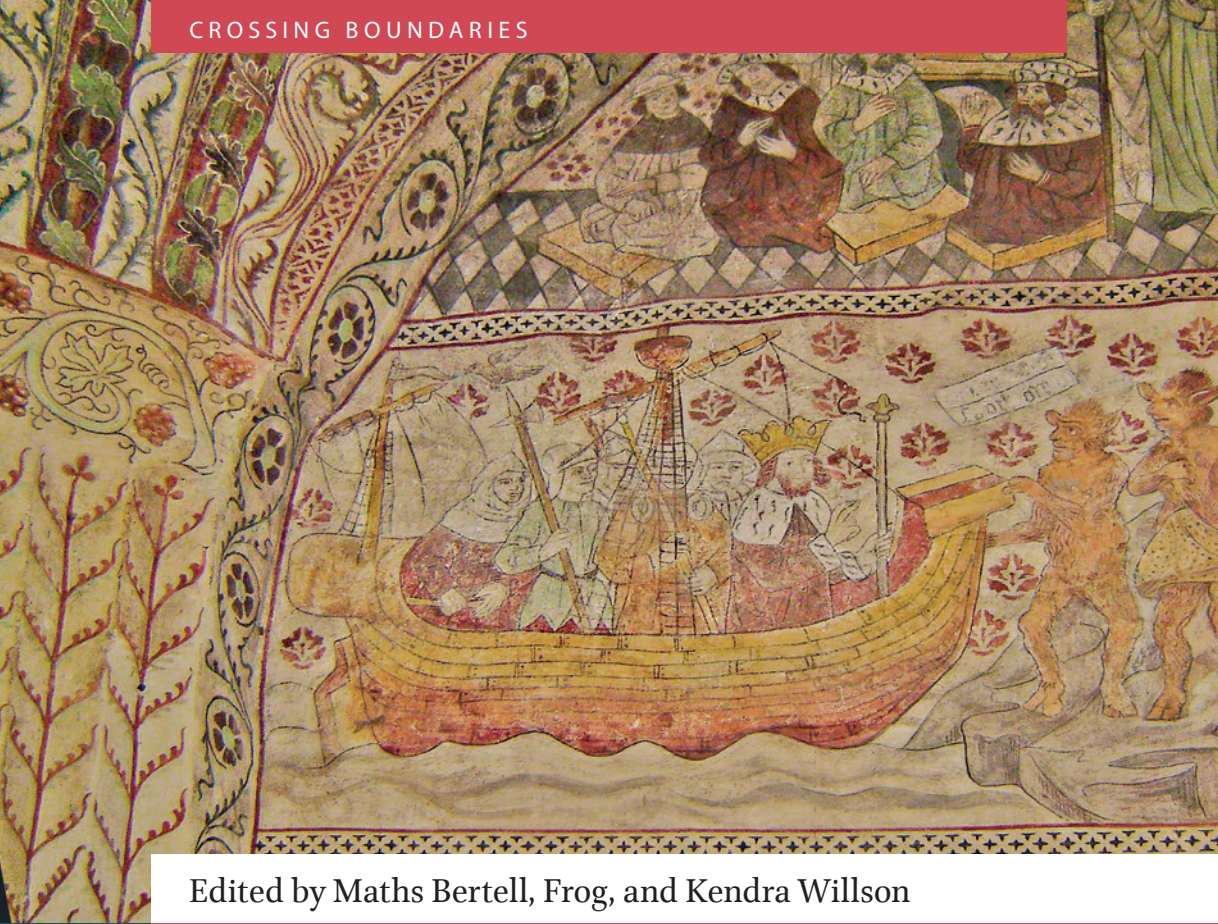


CROSSING BOUNDARIES



Edited by Maths Bertell, Frog, and Kendra Willson

# Contacts and Networks in the Baltic Sea Region

*Austmarr* as a Northern  
*mare nostrum*, ca. 500-1500 AD

Amsterdam  
University

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## Contacts and Networks in the Baltic Sea Region

# Crossing Boundaries

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Cover illustration: Fifteenth-century painting from the church in Odensala, Sweden, depicting the mid-twelfth-century arrival of Erik the Holy and the missionary bishop St. Henrik in Finland

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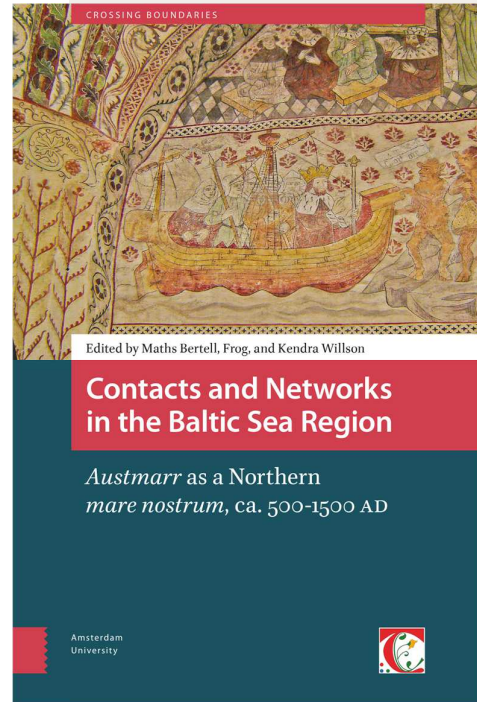
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## Contacts and Networks in the Baltic Sea Region

*Austmarr as a Northern mare nostrum, ca. 500-1500 AD*

Since prehistoric times, the Baltic Sea has functioned as a northern *mare nostrum* – a crucial nexus that has shaped the languages, folklore, religions, literature, technology, and identities of the Germanic, Finnic, Sámi, Baltic, and Slavic peoples. This anthology explores the networks among those peoples. The contributions to *Contacts and Networks in the Baltic Sea Region: Austmarr as a Northern mare nostrum, ca. 500-1500 AD* address different aspects of cultural contacts around and across the Baltic from the perspectives of history, archaeology, linguistics, literary studies, religious studies, and folklore. The introduction offers a general overview of cross-cultural contacts in the Baltic Sea region as a framework for contextualizing the volume's twelve chapters, organized in four sections. The first section concerns geographical conceptions as revealed in Old Norse and in classical texts through place names, terms of direction, and geographical descriptions. The second section discusses the movement of cultural goods and persons in connection with elite mobility, the slave trade, and rune-carving practice. The third section turns to the history of language contacts and influences, using examples of Finnic names in runic inscriptions and Low German loanwords in Finnish. The final section analyzes intercultural connections related to mythology and religion spanning Baltic, Finnic, Germanic, and Sámi cultures. Together these diverse articles present a dynamic picture of this distinctive part of the world.



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Note on alphabetisation

The alphabetisation throughout the book follows a Nordic practice. Å, Ä/Æ Ö/Ø are listed at the end of the alphabet (also for German names). Þ is alphabetised after Z and before the diacritic vowels. Icelanders are listed under first name. No other diacritics affect alphabetisation.

## Preface

Since prehistoric times, the Baltic Sea has functioned as a northern *Mare nostrum*, connecting the people who live on its shores in ways analogous to the more widely known Mediterranean Sea. Millennia of contacts have crucially shaped the languages, folklore, mythology, religions, technology, and institutions of the people living in this part of the world. The long history of interactions has contributed fundamentally to forming modern ethnic and linguistic identities among Baltic, Finnic, Germanic, Sámi, and Slavic peoples of the North. Understanding any one of these cultures depends on understanding its context in the history of the Circum-Baltic arena.

The present volume is a product of the Austmarr Network. *Austmarr*, literally ‘East Sea’, is an Old Norse term for the Baltic Sea that reflects the Network’s geographical focus on the Baltic Sea Region as an arena of cultural contacts and interaction. The term also relates to the Network’s historical emphasis on the period *ca.* AD 500–1500. At the initiative of Professor Daniel Sävborg of the University of Tartu, the Network was initially formed by a small, international group of medieval philologists, folklorists, linguists, archaeologists, and historians, who were united by interests in exploring the role of contacts in shaping cultures, cultural practices, ideologies, and identities through cross-disciplinary dialogue and cooperation. The Network’s growth has been nurtured through annual meetings that move around the Baltic. The founding meeting was held in Tartu, Estonia, in 2011, followed by a symposium in Helsinki, Finland, in 2012; in Härnösand, Sweden, in 2013; in Sundsvall, Sweden, in 2014; in Visby, Gotland, in 2015; and back in to Helsinki for a symposium and workshop in 2016. The largest meeting to date was on returning to Tartu in 2017 with close to 100 participants; the 2018 meeting was held in Stockholm, Sweden; and the 2019 meeting will be in Klaipėda, Lithuania. As the network is an offspring of the Retrospective Methods Network, the work done by participants pays attention to methods and the compatibility of methods across disciplinary frameworks. A central aim of the Network has been to synthesise knowledge about the past produced in different disciplines and national scholarship traditions in order to advance toward truly interdisciplinary reconstructions of human history in the Baltic Sea region.

The present collection was precipitated by discussions following the third Austmarr meeting in Härnösand, where a decisive interest was expressed in developing a volume around discussions at the symposia. Some of the contributions to this volume are based on presentations at the symposia in

Härnösand and Helsinki. The many voices and perspectives brought together here enter into dialogue with one another as their accumulating insights build new ways of looking at the Baltic Sea region in all of its dynamism.

We would like to thank the many anonymous reviewers who devoted much-appreciated time and energy to assessing and commenting on individual papers. We would also like to thank those who have contributed to establishing and developing the Austmarr Network.

We sincerely hope, dear reader, that you will find the works collected in this volume interesting and stimulating, leading to new ideas and arguments that can carry discussion into the future.

*The Editors*

# Introduction

Looking across the Baltic Sea and over linguistic fences

*Frog, Kendra Willson, and Maths Bertell*

## Abstract

The introduction presents a history of the current state of scholarship on cultural contacts in the Baltic prior to the High Middle Ages. We discuss the challenges of bringing together the separate disciplinary and national traditions. Each academic subject has evolved largely as a separate practice across much of the twentieth century, with only gradual and often limited integration with the more recent movements toward interdisciplinarity. Furthermore, each discipline operates to a great extent within national traditions, maintained by language barriers and funding structures, making international dialogues crucially important. This introduction is intended as a steppingstone for gaining perspective on the diverse contributions to the present volume.

**Keywords:** Baltic Sea, language, culture, contact, networks, multidisciplinary reconstruction

## 1 Introduction

For well over ten thousand years, the Baltic Sea region has been a lively contact zone for diverse languages and cultures. Following the Last Glacial Maxim, the first human beings arrived on the eastern and western shores of the Baltic Sea from different parts of Europe (Carpelan and Parpola 2001: 78). From that time onwards, peoples of different cultures have met and influenced each others' language and poetics, technologies and material cultures, social organisation and subsistence strategies, mythology and religion, and so forth (see e.g. Salo 2000; Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001;

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Bertell 2003; Ahola and Frog 2014). The patterns of influence range from borrowings and hybridisation to amplifying contrast and othering – influences that reflect histories of power relations, competing valorisations, cultural ideologies, and social dynamics between the groups concerned. This history of contacts also unites the region: the cultures identified with Baltic, Germanic, and Slavic subfamilies of Indo-European and Sámi and Finnic subfamilies of the Uralic languages (also called Finno-Ugric<sup>1</sup>) have evolved features that link them to one another while setting them apart from other Indo-European and Uralic groups. The filtering in of significant outside influences, for example from the Roman Empire (see e.g. DuBois 1999; Fischer 2005), as well as impacts from otherwise extinct cultures and languages, such as speakers of so-called Palaeo-European languages that were neither Indo-European nor Uralic, have also fed into this process across the millennia. The Circum-Baltic arena thus presents a rich laboratory within which the dynamics of historical processes can be explored, producing knowledge about specific events, cultures, and identities, but simultaneously providing a historical space in which researchers can test and develop methods and theories with wider applicability.

The present volume brings together a multidisciplinary variety of studies that develop our understanding of the Baltic Sea region and its populations during the Late Iron Age and the medieval period (*ca.* AD 500–1500). The nation-states and their populations in this part of the world are the most recent outcomes of this region's history. Fundamental aspects of the identities that are today connected with modern linguistic and ethnic labels for peoples in this part of the world underwent fundamental developments during this crucial period. This is the period when Christianity began penetrating the region, carrying with it the manuscript technologies that were appropriated for vernacular literature among Scandinavians and the Rus', while it concludes on the cusp of writing as a medium for Finnic, Sámi, and most Baltic languages following the Reformation. Thus, this period spans the threshold between history, in the narrow sense of an era from which written records are available, and prehistory, as an era before indigenous written histories, a period that must be accessed through non-textual sources and their collation and reconciliation with textual sources from outsiders

1 Uralic initially designated a distinct collective language phase thought to have split into Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic language branches. Samoyedic is accepted as belonging to the same language family, but is no longer commonly considered the earliest branch among Uralicists, with the consequence that Finno-Ugric gets used as a synonym for Uralic. Although Finno-Ugric is the term more widely recognized across disciplines, Uralic has become the preferred term.

perspectives such as those of Roman authors. It is also during this time that the Circum-Baltic world became integrated with the continent of Europe and that Europe, as the geopolitical space is understood today, was first defined (Heininen *et al.* 2014). On the one hand, the Circum-Baltic perspective is a necessary context for approaching any single language, culture, or society belonging to it. On the other hand, the lack of contemporary vernacular written sources for much of this period presents significant methodological challenges, for which solutions are of potential value to researchers facing similar issues in the same or different materials.

## 2 Mental maps

Today, we are inclined to conceive of the Baltic Sea region in absolute terms of geologically defined space, concisely measured and describable with current technologies. Geography, however, is socially constructed, defining and situating places and spaces relative to one another. In pre-modern environments, geography would most often be construed from an anthropocentric perspective in dialectic with circulating discourse. The result is what can be described as a *mental map*, an imaginal understanding of situated relations of places and spaces. Although imaginal understandings may be subjective, mental maps as organised representations can also be communicated, even if they are not visually represented from above.

It is very difficult to reconstruct more than traces of such constructions prior to written sources, and thus our first substantial knowledge of mental maps of the Baltic Sea region comes from the Classical world. Historically, the construction and communication of mental maps extending to the Circum-Baltic area were most likely connected with long-distance trade networks, combining knowledge of travel routes with populations and cultures encountered there (Valtonen 2008). In pre-modern environments, frameworks of modern scientifically defined ontologies did not apply. Consequently, people were not categorised as ‘human’ on an empirical basis of biology but rather on an ethnocentric basis of ‘people like us’ as opposed to ‘others’, differentiated by fractional increments in both physically observable and imaginal qualities (Lévi-Strauss 1952: 11-16; de Castro 1998: 474-477; Lindow 1995). In the place of our fundamental, scientifically based distinction between ‘real’ and ‘not real’, there operated imaginal constructions of the world. These constructions participated in the evolution of mental maps and the populations inhabiting the places that these maps organised, which allowed otherworld locations to be situated in geographical

space and empirically explorable places to be conceived as a realm of the supernatural (Frog 2019). From the perspective of the Classical world, remote, geologically material locations blended with imaginal otherworlds within broader cosmological models, as is clearly apparent in the sources surveyed and discussed here by Aleksandr Podossinov in ‘The northern part of the Ocean in the eyes of ancient geographers’.

Mental maps are social constructions providing shared frames of reference. The information interfaced with these maps in the present is often founded on traditional modelling with a *longue durée* (see also Heininen *et al.* 2014: 298-299). As a consequence, perceived relations between places may be historically encoded with information about perceptions of the organisation of the world. This is illustrated by Tatjana Jackson in ‘*Austmarr* on the mental map of medieval Scandinavians’, which shows that, in Old Norse texts, differences between cardinal directions and the use of terms of directions relative to Denmark implicitly reflect a vernacular model for the division of the world into regions. At the same time, places are sites to which historical and mytho-historical knowledge is moored in discourse, which reciprocally constructs those places, their significance and relationships to one another (Basso 1996). Such circulating knowledge is an integral part of much of our early literary sources for the history of the North, as is evident in Old Norse saga literature. This is exemplified by Sirpa Aalto in ‘The connection between geographical space and collective memory in *Jómsvíkinga saga*’, which explores the use of geographical names as markers for memory in a saga that features a band of ‘Vikings’ in what is now Poland. As contributions to this volume show, understandings of how people have perceived and organised places and spaces is a social process to which we require at least some access if we wish to understand historical processes of mobility, contacts, interactions, and relations in the Circum-Baltic arena and how these are reflected in the sources.

### 3 Mobility

The relevance of remote locations on mental maps and a precondition of contacts on a Circum-Baltic level is mobility. Mobility seems to have been stimulated during the sixth century, following the so-called climate catastrophe of AD 536-537, which resulted in, for example, massive reorganisation of the social landscape in Sweden (Line 2007: 39), immigration from Sweden to the Åland Islands (Ahola *et al.* 2014) and the Eura river basin in Finland (Lehtosalo-Hilander 1984-2000), populations of south-west Finland becoming

active in long-distance trade (Tvauri 2014), and so forth. Many of these processes remain obscure, including the factors that produced the draw east and the founding of the famed trading centre known as Staraja Ladoga in *ca.* AD 750 (Kuz'min 2008), followed by the opening of the *Austrvegr* (Old Norse) or Eastern Route through what is now Russia to the Middle East (Ahola and Frog 2014). The Viking Age is customarily considered to end with the conversion of Scandinavian kingdoms to Christianity. The processes that carried conversion through Scandinavian polities did not advance in the same manner east of the Baltic, where broad regions and their populations were annexed into the Middle Ages through the Northern Crusades. These Crusades not only extended political and religious spheres of authority, they also provided essential conditions for the (Christian) Hanseatic League, a confederated trade network that emerged from those that had developed during the Viking Age, and which in its turn has had implications through today. The period AD 500-1500 was thus a crucial era across which contact networks both underwent fundamental developments within the Circum-Baltic area and integrated the Circum-Baltic area into long-distance networks.

Although the Eastern Route affected lives at the level of individuals, processes connected with it also operated at the level of geopolitics, of which mobility is a significant factor. Geopolitics at this time was not among modern nations but among polities of different organisation and scope (Heininen *et al.* 2014). East of the Baltic, Finnic and Baltic cultures were positioned between the rapid centralisation of power in Scandinavia and the emerging Slavic centres such as Novgorod. Economic and political interests in the West became linked to religious agendas, giving rise to the Northern Crusades. These crusades allowed the increasingly centralised kingdoms united by Christianity to expand their authority across the more dispersed Finnic and Baltic societies under the aegis of Christianising them. The Viking Age and Middle Ages saw a transformation in the political ecology of the Baltic Sea region as the centralisation of power, new administrative structures, and advances in sea-faring technologies allowed polities to extend their reach and gradually evolve into states.

The mobility of individuals is observable in a variety of contexts and seems to be motivated by an assortment of factors. In 'Rune carvers traversing *Austmarr?*', Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt emphasises that political situations and the current power relations between polities also affected the movement of individuals: evidence from rune-carving techniques reveals that rune carvers brought their skills from central Sweden to Gotland. Among the elite of society, individuals could symbolically embody alliances between polities

through marriage. Such a marriage invested enormous political significance in the movement of a single person from one household to another. It also impacted the identity of members of especially the receiving family and its networks of personal relations for generations to come. This type of process is explored by Leszek Słupecki in the case of 'Polish noble families and noblemen of Scandinavian origin in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: The case of the Awdańcy family: By which route did they come to Poland and why?' This article concerns evidence of the hypothetical Scandinavian origin of some prominent Polish families, as well as ways in which the image of Scandinavian origin has been cultivated in later times. At the opposite end of the social spectrum were, of course, individuals exchanged unambiguously as commodities, as slaves. Slavery in the Circum-Baltic area of the Late Iron Age was significantly impacted by mobility: slaves in these societies were probably moderate in number, whereas channels of long-distance trade opened lucrative markets for trafficking in captured people (see also Brink 2008; Korpela 2014). Jukka Korpela's 'A medieval trade in female slaves from the north along the Volga' reveals the dynamics of trade from the Baltic Sea region to the Mediterranean in the historical record of the Middle Ages. It shows both the economic value of especially blonde women on this market as well as aspects of how the slave trade engaged with religious identities, as only religiously 'other' people could be traded as slaves. However, across all of these cases, the changes through the Viking Age and Middle Ages increasingly related the mobility of individuals to larger political entities, such as kingdoms or emerging states and the Church.

#### 4 Language

The Circum-Baltic region is historically identified with languages belonging to several branches of the Indo-European and Uralic language families. Effects of prolonged close contacts among speakers of different languages are seen on many levels, from vocabulary to syntax. The Circum-Baltic area has been discussed as a linguistic region or *Sprachbund* analogous to the Balkans (Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001). Although we tend to imagine the distribution of languages in the past through their distribution today, changes in the linguistic geography of the region have been quite dramatic, especially across the Iron Age. We also tend to correlate language with culture and ethnic identity and refer to cultures and ethnic identities by language, which easily obscures more than it reveals, especially east and north of the Baltic Sea. The direct correlation of an archaeologically

observable culture with speakers of a reconstructed language like Proto-Finnic has been shown to be methodologically unsound and produced models that are incompatible with how languages vary and evolve. The absolute chronology of linguistic changes generally remains uncertain where it cannot be ultimately linked to written evidence, and even then there are questions about variation by dialect or even differences in how language is used in speech as opposed to writing. Signals of abrupt changes in the archaeological, genetic, and linguistic records seem to show a discrepancy of as much as a thousand years. There is also ample evidence that a shift in language can occur without clear impacts on the archaeological record, that a transformation of culture can occur without exchanging one language for another, and that different groups speaking the same language can appear as multiple cultures in the archaeological record or vice versa. (See further e.g. Saarikivi and Lavento 2012.) Because some perspective on language history is crucial for understanding many of the discussions in the present volume, aspects of the history of languages in the Circum-Baltic region will be outlined here in very broad (and thus simplified) strokes.

Indo-European is only thought to have arrived in the Baltic Sea region in the third millennium BC. Dialects on the (south-)west side of the Baltic evolved into the Germanic languages while the Balto-Slavic languages evolved on the (south-)east, with Slavic eventually becoming distinct to the south. Germanic and Baltic are generally considered to have continuity in these areas from that time, although Baltic languages were earlier also spoken much farther to the east. (See e.g. Carpelan and Parpola 2001: 79; Siiriäinen 2003; Anthony 2007: 367-368, and cf. 379-382). The arrival of Uralic languages is less clear. Proto-Uralic emerged after the break-up of Indo-European, probably toward the end of the third millennium (Kallio 2006b). The dialect from which Sámi languages evolved likely arrived among mobile hunter-gatherers, although it is unclear when (cf. Aikio 2012). The dialect from which Finnic languages emerged first developed elsewhere and subsequently spread through an area where a now-extinct branch of Baltic language was spoken, probably in its arrival in the Circum-Baltic region from the south-east (Kallio, forthcoming). Without going into detail, Proto-Sámi is likely to have emerged in a relatively small speech community in a southern inland region of Finland and/or Karelia around the beginning of the present era. It then spread rapidly through Finland, Karelia, Lapland, and the Scandinavian and Kola Peninsulas, and indigenous populations gradually underwent language shifts. The earlier languages spoken are largely unknown, although some of them are considered as Palaeo-European – i.e. neither Indo-European nor Uralic in origin (see further Aikio 2012; Frog and

Saarikivi 2015). Proto-Sámi seems to have spread primarily as a medium for inter-group communication: there is a lack of positive evidence for a spread of a full array of culture (Frog 2017). It is unclear why, but loanword evidence suggests that the most intensive period of Scandinavian influence on both Proto-Sámi and Proto-Finnic (which was still east of the Baltic) was some time during the third century to around the beginning of the sixth century, waning by the Viking Age (Aikio 2012; Kallio 2015). It is also unclear when Finnic languages reached south-east Finland, but the dialect of Proto-Finnic spoken there seems to have become a language of inter-group communication at the opening of the Eastern Route, at a time when the territories to the east and south-east were a continuum of Uralic languages (Frog and Saarikivi 2015). The opening of the Eastern Route also produced the first major contacts of Finnic with Slavic (Kallio 2006a); although the Rus' had a Scandinavian elite, Slavic languages rapidly become dominant on the Eastern Route, gradually leading speakers of many Uralic and also Baltic languages to undergo language shifts in what is now Russia. Also beginning especially from the Viking Age, the dialects that came to characterise Finnish and Karelian cultures spread extensively to the north, where mobile groups underwent shifts in language in conjunction with shifts in culture (Ahola and Frog 2014; Frog and Saarikivi 2015). With the Northern Crusades, the sphere of Germanic languages grew along with the expanding Christian world: immigration in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries established Swedish-speaking areas in Finland and Estonia while other Germanic languages became important further south, followed by the rising significance of the Hanseatic League and role of Low German within it.

Language provides crucial evidence for contacts as well as for the social dynamics of contacts through evidence ranging from ways of using and representing language, contemporary representations of linguistic text, and, of course, through more direct impacts of one language on another. Written vernaculars in the Circum-Baltic region begin with runic inscriptions from roughly the beginning of the first millennium AD. Runic inscriptions were often relatively short texts normally consisting of only a word or two or of a few sentences at most. However, they provide crucial if limited evidence for an absolute chronology of Germanic languages to which the chronologies of Uralic languages are linked through loanword evidence. Considering the richness of linguistic and cultural influences of Scandinavians on speakers of Finnic and Sámi languages, it is striking that runic writing does not appear among these. The paucity of any evidence of Uralic languages or even their speakers utilising this writing technology is further highlighted by Kendra Willson in 'Ahti on the Nydam strap-ring? On the possibility of

Finnic elements in 'runic inscriptions', which explores a potential example of a Finnic word – in this case a personal name – in a runic inscription.

Trade and trade networks present a vital context for languages to impact one another in relation to the structuring of participant identities and the language ideologies of participant speakers. Following the great trade networks of the Viking Age, the Middle Ages saw the emergence of the Hanseatic League, which carried Low German influence through the Circum-Baltic area, such as those loanwords observable in Finnish discussed in Mikko Bentlin's 'Low German and Finnish revisited'. The wide range of evidence associated with language, from written text to etymologies, provides invaluable data for exploring the history of contacts in this part of the world.

## 5 Mythology and religion

Alongside language, groups around the Baltic Sea exhibit a rich history of interaction and exchange concerning mythology and religious practice, which has been a lively area of discussion and debate. There has been a long-standing tendency to generalise one language for one culture, one mythology, and one religion, and a tendency to view mythologies and religions as static and ideal entities that are mutually exclusive. The reality tends to be far more complex. Much as languages affect one another at the level of individual words or their meanings, features of pronunciation, or grammar, mythologies and ritual practices affect one another at the level of images, motifs, and stories or their episodes, what these mean and conceptual models to which they link, or how they are organised and related to, represented, or actualised as practice, for example as a ritual or a constituent of a ritual. Most contact-based influence occurs at this level, whereas conversion is analogous to a language shift: one system of mythology, practices, and ideology being adopted in the place of another, most probably resulting in individual elements or features of the earlier system being filtered into the new one. For example, the motif of the creation of celestial bodies from an egg in Finnic mythology does not seem to have either a Uralic or an Indo-European pedigree. This motif is found represented in Stone Age petroglyphs on Lake Onega, identifying it with a Palaeo-European culture of the region, which implies that its position in Finnic cosmogony is related to contacts with mythologies of other peoples (Lahelma 2008: 155-157; Valk 2000: 154; Frog 2012: 213). Elements of mythology and religious practice can have astoundingly long histories, but they are also continuously being adapted to suit contemporary societies, and potentially asserted or manipulated in communication as powerful symbols linked to meanings and identities.

Approaching non-Christian mythology, ritual, and religion relies heavily on textual sources, without which symbols in iconography, burials, and so forth remain so abstract that any interpretation is highly speculative. Even runic inscriptions are in general so laconic that references to mythology or religious practice require careful contextualisation. Other written sources, however, are dependent on the technology of writing that accompanied the spread of Christianity and were produced by Christians for Christians who viewed vernacular mythology and religion as 'other', first as 'pagan', and later from a modern perspective as heritage preserved among 'the folk'. This situation presents methodological challenges, particularly when approaching Baltic, Finnic, and Sámi traditions, which are at a much greater historical remove from the Iron Age. Folklore studies as a discipline emerged in the Nordic countries with a historical emphasis and explicit aim of reconstructing an *Urform*, or 'original form', and identifying its time and place of origin. This type of investigation became stigmatised and was largely abandoned when the interpretive frameworks of such research became unviable in light of changing understandings of how oral traditions are transmitted (Frog 2013). However, there has been a recent revival in interest in comparative analysis under the aegis of 'retrospective methods' (e.g. Heide and Bek-Pedersen 2014).

Methodology is now foregrounded in historical comparative studies of later source materials such as nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklore and linguistic data. The result has been new trends in research across the fields of folklore studies, linguistics, and comparative religion that have been developing especially in today's academic networks spanning the Baltic Sea. Approaching diachronic investigation through current theoretical frameworks and research interests has broken down the earlier aim of a single historical target and the very idea of an *Urform*. In its place, attention has turned to stratification as an ever-evolving historical process that reciprocally reveals information about changes in society and performance culture, and contact history with other groups and networks. Indicators of historical relations are patterns of symbolism that link a phenomenon to a certain image or conception, such as identifying the shadows on the moon as a girl carrying pails of water, or it may manifest more directly as a calque across languages, such as referring to the Milky Way as a 'path of birds' (Berezkin 2010). Historical relationships become particularly salient when the symbolic model for such imaginal understanding can be linked to the etymology of a name, word, or phrase. Conversely, a tradition may exhibit patterns of development in which the history of individual images and motifs may remain open to question, but collectively a pattern of contacts or historical change becomes evident that is not dependent on the interpretation of any single image or motif. This

is no different from the fact that etymologies of individual words may be challenged without affecting the view of significant Scandinavian impacts on Finnic and Sámi languages during the Iron Age. Thus, in spite of the methodological challenges, comparisons of more recent source materials can be applied at different levels of complexity and scope with a variety of aims.

Several ways in which influences among mythological models can be discerned behind supernatural entities, interpretations of nature, ritual sites, and other images and motifs are explored by Lauri Harvilahti in 'Mythic logic and meta-discursive practices in the Scandinavian and Baltic regions'. This contribution reveals how things perceived in nature can themselves operate as signs – i.e. can be interpreted as meaningful – much as smoke is a sign indicative of fire, but concern here is with apprehension as mythological signs such as recognising thunder as a product of supernatural agency. Karolina Kouvola then illustrates the potential for variation in more complex narratives and their poetic forms to offer insights into the dynamics of historical change of a tradition in 'The artificial maiden on both sides of the Gulf of Finland: *The Golden Maiden* in Finno-Karelian and Estonian folk poetry'. Of course, language is only one medium through which symbols may be expressed. Maths Bertell's 'Local Sámi bear ceremonialism in a Circum-Baltic perspective' brings into focus symbols in performative action and as material objects connected with Sámi shaman drums in order to situate variation connected to bear ceremonialism in relation to current ideas about the rapid spread of Sámi language. Processes of change and exchange can be at different levels of scope and complexity as well as affect other elements of mythology and practices within a system. Frog elucidates the dynamics of interactions between mythologies in long-term perspective in 'Mythologies in transformation: symbolic transfer, hybridisation and creolisation in the Circum-Baltic arena (illustrated through the changing roles of *\*Tīwaz*, *\*Ilma*, and *Óðinn*, the fishing adventure of the Thunder-God, and a Finno-Karelian creolisation of North Germanic religion)'. The millennia of contacts and interactions among different groups in the Baltic Sea region have had profound effects on mythologies and practices that create connections between them, of which the spread of Christianity and subsequent Reformation are only among the most recent.

## 6 Crossing linguistic and disciplinary boundaries

The period AD 500-1500 saw profound metamorphosis of cultures and societies in the Baltic Sea region. It was an era during which the Baltic Sea

region became increasingly perceived in the broader context of northern Europe and in relation to cultures of continental Europe more generally. Changes in seafaring technologies and new long-distance networks yielded an unprecedented degree of connectivity that also affected the groups it united. This connectivity was interfaced with social and political changes that gradually generated new types of power relations with transformative effects on societies and their cultures. The impacts can be seen reflected in features of language, mythology, and religious practice. Exploring these processes is the concern of numerous disciplines, such as archaeology, folklore studies, history, linguistics, onomastics, philology, and religious studies. The practices, priorities, and paradigms have not always been in step or even compatible across these fields, and each field also varies to greater or lesser degrees by national scholarship. It has become increasingly apparent in recent decades that each of these disciplines is reliant on knowledge produced by others in order to appropriately analyse and interpret data relevant to that past. There are nevertheless disagreements about how to reconcile textual and non-textual sources and methodological debates on how to relate archaeological evidence to linguistic data and documentary sources. A crucial concern has become the development of methodologies for reconstructing the human past that are compatible across disciplines and able to produce enduring knowledge. These issues are so complex and wide-ranging that they cannot all be covered in a single volume, particularly as they remain in ongoing negotiation, continuously evolving through new insights. If the history of research has shown anything conclusively, it is that there is no single, final, and absolute solution to such questions of methodology. Instead, the present volume is constituted of diverse case studies from numerous perspectives that illustrate the variety of methods available and their potential. Together, these contributions create a picture of a dynamic region where contacts and mobility have had a pervasive impact on cultural developments in many spheres. Rather than a conclusion to research, this volume presents a platform for engaging and furthering discussion on these significant topics, of which so much remains to be explored.

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