<sup>3</sup> While some of these items were produced in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, others were from the areas of the current Ukraine, Moldova and Romania, where Gothic tribes established their kingdom in the second century AD.<sup>4</sup> In later centuries Gothic princes claimed to have descended from Scandinavian dynasties in the north. Even if these claims are legendary, the myth of origin may have given Gothic aristocracy an incentive to maintain exchanges with princes in what they considered an ancient homeland, traversing much of what would be referred to from a Roman perspective as *Barbaricum*.

By the 11th century the former *Barbaricum* had been transformed into a string of Christian kingdoms and principalities, whose parallel histories are as conspicuous as their differences. Through the Viking Age they had experienced powerful cultural and economic integration, thanks in part to the emergence of a new continental by-pass, the Dnieper route, or “The Road from Greeks to Varangians”, as it is called in an early 12th-century Russian chronicle. Along this route a string of emporia emerged, from Birka in the Baltic to Staraja Ladoga and Rjurikovo Gorodišče in north-west Russia, via Gnezdovo to Kiev in the Ukraine. The archaeology of these centres is marked by evidence of close cultural encounters, including Islamic and Byzantine imports, and sometimes the use and manufacture of Scandinavian-style or-

naments.<sup>5</sup> Their significance as nodes in a common commercial and cultural network is brought out by a shared system of exchange based on the use of Arabic coins and other forms of silver as bullion in a “weight-money” economy, and by merchant-warriors, whose furnished chamber graves can be found in Hedeby, Birka, Pskov, Šestovica, Gnezdovo or Kiev.<sup>6</sup> Presumably these were the Rus’ – travelling merchant-warriors from the north – of contemporary Byzantine and Arab written sources. Later, as the word Rus’ came to refer to a fixed geographical area, travellers from the north became known as Varangians.<sup>7</sup> They formed the stock of the Byzantine emperor’s famous Varangian guard, and counted celebrities such as the later Norwegian king, Haraldr Hardrádi – who, after winning the Norwegian throne, launched a large mintage modeled on Byzantine designs.<sup>8</sup> He and other travelers carried more than treasure back. Many Scandinavians must have made their first acquaintance with Christianity while travelling in the East; and Scandinavian church art demonstrate a solid stylistic influence from Byzantium and Russia, as seen in 12th century frescoes in Danish and especially Gotland churches.<sup>9</sup>

From the legendary (if possibly real) migrations of the Goths in Antiquity to the Varangian guard at the imperial court of Byzantium in the late Viking Age, trans-cultural interaction complemented important historical developments. Why were the sort of contacts exemplified by Goths and Varangians brought into existence? If they were a ubiquitous feature of human societies, the question might not need asking. Yet at other times in history long-distance communication is less prominent. Between the Goths and Varangians lies a period of several centuries when interaction between the Baltic and the Black Sea, when not entirely absent, is much more difficult to trace.<sup>10</sup> We may ask indeed why people in early societies, who were challenged to maintain their subsistence and to cope with local and regional conflicts in a non-state order, should invest time and resources in maintaining bonds with people, who were too distant to yield any meaningful support on a day-to-day basis. What made such links significant?

This book is about aspects of the changing interactions from late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages, from Goths to Varangians, and from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Goths and Varangians frame an episode from c. 300-1200 when the East Mediterranean and the Near East was a power house of western Eurasia. From the decline of the Western Roman Empire to the crippling of Byzantium during the Fourth Crusade, the roads to the Black Sea were a focus of attention for societies in the north.

The history and archaeology of these connections have been poorly exposed and investigated in modern times. Problems of language and a polarization in the research traditions have combined with a troubled modern, political history to form a dead angle in the historical culture of Europe, neglected variously as irrelevant, inconvenient or simply incomprehensible.

## *Varangian Problems*

The papers presented in this volume are a selection of those presented during a series of four meetings organised 2007-2009 by the “Varangian Network”, an interdisciplinary network for archaeological and historical research on relations between the Baltic and the Black Sea from late Antiquity to the medieval period. The primary aim of the network was to re-appraise the frequently overlooked eastern dimension in the historical culture of Scandinavia. The network was also intended as an invitation to medieval scholarship in East and Central Europe, as a counterbalance to the national interests which are sometimes encouraged by domestic research traditions and, in some countries even by political forces.

The initiative of 2007-09 was by no means the first of its kind. Before the Russian revolution, relations were fruitfully maintained between Scandinavian and Russian scholars; this continued into the early Stalin period, possibly because the first, genuine high-profiled Marxist historian in the Soviet Union, Michail Pokrovskij († 1932) was sympathetic to so called Normanist views, the belief that Scandinavian and other western influences were significant in early Russian history.<sup>11</sup> This soon changed, and by the 1950s it had become impossible to maintain regular Russian-Scandinavian contact.<sup>12</sup> The dissemination of new knowledge was limited to the extent that leading Scandinavian scholars had little or no knowledge of contemporary Russian discoveries and fieldwork.<sup>13</sup>

After Stalin’s death, and especially after Chruščev’s secret speech at the 20th Party congress, the Communist Party loosened its grip on culture and scholarship. In this more relaxed atmosphere, the Danish Slavist and professor Adolf Stender-Petersen thought the time ripe to found a kind of “Varangian Network”, some forty years before our attempt. The idea was to arrange the “first international symposium on the theme ‘the Eastern Connections of the Nordic Peoples in the Viking Period and the Early Middle Ages’”. This still proved difficult, and it was only five years after the death of Stender-Petersen in 1963 that the symposium could finally be held in Aarhus, 7-11 October 1968.

The proceedings from this symposium, published as *Varangian Problems* in 1970, comprise a stimulating range of papers by mainly Scandinavian and Soviet scholars. The resolution from the meeting optimistically declared that “a number of topics should be further examined, both in a continuation of the symposium and by the establishment of working groups in limited fields, with a membership representing the countries involved.” Further, that the “participants welcomed the suggestion by professor Rybakov that the next meeting should be held in Denmark or the USSR”.<sup>14</sup> No second symposium materialised, however. The list of participants, printed at the back of the volume, reveals that no member of the Russian delegation had been able to attend the first one in person. Despite the moderately good international political climate in the late 1960s, the Russian contribution to this attempt at research collaboration was by letter only.

Nevertheless, there was an immediate attempt to continue this type of exchange. Thus the *Norwegian Archaeological Review* opened its pages for both Russian and Scandinavian archaeologists, and between 1969 and 1973 the journal published two articles by Soviet archaeologists and two by Scandinavians on problems relating to Scandinavian “Eastern connections”. The debate opened with an article by the leader of the excavations at Gnezdovo, Daniil Avdusin, who downgraded the Scandinavian impact in this important site, a point of view all three ensuing articles reacted against. The most interesting of these articles was written by four archaeologists from Leningrad, Leo Klejn and three of his pupils. This was one of the first indications to the outside world that a division among Soviet archaeologists on the question of the role of Scandinavians had arisen and that we could now talk about an anti-Normanist Moscow school and a Leningrad school that questioned that position.<sup>15</sup>

This attempt to continue relations petered out, and despite the persistent endeavour of a few scholars to organise more extensive communications<sup>16</sup> the situation remained unchanged into the mid-1980s. Lack of communication and language skills contributed to this situation, but the main issue was a mutual distrust nurtured by the political establishment first of all but not exclusively in the Soviet Bloc. Thus East European researchers were encouraged to think that historical and archaeological scholarship in the West had not attained true scientific standards, and did not merit the considerable trouble it took to get acquainted with it.<sup>17</sup>

Western scholars, on the other hand, suspected their Eastern colleagues to be ideologically biased or at least ideologically controlled; the exceptions were those who, to a certain extent, accepted the Soviet view as expression of *bona fide* scholarship and attempted on that basis to find common ground to build upon.<sup>18</sup> The knowledge that research, like every public activity, was subject to censorship in Soviet bloc countries, and that political repression was routinely enacted, made Western researchers reluctant to approach and assess the results published in Eastern books and journals, even when these were present in their research libraries. Eastern scholars helped this disbelief along by the common practice of quoting Marxist classics in the preface or conclusion to their works. Although they may have been aware that such quotations were a prerequisite for publication, few outsiders had the patience to notice the subtle lack of thematic coherence or the logical inconsistencies by which many researchers quietly stated their dissidence to these necessary “tribute payments”.<sup>19</sup>

The advent of perestrojka and glasnost’ after 1985 allowed a new climate of cooperation. New Varangian contacts were initiated, for example, at the “1st Soviet-Danish historians colloquium” organised by the Danish Society of Sciences in collaboration with the historical institutes of the Soviet Academy of Science in Copenhagen, 24-26 November, 1986. On this occasion, unlike 1968, a number of distinguished Soviet medieval historians and archaeologists were able to travel abroad. The organisation was still very much “Soviet

style”: participants were selected according to their status rather than scholarly interests, and with several last minute replacements. Altogether there was little common ground between the Danish and Soviet participants few of whom spoke any shared language.

Even if the value of this form of scholarly exchange was low, the initiation of connections paved the way for more, and before long young Danish archaeologists took part in the excavations in Staraja Ladoga, while publications brought out the first detailed first-hand reassessments by Scandinavian scholars of Russian archaeological materials to appear in the post-war period.<sup>20</sup>

The political transitions of 1989 in East Central Europe and 1991 in the former Soviet Union therefore raised great expectations among scholars in the East and West alike. A Lithuanian archaeologist fervently commented in the *Antiquity*:

“The collapse of these rigid boundaries between the various states in Europe will lead to a greater interchange of scholars, ideas, publications, and fieldwork opportunities. ... The less centralised control of political life in Eastern Europe will lead to the appearance of numerous younger archaeologists in the forefront of archaeological research”.<sup>21</sup>

A host of symposia and joint work programmes sprang from the excitement of these events across Europe.<sup>22</sup> The form became freer, and organisers could choose themes and invite relevant scholars without having to take old-style hierarchies into consideration. In that mode archaeologists and historians of the universities in Aarhus and Copenhagen summoned colleagues, mostly archaeologists, for “The First Interbaltic Symposium on The Baltic Region: Social and Cultural Development from the Birth of Christ to A.D. 1200” in Sostrup Castle on Djursland (Jutland) on 19-22 august 1991.<sup>23</sup> The participants included 24 scholars from Scandinavia, and two from each country of the former Soviet Bloc, bordering on the Baltic Sea, including the still Soviet Baltic republics. The symposium opened on the very morning of 19 August 1991 when members of the Soviet Union’s government attempted a coup to take control of the country from President Mikhail Gorbachev. The members of the symposium managed to complete the dense scholarly programme, though much spare time was spent alongside radios, listening to BBC World Service. Perhaps these circumstances tempered the attitude of the hosts. Nothing further came of the project and no proceedings ever emerged from the three-day long meeting.

The political upheavals that followed with the dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the structure of international collaboration within the Baltic region.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the “opening” of Eastern Europe had the immediate effect that the economy and structures, which had afforded scholarship, collapsed. These were the years when a common form of international “exchange” was for former Soviet scholars to emigrate and establish careers abroad.<sup>25</sup>

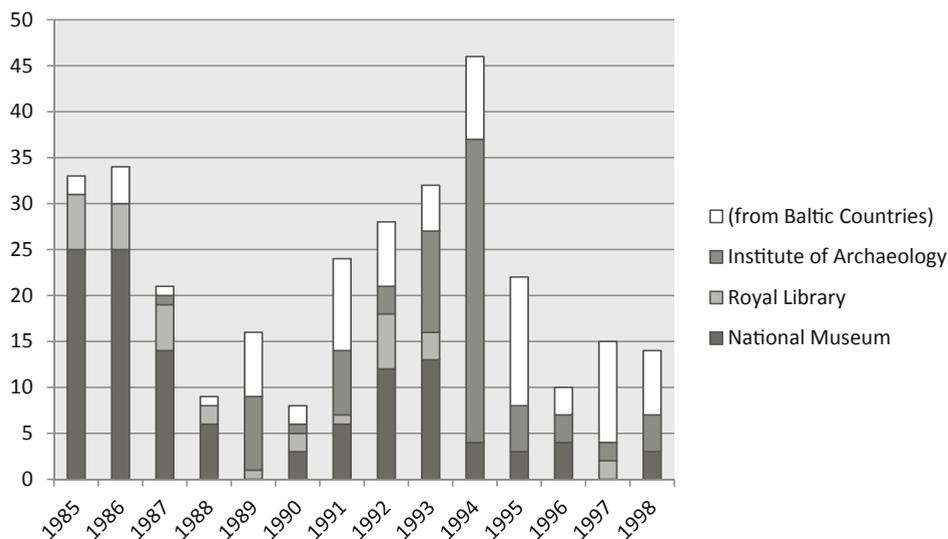


Fig. 1. Bars on scholarly communication. The annual accession of books from the Soviet, then post-Soviet countries in three major archaeological research libraries in Copenhagen.

For years the number of new books published in the former Soviet Union diminished sharply, while the strain on budgets meant that the acquisition of foreign books largely ceased, even in major research libraries.<sup>26</sup> When the rate of publications picked up, the costs of distribution meant that many new works saw very limited circulation.<sup>27</sup> International distribution in particular, which had formerly been maintained through formal exchange agreements, almost ceased. Western libraries, on their part, often discontinued their subscriptions on periodicals from the new countries in the East in view of rise of costs. In this way the “opening” led to a virtual closure of an essential mechanism of scholarly communication.

The effect can be illustrated by the accession of new literature in three major archaeological research libraries in Copenhagen (Fig. 1).<sup>28</sup> The steady flow of books from the Soviet countries, received through exchange agreements in the Royal Library and the library of the National Museum of Denmark, plunged after 1987. For some years the drop was matched by new *ad hoc* exchange created at the Institute of Archaeology at Copenhagen University as a result of collaboration projects. From the mid-90s this interest also declined. Counting the rising contribution in all libraries of books from the Baltic countries after their independence in 1989, some new literature was still arriving; but the rest of the former Soviet Union had virtually disappeared behind the horizon.

From the late 1990s onwards these problems were to some extent mitigated by the increasing availability of electronic resources.<sup>29</sup> For those who could adjust, the new circumstances also offered new possibilities, in particular the number of international conferences and other relations increased.<sup>30</sup> Joint

projects and “fieldwork opportunities” did indeed flourish; both at individual and institutional levels.<sup>31</sup> Substantial projects were organised by the *Eurasien Abteilung* of the *Deutsches Archäologische Institut*, who initiated co-operation with, amongst others, the State Historical Museum Moscow and the Russian Academy of Sciences.<sup>32</sup> Non-European collaborations included The Institute of Archaeology, University of Texas Austin, who partook in a project with the National Preserve of Tauric Chersonesos in Crimea from 1994 onwards. A particular stimulation was provided through the EU-sponsored *Intas* programme in 1993-2006, which supported more than twenty long-term collaborative research programmes on archaeological and historical subjects in countries in the former Soviet bloc.<sup>33</sup>

The general public experienced changes at first hand in several major museum exhibitions. In 1992-93 The European Council exhibition *From Viking to Crusader: the Scandinavians and Europe 800-1200* toured Berlin, Copenhagen, London and Paris with numerous objects borrowed from museums in the former Soviet bloc, and with texts contributed by Eastern scholars.<sup>34</sup> A few year later an integrative research programme was provided for Eastern Central Europe by a European Council sponsored programme, which led to a series of conferences and colloquia and culminated with the exhibition *Europas Mitte um 1000*.<sup>35</sup>

These and other projects involved personal, long-term cooperation between Eastern and Western researchers. Unlike earlier initiatives such as the symposium of 1968, they were not momentary exchanges, but maintained relations, which were conducive to the exchange of ideas. As a result, international co-operation in this field is characterised today by networks of strong personal relations, and by a high level of mutual trust and respect. In spite of this state of affairs, the result has not been an altogether happy integration. On some points, the frames of cooperation have deteriorated over the last ten years in a way which few would have imagined in 1989.

### *New frontiers*

Two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central European countries, which were until the end of the 1980s east of the Iron Curtain, have been fully assimilated with what was then “the west”, now to itself simply “Europe”. Just as boundaries have ceased to other citizens, scholars from Poland, the Czech Republic, Estonia, etc., now regularly travel to the same symposia and workshops, or publish in the same international journals, as their colleagues from the United Kingdom, Germany, or Denmark, for example; and they may apply on equal terms, together or in competition, to the same research councils. These changes are truly seminal. When Truso, the Viking Age port-of-trade in eastern Poland, was first discovered in the 1980s, one might have expected the site eventually to be published in a badly printed, sparingly illustrated, and rarely obtainable book in Polish, which would have

failed to attract the awareness of any but the most debated scholars abroad. It would have seemed impossible to imagine the splendid volume with parallel texts in Polish and English, which recently appeared.<sup>36</sup>

Further east, however, the situation contrasts starkly. Eastern Europe is apparently less interesting to its western neighbours today than when the Soviet Union posed as a “Great Unknown”.<sup>37</sup> Far fewer people learn East European languages, and few are thus able to access primary historical and archaeological materials. The cooperative research programmes, which were initiated in the 1990s, have largely ceased, and new research funding comes reluctantly.

In the ‘East’ the last decade has at least in some respects seen a turn away from internationalism, and a renewed political pressure for “national” history and archaeology.<sup>38</sup> Characteristically, the trading settlement Staraja Ladoga, freely branded through the 1990s as a “Viking” site, was re-invented in a major exhibition on occasion of its alleged 1250 years jubilee in 2003 as the “First capital of the Rus’”, Rus’ being here understood as a more or less homogeneous Slavic polity.<sup>39</sup> The concept of the “First Capital” may never have been intended as a scholarly idea, and has to some extent been renounced by its originators,<sup>40</sup> yet it clearly denotes a historical culture, in which the quest for national origins increasingly take primacy. This change of attitude has very direct implications for research beyond Russia. Unlike Truso, new work on Staraja Ladoga continues to be printed mainly in Russian – and too often fails to attract the awareness of scholars abroad.<sup>41</sup>

In the Ukraine, after the fall of the Iron Curtain a number of collaborative projects were initiated between Western and Eastern researchers.<sup>42</sup> But most were discontinued after a short period and by 2008 there were fewer ongoing collaborative projects than there were in the 1990s.<sup>43</sup> As in Russia, this is partly due to renewed nationalism in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the need of the new states to define a new national identity (though the difficulties presented by the barriers of language and different research traditions certainly add to the problem). The ancient past is instrumental in this process, as it offers countries such as the Ukraine a point on which to distinguish themselves from other post-Soviet states: a claim to a Mediterranean heritage pointing back in time to the Classical period. A consequence of this is that the interpretation of the past becomes a current political topic, in which archaeology is used to justify current policymaking.

With particular regard to the role of Scandinavians in early Rus’, views have recently moved in two opposite directions. A turning point came in 2001 when President Putin gathered some of the most prominent Russian medievalists in the Kremlin in order to discuss how the history of ancient Rus’ could contribute to the formation of an ideology of the Russian state. As a result of the meeting, plans were made for a major interdisciplinary conference which according to presidential wishes was to be held in 2002 in Kaliningrad. The presidential administration was, however, dissatisfied with the initial pro-

gramme. And in the meantime Putin seems to have held a further meeting with another group of historians, led by Andrej Sacharov, a participant in the 1986 Danish-Soviet historians' conference, and now promoted to director of the Institute of Russian History of the Academy of Sciences. He proved more than willing to supply the president with the wished-for patriotic solution. A first step was to go back to the ideas of a 19th-century anti-Normanist G.A. Gedeonov, according to whom the term Varangians was not derived from Old Norse "Væringjar" but from the West Slavic tribe Vagrians. In the Viking Age these Vagrians in reality lived on the south coast of the Baltic Sea in present-day Holstein. However, in order to meet the presidential wishes Sacharov relocated them to the region of Kaliningrad (renamed "Rjurikgrad" by sarcastic critics), making this disputed territory a genuine part of Ancient Rus'.<sup>44</sup> In an article published after the conference in the official paper *Ros-sijskaja Gazeta*, Sacharov designated a prominent colleague as an 'enemy of the people' – consciously evoking the term used to justify executions in the 1930s. This and similar accusations, however, met a brave, public response from other Russian scholars. Although members of Sacharov's group have continued to propagate their view,<sup>45</sup> they have failed to influence scholars at large. On the contrary, as Leo Klejn observe in this volume, the group of new anti-Normanists count few if any archaeologists. In fact, Russian Viking-age archaeology has moved in a quite different direction.

Before the 1980s the term "Vikings" was seldom used in Russia and then only in general works on medieval history or works pertaining to Scandinavian activity in the west. If the presence of Scandinavians in early Russia was acknowledged, they were hardly ever called Vikings but Varangians, Normans or, more seldom, Rus' (in case the author dared openly to adhere to the Normanist school).

This early reticence with regard to use the term "Viking" has now totally disappeared. The process was perhaps helped along by the "Leningrad school" of archaeologists, referred to above, who began to study Scandinavian activity in the East as part of overall Scandinavian activity in *The Epoch of the Vikings in Northern Europe*, the title of Gleb Lebedev's study from 1985.<sup>46</sup> The sudden increase in the use of the term "Viking" that followed must, however, be seen as result of the period of *glasnost*' and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union. This opened the floodgates of Western style market mechanisms on a large scale. It soon turned out that there was an enormous demand for almost everything from the West. That also applied to the book market and translations of fiction as well as non-fiction began to appear in substantial numbers. A number of major and minor classics of Western Viking-age scholarship soon began to appear in Russian translations: works by Holger Arbman, Gwyn Jones, Else Roesdahl, and Peter Sawyer, etc.<sup>47</sup> As in the West it now seems as if anything with "Vikings" in the title will sell in Russia.

The term "Viking" never occurs in early written sources in the East. In terms of historical connotations of pirates and sea warriors it is a highly prob-



*Fig. 1. Several generations of Scholars appreciate the late Antique cemetery Weklice in the company of W. Duczko (right). Photo: John Lind.*

lematic label for Scandinavian activities in Eastern Europe, and it is avoided as far as possible in the present volume.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, both Russian and Ukrainian Scholars – not least archaeologists – have started to label artefacts as “Viking” if they can be linked to Scandinavia, and people who are thought to be Scandinavians or of Scandinavian descent are now unreservedly called “Vikings”. This tendency can be seen in some of the literature referred to in the present volume. This modern “Viking” invasion of Russia is even more striking when we include the tourist industry. In one of the main archaeological sites in Russia connected with Scandinavians, Rjurikovo Gorodišče, scholars, municipal authorities and the tourist industry now join forces to brand the site as a station “Along the Roads of the Vikings”, as they have chosen to rename the old “Road from Greeks to Varangians”.<sup>49</sup> On another site a colleague claims that “Vikings in the Novgorod land were not warring and conquering towns; they were forced to come to terms [with the local population]. If we can show this to the Europeans, all of Scandinavia will come here as tourists”.<sup>50</sup> It seems that the use of the Viking brand is a necessity in order to get their plans to work on a sound financial basis.

Thus Russia has joined the rest of the world in its use of the Viking brand for Scandinavians and Scandinavia. This has happened despite the presiden-



*Fig. 2. Varangians networking. Participants in the seminar in Elbląg 2008 are guided into the Viking Age harbour of Truso and looking down at the excavation. Photo: Søren M. Sindbæk.*

tial support to nationalistic circles who wish to rid early Russian history of Scandinavians. Even with that kind of support it will hardly be possible to fight the combined forces of the tourist industry and market mechanisms in rolling back this questionable “Viking conquest” of Russia.

### *The Varangian Network*

These developments show why it remains worthwhile for archaeologists and historians to challenge the current state of affairs and work towards integration (and integrity) in historical and archaeological research. The inspiration for the “Varangian Network” was a growing awareness of unrealised research potential. Such potential had been seized for studies into the Classical period by the Danish National Research Foundation’s Centre for Black Sea Studies, based at Aarhus University from 2002 to 2010. Co-operation, with a focus on the high medieval period, had developed within the research project “Denmark and the Crusading Movement”, based at the Centre for Medieval Studies of the University of Southern Denmark (and subsequently continued within the “Scandinavian Network for Crusade Studies”). Persuaded by these projects, and encouraged by their principal

investigators, the editors of this volume set out to organise a network focussed on the intervening periods.<sup>51</sup>

Since recent professional interest in this field in Denmark had been erratic, what was called for was hardly another research centre, but a forum in which to gather and develop expertise. During 2007-2009 the Network hosted a series of four seminars, aided by grants from the Danish Research Council for Culture and Communication. The seminars aimed to create a survey of material and problems, and to contribute to exchange between disciplines and sub-fields of research. In addition to the network participants, each seminar had several invited speakers, including, in the course of the series, guests from Belarus, Estonia, Poland, Russia, the Ukraine, USA and the Nordic countries. Four different themes were selected, which outlined different approaches to integrate interdisciplinary perspectives on the study of cross-cultural communications.

The first seminar, "Sites of intersection – central places between the Baltic and the Black Sea", took place at the host institution of the network, the Danish Research Foundation's Centre for Black Sea Studies at Aarhus University, on 11 November 2007. The seminar examined cross-cultural dialogues from the point of view of individual sites, which acted as hubs in the communication across cultural boundaries. The second seminar occurred in Elbląg, Poland, on 20-21 June 2008, and was hosted by the Museum of Elbląg under the generous direction of Dr. M. Jagodziński. The setting allowed the participants to gain a first-hand acquaintance with the site Truso and the results of the investigations carried out by Jagodziński and colleagues in recent years (Fig. 2). The meeting was titled "Weak ties and close encounters – communication between the Baltic and the Black Sea", highlighting the means, modes and directions of interaction.

The third seminar, "Transferable cosmologies – cultural exchange between the Baltic and the Black Sea", took place on 10-11 November 2008 at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of South Denmark, Odense. The meeting entered into the centre's long-established series of annual November symposiums. True to its title, "Varangian voyagers – actors, groups and networks between the Baltic and the Black Sea", the final seminar was hosted by the Viking Ship Museum, Roskilde, on 21 February 2009, in cordial co-operation with curators A. Sørensen and A. Englert.

The papers printed in this volume are dedicated to the memory of Pia Guldager Bilde (†) 1961-2013 formerly director of The Danish Basic Research Foundation's Centre for Black Sea Studies. Who was a driving force and inspiration in bringing the Varangian Network together. The papers, mostly presented at the third seminar "Transferable cosmologies", go a long way to justify her efforts as well as those of many others who contributed to the project. The four seminars served to articulate a research environment, and to introduce a new generation of scholars to international colleagues. As the

papers testify, the seminars were also a forum for the presentation of a considerable amount of new discoveries and observations.

In some cases, research in the East has a direct bearing on our view of the history and archaeology in the Baltic Sea countries. The cultural impact of Byzantium in Scandinavia in the Viking Age and Early Middle Ages appears limited if considered only in terms of the few objects of Byzantine origin found in Scandinavia; yet it must be assessed differently in light of the numerous Scandinavian and Byzantine finds, which occur together in Gnezdovo and other Russian sites, as presented here by N. Eniosova and T. Puškina, and F. Androščuk. The fortress in Šhestovitsa, the Ukraine, was certainly visited by Scandinavian warriors in the late 10th century, and it may not be unreasonable to speculate, as V. Kovalenko does, that such visits bear links to the contemporary emergence of the Trelleborg fortresses in Denmark. Maritime culture in the Baltic Sea area can be gauged in a new perspective, in light of the c. 30 wrecks of the 7th-12th centuries AD recently excavated at the former harbour of Yenikapı, Istanbul, as discussed by O. Crumlin-Pedersen.

Elsewhere a new frame of interpretation emerges when old sources are approached in a context which transcends their traditional interpretation. The merit of this approach is demonstrated by E. Melnikova's comparison of geographical "mental maps" in Russian and Old Norse sources; by U. Hastrup and J. Lind's consideration of Murals in Danish Romanesque churches in the context of their Byzantine and Russian parallels; and by I. Garipzanov, who shows how the historical significance of the dissimilation of the cult of St Clement in Scandinavia is only revealed when the process is assessed in relation to an intimate understanding of the saint's popularity in the early Russian church. Conversely, L. Bjerg argues that the distribution and composition of coin hoards in the late third century around the northern shores of the Black Sea needs to be explained with reference to migrant warriors from the Baltic Sea region.

Still other aspects of history and culture only come into sight when phenomena are considered on a continental scale. H. Horsnæs reveals how the use of imitations of Roman gold coins was a widespread phenomenon within Barbaricum during late Antiquity. The *aureus* and *quinarius* imitations were dispersed over long distances as a result of elite interaction on a peer level. The study of these interactions demands a frame of reference reaching from Scandinavia to the Ukraine. M. Gleba is able to demonstrate how the technology of weaving *Auratae vestes*, gold-embroidered textiles, dispersed and diversified in early medieval Europe only by compiling and comparing finds from across the continent. By contrast, evidence of long-distance contacts is found more rarely in North-east Europe in the 7th and 8th centuries. Nonetheless, J. Callmer demonstrates how changing cultural affiliations and communication patterns in the Russian watershed zone in this period are important for the emergence of Scandinavia's "Eastern contacts" in the following centuries.

History and archaeology of the early Middle Ages in the lands between the