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8. Contacts between Scandinavia and the Caucasus in Viking Age

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The journeys of the Svear in the 8th until the 12th centuries reached very far as a result of highly developed boat building methods that gave light boats and ships well suited for shallow rivers and for portaging between river systems and beside rapids. These ships were the necessary requirements for establishing the new trading networks and cultural contacts towards the East that according to both Runic inscriptions, Old Norse sources, Arabic, Byzantine, Georgian and Russian sources, as well as a rich archaeological material, was the main direction of the communication by the Svear. Despite this only a limited research has been made concerning those contacts, while the limited contacts with Western Europe has received much more attention. This is partly a result of the earlier political situation and a limited access to research on archeological material in the East prior to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989.

In the earlier article I discussed the journey of Ingvar the Far-Traveller 1036-1041, that has been mainly studied by Mats G. Larsson and the author of this article (G.Larsson 2007, 2009; M.G. Larsson 1983, 1986, 1990b, 1996). In this article information of this and other journeys in the Viking Age will be studied from different historical sources, and especially from Arabic sources that refer to Scandinavian journeys to the Caucasus will be taken into consideration. Finally, some of the archaeological remains will also be discussed. Both artifacts from the Caucasus found in Scandinavia, and objects of Scadinavian origin recovered in Caucasus will be used to enlighten the character of these contacts. The focus will be on material from Sweden and Georgia, which dominates in the material remains.

The Background to Ingvar the Far-Traveller's Journey: the Textual, Archaeological and Artistic Evidence

The famous expedition of Ingvar the Far-Traveller through the Caucasus in Late Viking Age, an event commemorated in many Swedish rune-stones and an Icelandic saga, followed upon a long period of Scandinavian involvement in the south and east which brought the Vikings to the Caspian Sea and beyond. While much of this earlier history concerning the journeys to Byzantium and to some degree Russia has been well documented, the ongoing work of our project is providing a new research field related to the journeys to the Caucasus, with some of the most interesting evidence coming from analysis of textiles in Swedish collections and in Georgia. New analysis of archaeological material has enhanced our understanding of how the travel to the East became possible. We are only at the beginning of archaeological work in the Caucasus, where we can expect to learn a great deal more. In this essay, I shall review the source evidence regarding the "pre-history" of Ingvar's expedition. In a following article the archaeological and historical material related to the expedition itself will be discussed.

The presence of Sasanian coins in Sweden shows that commercial contacts with the Orient were initiated already in the 7th century. The big expansion of the Eastern trade came in the mid-8th century and resulted simultaneously in the establishment of the Viking Age towns Birka in Sweden and Staraja Ladoga in Russia along the Eastern trade route. According to the latest dendrochronological datings, both of these were established in the 750s.

There were fundamental changes in the Swedish contacts with the East in Viking

Age that also affected the contacts with the areas along the Silk Route. Ingmar Jansson has made the important observation that the material culture related to the Eastern journeys can be divided into an “older phase” beginning in the 8th century and enduring until the late 10th century, and a “younger phase” that started in the late 10th century and lasted to the mid-12th century (2005:39). The transition in the late 10th century is associated with political and religious changes, as well as with changes in trade and towns. In Scandinavia, in the “older phase,” the Islamic silver coins dominate as payment in both Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. One of the most obvious expressions of the changes is their disappearance and replacement by German and English silver coins in the late 10th century. At the same time, Birka is replaced by Sigtuna; and in Russia the oldest Novgorod, Riurikovo gorodishche, disappears, and the present Novgorod is established about 2 km away. Most of the Scandinavian finds in the East belong, according to Jansson, to the “older phase.” That they are few in the “younger phase” may be explained by a change in dress, where the typical Scandinavian style is no longer as obvious. However, another explanation may be that the burial practice changed as a result of Christian influences (Jansson 2005:43). True Scandinavian finds from the “younger phase” are detectable along the Dnieper route all the way down to the Black Sea, such as the runic grave-stone from the island Berezan outside the mouth of the Dnieper.

The eastern artefacts in Scandinavia in the “older phase” are, as Jansson has observed, from the eastern Caliphate (Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan), from the Khazar Empire between the lower Dnieper and lower Volga, and from the Bulgar area in the middle Volga. Comparatively few finds are of Byzantine origin—approximately 600 coins, pendant-crosses and reliquaries, and a few others, and the majority of them are from the ‘younger phase’ (Jansson 2005:44). This is in line with the recent results by Annika Larsson (2005), who has argued that the clothing styles, materials and decoration found in Birka (that is, in the “older phase”) are “Oriental,” not Byzantine. See the details below.

The written sources, such as the Russian Primary Chronicle, tell of predominantly hostile relations with Byzantium in the “older phase,” including repeated attacks

from Rus until the 10th century when the first peace treaties and trade agreements were made. Later, in the “younger phase,” the Rus also enter Byzantine military service, and the Rus ruler converts to Christianity in order to marry a Byzantine princess.

The Islamic sources in the “older phase” talk about “*Rus*” and the journeys to the areas around the Caspian Sea, whereas they talk about *warank* in the “younger phase.” And finally, in the Old Russian and Old West Norse early medieval literature the contacts with the Caliphate seem forgotten, and the Byzantine connection stands out as the most important (Jansson 2005:44). The later term *warank* is associated with the Scandinavians in Byzantine military service, which in Russia are called *variag*, in Greece *varangos*, and in Scandinavia *våring*. These Scandinavian warriors are first mentioned (in the Primary Chronicle) as being employed in Byzantium in the second peace treaty between Rus and Byzantium in 944. There we learn that, besides a trade agreement, the Rus ruler should send warriors to the Byzantine emperor to fight against his enemies in the number that the latter requested. This started a new era in the Eastern relations: the contacts and the communication network had begun to change. Further evidence is the work *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* by Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos, where, in connection with the Rus princess Olga’s visit in 957, the emperor complains that Rus had not sent people to him to the extent they had agreed. The Byzantine Empire had replaced the Orient as the target for the Scandinavian journeys and commercial contacts.

The necessary prerequisite for the contacts: the ships

Changes in boatbuilding technology were the main factor behind the expansion of contacts and trading networks in the Viking Age (G. Larsson 2007). The resulting improvement in the ships made possible long distance journeys from Scandinavia to the areas south of the Aral Sea in the East and “Vinland” America in the west, the northern African coast in the south and Baffin Island in Canada as well as the Arctic Sea in the north.

The well preserved 11th-century Viking boat (Fig. 4), which has been documented, reconstructed and rebuilt by the author, is the only Viking Age ship find in Sweden with

almost all of the wooden hull preserved and thus with a unique potential to inform about Viking Age shipbuilding and the qualities of the ships (G. Larsson 1994, 1997, 2000, 2007). The planking in the ship was made from radially split oak, a method that according to the analysis of wooden fragments attached to rivets in burials was introduced in the 7th century, the earliest example being the burial boat from Valsgårde grave No. 7, excavated near Uppsala (Arwidsson 1977; G. Larsson 2007). The method enabled the fibres in the wood to remain intact, and, thanks to the strength and pliability of the fibres, the planking could be made much thinner than if it was sawn, in which case the fibres were cut. 10–20 mm is a common thickness of planks in Swedish Viking boats: they have the thinnest planking among the Scandinavian ships and therefore are the lightest ones. Embla, the reconstruction of a 7.2 m-long burial boat, weighs only 250 kg, and the 9.6 m-long Viks boat replica, 500 kg (G. Larsson 1998, 2006). By contrast, the 8.5 m-long replica boat Krampmacken that was built with modern methods weighs more than 850 kg (Edberg 1993, 1995 a,b, 1996). The light boats were the most important factor behind the success of the Viking raids, where the ships could land anywhere with shallow waters. Since the boats could land anywhere, it was impossible to anticipate where the next attack might fall.

The light boats were the main factor that made possible the far-reaching Eastern trade. As I have shown earlier, analysis of Viking Age Scandinavian boat remains in Russia shows that it was almost exclusively the very light Swedish boats which could be and were used on these trade routes. Shallow rivers, many portages beside the rapids and between the different river systems, made it necessary to have very light boats. In experiments I have shown that boats built with radial splitting of the planks were so light that children and teenagers can pull them on land on rollers placed on portages without difficulty. The replica of the Viks boat was pulled almost one kilometer in one hour by these young people, and the burial boat took only fifteen minutes. By contrast, the experimental boat “Krampmacken,” built in the modern way with thicker sawn planks, and thus much heavier, though smaller than the Viks boat, could be pulled on portages only by adult men and with great effort, necessitating the construction of a wheeled carriage for the boat. The portaging of ships by Rus merchant travellers was described

already in the 10th century by Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos in his *De Administrando Imperio*, a book instructing his son how to rule the empire and how to deal with the many different peoples living in and around it.

The discouraging results by some experimental archaeologists using modern methods to build the replica boats has caused these scholars to wonder whether the Rus even could travel such distances in Eastern Europe (Edberg 1997, 1998, 1999). My experience with replica boats built with original methods, and similar experiences in Denmark, give completely different results and show that it is possible without effort to use ships of this type on communication routes that involves many portages. Moreover, these results are also supported by contemporary historical sources that are good evidence about these long-distance journeys. Several contemporaneous Arabic authors emphasise that the Rus, who are ethnically different from Slavs, also differ from them in that they come by ships, and that the ships are central in warfare, raids as well as trade. One of these authors Ibn Rustah (fl. CE 903–913) writes:

...They have a king who is called khaqan Rus...they make raids against Saqalaba, sailing in ships in order to go out to them, and they take them prisoner and carry them off to Khazar and Bulgar and trade with them there...They have no cultivated lands; they eat only what they can carry off from the land of Saqalaba...their only occupation is trading with sables and grey squirrel and other furs, and in these they trade and they take as price gold and silver and secure it in their belts (or saddle-bags). (transl. by Macartney 1930)

A few decades later, around 950, Constantine Porphyrogenitos described the recently organized trade network between Rus and the Byzantine Empire, which included journeys by boat. The Rus merchants from Novgorod and Kiev travelled north in winter to purchase furs, and returned in spring and bought local boats on which they travelled down the Dnieper to sell their merchandise in Constantinople. The description resembles that of the later, medieval trade journeys from Novgorod to the northern Sámi markets, described by Olaus Magnus (*Historia* 20:2). In Olaus Magnus' time, the 16th century, it was the heirs of the Rus in the East who continued to use the old communication routes and means of travel in lands without roads in northern Scandinavia. Olaus Magnus reported that the Russians on their way to the Torneå market with furs ‘sometimes carry

their boats on their shoulders over the strips of land that separate the water routes' [Fig. 5] (*Historia* 20:2 my transl.). Both among the Sámi and the local peasant population of north Sweden, there is much evidence that travelling in areas without roads meant journeys with light boats over communication networks that included combined water and land transport. The analogies with ethnographically and historically known ways of travelling in this area shed light on the probable solutions in prehistoric and medieval times in central Sweden. Like the Swedes in the Iron Age the Russians and Karelians in the 16th century used *light, portable boats* as the necessary prerequisite for this widespread trade along the northern river systems.

Historical sources

With ships to the Caspian Sea

The main route used by Rus to Baghdad and the Caliphate seems to have been the route by the Caspian Sea, according to contemporaneous sources from the mid-9th century. And all the sources are in agreement about the use of boats – that the arriving Rus came by boat, and that this aspect separates the Rus from the other peoples in the area. The earliest source is the earlier mentioned Arab writer Ibn Khordadbeh, who was a director of Posts and Intelligence in the Baghdad Caliphate. In the book *Kitab al Masalik Wa 'L-Mamalik* (The Book of Roads and Kingdoms), which probably was written in the 840s, he gives information on Rus:

“...a tribe from among the as-Saqaliba. They bring furs of beavers and of black foxes and swords from the most distant parts of the Saqaliba [land] to the sea of Rum, [where] the ruler of ar-Rum levies tithes on them. If they want, they travel on the Itil, the river of the as-Saqaliba and pass through Khamlij, town of the Khazars, [where] the ruler of it levies tithes on them. Then they arrive to the Sea of Gurjan and they land on the shore of it which they choose. On occasion they bring merchandise on camels from Gurjan to Baghdad [where] as-Saqaliba eunuchs serve them as interpreters. They claim to be Christians and pay [only] head tax.” (transl. by Boba 1967:27)

What is important to note here is that he also says they do not travel on land on their way to the Caspian Sea, but instead ‘they travel on the Itil, the river of the as-Saqaliba’. Furs and swords were light wares that were possible to transport on the small and light

boats that were necessary for these journeys. The squirrels are of major importance; they were used as money of a fixed value. Furs were attractive to the Caliphate and were a much appreciated and highly valued contribution from the North already in the Early Iron Age in the Mediterranean, where (Tacitus?) also speaks of the black foxes.

As is also clear from this quotation, the first known journeys by Scandinavians to the Muslim states surrounding the Caspian Sea were *peaceful trading expeditions*. Ibn Khordadbeh says that these journeys were *waterborne*, that Scandinavians were arriving to the Black Sea from the distant parts of the Saqaliba, and then travelling on the Don and through the Khazar Empire further to the Caspian Sea. Here they landed on any shore, and sometimes they also left their ships and travelled on camels to Baghdad to sell swords as well as furs from beaver and black fox.

Much indicates that these peaceful traders returned with silk and expensive clothing from the Persian market and from the nomadic peoples. Annika Larsson (2004) has recently shown that the areas of origin for the silk found in Birka must be around the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Earlier the kaftan of Byzantium was seen as the source of influence for the kaftan finds in Birka. But as Larsson has shown, the use of the kaftan in Constantinople instead was introduced in connection with the medieval cultural and religious changes caused by the conquest of the Osmans; the change in dress namely marked the religious change from Christianity to Islam and the demand that the arms should be covered. Instead of being typical of Byzantium, the kaftan in the Late Iron Age is, according to Larsson, characteristic of nomadic riding peoples as well as of the Persian clothing in the Islamic Caliphate. Another important observation by Larsson is that the trade agreement with Constantinople, which included a limited amount of silk, dates to the late 10th century when Birka ceased to exist. Larsson argues that the silk earlier arrived by the northern silk-route and not from Byzantium. The precious silk was easily transported on the light vessels of the type we find in the boat burials and did not need to be transported in heavier cargo-ships.

Rus arriving in ships

Several contemporaneous Arabic authors emphasise that the Rus, who are separated from the Slavs ethnically, also differ from

them in that they come by ships, and that the ships are central in warfare, raids as well as trade. One of these authors is the Arab writer Ibn Rosteh, active AD 903–913:

“...They have a king who is called khaqan Rus...they make raids against Saqalaba, sailing in ships in order to go out to them, and they take them prisoner and carry them off to Khazar and Bulgar and trade with them there...They have no cultivated lands; they eat only what they can carry off from the land of Saqalaba...their only occupation is trading with sables and grey squirrel and other furs, and in these they trade and they take as price gold and silver and secure it in their belts (or saddle-bags).” (transl. by Macartney 1930)

Later in the text the central role of the ships and seafaring is emphasised even more:

“The Rus are strong and observant. And their raids are not made riding, but their raids and fights are only in ships. (transl. by Macartney 1930).”

The ships and seafaring of the Svear was so special, that it was ethnically significant and worth mentioning. It made a lasting impression on the peoples they encountered and remained for a long time in the memory and in the written sources.

The Khazars by the mouth of the Volga

By the mouth of the Volga into the Caspian Sea, the Rus seafarers had to encounter the Khazars, who since the 7th century had a flourishing multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire reaching from the Don in the west, to the lower Volga, and to the steppes in the east. The Rus came on ships along the Don and through the Khazar Empire (channel or portage) to the Volga, or from the north on the Volga to the Caspian Sea, and they needed good relations with the Khazars. The Arab geographer Ibn Khordadbeh tells that Scandinavian merchants already in the 840s were travelling from the Don to the Caspian Sea, and thus through the Khazar realm on their way to Baghdad for trade. The Russian merchants are described by Ibn Khurdadbeh as ‘a kind of Slavs’. He calls the Don ‘the Slav River’. Later, Idrisi calls the Don *nahr al-Rusiya*.

The relations with the Khazars were peaceful at first, and the Rus were present in their country as traders. Al-Masudi knows them as numerous nation with many subdivisions, who ‘for trading purposes constantly visit the countries of Andalus, Rome, Constantinople and Khazar....’ (§ 8 after transl. by Minorsky 1958, annex III). He also describes the multi-ethnic people of the Khazar Empire, and says that in Atil,

where the Khazar king resided, there were Muslims, Christians, Jews and pagans; the latter included Rus, one of the groups residing in the town. He says that, just as we have seen in Constantine’s description from Constantinople, the Rus had a special part of the town that was situated on one side of it together with the Saqaliba (Slavs)’ (Al Masudi § 4, after transl. by Minorsky 1958, annex III). Al-Masudi is also very informative about the Rus burial customs in the town. They:

“...burn their dead together with their animals, their implements and ornaments. When a man dies, his wife is burnt alive with him, but if the woman die, the husband is not burnt. If someone dies unmarried, he is married posthumously and women ardently wish to be burnt (thinking) that their souls will enter paradise jointly with the souls of the (deceased) men’.” (Al Masudi § 4, after translation in Minorsky 1958:146)

Another important piece of information given by al-Masudi is that here, like in Byzantium:

“The Rus and Saqaliba, who as we have said, are pagans, (also) serve in the king’s army and are his servants...” (Al Masudi § 4, transl. by Minorsky 1958:147)

The first naval expeditions were not directed towards the Khazar Empire, but only used the water route through this country to reach the shores of the Caspian Sea. In 912 an expedition with warships arrived from the Black Sea to the lower Don with the plan to use the channel to reach the Volga through the Khazar Empire, and then to reach the Caspian Sea. Al-Masudi described how Rus entered this area but they were stopped, probably at the fortress Sarkel by the Don. Negotiations began with the emperor with whom they made an agreement to share all booty and in return get free passage through Khazar country. They continued upstream the Don and then along a channel (?) to the Volga where they passed the Khazar town of Itil before reaching the Caspian Sea to start the plundering and raids.

Rurik’s son Igor might have taken his fleet eastward after the peace treaty with Byzantium in 943. In 943 or 944, according to the Arab philosopher Ibn Miskawayh, troops from the people called Rus came sailing on the Caspian Sea toward Azerbaijan (Larsson, M.G., 1993). They probably arrived by the route Don-Volga, since the Khazar still ruled there after another agreement with their emperor.

The intentions of the Rus were more and more seen as a cause of worry. In 960, the

Khazar king Josef expressed his concern in a letter to Hasday Ibn Shaprut, an eminent official of the caliph of Cordoba:

“Know and understand that I live by the mouth of the river. By the help of the Almighty I guard the mouth of the river and do not prevent the Rus, who come in their ships, to come out on the Caspian Sea to go against the Arabs, and not either any enemy on land towards Bab al-Abwab. I fight them. If I would let them for an hour (to sail down to the Caspian Sea), they should raid the whole Arab country all the way down to Baghdad...” (After Arbman 1955:61 my transl.)

The concern of the Khazar king was justified. Within a few years the devastating attack he feared came, not only to the shores of the Caspian Sea but also to the Khazar realm itself. It was Svjatoslav, Igor's son, who at the end of the 960s in his big expedition to northern Caucasus and further to the Caspian Sea first struck against the Khazars and defeated them. In 965, according to the Russian Chronicle, he launched his devastating expedition. According to Hypatios Codex (see Minorsky 1958:113 note 3) he took both the Khazar town and the fortress Bela Vezha ‘white city’. The fortress is probably Sarkel, which according to the investigations at Tsymljanskaja Stanitsa was abandoned by this time and transformed into a small agricultural village (Minorsky 1958:115). The route to the Khazar realm and the Caspian Sea was opened.

Ibn Haqal tells how the Rus thoroughly destroyed the Khazar towns of Atil, Samandar and Khazaran. In Samandar there had been 40,000 vineyards. When speaking with a man in Djordan who had recently returned from there, the man said that, ‘there was nothing left even for charity to the poor in any vinyard or garden, if it even is a leaf left on a branch. Because the Rus’ came, and not one cluster, not a single grape remained...’ (my transl. after Arbman 1955:62). The people who lived there – who were Muslims, of other faiths, or heathens – all emigrated. This event marked the beginning of the fall of the Khazar Empire.

Khazar boats are mentioned by al-Masudi; the so-called *zaurac* sailed upstream the river Volga (§ 4 transl. after Minorsky 1958:148 annex III). However, the Khazars had neither boats nor crews capable of navigating on the Caspian Sea, according to al-Masudi (§ 8 transl. by Minorsky 1958, annex 3): In the Azov Lake we are informed that only Rus navigate:

“...In the upper part of the Khazar River there is an estuary (masabb, a canal?) disemboguing into a

gulf of the Nitas (Pontus) sea-which is the sea of Rus and is navigated only by them, and they are established on one of its coasts.” (al-Masudi § 6, transl. after Minorsky 1958, annex III)

Minorsky means that Maytas, the Azov Sea, is intended (1958:149).

Where the passage between the Don and Volga is shortest, it is only 30 km. Today there is a modern channel here. In the sources there are several references that could be connected with the presence of an ancient channel here. Al-Masudi informs us of how the Rus passed through the Khazar realm on their expedition to the Caspian Sea. Here he speaks of, ‘the branch which joins the Khazar River to the gulf of Pontus’. When the Rus entered the Don after getting permission to pass, ‘they began to ascend that branch until they came to the Khazar River by which they descended to the town of Atil’ (§ 8, after transl. by Minorsky 1958, annex III). Minorsky himself thinks this is a misunderstanding for a portage.

Al-Masudi also tells that at the start of the water route through the Khazar Empire the Khazar king had positioned well-equipped men, at the place where ‘the straits of Nitas join with the Khazar Sea’. The task of these men was to ‘oppose anyone coming from this sea, or from that side of the land, the parts which stretch from the Khazar Sea down to the Nitas’ (§ 6, transl. by Minorsky 1958 annex 3). The stronghold mentioned by al-Masudi may correspond to the remains of a fortification found and excavated by Russian archaeologists at Tsymljanskaja Stanitsa, by the Don and close to the present-day channel between the Don and Volga. At this place a strong brick wall has surrounded an area of 18 hectares, built with massive towers at the corners (Arbman 1955:60). The artefacts show that the fortress was losing its importance sometime during the 10th century, and the brick walls were deteriorating. This is probably the remains of the fortress called Sarkel, built by the Khazars to guard the border between 834 and 837. Constantine Porphyrogenitus describes how this fortress was built with the help of the Greek emperor, who sent officers with naval ships to the area. Since the royal Greek warships were much deeper than the Scandinavian they had to be left already at Kersonesos, where the crew transferred to smaller cargo boats in which they continued up the Don. When finished the stronghold was manned by 300 warriors, and it served as a blockage for the water routes.

Whether the ‘branch of the river’ mentioned by al-Masudi is a forerunner to

the present channel, can be discussed. Larsson doubts this, and thinks that the short distance between the Don and Volga here was a short portage. However, it seems that the intention may have been to use water as an additional obstacle for most intruders, which except for the Rus normally came by land. This is seen in the description where al-Masudi relates the problem when the water route was frozen:

“...in view of the fact that the nomad Ghuz Turks come in winter to this tract of the land. Sometimes the branch which joins the Khazar river to the gulf of the Pontus becomes frozen and the Ghuz with their horses cross it. This is a large stream but the ice does not collapse under them because it is as hard as stone. Consequently the Ghuz pass over to the Khazar country and on several occasions, when the men posted here to repel the Ghuz were unable to hold them at this place, the Khazar king had to sally forth to prevent them from passing over the ice and to repel them from his territory.” (al-Masudi § 8, transl. after Minorsky 1958:151, annex III)

Channel construction was known early in the area of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean. For instance Persians, Sumerians and Egyptians dug irrigation channels already 3000 BC. Considering the advantages of a channel at this place, it is not unlikely that a channel really had been built by the Khazar Empire by the time of Rus visits.

From trade to raids

In the late 9th century the character of the voyages to the Caspian Sea and surrounding areas seems to change dramatically. Like the situation in the Byzantine Empire, the Rus' raids spread over the area, and they came in ships. The earliest Muslim report on the devastation by Rus on the Caspian coast is recorded during the reign of 'Alid Hasan b. Zayd (864–884). According to Ibn Isfandiyar, the Rus on this occasion went to attack Abaskun in Tabaristan by the southeast shore of the Caspian Sea, a Muslim area. This time the emperor stopped them, and his troops killed all of them (Minorsky 1958:111).

In 909, says Ibn Isfandiyar, the Rus arrived by sea with 16 ships, raided the same coast and launched another attack on Abaskun, with plundering and murder. The commander of the area was, as earlier, quick to launch a counterattack on the Rus one night. The Rus were taken by surprise, many were killed, and several were taken away to a life as slaves (Larsson 1997:25).

In c. 910 the Sari and Gilancoust in the SW Caspian Sea became the target of Rus maritime expeditions (Larsson 1997:26). They were said to have come 'in great numbers' and raided the Sari, but in Gilan the emperor attacked them at night when they had pulled their boats ashore. He had all the Rus ships set on fire, and killed everyone that was on the shore. Only the more cautious participants who had spent the night at sea survived. This may or may not be the same expedition that al-Masudi has described in great detail and of which he has forgotten the date, though he says it was 'after 300', i.e., after AD 912.

The largest attack on the shores of the Caspian Sea was in 300/AD 912. Here al-Masudi has a detailed description of both the route and the events. The Rus came with a large fleet of 500 ships from the Black Sea and entered the Azov Lake, where they were stopped by the Khazars, probably at the fortified town of Sarkel by the Don. After making a deal with the Khazar emperor they got free passage through his country to the Volga and the Caspian Sea; in return the Rus had to share the booty from the raids with the emperor. Al-Masudi writes:

“The ships of the Rus scattered over the sea and carried out raids in Gilan, Tabaristan, Abaskun (which stand on the coast of Jurjan), the oil-bearing areas and (the lands lying) in the direction of Azarbaiyjan, for from this territory of Ardabil in Azarbayjan to this sea there is a three days' distance. The Rus shed blood, captured women and children and seized the property (of the people). They sent out raiding parties and burnt (villages). The nations around the sea were in an uproar, because in olden times they had not witnessed any enemy marching on them from the sea, as only boats of merchants and fishermen had been plying on it. The Rus fought with the Gil and Daylam and with one of the generals of Ibn al-Saj. Then they came to the oil-bearing coast of the kingdom of Sharvan known as Bakuh (Baku)...” (Al-Masudi § 8 transl. by Minorsky 1958 annex III)

The inhabitants around the Caspian Sea were taken by surprise by this sea-borne enemy. Despite this, when they got the opportunity they made a less successful attempt to reach the Rus by boat:

On their return (from the coast) the Rus sought shelter on the islands which are only a few miles distant from the oil-bearing (area). The king of Sharvan in those days was 'Ali b. Haytham. Having made their preparations, the inhabitants took their boats (qavarib) and trading-ships sailed towards these islands. The Rus turned upon them and thousands of the Muslims were killed and drowned. The Rus remained many months at sea, as we have said, and none of the nations

adjacent to that sea could find a way to reach them. (al-Masudi § 8 transl. by Minorsky 1958 annex III)

Not even the Khazar king had seagoing ships that could meet the returning Rus ships, according to al-Masudi:

“When the Rus were laden with booty and had enough of their adventure, they sailed to the estuary of the Khazar river and sent messengers to the Khazar king carrying to him money and booty, as had been stipulated between them. The Khazar king has no (seagoing) ship (*marqab*) and his men have no habit of using them... (al-Masudi § 8 transl. by Minorsky 1958 annex III)

However, the Muslims of his country had heard about the plundering and demanded revenge for what had happened to their brothers. The Khazar emperor couldn't stop them, but had a warning sent to the Rus (the emperor himself was a Jew). The Muslims gathered 15,000 people, among which were also many Christians. They also had horses, and probably because of this they easily defeated the Rus. Five thousand managed to escape from the slaughter, but they were later killed by the Burtas, a tribe living in the forests by the Volga, and by the Muslim tribe Volga Bulgars further upstream. According to al-Masudi, all in all 30,000 Rus were killed by Volga. This coincides with the death of Oleg in c. AD 912, who according to Khazar sources was killed in the emperor's service in battle with the Persians, though this information is not completely certain (Larsson 1997:27). Oleg could have been the leader of the expedition, though the Primary Chronicle refuses to tell about this unsuccessful journey. Oleg was, according to the Chronicle, later buried under a mound near Kiev. A mound at the shore of the Volkhov at Staraja Ladoga is called Oleg's mound, and by tradition it is said to be Oleg's grave.

Al-Masudi, writing his account in AD 943, says that after the defeat in 912 ‘from that time the Rus have not reverted to what we have described’ (al-Masudi § 8, transl. by Minorsky 1958, annex III). However, the same year another naval expedition from Rus entered the Caspian Sea.

The Arab philosopher Ibn Miskawayh tells that, in 943 or 944, a fleet from the people called Rus came sailing on the Caspian Sea toward Azerbaijan (Eclipse ed. II 62-67). Ibn Miskawayh has presented a report of the events by an eyewitness. From the Caspian Sea the Rus sailed up Kura to the province of Arran and then continued up the side river Terter to the town of Berda, where the town's governor and an army of more than 5,000 men met them. They made

the mistake of thinking that the Rus were like Byzantine people or Armenians. Many volunteers had joined to fight the holy war against the intruders, but the Rus made a sudden attack and killed or drove away all but 300; these were killed except for those mounted on horses. The Rus seized the town. In the beginning the inhabitants were treated well. When the Muslims attacked and threw stones at the backs of Rus, the latter lost patience and gave them three days to leave town. When many refused to go, the Rus used their swords on them and took many as prisoners. Men were gathered in a mosque, women and children in the fortress, and everyone was offered to buy themselves free. Those men who didn't were killed, and women and youngsters were turned into sex slaves. The emperor in Azerbaijan, al-Marzuban Ibn Muhammed, tried to attack them with 30,000 men, but he and his troops were continually defeated. Then Allah heard his prayers. The Scandinavians were struck by a disease. When they were decimated, they were ambushed, and more than 700 were killed. In the city the disease hit them hard, and finally one night they gave up, fled to their ships with women and jewellery, and sailed away. Who was leading this expedition? Rurik's son Igor might have taken his fleet eastward after the peace treaty with Byzantium in 943 (see above), but the sources are silent about the leader.

Minorsky, who has made thorough studies of Caucasian history (1953, 1958), bases his work on the translation of history from ancient Arab writers, especially the ancient *Ta'rikh al-bab* (fourth/eleventh century). In his history there are several examples of historical information concerning Rus actions in the area. In the area around al-Bab (Derbend) there were internal struggles in the late 10th century, and the ruling amir Maymun sought help from Rus against the chiefs and opposing groups in the area. The Rus arrived in 987 in 18 ships, but when the crew of one ship went to town they were attacked by inhabitants and all were killed. The other ships then proceeded to Sharvan and Mukan and *nahr al-atiq* ‘the old river’. It seems that here they entered the same region as in 943–44, but *nahr al-atiq* ‘the old river’ could either mean one of the two estuaries of the lower Kura or, as Minorsky argues, the river Kuran-rud ‘the Old River’ further down to the south in Persian Talish.

To judge by the *Ta'rikh al-bab*, the amir Maymun was apparently relying heavily on the Rus despite the events of 987. He had several of them around him as *ghulams*,

which Minorsky interprets as a kind of *druzhina* ‘comitatus’ (1958:114). In 989 the history tells that a fanatical preacher arrived from Gilan and demanded that he surrender his Russian ghulams so that they could be either converted or killed. Naturally, this may have been spurred by the memory of their earlier attacks on the Gilan coasts and a fear that the Rus would use al-Bab as a harbour for further raids along the coasts.

In the year 1030 the Rus arrived once again to the Caspian Sea, now with 38 ships. The ancient *Ta’rikh al-bab* (fourth/eleventh century) describes how they arrived in Sharvan again, where the shah met them near Bakuya (Baku). On this occasion most of the Sharvanians were killed, and the Rus could continue up the river Kurr (Kura). The shah Minuchihr tried to close the al-Rass (Araxes) in order to stop their progress, but instead they drowned many of the Muslims. The Rus were not eager to leave their boats, but it is told that later the lord of Janza (the town Ganja by Kura) made them disembark and gave them money to assist him for his own purposes (*Ta’rikh al-bab* §15, after Minorsky 1958:31 ff). He took them to Baylaqan, N of Araxes, whose inhabitants had revolted against him, and with their help he captured the town and seized and killed his brother Askariya. The Rus then left Arran for Rūm, the western parts of Caucasus that were controlled by the Byzantines, and then continued to their own country (*Ta’rikh al-bab* §15, after Minorsky 1958:31).

Thus, in 432/1032 *Ta’rikh al-bab* tells that the Rus returned for more raids, encouraged by the earlier victories. After more raids by Rus in the territories of Sharvan (*Ta’rikh al-bab* § 35 after Minorsky 1958:45), where they ravaged and plundered the area and made captives of many inhabitants that were not murdered, the amir Mansur of al-Bab (Derbend), together with the leaders of the Islamic ‘Centres’, led a great expedition on the Rus. The roads and defiles were guarded, and when the Rus returned with their hands full of booty and captives, most of them were put to the sword and killed (*Ta’rikh al-bab* §38, after Minorsky 1958:47).

The Rus, however, together with Alans, returned to the area for revenge. They arrived in 1033, but were beaten again due to a joint military effort of the different local groups (*Ta’rikh al-bab* §38, after Minorsky 1958:47).

The *Ta’rikh al-bab*, which is usually informative about important foreign visits, gives no information on Rus having entered

during Ingvar’s expedition in 1040–41, however, and this has led to scepticism on whether they really came down to the Caspian Sea. Less than ten years after the last severe raids, the inhabitants would have been on their guard and reluctant to let the expedition pass through these areas.

The continuation of the journeys from the shores of the Caspian Sea

From the south shore, the journey went on camelback to Baghdad. The east Swedish merchants continued their journeys east of the Caspian Sea as well, to the areas rich in silver, valuable pigments and spices. Whether they used boats part of the distance or changed to camels, is not known.

The problem of the maritime journeys to Särkland

The destination called *Serkland* is an area that in the runic inscriptions is closely related to Ingvar the Far-traveller’s expedition in 1036–1041. The name occurs five times (Jesch 2001:104). In the Gripsholm (Sö 179) inscription the death place of Ingvar himself is indicated:

‘Peir fóru drengila
fjarri at gulli
ok austarla
erni gáfu
dóu sunnarla
á *Serklandi*.’

They travelled valiantly far for gold, and in the east gave (food) to the eagle. (They) died in the south in Serkland.

Still, we don’t know for sure how to interpret the place name nor where it is located. *Särk* is the old Swedish word for the long, white, linen cloth that Viking women wore under their skirt and that both men and women up to the last century used as a nightdress. It is also the dress that the Muslim men in the Arabic countries wore and in some places still wear, and that Ingvar and his expedition probably encountered if they reached the Arabic countries west and south of the Caspian Sea. Therefore, *Serkland* could be interpreted as ‘the land where people were dressed in *särk*’, a custom that would have seemed peculiar and exotic to the Scandinavians. Another explanation that points in the same direction is that the name *Serkland* means ‘land of the Saracens (Muslims)’ or that it derives from Lat. *Sericum* ‘silk’, designating the regions producing silk (Shepard 1982-5:235).

There is another important person associated with Serkland, namely Harald Hardrade. He is known to have fought in Byzantine service in Syria or Asia Minor, and there also have been suggestions that Ingvar's expedition was involved in this as well (Shepard 1982-5:222-223, 234-238).

Yet another possible explanation of Serkland is that it is derived from the name of the city of Sarkel in the area northwest of the Caspian Sea. Together with the surrounding region, this formed the territory of the Khazars (Jarring 1983).

There is also another interpretation of the word *Serkland* that deserves serious consideration. The interpretation was offered to me, at the end of work on this thesis, by Swedish immigrants from the area south of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea. According to Arslan Bicen, whose family originates from Kurdistan, the south Caucasus and Iran, there is an Arabic name *Şarkland* used to denote 'the areas in the East', originally the eastern parts of the Caliphate, the Caucasus area and eastward. Şark still means East (Dept. of Semitic Languages, Uppsala University). According to Lemide Güney, who was born in Turkey, *Şarkland* is an ancient word in the Turkish language, still used, that denotes the Kurdistan area in Iran, Iraq and Turkey, together with parts of Syria and Armenia.

Through the Caucasus

In 943 Ibn Miskawaih tells that Rus came across the sea that forms a border to their country, and continued until they came to the big river known under the name Kura, which gets its water from the mountains of Armenia and Azarbaijjan and flows out into the sea.

The sea that borders the Rus country must be the Black Sea, and the big river Rioni. From this river, the ancient communication route follows the river Kvirila and crosses the low Likhti mountain ridge, after which the other big river, Kura, is reached, which flows out into the Caspian Sea.

Ibn Miskawaih continues by describing how the Rus head toward the towns in Armenia and Azerbaijan, conquer Berda and take Meraga (the capital of Azerbaijan at the time). Here they were struck by a disease and decimated:

“When the number of Rus was reduced, they left the fortress during the night, where they had stayed, and put on their backs as much as they could carry of property, valuables and precious clothing; the other things were burned. They brought with them as many

women, youngsters and girls that they wanted, and left for Kura. There their ships were ready, on which they had come from their country; on the ships were sailors and 300 men of Rus, with whom they shared their booty and sailed away. Allah saved the Muslims from the Rus' misdeeds. “(Arbman 1955:57, my transl.)

We can expect that they returned the same way as they came, through Georgia.

After the raids in 1030 along the Kura and the lower Araxes, and with the ruler of Arran towards Baylaqan, the richly rewarded are said to have continued westward to Rum, i.e., the west parts of the Caucasus controlled by the Byzantines, and then to the Black Sea and back to their own country (Minorsky 1958:115). Minorsky argues that the journey back possibly should be viewed in connection with the founding of Tmutorokan, a short-lived Russian principality at the entrance to the Azov Sea, which really brought the Russians to the very gate of the Caucasus (1958:115).

Archaeological evidence

There has been no thorough investigation yet of artefacts from Scandinavia in Caucasus or artefacts of Caucasian origin in Sweden or other places in Scandinavia, but this will be a topic for future investigation. Despite this, there are already some that clearly reveals contacts. There are also traces of mutual, cultural influences in art, habits and religion.

The coins from the Caucasus found in Sweden

The Islamic coins on Swedish soil are the most concrete remains of the contacts with the areas around the Silk Route. More than 80 000 coins have been found from ca. CE 700 to ca. 1013 with the majority minted in the 9th and at the beginning of the 10th century [Fig. 6]. In the beginning the coins are ones minted in the south, in the areas around Baghdad, but later the eastern parts of the Caliphate come to be the dominant source. The majority are silver coins. The finds follow the water communication routes through Eastern Europe. Important studies on Islamic coins as evidence for trade and the development of relations between the Caliphate and Europe have been done by Thomas Noonan and Roman Kovalev (Noonan 1984; Kovalev 2001, 2003, 2007). In recent years many additional hoards have

been discovered and analyse has started that will bring new light on these relations.

The coins document the trade connections with the Caucasus. The only one which received attention in the discussion about evidence concerning Ingvar's journey was the Swedish find of a Georgian coin printed for David Kuropalates (r. 990–1001) (Larsson 1983:103). However, there are several other places in the Caucasus under control of the Caliphate which minted coins (von Zambaur 1968; Sears 2004). The Swedish expert on Islamic coins, Gert Rispling, has analysed thousands of Swedish finds of Islamic coins, among which he has also found Khazar copies of Islamic coins (Rispling 2004). His present work is to analyze the big hoard from Spilling, Gotland found in 1999, which with 14 000 coins constitutes the biggest Viking Age silver treasure hoard in the world. Most are Islamic and several are Khazar copies. In connection with our project he has surveyed the known coin finds in Sweden of the Caucasian origin (unpublished manuscript). He has determined that 11 Islamic coins found in Sweden were minted in "Tiflis," which for four centuries was under Islamic rule. The biggest share of Islamic coins minted in the Caucasus and found on Swedish soil (377 examples) is from "Arminiya" (Armenia), but none is known from the other Armenian mint at "Dabil" (today Dwin).

In Rispling's survey there are also places that may be related to the 10th-century raids. 70 of the Swedish finds are from "Arran" (Partaw, present-day Azerbaijan), 31 from Bardha'a (Partaw), but none from the third Azerbaijani mint, "Janza" (today Ganja). A single coin comes from "al-Bab" (Derbend, Russia). A number of other Swedish finds of Oriental coins come from adjoining regions that can be connected with the journeys of the Rus: In Iran, the mint at "Adharbayjan" (Ardabil) produced 13 of the coins, "Ardabil" 4, "Urmiyya (Urumia) 2 None, however, came from "al-Maragha." 12 of the finds are from "Ma'din Bajunays" in eastern Turkey.

Colour pigments

Colour pigments were another important trading product, easy to transport and very valuable, that will be analysed thoroughly in a coming thesis by Sylvia Sandelin. During our research visit in 2009 in Georgia, when a research project "Early Contacts between Scandinavia and Caucasus" was being established, for instance *Rubia Tinctoria* was

presented by Professor Iulon Gagoshidze, as one important plant for production of colour pigments for export. In Sweden there are several finds of artefacts painted with this pigment, only available by import. For instance on the Överhogdal tapestry from Härjedalen in North Sweden, recently dated to Viking age¹, the red colour derives from *Rubia Tinctoria*. These textiles will be further discussed below.

Silk, textiles and clothes

Textiles are another research area where Annika Larsson has revealed traces of influences and cultural contacts. The research has only started, but both an earlier type of silk that is manufactured, but not produced in Georgia, and silk of a type that resembles the quality in silk produced in Georgia, have been identified in Swedish Viking age finds which was presented at the workshop and conference.

Textiles are an important source of information about contacts between East and West. Silk from China, Sogdiana and also the Caucasus appear in Swedish Viking Age burials. Our present knowledge is based on the preliminary results by Annika Larsson (2005), who argues for the Eastern origin of those silks rather than a Byzantine provenance.

During the last decade many textiles in Sweden have been ¹⁴C analysed, and several have turned out to be of Viking Age date (Nockert & Possnert 2002). In the earliest phase, from the 9th to the 12th century, ships occur as important motifs. Often the composition of motifs and ornament are similar to those on coins and carved picture stones. In techniques and motifs they show strong influences from some areas around

¹ According to Nockert, fragments Ia and Ib were woven on the same warp but by different weavers, perhaps a mother and daughter (in Nockert & Possnert 2002:69). What is probably the older tapestry has a 14C cal. date between CE 656 and 852, 1 σ (Ua-1942), while Ia has two dates: 14C cal. 772–950, 1 σ (Ua-1940), and 965–1170, 1 σ (Ua-1941).

The Weaving Art Museum and Research Institute defines *soumak technique* as follows: "[It] produces a patterned weaving with a flat surface of discontinuous horizontal threads known as weft. The variously colored weft threads are wrapped around the warp threads, the primary structural component. In *kelims*, they are passed over and under adjacent warps. But unlike *kelim* weaving there are no slits at each color join and there is a supplementary weft thread which, along with the pattern weft, provides the second component necessary to create a structurally sound woven object" <http://www.weavingartmuseum.org/ex2_main.htm>, accessed October 4, 2011.

the Silk Route, especially the Caucasus region and the Caliphate,

The Kyrkås tapestry, used as an antependium in Kyrkås old church in Jämtland and recently ¹⁴C dated to CE 990–1160, shows a ship and other images within octagons and in a strongly geometrical pattern. The ship resembles the Scandinavian Viking ships. The choice of motifs in the octagons here — the pair of birds and the backward looking animal — is also found on the Birka coins. These motifs are influences from Islamic art, as also are the single big bird, the tree, and the geometrical pattern. The octagons and these kinds of geometrical patterns are still used in traditional textile art in the Caucasus and in Anatolia among the Kurds. The equal-armed crosses and the crossed crosses that fill the frames are Orthodox, representing influences from the Eastern church.

While most of the elements in the patterns are the result of influences from the long-distance journeys, the ship is the Nordic addition to the variety of images displayed on the textile. It was probably made when the ship still had a central ideological meaning and value, i.e., in the late 10th or beginning of the 11th century. As we know from the picture stones, by the late 11th century the ship had lost its role as a central motif (Franzen & Nockert 1992:66ff; Nocker & Possnert 2002, Nordic Museum nr 10038).

One of five pieces (fragment IV) comprising the tapestry found in a building beside Överhogdals Church in Jämtland has a similar pattern to that on the Kyrkås tapestry. Dated between CE 900 and 1100, it has octagonal fields with a decoration of geometrical ornaments such as crossed crosses, ships, and birds [Figs. 1, 3, 5] (Nockert & Possnert 2002:77). The Överhogdal tapestries include two in soumak technique (Ia and Ib), which fall within the same date range or are slightly earlier, on which the designs include horses, ships (without sails), people, deer, elk, birds and a central tree.² One depicts part of a procession that includes a “valkyrie”-like female figure, larger in size than the other people depicted. The central tree has one bird at the tip and one below, recalling the myth about the peacock that sits on top of Yggdrasil, the world tree, and that crows to wake the fallen warriors in Valhalla. Fragment III has similar imagery, the ship with high stems and a small sail.³ But the last of the fragments, whose depictions of churches suggest it is of later date, has no

ship and thus probably dates to the period when ship imagery was no longer used.

In these Swedish Viking Age textile finds, both techniques and motifs seem to reveal influences from certain areas around the Silk Route. The soumak technique and motifs including octagons, the pair of birds and the different types of geometrical and other patterns, which are seen on the Swedish Viking Age textiles, are all found in the area of the kilim carpets around the Caspian and Black Seas and especially in the Caucasus. On the kilims of Dagestan (Ramsey 1996:78) there is also a ship-like motif [Fig. 4] that greatly resembles the Scandinavian ships with curved stems and animal- or bird-like stem decorations.

Some symbols resemble cut-out stems, that *pars pro toto* may represent whole ships.

In the few regional depictions within Sasanian art east of the Caspian Sea, the ships differ from these. Especially interesting on these flatweaves from Dagestan is the shape of the ship's hull. It is often box-shaped, as on the Birka/Hedeby coins. Here, the character of the river systems requires light ships to be used, which means that these ships must have a completely different hull than the cog, which is commonly associated with the box-like hull shape. On the Dagestan kilims, the dragon motif is also central in more or less stylised form (Ramsey 1996, G. Larsson 2007) and often appears as a dragon-snake. This is well known from Scandinavian Viking Age art. It has been assumed that this motif was introduced in the Caucasus with Mongol expansion in the 13th century and originated in China, but Western sources have shown that it appears earlier (Ramsey 1996). The similarity in ship types may indicate early contacts between Scandinavia and the Caucasus.

The obvious parallels between the ship types and other motifs on the earliest Swedish textiles from Överhogdal, and the ship types and symbolic language in the Caucasus and the Orient, must be seen in relation to the journeys to these areas in the 8th – 10th centuries. The intense commercial contacts have resulted in an exchange of ideas as well as cultural influences in both directions. As was observed on a research expedition in Khevsureti 2009, not only the motifs but also the textile techniques used are the same. Where the Birka fragments, as Annika Larsson has shown, point to their origin in the East, not Byzantium, as others had assumed (A. Larsson 2007; cf. Hägg 1974), the increasing contacts with the latter

starting in the late 10th century are reflected in the mixture of Islamic and Byzantine influences seen on the later Kyrkås tapestry. Foreign material found in Sigtuna from the early 11th century (the probable date of the Kyrkås tapestry) shows that cultural impulses from Byzantium had to a large extent replaced the earlier Oriental influences that were strong in the Birka material. This is visible, for instance, in recently published analyses of glass from Sigtuna, where the Byzantine influences are strong from the 11th to the 14th century (Henricson 2006). This reflects the change in the communication pattern and seafaring, which corresponds to the transition in the late 10th century between the periods that Jansson has identified as the “older phase” and the “younger phase” (2005:39).

The motifs on Överhogdal tapestries reveals cultural influences from the Caucasus area with the octagon fields in which the pair of birds are found, a motif common in the Caliphath, a heritage from the Sassanid times that lasted into the Middle Ages. The same motif occur already on the picture stones on Gotland of B-type from Vendel period, and is also used on the early Viking age coins found in Birka (Malmer 1966).

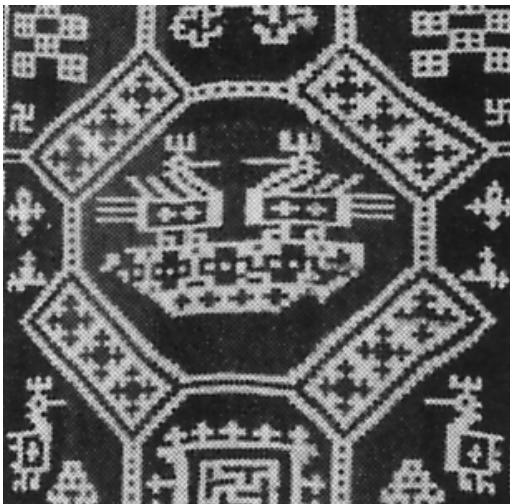


Fig.1. Pair of birds on Överhogdal IV.

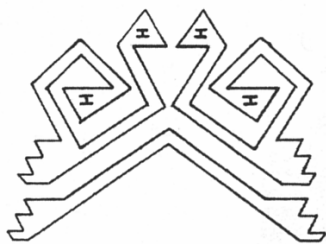


Fig 2. Pair of birds, one of the most common motives on kilims in Anatolia and Caucasus. After Özkahraman 2005.

Also the ship types on the Överhogdal tapestry with a special type of outward curved or bent stems can be found in the Caucasus textile art. The type is represented both on Överhogdal 1 and on Överhogdal III² (fig 3, fig 5). In the Caucasus they are found especially on the kilims from Daghestan (fig 4).

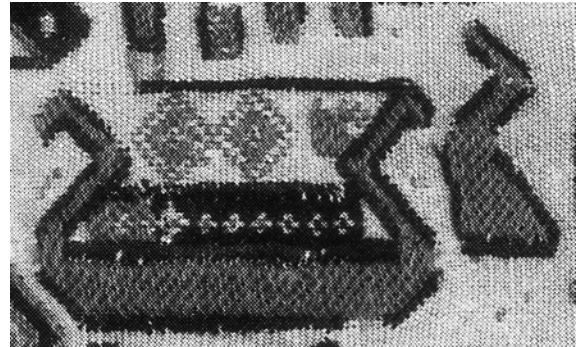


Fig 3. The ship and a female figure on Överhogdal 1a. After Nockert & Possnert 2002.

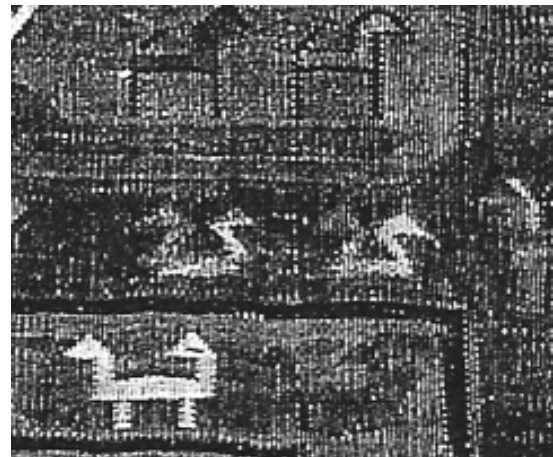


Fig 4. Ships on flatweave in Daghestan. After Ramsey 1996:78 fig. 4.

² Fragment III has been 14C dated to CE 900–1160 1 σ (Ua-1944). It is interesting to note that, the “later” imagery notwithstanding, Fragment V has an early 14C date, cal. CE 794–963, 1 σ (Ua-1943).



Fig. 5 Ship with outward curved top of high stems. Överhogdal III.

The drinking horn

A very special artefact that occurs in prehistoric and Medieval Sweden, as well as in Georgia is the drinking horn. In Sweden it was used for drinking on special occasions, on social events, and for ritual drinking. In Georgia it is still used on special occasions and on traditional feasts like supra. The occurrence in both places may be a coincidence or the result of cultural contacts.

Architectural remains

Architectural remains in Sweden that probably reveals religious influences are the earliest churches, now ruins. The cross section with a central tower is foreign to Scandinavia, but we find it in the Sigtuna churches St Olof and St Per, the first church in Old Uppsala and also the earliest church in Linköping. The type is common in both Georgia and Armenia and has according to Nicholas Vacheishvili close parallels in some districts in Georgia. In the Norwegian lawbook Grágas, it is said that Armenian priests in the period of King Hakon Adalsteinsfostre (933-969) were allowed to preach in the area of the Frostating law. The Old Norse book *Islendingabók* written down from an earlier manuscript in the 12th century mentions the Armenian bishops Stephanus, Petrus and Abraham working in the northern countries. In connection with this it is also worth noticing that one of the most common cross-types on the rune-stones is St. George's cross.

Scandinavian burials and artifacts

Ancient monuments in Georgia that probably are remains of Scandinavian burials of central Swedish type, are visible in several places resembling the ones excavated in Simoneti in 2005. During the Vittfarne expedition, such small mounds were observed in many places. During a journey to a museum in Khevsureti, structures like Scandinavian burial mounds were observed beside villages on the way. A thorough survey is needed to map and document them.

Several artefacts of Scandinavian origin have been found in Georgia, for instance armrings, axes, and oval brooches. Armrings are found in Tusheti and in Khevsureti. The oval brooches are of interest, since they represent the ethnical distinctive ornament for the dress of the Scandinavian woman.

Further research is needed to enlighten the contacts between Scandinavia and Caucasus, the trade relations and the cultural influences, but a research project has started involving both Georgian and Swedish scholars to shed light on these questions.

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