TATJANA N. JACKSON

Navigare necesse est, vivere non necesse

'To sail the seas is a necessity, to live is not'

The popular ancient saying "Navigare necesse est, vivere non necesse" expresses, to my mind, the very spirit of the dissertation work presented by Kristel Zilmer. These words were pronounced in the year 56 B.C. by the proconsul of ancient Rome Gnaeus Pompeius in the following situation described by Plutarchus: being busy to supply the Romans with bread, the proconsul was ready to start with his ship full of grain towards Rome, but the weather suddenly changed, and there was a great storm. His sailors were in doubt whether they should sail off, or not, for the fear of loosing their lives in the stormy sea. This was the moment when Gnaeus Pompeius pronounced the words that were to become famous for the centuries to come. In the Middle Ages these words served as a motto of the Hanseatic League, and even today we can read them on the pediment of the Seaman House in Bremen; in the twentieth century Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) opened the first chapter of his book on Magellan with these words, designating them as an old sailor's saying that constantly gains power over human souls.

Travel in various forms and to increasingly remote and challenging destinations is taken for granted in contemporary society. But in the Middle Ages it was an indispensable (*sine qua non*) condition of life. Travel was a substantial part of mediaeval life. It is undoubtedly true

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Jackson, T. N., dr., leading research fellow, Institute for Universal History, Russian Academy of Sciences; professor II, University of Tromsø. "Navigare necesse est, vivere non necesse 'To sail the seas is a necessity, to live is not'", *ANF 121* (2006), pp. 79–100.
Abstract: This article is a review of the thesis presented by an Estonian scholar Kristel Zilmer for defense for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (in Scandinavian Studies) at the University of Tartu. The thesis is entitled "'He drowned in Holmr's sea — his cargo-ship drifted to the sea-bottom, only three came out alive': Records and representations of Baltic traffic in the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages in early Nordic sources". The thesis had been written under the supervision of prof. Terje Spurkland and prof. Stig Örjan Ohlsson. The thesis was successfully defended at the University of Tartu on June 27, 2005. The author of this article was one of the reviewers of this work. The text appeared in 2005 in the series *Nordistica Tartuensia* 12.
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that a great many people may have been born, lived and died in the same place. However, there were groups of people who did travel, and given the conditions of the time, they traveled most adventurously and sometimes very far. Traders, warriors, fortune hunters, missionaries, ambassadors and many others moved from one place to another trading, harrying, carrying out their missions of different kinds. These people served as vital links, connecting distant corners of the world and spreading both fables and news.

Subject-matter

Kristel Zilmer's work is an engaging and well-researched account of records and representations of Baltic traffic in the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages in early Nordic sources. The purpose of this study is not only the evaluation of particular facts and events related to raiding, trading, traveling, but "the discussion of the complex modes of expression that runic inscriptions, skaldic poetry and saga literature apply, as well as the general manner in which these significant monuments of the Nordic verbal culture understand and interpret the motive of traveling" (p. 329). These are not the facts that she is interested in, but their fixation in the texts: "what we explore is thus not so much the history of events and actions as such, but their records and representations through texts" (p. 36).

It was her lucky choice of the subject-matter, of a certain chronological period, a particular geographical region and a set of sources that enabled her to create this impressive work.

Baltic traffic was in fact the core of life within one of the European subcontinents, namely within the vast territories of Northern and Northeastern Europe around the Baltic Sea. The peoples who lived there belonged to different families of languages — they were of Germanic, Slavic, Baltic and Finno-Ugric origin, but there had always been manifold economic, social, political and cultural connections among them, and the Baltic Sea played the role of communication means. In the 8th and the 9th centuries people living in this subcontinent witnessed the period of formation of a network of international routes that connected typologically similar trade centers. The exchange of goods, the so-called "Baltic trade", increased on the basis of common currency — first this currency being glass beads, then Arabic silver, and later German and English silver coinage. Proto-urban centers of the Baltic Sea region (such as Kaupang, Birka, Hedeby, Ladoga and others)

developed the "Baltic urban culture" which was at most uniform. This "community" of towns, peoples and countries of the Baltic region in the 8th through the 11th centuries is referred to in Russian research literature as "Baltic subcontinental civilization" (Lebedev 1985).

Kristel Zilmer uses a different notion to designate the same region, and this is the geographical concept of "the Baltic Sea drainage basin". The application of this concept proves really useful, and enables her to broaden the scope of her material. Thus, studying runic inscriptions, she considers runic references to inter-regional Scandinavian connections as evidence of Baltic traffic. According to this broader perspective, references to *Garðar* (Old Rus) are also understood in the similar manner. Kristel Zilmer explains that "the importance of *Garðar* also comes from its central position in the crossing of major trade routes that led from the Baltic down to southern and southeastern Europe. Extensive historical and archaeological research has proven that the Old Rus was a common arena for Scandinavian travelers — they even came to settle in these territories" (p. 147).

To support this idea I can suggest the following example. Snorri Sturluson narrates in his "Heimskringla" that "King Jarizleif and Queen Ingigerth had invited King Óláf to take up residence with them and establish himself in the realm which is called Vúlgáríá which is a part of Gartharíki where people were heathen" (ÓsH, k. 187 — Hollander 1964). If one reads this text literally and tries to obtain some bits of direct information, he is likely to be a failure. But the indirect information behind this passage is a background knowledge of the route that led to Bulgaria on the Volga via Old Rus (Jackson 1999). This example proves that *Garðar* was the nearest destination beyond the Baltic Sea, and to go further Scandinavian travelers had to traverse this country. In fact, there were two great water routes that traversed the East-European Plain — the Baltic-Volga route and the named by the Russian Primary Chronicle route "from the Varangians to the Greeks".

Methodology

I am really impressed by the fact that Kristel Zilmer's thesis contains "a warning against building up naïve historical connections", that she emphasizes that already "in the selection of sources there lie clear limitations to the overall nature of evidence" (p. 27). Unfortunately, we often come across the opposite treatment of source material.

I completely approve of her general methodology — the adapted

hermeneutical approach, which presupposes 1) the examination of each text from various angles and viewpoints, 2) focus on identifying different levels of contextuality, and 3) application of perspectives and knowledge from different disciplines. She is well aware of the limitations and the validity of the analysis, and she knows (which is a positive moment) that "there are no means of reaching absolute objectivity, and there will always be an element of subjectivity and personality present in the study" (p. 31).

I must confess, I am charmed by this *personality*. Kristel Zilmer has a rare gift of a cautious, critical and, as she herself calls it, "conservative approach" to her sources. I cannot help quoting at least some of the examples of her theoretical statements that, as further reading proves, are in full accord with her practical source criticism:

- This may seem as too conservative an approach, but it is necessary to underline that no analytical argumentation should be built upon dating one's material on uncertain (and maybe even false) grounds (p. 51);
- a certain general conservatism in the applied approach is a sound device (p. 66);
- it is wise to follow the so-called "cautious interpretation strategy", leaving the disputed words uninterpreted, but taking into consideration various alternatives that have been suggested (p. 66).

I am happy to find in Kristel Zilmer's work a harsh rebuff to falsifiers of historical sources. Studying the Forsheda stone (Sm 52) she points to existing views and stresses that "although it remains a possibility that the three men from Finnveden participated in a battle at Garðstangir around the same time, the evidence for connecting them with that particular event is non-existent. What we see here is instead the desire of scholars to connect authentic pieces of evidence recorded by runic inscriptions to historically known occasions, without having direct evidence that would speak in favour of that particular understanding" (p. 99). This criticism is absolutely correct from the point of view of methodology. For instance, when one asserts that "Yngvarr stones" prove that *Yngvars saga viðfǫrla* is based on a real historical fact (Glazyrina 2002: 190), I have a strong feeling that the stones are overrated: we could assert something on the basis of runic inscriptions only in case the runic inscriptions in question contained this information, in our case if they mentioned the existence of *Yngvars saga*.

Runic evidence

Runic inscriptions constitute the core of the analysis. The number of Baltic traffic inscriptions studied here is 64. But alongside with them supplementary runic evidence is studied here that refers to: 1) travels to the east without specifying the destination(s), and 2) personal names constructed on the basis of names of ethnic origin. The "primary group" of inscriptions is also examined in a wider context of inscriptions mentioning travels to other destinations that lie outside the Baltic region — leading further to the east and to the west.

Kristel Zilmer points out that not all the preserved rune stones that belong to the "primary group" have been studied *de visu* ('experienced on a first hand basis'), and claims that "this is a shortcoming that can naturally be criticised" (p. 64). No one would ever dare criticize a scholar for not being able, for time-wise or financial reasons, to travel along the routes of mediaeval sailors and to visit every memorial stone. On the contrary, this scholar who does not conceal her disability to study everything on a first-hand basis, deserves our respect.

Again I have to stress that Kristel Zilmer's methods of runological research are marked by real thoroughness, criticism and caution. I am going to illustrate this with a couple of examples.

Thus, on p. 66 she claims that "in case there is no widely accepted reason according to modern runological standards for considering suggested alternatives as correct, the names have been left uninterpreted and corresponding inscriptions have not been included in the primary analysis group".

A good example is her analysis of the Stenkumla stone (G 207) on pp. 94–96. In her opinion, **ulfshala** mentioned in the inscription is on the trade route from Gotland to Jutland. She quotes here an alternative interpretation of Melnikova (1998: 650), who proposed that the place name had to be identified with one of the Dnieper rapids, her only ground for that reading being the adverb **sunarla** ('south'). Here Kristel Zilmer critically explains that "the adverb **sunarla** does not connect with the place of death" and so asserts that the commemorated man met his death at Ulfshala, but, when still alive, he was engaged in fur trade somewhere "in the south": "perhaps the arena of such southern activities was somewhere around Hedeby and Schleswig — Denmark is in early Nordic sources often referred to as located in the south".

When analyzing on pp. 118–21 the Hällestad stone 1 (DR 295), she explains that this inscription and DR 279 "have often been analyzed as

potential evidence of a battle on the river Fyrisån" which is supposed to have taken place around 980. And again her critical attitude helps her to find the right solution. She writes: "It is our conclusion that when assessed critically, the question of possible connections between the above mentioned runic inscriptions and skaldic/saga evidence must remain open, as well as the question as for which exact battle the men from Skåne participated in". And still more: "Attempts to establish connections between bits of history that are known can prove useful, but it has to be remembered that history consists also of the unknown. The mere fact that the name of one locality/region is repeated on a couple of occasions does not automatically connect the circumstances around their description. Furthermore, when we find parallel formulations in the sources it may simply reflect how similar vocabulary was applied in certain types of depictions".

I would like to illustrate the opposite methods of "research work" and give just two examples from a recent publication of *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla* carried out by Glazyrina (2002). Having compared the saga information that the daughter of the Swedish king Eiríkr was married to a provincial king from *Garðaríki* who was later killed by the Swedish chieftain called Aki and the statement of the Russian historian Vasilij Tatishchev that, according to Ioakim chronicle, Russian prince Vladimir happened to have a wife in Scandinavia whose name is unknown to us, Glazyrina suggests the following research method: "Let us suppose, with great cautiousness, that Tatishchev's information in connection with Vladimir's stay in Scandinavia reflects a real fact. Then we can try to ascertain a connection between the saga mention of a marriage of a provincial Russian king to the daughter of the king of Svealand and this fact" (Glazyrina 2002: 76, my translation). And she manages to "ascertain" this "connection" and marry prince Vladimir to the daughter of Eiríkr sigrsæli by means of a flat explanation that the murder of the Russian son-in-law of Eiríkr, which never ever occurred in reality, is a "literary device" (Ibid.).

No less sensational is her "discovery" in the field of Scandinavian history. According to *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla*, the devil informs a man called Soti that Yngvarr will suffer the same fate as "Haralldr Sviakongr". Wondering who that Haraldr is, Glazyrina formulates in so many words her methodological foundations: "brevity of saga mention does not offer an opportunity to undertake a thorough investigation, so we can only *try and guess* [my italics. — *T.J.*] on the basis of available sources, which

of the Haraldrs living before mid-eleventh century — the supposed time of Yngvarr's death — could be called *Haralldr Sviakongr*". This guesswork gives its fruit: bringing in an equally unreliable historical source, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, she claims that "Haraldr Bluetooth was thought to have been the first king of *sviar*" (Glazyrina 2002: 352–53, my translation), correspondingly it was he who drowned in "Raudahafs suelg". As far as it is known from relevant sources, he did not!

I would like to point to one more important observation made in the dissertation work. Kristel Zilmer stresses that "certain localities that nowadays may seem to be of minor importance nevertheless figure among the recorded destinations in runic inscriptions", as they "could be considered important enough in the context of the 11th century" (p 137). The example is that of *Bógi* mentioned on the rune stone from Vidbo church (U 375), "since it was situated along a common sailing route" (Ibid.).

What also impresses is her constant attention to layout patterns (the placement of different content elements on the stone) and design. I completely agree with Kristel Zilmer that "once the text was brought onto the stone, the layout would nevertheless start influencing the event of experiencing a runic inscription in a very direct and expressive manner. Here lies the reason for why the potential visual meaning of inscriptions should not be ignored — it can in fact modify our understanding about the focal points of the inscription" (p. 203). She is quite right to notice that her study "distinguishes itself from most previous research in which the visual dimension of recorded messages is not brought into focus" (p. 327). It is really valuable that "the analysis of Baltic traffic inscriptions was consciously combined with studying the communications around the preserved monuments, in an attempt to reconstruct at least part of the routes that the people may have followed" (p. 328). It is true that "the inscriptions gain broader cultural-historical significance when regarding the textual evidence in combination with what we know of the communicative setting and the sites of runic monuments" (p. 216). We see, due to it, that the traffic in question used to be the traffic employing major water routes, along with lakes, rivers and inter-regional land roads. Still, the communication was in the Viking age and Early Middle Ages mostly dependent on waterborne traffic.

The observed in the dissertation work pattern of traffic routes in the Baltic Sea region is in accordance with the scheme of early settlements

that were concentrated around central waterways and land roads. The same picture can be observed on the Russian material of the Old Norse sources. Studying the main rivers of the East-European Plain in these sources I come to the conclusion that the main settlements in this territory were situated along the main water routes (Jackson 2003).

There is no doubt about Kristel Zilmer's general conclusion that, "viewed as a whole, the Baltic traffic inscriptions, for one, demonstrate mobility both on a regional level (within and between different Scandinavian districts) and an inter-regional level (i.e. on the level of different countries). Secondly, they present information about names/identification labels that belonged with the geographical repertoire of Scandinavian communities, and as such they express shared knowledge" (p. 218).

The analysis of contemporary runic evidence widens the background understanding of the primary inscriptions. Among the former there are 230 inscriptions with personal names that contain elements referring semantically to the peoples of the Baltic region. Kristel Zilmer explains that it is not so easy "to make claims about the actual motivation behind the application of personal names". Mentioning as an example Melnikova and Petrukhin's article (1991) where they prefer to treat personal names beginning with *Eist-* as traces of matrimonial contacts, she has all the reason to stress, following Enn Tarvel, that "it is possible that they were ordinary personal names without any connotations to special ethnic connections" (p. 222).

Speaking about the eastern direction (pp. 223 ff.), Kristel Zilmer claims that "with inscriptions that leave the precise destination open, we have at least a theoretical possibility that the recorded events unfolded somewhere in the Baltic area" (p. 224). One can also assume that they are connected with Baltic traffic. She exemplifies this statement with the help of inscriptions commemorating people who were killed "in the east with Yngvarr". I have a strong feeling that those inscriptions had to have been included into the primary group, as those who went from Scandinavia to the east in the direction of *Serkland* could not have escaped traveling in the Baltic. As far as other destinations, such as Byzantium and Jerusalem, are concerned (pp. 226 ff.), again I can see no reason for not having included the inscriptions bearing these names into the primary group. If one moves *austr* in order to go there, he is very likely to travel in the Baltic as well.

In this connection I would like to discuss the adverb *út*. On p. 226

we read about a woman who, according to U 605, "planned to travel to the east, to Jerusalem: **hn · uil · austr · fara · auk · ut · til · iursala**". In my understanding, this is a wrong translation. I would rather say: "planned to travel to the east *and further* to Jerusalem". As I have written somewhere else, the way to Jerusalem and Constantinople had no designation in terms of cardinal points: a traveler from Old Rus, be that Ladoga or Kiev, moved no longer *austr* "to the east", but merely *út* "out, towards the outer side". In old Scandinavian consciousness that was really keen on the problems of orientation in space three destinations, lying far away from Norway and significant each in its own way, namely Jerusalem and Constantinople (in the east) and Rome (in the south), lacked orientational specification, and in this sense were "marked" on the "mental map", very much like Iceland (in the west) was (Jackson 2003a).

On p. 228 we read that "G 280 refers to the *southern route* along the Dnieper river — the inscription commemorates a man who must have died south of Rofstein (*suðr fyrir Rofsteini*) while traveling in Eifor" [my italics]. I would not recommend asserting here that this is a *southern route*. A route towards the Dnieper and along the Dnieper could be nothing else but the *eastern route* on the "mental map" of medieval Scandinavians. What is said in G 280 is that the place of his death was to the south of a certain geographical object, namely to the south of Rofstein.

And now, probably, is the right time and place to describe this "mental map". This is going to be a rather long excursus, based on my own research work (Jackson 1994, 1998 and 2001), but I must say that reading carefully through Kristel Zilmer's thesis I found a good number of source material not yet studied by me, but proving my previous conclusions.

Terms of cardinal direction were not monosemantic in Iceland: their meaning depended on the context in which they were used. Directions expressed by them could either correspond or not correspond to the compass. This means that the terms of direction could be used by the Icelanders with both "correct" (better to say, "approximately correct") and "incorrect" meanings. Einar Haugen (1957) distinguished two types of orientation in space, which he called "proximate" and "ultimate".

"Proximate" orientation is the one that is based on visual experience, both in the vicinity (cf. phrases like *fyrir norðan kirkjuna*, 'north of the church') and in the open sea, where celestial observation is the

only possible way of defining one's location and of finding one's way. Cardinal terms are used in this case "correctly".

"Ultimate" orientation in space developed in land travel and in coastal navigation between the four Quarters *(fjórðungar)* that Iceland was divided into in 965 and which were named after the four cardinal directions. Going "west" (from any geographical point within Iceland) meant movement towards the Western Quarter, going "north" towards the northern part of Iceland, and so on. Accordingly, cardinal terms are used here "incorrectly".

While studying the "mental map" of the early Scandinavians, as it was reflected by skaldic poetry, runic inscriptions, sagas and geographical treatises, I came to a conclusion that in describing concrete geographical objects, distant voyages, sea routes, in practical orientation in space, Scandinavians put to use the idea, traditional among them, as well as among the other Germanic and even Indo-European peoples, of the world divided into four segments in accordance with the four cardinal points.

The set of lands in each segment of this "mental map" is invariable. The western quarter includes all the Atlantic lands such as England, Iceland, Orkney and Shetland Islands, France, Spain, and even Africa. The eastern lands are the Baltic lands and the territories far beyond the Baltic Sea such as Russia. The southern lands are Denmark and Saxony, Flanders and Rome. The northern quarter is formed by Norway itself, but also by *Finnmǫrk* and, sometimes, by *Bjarmaland*, which is described as a territory lying on the borderline of the easterly and northerly segments, since it was thought to belong to the easterly quarter, but to get there one had to travel northwards[1]. Me and my colleague suggested that the centre of this "wind-rose", as it may be called, was situated somewhere in the south of Scandinavia, or in Northern Jutland, or in the northern part of the Danish islands, in the focal point of trade communications of Northern Europe already at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. (cf. Jackson, Podossinov 1997; Jackson 1998).

In the light of all this, when I read in the dissertation work that *Svíþjóð* "is a common destination when heading to the east from Norway" (p. 288, passim.), I have a feeling that our connotations still differ. We both share a view that *Svíþjóð* is in the east, but for Kristel

[1] Of course, there are no rules without exceptions. In case of spatial orientation, it is the notion of Icelanders that Norway is situated *austr* "in the east". This is what Kristel Zilmer calls "the approach of the Icelandic skalds" (p. 268).

Zilmer it is in the east because it is in fact to the east of Norway, but for me it is in the east because it belongs to the eastern quarter of the world.

Here follow some more points of my disagreement with Kristel Zilmer.

1. A serious drawback is the inconveniency in correspondence between the main section (3.1) and two parts (A and B) of the Appendix III, as the inscriptions themselves, as well as the translations, can be found only in part B, but the order in which the inscriptions are organized in the Appendix differs from the one in the main body of the thesis. One needs the texts of the inscriptions while reading the commentary, so one has to turn to the Appendix all the time. When, for instance, I am reading about the Stenkumla stone in section 3.1.4 on pp. 94–96, I go, in search of the text, to pp. 369–380, but the stone in question is not that easy to find. The description of the stone bears a title "Stenkumla stone, G 207", but the inscription in question can be spotted in part A of the Appendix under the code "G 207F" (p. 371), and in part B under the number 47 and the title "G 207, Stenkumla" (p. 378). I wish there was a concordance of these three parts of the dissertation.

2. Not every stone, not every inscription has a dating. I do realize that "the nature of the material and the available methods do not allow for establishing precise decades for most of the inscriptions" (p. 209), still I think that in every particular case the problems should be highlighted.

3. Formal description of every inscription should be, in my opinion, more formalized. If we have an abbreviation that of MMF for the "main memorial formula", why not introduce such notions as PF "prayer formula", CSF "conventional sponsor formula", and some others?

4. Turinge rune stone (Sö 338) commemorating a man who "fell in battle in the east in Garðar, commander of the retinue". A commentary "Þorsteinn thus appears as the commander of a campaign that ended with a battle somewhere in *Garðar*, during which he died", sounds to me, a historian of Old Rus, somewhat abrupt. I would have appreciated finding either a date of this inscription, or a reference to some works where suggestions as to the nature of these military activities had been made (for instance, Melnikova 2001, 314: "One can suppose that he and his warriors were at service with one of the Russian princes" — my translation).

5. Alstad rune stone (U 62), the second inscription commemorating Þóraldr "who died in Vitaholmr — between Ustaholmr and Garðar" (pp. 154–55). While discussing the three place names it is worth paying attention to the work overlooked by Kristel Zilmer, namely "Bredsideindskrifter på Alstadstenen" by C. J. S.Marstrander published in 1947 in a "Festskrift til Olaf Brock". The scholar thinks that the third line was added later as a specification of what had been written earlier and the second name was a repetition of the first one. He reads both place names as **ustaulms** and understands the name as a designation of some place in the Eastern Baltic, taking into consideration the Latvian word *uosts, uosta* "a firth, a river mouth". In his reading *Garðar* has the same meaning as in all other cases, and I am prone to share this part of his statement.

I do agree with Kristel Zilmer that "it is wise to follow the so-called "cautious interpretation strategy", leaving the disputed words uninterpreted, but taking into consideration various alternatives that have been suggested" (p. 66), and I don't insist on Marstrander's reading as a whole. But I would strongly recommend to refrain both from sticking to Boris Kleiber's interpretation, as it is based on a number of false presumptions,[2] and from asserting that the inscription bears an "identification of some southern border region of *Garðar*" (p. 155).

6. Sjusta boulder (Sö 171). The accepted and discussed in the dissertation work (pp. 161–62) reading of the phrase **an uar tauþr i hulmkarþi i olafs kriki** is "He died in Hólmgarðr in Óláfr's church". However, there have been suggested different interpretations of it (by R. Dybeck, O. Montelius, S. Bugge, A. Noreen and E. Brate), and I am surprised that Kristel Zilmer, being at most critical, cautious and conservative, leaves these views without attention.

I can hardly agree with Kristel Zilmer that "the occurring reference to Óláfr's church from around that time documents *Scandinavian influences* in the Novgorod region" (p. 162, my italics). This is not the question of "influences", but a question of intense and brisk trade connections. Here I would love to remind her her own wise words that reading and understanding runic inscriptions cannot be achieved "in total isolation and ignorance of contextual matters — any kind of interpretation depends upon an understanding of the meaning of the

[2] To name at least one, fire signaling was familiar to different peoples, including the Slavs, and could not have been brought (together with the term designating it) to the Dnieper region by the Scandinavians. For the criticism of his phonetic constructions see Melnikova 2001: 282–84.

inscription as a whole" (p. 57). In this particular case "ett rimligt socio-kulturellt sammanhang" 'a reasonable socio-cultural context' (in terms of Gun Widmark) is as follows.

Óláfr's church is mentioned in a number of Old Norse sources of the late 12th and 13th centuries, as well as in the Chronicle of Novgorod (telling *s.a.* 1152, 1181, 1217, 1311 about the fire in the market place, about burning down churches, the Varangian one among them). The analysis of some 13th century sources (Novgorodian Schra; Latin and German versions of a treaty of 1270 between Novgorod and German towns and Gotland; Russian chronicles) enables the scholars to conclude that since the late 12th century there existed in Novgorod two foreign trade yards, the German one with the church dedicated to St. Peter, and the Gotlandic one with the church dedicated to St. Óláfr (Svahnström 1970). The existence of a Scandinavian trade yard in Novgorod points to the fact that by the 12th century trade relations between Rus and Scandinavian countries had already been quite permanent.

Written sources demonstrate that the church of St. Óláfr was being built in the time of *posadnik* Dobrynja, that is on the eve or at the beginning of the 12th century (Rybina 1978). The dating of the runic inscription on the Sjusta boulder is, as we learn (p. 162), "the latter half of the 11th century", and in this case the Scandinavian sources give a somewhat earlier date of the foundation of the church. Naturally, one prejudices either the date of the inscription on the Sjusta boulder, or its reading.

I have to confess that the excellent analysis of runic inscriptions carried out by Kristel Zilmer has crucially undermined my conclusions as to the volume of East-European toponymic nomenclature of Old Norse sources. I happened to write elsewhere (Jackson 1993) that the general analysis of the Old Icelandic toponymy of Eastern Europe demonstrates that each source (or a group of sources) has its own toponymic nomenclature. The chronology of written fixation of place names reflects the sequence of their emergence into the language of the early Scandinavians. However, this is not a one-to-one correspondence. It just shows the general line of the development of Scandinavian place names of Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the study of the whole complex of place-names on each chronological level is, of course, of certain interest. The first toponymic stratum, that of skaldic poetry and runic inscriptions, as I understand it, includes several hydronyms: the names of the Baltic Sea (*Austmarr, Eystrasalt*) with the Gulf of

Finland (? *Hólmshaf*), the White Sea or the Arctic Ocean (*Gandvík*), the two Dvinas — the Western (*Duná*) and the Northern (*Vína*). Here we also meet a number of ethnic names, or place names derived from ethnonyms, in the territory from the Western to the Northern Dvina: *sœmgallir, Lifland, eistr, eistneskr, Estland, Virland, Finland, Tafeistaland, bjarmskar kindir.* The Baltic toponymy is related to the sea: these are the names of islands Ruhnu and Saaremaa (*Runö; Sýsla, Eysýsla*), of Cape Kolkasrags (*Domesnes*), as well as the expression *allar Sýslur* which was left by the skald undeciphered but was read already by Snorri Sturluson and is now read by scholars as the name for both *Eysýsla* and *Aðalsýsla* (part of Estonia mentioned in the kings' sagas).

Unfortunately, the book on which I relied and where from I borrowed my information concerning runic inscriptions (Melnikova 1978; reproduced in: Melnikova 2001) has kind of misled me. This is my negative profit:

- Saaremaa in the inscription on the Västra Ledinge rune stone (U 518): **i silu nur**. It is a designation of neither Saaremaa (Sophus Bugge, Elena Melnikova), nor the Finnish harbor and trading site Salo (Erik Brate), but of *the sound of Sila* (Selaön in lake Melaren), "a passage between Selaön and the mainland, now known as Kolsund" (Otterbjörk) (pp. 114–16).
- The Gulf of Finland on the Rune stone from Vallentuna church (U 214). Elena Melnikova, while discussing this inscription, as well as that on Högby stone (Ög 81), mentions different readings, but the text is organized so that you feel which of these readings (connected with *Hólmgarðr*) is preferable, whereas the index includes only one reading, namely "the Gulf of Finland" (2001: 322, 345, 384). Kristel Zilmer explains that the reference **a holms hafi** "could have also been made to the seawaters around Bornholm" (pp. 127–29).
- Runö on the Ulvsta rune stone (Vs 22): "it is apparent that the grounds for connecting **runo** with the place name Runö are not convincing" (p. 172).
- Western Dvina on the lost rune stone from Bönestad (Sö 121): "the identification of **i : tuna : asu** has to remain uncertain" (p. 178).
- Semgallir on the missing Grönsta rune stone (Sö 110): the reading of Sophus Bugge "han drog til Semland" "rearranges runes in a lost inscription, and can therefore by no means be considered a qualified alternative" (p. 179).

Skaldic poetry

The survey of skaldic poetry is a useful part of the dissertation work. Kristel Zilmer is quite right when she points to the fact that there exist no special studies on skaldic depictions of Baltic traffic. I have here just a couple of comments.

On p. 248, when discussing *Gráfeldardrápa* by Glúmr Geirason, Kristel Zilmer expresses her disagreement with me (Jackson 2003) as to "that *Austrlǫnd* and *austr* function as parallel references in this case". I must confess that I accept her argumentation that "skaldic poems often demonstrate how separate stanzas concentrate on different events at different localities", which is why my conclusion is not self-evident.

Note 654 mentions *Bjarmaland*: "The river *Vína* may in this connection indicate the Northern Dvina, although it is also possible that in skaldic poetry it served as a general designation for any river and was only later taken to stand for a proper name ..." I happened to write elsewhere (Jackson 1992) that the most serious ground for reading *Vína* as "the Northern Dvina" is still the phonetic similarity of this river's names in the Russian (*Двина*), Finnish (*Viena*) and Old Icelandic (*Vína*) languages. Nevertheless, the Icelandic skald Glúmr Geirason, who was the first to "connect" the *Bjarmar* and the *Vína* in his poem, could mean something completely different, as *Vína* in skaldic poetry was used as a metaphoric description of a river in general (cp. *Vína* as a "river" in the strophe by the 10th century skald Egill Skallagrímsson and *Vína* in a complicated *kenning* of poetry in a strophe by the 10th century skald Einarr skálaglamm). The correlation of the skaldic *Vína* with the real river — the Northern Dvina — could have been achieved in the process of Vikings raids to the White Sea region.

On p. 251 Kristel Zilmer discusses *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld. Snorri Sturluson in the accompanying prose text ascribes this strophe to the 12th century Icelandic skald Hallarstein, but since the time of Finnur Jónsson this strophe has been ascribed to Hallfreðr. However, it has been thought to be a borrowing from another skald, namely Arnórr jarlaskáld (Finnur Jónsson) and even a spurious importation from the tradition about Magnús to that of Ólafr Tryggvason (Bjarne Fidjestøl). Diana Whaley (1998) has recently put forward a convincing argumentation in support of this opinion. Although Kristel Zilmer is familiar with this view, it is difficult to see from her account, whether she shares it or not.

All in all, this section of the dissertation work is a brilliant critical

analysis of skaldic material, and it leads to a sound conclusion that "on the general level of depicting travels outside Scandinavia, skaldic poetry shares some similar features with runic inscriptions in that the eastern route seems to extend all the way from the Baltic to Byzantium" (p. 268).

Saga literature

I was surprised to find that, regardless of the traditional research requirements, the two different sub-genres (or groups, as Kristel Zilmer calls them) of sagas, namely the kings' sagas and the sagas of Icelanders were not analyzed as separate source categories, but there was given a joint description of them.

In spite of the fact that *Íslendingasögur* "may be seen as a logical extension of the interest in family genealogies referred to already at the end of the twelfth century and blossoming in the thirteenth century in various redactions of *Landnámabók* (an account of Iceland's colonization)" (Andersson 1978: 148–49) and *konungasögur* exist only within the boundary lines of the Old Norse historiography of the 12th and 13th centuries, and that it is considered necessary for the historical study to take this genre subdivision of the sagas into consideration, this joint description brought its fruit.

Kristel Zilmer is quite approved of her choice of this method by the fact that "both the sagas of Icelanders and the kings' sagas present themselves as "historical sagas about the past" — to use the formulation of Meulengraht Sørensen" (p. 271). She is aware of the proven earliness of the kings' sagas, she uses modern classification (developed by Vésteinn Ólason) of the sagas of Icelanders, she is well read in voluminous research literature on the sagas, she gives a qualified review of the latest literature dedicated to the reliability and historicity of the sagas. Her conclusion is not absolutely new, but it is reasonable and well-founded: it is "essential to realize the manifold levels of meaning in sagas, as well as the necessity to combine different approaches in their study" (p. 276).

As her source material she chooses the total corpus of known sagas of Icelanders (about 40) and two major works among the kings' sagas — the 13th century *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson and *Knýtlinga saga* that might have been written by Snorri's nephew Óláfr Þórðarson. Limiting her source base to the works of the 13th century, she is aware of the fact that she is going to get a rather static picture, that she won't

be able to study saga depictions of Baltic traffic in transition. Still, she finds her choice reasonable, as it enables her to compare the kings' sagas' material with that of the sagas of Icelanders also representing the context of the 13th century (p. 279).

To my mind, however, the early kings' sagas (*Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sǫgum*; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Oddr Snorrason; *Morkinskinna*) should have been studied as well. These sagas, as I have shown elsewhere (Jackson 2003), are of vital importance for the understanding of place-names with the root *aust-*, as they have preserved this toponymy on the intermediate stage of its development, between the early sources and the great compendia of the 13th century. In these sources, as the analysis shows, *austr* is no longer used as a geographical term, but only as a locative adverb; compounds *Austrvegr* and *Austrlǫnd*, as well as *Austrríki*, are used to denote the lands along "the route from the Varangians to the Greeks". For example, we read in *Ágrip* that after the fall of Óláfr Haraldsson his step-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson *flýði ... braut ýr landi ok í Austrvega ok svá til Miklagarðs* ('fled the land, and to the Eastern ways, and thereafter to Constantinople' — Ágrip, 33), and some time later he sailed *heim ór Garði (Miklagarði. — T.J.) um Austrveg* ('home from Constantinople, through the Eastern way' — Ágrip, 38). *Morkinskinna*, describing Haraldr's trip from Miklagarðr, states that *þaðan fer hann um avstrriki til Holmgarðs* ('therefrom he traveled through the Eastern state to Novgorod' — Msk, 85).

It is evident that Byzantium is excluded from a number of lands denoted by these place names. On the contrary, the names imply only Rus: Oddr in his saga calls Vísivaldr *Austruegs konungr* ('the king of the Eastern way' — ÓsTOddr, 107), while in *Heimskringla* he is *Vísivaldr austan ór Garðaríki* ('Vísivaldr from Rus in the east' — ÍF, XXVII, 436); it is said in *Ágrip* that Ingigerðr, the daughter of Óláfr sœnski, was married to *Jaritláfi Austrvegs konungi* ('Jaroslav, the king of the Eastern way' — Ágrip, 27), who is named by Snorri as *Jarizleifr konungr austan ór Hólmgarði* ('Jaroslav, king from Novgorod in the east' — ÍF, XXVII, 147); *Ágrip* also tells of the noble men from Norway, who sailed to Rus to fetch the young King Magnús who had been brought up there, how they *sótto í Austrvega til Jaritláfs konungs* ('went to the Eastern ways to king Jaroslav' — Ágrip, 34); the heroes of *Morkinskinna*, discussing whether it is worth traveling *i Austrveg* ('to the Eastern way'), come to the conclusion that the absence of trade peace between kings Jaroslav and Svein could be a hindrance in this enterprise (Msk, 3).

To say more, the great compendia are based on the early sagas, they

had used them as sources and often borrowed from them, which why, analyzing such works as *Heimskringla* or *Knýtlinga saga*, one has to check his material with the help of earlier sagas.

I also think that the only known to us Swedish saga, the 13th century *Guta saga*, should have also been taken into consideration. This would have proved useful for the discussion of *Gotland*, "the Viking age news center" (p. 291). The saga describes the history of Gotland, mentions such islands as *Faroy* (Fårö) to the north of Gotland, and *Dagaiþi* (Dagö) in the mouth of the Riga Bay, along with the Western Dvina (*Dyna*). The saga also tells that *þan tima war wegr oystra vm ryzaland oc gricland fara til ierusalem* ('at that time the route eastwards was to cross through Rus and Greece to Jerusalem').

In the discussion of saga representation of *Sviþjóð* Kristel Zilmer notices that in the sagas "the heathen background of *Sviþjóð* is brought into focus" (p. 289). I would recommend here to pay attention to the "heathen image" of the Eastern Baltic lands as well (see my paper on heathens and Christians on the Eastern way — Jackson 1995).

When reading what Kristel Zilmer has written about *Austrvegr* (p. 291), I get a strong impression that for her this *vegr* still means "way", so that *Austrvegr* serves as a designation of a certain route, but not a territory. I happened to write elsewhere (Jackson 1976) that this place name only then became a place name when the root *veg-* lost its original meaning. *Vegr* means 'a road to be used from one place to another', while *Austrvegr* no longer contains in its meaning indications of a departure point and a destination.

As far as *Vik* (Viken) is concerned, I agree with Kristel Zilmer that this region should have been included into the sphere of studies (on the basis of saga material), as in the sagas it functions as an important station for the kings' travels, not only inside the country (Norway), but in distant voyages as well (p. 282). However, it is difficult for me to accept that part of her argumentation where Kristel Zilmer says that Viken "is determined as situated in the east", and that this image is created in skaldic poetry as well, in which way "the poetic narrative of skaldic poems and the prose narrative of the sagas differ from the brief statements of runic mini-narratives". This notion (*austr í Vík*) is, to my mind, expressed in terms of "proximate" orientation, and has to do with the mediaeval idea of the geographical position of Norway and its subdivision (Jackson, Podossinov 1997). Viken is merely the eastern part of Norway, but not a part of the "eastern world" (cp. her own example on p. 287 where Óláfr is going north

to Viken from *Konungahella*). Still, this geographical broadening is quite reasonable.

In connection with Kristel Zilmer's discussion of *Gardariki* in the sagas (pp. 296 ff.) I would again express my regret that in this direction the research area has not been broadened. Going *austr* from Scandinavia implied going further along the rivers. Sagas (and early sagas among them) contain valuable information on the river routes from the Baltic to the Black Sea (strangely enough the famous route "from the Varangians to the Greeks" has never been mentioned in the dissertation work). They also include data on the conditions under which foreign travelers were allowed to proceed deeper into the land, on the summer and winter traffic along the rivers. They are in good accordance with archaeological material that in Ladoga travelers from Scandinavia had to change from sea ships to ships of different kind.

By the way, note 799 on p. 287 mentions "nine *austrfararskip*", but there follows no commentary. This ship is twice mentioned in *Sverris saga* as well. In ch. 24 it is described how King Sverrir seized a farmstead, burnt down all buildings and war ships, but took away the newly constructed *austrfaraskip*. In ch. 86, in the description of the ships participating in some military activities of Magnús Erlingsson, his *gestir* are said to have a ship called *Fleyit micla*, and it is an *austrfararskip*. It is further explained that on low-tide this ship failed to leave the seaside with all other ships. These mentions enable us to assume that there existed a special type of ships — *austrfararskip* — that was supposed to sail in the Baltic Sea, and that differed from a war ship, *langskip*, most likely by its big size and bad mobility. It had to have been a merchants' ship. I think that more attention should have been paid in the dissertation work to ships and navigation as such.

Still, Kristel Zilmer has achieved a really deep research into the saga material. Her "overall study of corresponding sources has revealed the importance of travel motive for the saga narrative" (p. 317). She has managed to spot "the so-called focal arenas for Baltic traffic" (p. 318).

Conclusion

I must stress that the concluding discussion (pp. 321 ff.) is really competent from the point of view of methodology. Kristel Zilmer explains that references provided by the sources cannot "be set into a comparative relation to each other in a mechanical manner" (p. 323), as these groups of sources (runic inscription, skaldic poetry, kings' sagas and

sagas of Icelanders) have had varied nature and biases. They should have been and were in fact studied separately, and the conclusions each time were made on the basis of one group of sources. In fact, "the generally accepted authentic nature of runic messages provides a suitable point of departure, whereas skaldic and saga evidence proves helpful in understanding the broader meaning of applied practices" (p. 326).

Kristel Zilmer realizes that sagas "are considerably later and more distant representations of the studied matter" (p. 323), but, in my opinion, not the sagas, but the runic inscriptions, should be united in the discourse with skaldic poetry, since the skalds created their poems at a time when people erected rune stones, while the sagas are still of much later origin (be they the reflection of the voices of the narrators or that of the tradition).

The results achieved in this dissertation work go far over the formulated aims of the research. Baltic traffic has been presented through the agency of early Nordic sources in a broad cultural-historical perspective. It is a high quality research work carried out by a real professional.

Not so long ago there had been no scholar named Kristel Zilmer on the Old Norse studies horizon, but then she came, came as a real winner. The ancients would say: "Veni, vidi, vici". Her dissertation work is, to my mind, a real success, and I have no doubt that she deserves the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (in Scandinavian Studies).

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