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7. Ingvar the Fartravellers Journey: Historical and Archaeological Sources

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The research about the contacts between Scandinavia and Caucasus has earlier been very limited. This was true until Mats G. Larsson in the late 1980's became interested in this issue during his studies of Runic inscriptions about foreign journeys. The person who was most mentioned in the inscriptions related to journeys abroad, was the Viking chieftain Ingvar the Fartraveller (1016-1041) who lived at the beginning of the 11th century in central Sweden. He was the leader of the most famous Swedish Viking expedition to the East, whose destination was probably the Caucasus region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea (see below). The journey was commemorated in ca 27 contemporary runic inscriptions on erected stones, which is about ¼ of all inscriptions mentioning journeys abroad. Most of them, 24, are distributed over a vast area in central Sweden: Uppland, Västmanland and Södermanland, which constituted the mainland of Svitjod, i. e. ancient Sweden. There are also two in Östergötland and one in Norrland (M.G. Larsson 1986, 1990).

In the 13th century, Ingvar the Far-traveller also became the first and only Swede whose life story was written down as an Icelandic saga. According to this, his father was the grandson of king Erik Segersäll (king 970-995). The Icelandic saga (Brocman 1762) has sometimes been questioned as a historical source, but most scholars agree that it has a core of truth since so many runic inscriptions in Sweden mention Ingvar's journey to Särkland (Wessén 1937:3ff and 1960:30ff; Larsson 1983:95ff). The later medieval oral tradition was written down in Iceland in the late 13th or early 14th century. Since Ingvar was an important historical person, the year of his death, 1041, has been recorded in several Icelandic annals: in *Annales regii*, the Law man annals, and the *Flateyjarbók*.

Despite Ingvars role in the 11th century and the fame of his expedition, the history,

context and destination of this journey had never earlier been investigated before Mats G. Larsson began the research into these problems. According to the inscriptions the destination was 'eastward' and 'Särkland', with no further information as to where these areas were located. The medieval Icelandic saga about this journey gives some clues, but even these can be interpreted in several ways. Mats G. Larsson reconstructed Ingvar's expedition with the help of both the runic inscriptions, the saga of Ingvar the Fartraveller, and Georgian chronicles, together with an local investigation of several water routes in the East that could have been used. He comes to the conclusion that the expedition reached the Black Sea via the Russian rivers, and then travelled through the Caucasus through Georgia and Azerbaijan via the rivers Rioni, Kvirila, Tscheremila and Mktvari to finally reach the Caspian Sea (M.G. Larsson 1983, 1986, 1990b, 1996). Here they would have met Muslims (Saracens of Särkland) in the eastern part of present-day Georgia and in Azerbaijan.

To find out if this suggested route was possible to travel, plans for an experimental journey was made. A replica of a Swedish Viking Age burial boat from Valsgårde was built, called "Aifur". The first summer in 1994, the first part of the expedition went from the late Viking Age capital Sigtuna to Novgorod. Second part was made in 1996 with Aifur from Novgorod to Gammelsvenskby in the Ukraine. For the last part another boat was built, based one of the Viking Age ship boats in the Gokstad find, the largest of them 9,8 m long, again built by Håkan Altrock. In 2004 the experimental voyage along this route to the Caspian Sea and Baku was completed, which verified that this route was both likely and possible to use with small and light boats.

This journey became the starting point for the contacts between Swedish and Georgian scholars interested in research on the early

contacts between Scandinavia and Caucasus. The author of this article and Mats G. Larsson participated as archaeologists and scientific leaders of this expedition. My own aim was to identify archaeological traces of this journey, especially remains of boats if possible, since the problem of ships and seafaring of the Svear was a main issue in my work for Ph D-thesis (Larsson 2007).

In this article, I will concentrate on this journey and the archaeological remains that may relate to it. The contacts and continuous

research of me and fellow researchers in Sweden and Georgia has revealed that this was not the only journey. People from Scandinavia has made regular journeys to Caucasus long before that, which is evidenced by both archaeological and historical sources. These research results will be discussed in coming articles.

Before entering the problems related to the journey, we will have a brief look at the background, and at the identity of the leader Ingvar.

Who was Ingvar the Far-traveller?

The identity of Ingvar has been discussed (Braun 1910; v. Friesen 1910:199; Olsson 1912:XCIVff; Pritsak 1981:423ff; M.G. Larsson 1987, 1990). Some early historians have claimed that Ingvar of the saga must be the Russian Igor who launched an unsuccessful attack on Constantinople in 941, where his fleet was destroyed by Greek fire. An attack by Greek fire is also described in the saga, and the name Igor corresponds to the Nordic name Ingvar. The dominating interpretation that corresponds to the information in the saga is that Ingvar belonged to a sideline of the royal family and died in 1041. The date is confirmed in Icelandic annals, i.e. in *Annales regii*, the *Law man annals* and the *Flateyjarbók*, and not least by the many runic inscriptions related to this journey. The inscriptions can be dated to this period stylistically, by using Anne-Sofie Gräslund's (2002) method.

The most important sources for establishing the identity of Ingvar are the

runic inscriptions referring to Ingvar's family. In the saga, Ingvar is descended from a daughter of King Erik Segersäll (ruled c. AD 970–995) who married a local chieftain Åke and had a son, Emund, who was Ingvar's father. At the minster in Strängnäs there is a fragmentary inscription commemorating a person who died on the expedition to Särkland, and it also mentions Emund as the father of a person who died at this destination, just like Ingvar:

Sö 279

**ai... ..(u)a : --(a)-uni ÷ aimunt... ..
sunarla : a : se(r)kl...**

*Ei... .. [hōgg]va [st]e[in] ... [s]onu Eimund[ar] ...
sunarla á Serkl[andi].*

*Æi... .. [hagg]va [st]æ[in] ... [s]yni Æimund[aR]
... sunnarla a Særkl[andi].*

Engl. transl.

Ei-... .. the stone cut ... Eimundr's son ... in the south in Serkland.



Fig. 1. The runic inscription Sö 179 from Gripsholm, Södermanland. Photo: Gunilla Larsson.

Most researchers have connected this with Ingvar's journey because of the occurrence of the name of Ingvar's father and of the place of death as Särkland. Not far from this site is another stone, Sö 179. This stone had been used as a threshold stone at Gripsholm Castle, Södermanland, but originally had

Sö 179

× tula : lit : raisa : stain : þinsa| at : sun : sin : haralt : brupur : inkuars : þaiR furu : trikila : fiari : at : kuli : auk : a:ustarla| ar:ni : kafu : tuu : sunar:la : a sirk:lan:ti

Tóla lét reisa stein þenna at son sinn Harald, bróður Ingvars. Þeir fóru drengila fjarri at gulli ok austarla erni gáfu, dóu sunnarla á Serklandi.

Tóla let ræisa stæin þennsa at sun sinn Harald, bróður Ingvars. ÞæiR fóru drængila fiarri at gulli ok austarla ærni gafu, dou sunnarla a Særklandi.

Engl. transl.

Tóla had this stone raised in memory of her son Harald, Ingvar's brother. They travelled valiantly far for gold, and in the east gave (food) to the eagle. (They) died in the south in Serkland.

The most informative stones related to Ingvar's family are, however, two inscriptions close to the 'Sjuhundra River route' in east Uppland. The first stone mentions not only Ingvar but also four

been erected for Ingvar and a brother named Harald. The inscription also mentions participation in battle in the East, as well as the death-place Särkland. Therefore it can be interpreted as a stone related to Ingvar the Far-traveller and his journey:

brothers, and was found walled into Rimbo Church. It had been erected for a deceased brother Ragnar by the other brothers:

U 513

* anuntr * auk * airikr * auk * hakun * auk * inkuar * rais-- ... (þ)(i)(n)-(a) * (i)(f)(t)ir * raknar * brupur sin * kuþ * hialbi ant * hans

Ómundr ok Eirikr ok Hákon ok Ingvarr reis[tu stein] þenna eptir Ragnar, bróður sinn. Guð hjalpi ónd hans.

Anundr ok ÆirikR ok Hakon ok Ingvarr ræis[tu stæin] þenn[s]a æftiR Ragnar, bróður sinn. Guð hialpi and hans.

Engl. transl.

Ómundr and Eirikr and Hákon and Ingvarr raised this stone in memory of Ragnar, their brother. May God help his spirit.

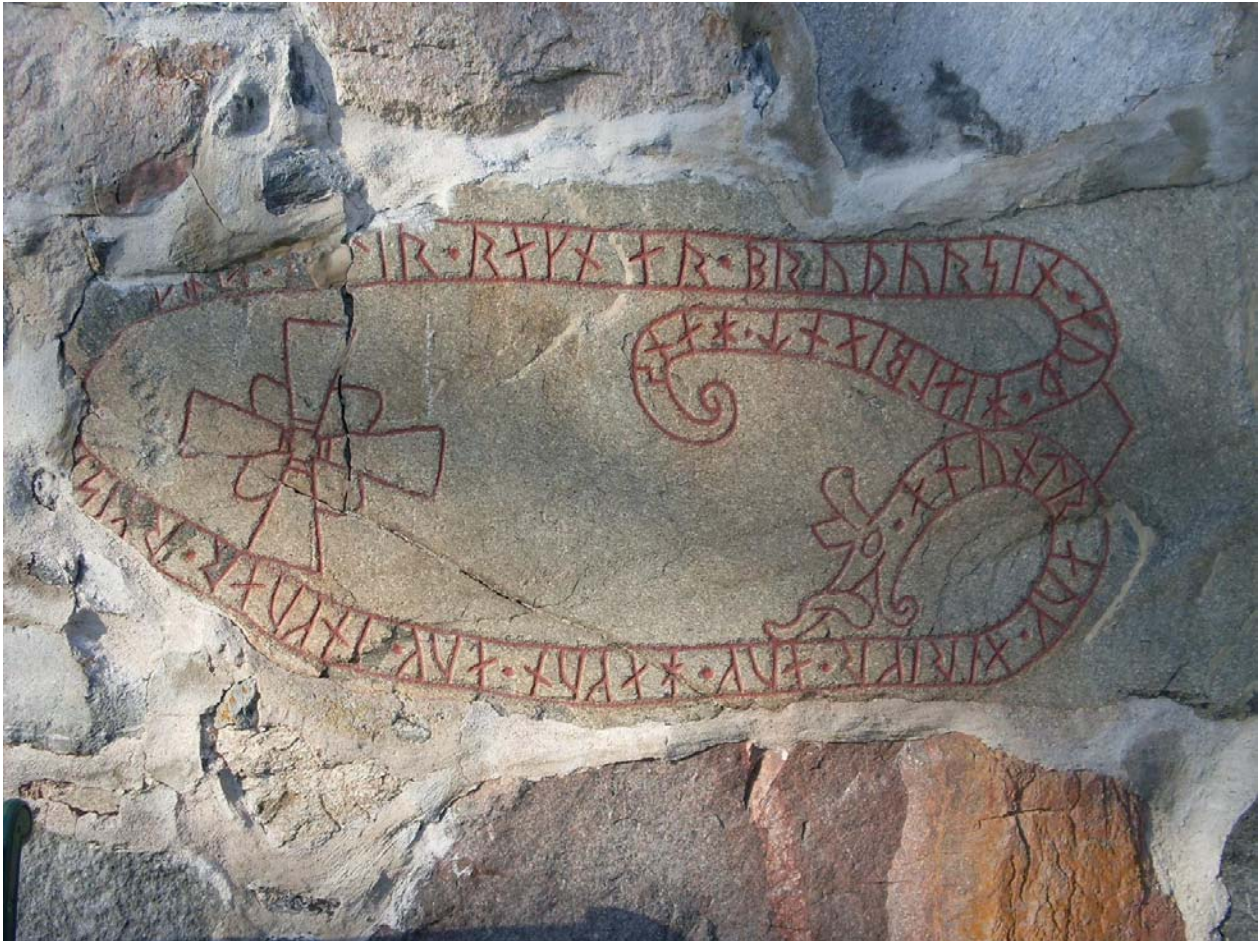


Fig. 2. The runic inscription U 513, Rimbo Parish, Uppland. Photo: Gunilla Larsson.

According to local traditions, mentioned both in the 17th-century ‘Hornska boken’ in Rimbo and the 17th-century investigation of ancient monuments ‘Ransakningar’, Ragnar is said to have been a king. Further, it is said that he lived in the village Kunby in Rimbo, which earlier was called Kunungaby ‘king’s village’ after him, and that he supposedly was buried in a grove of aspens at ‘two musket shots distance from the church’ (Norberg 1986). According to DMS, Kunby was really called Kunungaby in the earliest sources (Skoglund 1986, DMS 1:5). Beside Vallby, close to the church, where the road passes across the Vallby River, there are remains of a royal mound, with a hole at the top after an erected stone and with large boulders surrounding the edge of the mound (Rimbo Raä 206). This was already in the 19th century about to be taken away when the antiquarian Dybeck passed and stopped the work. The ground around this mound was cultivated field when the survey for ancient monuments was done here, and mound-like raised parts of the field may be the remains of over-ploughed similar mounds, according to Kjell Silver who is a specialist on large and royal mounds (oral information during

field visit at the site). All other elevations in the field were unfortunately removed some years ago when the area was exploited and blocks of flats were built. Fifty metres NW of the remaining and registered mound is a grove of aspens. According to the local population, earlier there were several similar mounds in the vicinity, but they were taken away when the present road was built (Axel Rimsén, oral information).

On the other stone mentioning the same brothers, Raä 540 at Husby-Sjuhundra Church, also Anund is missing:

U 540
airikr ' auk hokun ' auk inkuar aukk rahn[ilt]r
' þou h---... ..-R ' -na hon uarþ [tau]þ(r) [a]
kriklati ' kuþ hialbi hons|salu|uk|kuþs mupi(R)
Æirikr ok Hakon ok Ingvarr ok Ragnhildr þau ...
... .. Hann varð dauðr a Grikklandi. Guð hialpi
hans salu ok Guðs moðir.

Engl. transl.
 Eirikr and Hákon and Ingvarr and Ragnhildr, they
 He died in Greece. May God and God’s
 mother help his soul.

The inscription may be connected with the big mound called Anunds hög, situated in Skederids Parish 2 km to the west of Husby-Sjuhundra Church. Skederid is by Gustav Vasa called Husby Skederid. Here, beside the river, is a spring called 'Birgitta's spring', which may recall the words in the Older Västgöta Law that King Olof Skötkonung was baptised 'in a well called Birgitta's situated beside Husby'. Olof Skötkonung was a Christian long before he moved to Västergötland and Husaby, where it is now stated that he was baptised, and in the vicinity of this spring we have two of the four runic inscriptions that mention members of the royal family during the first half of the 11th century. Husby-Sjuhundra Church had a gallery for the king in the earlier, now pulled down, tower.

Why did he leave for this journey?

According to the saga, Ingvar was disappointed that he could not get a king's title, although he was entitled to it since he belonged to the royal family of Erik Segersäll. There were, however, probably more important reasons for the journey, rooted in the historical and political situation and closely connected with the water communication network. The main water-route to Constantinople was threatened by a nomadic tribe, the Pechenegs, who even took the opportunity to occupy Kiev when Jaroslav was in Novgorod. According to the Primary Chronicle, in the year 1036 Jaroslav assembled a military force to confront them, a force in which also Varjags participated. According to Larsson, this may have been done with the help of Jaroslav's brother-in-law Anund Jakob, by using the military levy system to assemble this force (M.G. Larsson 1996).

The continuation to Särkland after three years may not have been planned from the start, but there was a serious reason to investigate new routes to Särkland from the Swedish as well as the Russian side, since the trade route to the areas around the Caspian Sea had been blocked after the fall of the Khazar Empire by hostile tribes around the lower Volga. A century earlier, the journeys along this route to the Caliphate had, as discussed above, been the main source of the inflow of Arabic silver, and an economic base for trading centres such as Birka. Alternative routes now had to be sought, as well as new ways of getting silver.

For a short period during Olof Skötkonung's rule, Swedes participated in the Danish attacks on England and got a significant share of the *danagäld*, the tribute taken in silver (as discussed by Edberg 2006). After him, however, Sweden once again turned its loyalties eastward both politically and religiously. The trade was mainly with Byzantium, where the Scandinavians also took an active part in the emperor's service. The memory must still have been alive regarding the many journeys further east to the Caspian Sea, from which Baghdad could be reached on camelback. Ingvar's mission may have been to find a new, or to reuse an earlier, trade route through the Caucasus to the Caspian Sea.

The reconstruction of the route by Mats G. Larsson

The route of the journey has also been discussed. Thulin (1975:19) means that it should be seen in connection with an Arabic source mentioning ships from Rus on the Caspian Sea in 1035, and that it could have been an assisting expedition from Jaroslav in Russia to a Turkish chieftain aiming to conquer Chorezm south of the Aral Sea. Ingvar and his men could have died in the battle there in 1041 (Pritsak 1981:443). Larsson (1983) takes his point of departure in a close examination of the information given in the Icelandic saga. According to this, they followed a river that came from the east. This does not fit with the Volga, which goes to the east. Instead, as Larsson has noted, it fits perfectly with the Rioni in present-day Georgia in the Caucasus. Citopolis, mentioned in the saga, was identified by Larsson as Kutaisi by the northwest shore of the river Rioni. According to the history scholars at Kutaisi University, Citopolis is the ancient name for Kutaisi (Historical Department, Kutaisi University). The port of Kutaisi by the river is Bashi. As Larsson has observed, it is mentioned in the Georgian Chronicle that 3,000 Varjags were placed at Bashi, probably by the king Bagrat who resided in Kutaisi and from whose reign the ruins of the palace and the cathedral still exist. Bagrat was out in warfare in the east, and according to the saga it was at this place that Ingvar's expedition met Queen Silkesiv, who had their boats carried up to the town and which impressed the Varjags greatly because of all the shining white marble. Today, air pollution has damaged the 11th-century

marble buildings, but in reconstructed parts one can get an impression of how it once looked.

The Georgian Chronicle tells that Ingvar continued with 700 men across the mountains. The Lichti mountains have to be passed here by pulling the boats on land to get to the next river, Kura. One of the descriptions mentioning the use of this route is by Marco Polo in the 13th century, who also tells that the people of Genoa pulled their boats on land on their way to the Caspian Sea.

Several routes across the mountain were shown to Mats G. Larsson and Håkan Altrock in the planning of the Expedition Vittfarne. The route chosen, with a low passage, was in earlier times used for pulling boats across the mountain to Mktvari (Kura), according to information I received in 2004 from the history teacher at the local school in Zuare.

According to Mats G. Larsson, the expedition then continued downstream the Mktvari. In the town of Heliopolis they met a king named Julf; Larsson identifies this king as Bagrat, and the town of Heliopolis as Tbilisi. The expedition then continued to find the sources of the river, and came to a place where the river falls out of a cliff into a chasm close to an isthmus called Siggeum. The chasm is in Larsson's interpretation Kara Bugaz, and the isthmus the neck of land between the bay Kara Bugaz and the Caspian Sea. The saga also tells about the Red Sea, where the high salinity of 15-30 % often makes the sea look reddish.

On the return voyage the expedition was engaged in a battle to help Julf. Larsson has found information in the Georgian Chronicle that the Varjags helped the Georgian king Bagrat against his enemy Liparit, before they returned across the mountain. On the way back, the saga says, the expedition was struck by disease and most of the participants including Ingvar died. The Varjags were buried along the rivers, while Ingvar's burial is said to have taken place later in a church in Citopolis (Kutaisi) at the insistence of Queen Silkesiv.

Of the 30 ships, only 12 remained. The saga tells that on the return voyage most of these navigated wrong or capsized. Valdemar, who may be Jaroslav's son Vladimir, came to Constantinople, which as Larsson also has concluded is among the best evidence that the Scandinavians travelled the reconstructed way and not on the Volga. Only the helmsman Ketil is said to have chosen the right route and come to Gårdarrike, and in the following summer to Svithiod to tell about the journey. After the return to Sweden, as we know, 27 stones were erected in memory of the participants who fell in the expedition.

As we shall see, it is not only literary sources and historical chronicles that support the reconstruction made by Larsson of the route taken by Ingvar's expedition. There is also archaeological evidence to support it. After a closer look at the other evidence, an alternative possibility for the last part of the journey from Mktvari will be discussed (see below).



Fig. 3. The reconstruction of Ingvars journey according to Mats G. Larsson.

From history to archaeology

The first attempts to scientifically verify the reconstructed route of Ingvar the Far-traveller were done by Larsson as experimental archaeology, using replicas of

Viking ships along this route. In 1994 and 1996, the boat Aifur was used first to Novgorod in Russia, and then to Cherson in the Ukraine (Rune Edberg). During the

Expedition Vittfarne in 2004, the replica Himingläva was used from Cherson on the Dnieper to the Black Sea and then through the Caucasus to the Caspian Sea (Altrock 2006).

Himingläva was built as a replica of the largest of the small boats in the Gokstad find by Håkan Altrock, who also was the captain on the boat all the way from Sigtuna in

Sweden to Baku in the Caspian Sea. With some effort, the rivers could be used both upstream and downstream. The bottom is, however, more V-shaped than the Viks boat, which is very flat in the bottom amidships and does not penetrate deep into the water, thus making it possible to row in shallow rivers whereas Himingläva had to be pulled.



Fig. 4. Himingläva is pulled upstreams Rioni in shallow water. Photo: Gunilla Larsson.

The land passage between the Tscheremila (a tributary to Kvirila, which is a tributary to Rioni), to Mktvari, between the villages of Zuare and Kvishketi, was easily done with the help of four rented oxen as pulling force and a runner under the keel (fig.). The passage point was 1152 m a s l. The land part of the journey took four days, which shows a striking correlation with information

by classical geographers like the Roman Plinius and the Greek Strabo, where it is said that across the mountains a driving route was used for 4-5 days. This route was by that time one of the routes used by Roman merchants, and also one of the routes used for the so-called Silk Route, especially when the routes north and south of the Caucasus were blocked for different reasons.



Fig. 5. Down a hollowed-out road. Photo G. Larsson.



Fig. 6. Pulling help by oxen on Likhti mountain passage. Photo: Gunilla Larsson.

In connection with the expedition in 2004, I visited museums to look for Scandinavian finds. I also looked along the rivers for remains of burials of central Swedish type, and of course also for boat parts of Swedish type.

Close to Bashi, where according to the Georgian Chronicle the Varjags had a camp, several boat parts of oak were observed.

Among them was a small piece of a strake made from radially split oak with traces of rivets or nails of iron, and a rabbet for luting material, like in Scandinavian ships. Because of the lack of knowledge of local shipbuilding traditions in the Late Iron Age, it is impossible to know whether the fragment actually originates from a Swedish ship.



Fig. 7. Radially split oak strake with rivet hole and rabbet for luting material found near Bashi.

In many places along the rivers, small mounds and earth-covered stone-settings were observed (fig.) which looked very much like the ones registered beside every Iron Age village in Sweden. These were so different from any prehistoric burial practice in the area that they had never been looked upon as ancient monuments. The local mounds were huge and contained rich chamber burials from the Kolchis era in the centuries before Christ.

Of Scandinavian finds, Mats G. Larsson has earlier found a *penannular brooch* in the collections. During my visit to the Museum of Kutaisi, the staff said that in the archaeological collections they had seen battleaxes of the special type called 'beard axe' used by the Scandinavians, and one of these was also exhibited. Language problems resulted and therefore much material in the collections still remains to be further investigated.

There ought to be a lot of archaeological evidence of both Ingvar's expedition and other visits to the area. In an earlier source, ca 980, the Arabic writer Ibn Miskawaih tells of the weapons and other equipment of the Rus: swords, daggers, battleaxes, spears

and shields, as well as tools such as axes, saws and hammers. What is also important is his knowledge of burials. When a Rus died, Ibn Miskawaih says, he was buried with his clothes, weapons and tools, as well as with his wife, another woman or servant. This custom is well known from both homeland Scandinavia and from finds along the Russian rivers.

However, concerning Ingvar's time, the participants in the expedition may all or to a large extent have been baptised. The above-mentioned inscriptions where Ingvar is erecting the stone are both Christian; on the Rimbo stone there is both a cross and a prayer, and Husby-Sjuhundra has a prayer. Jaroslav's son Vladimir, who probably participated, was also a Christian. This means that there may be few or no finds in the burials of the deceased on Ingvar's journey. However, the investigation of the mounds along the presumed river route used must continue. They may reveal preserved belt- or dress-ornaments and possibly also bone material that can shed more light on, as well as verify, Larsson's reconstruction of this route.

The archaeological investigation in 2005 of burial mounds at Simoneti

There are in some places in Georgia mounds resembling Scandinavian burial mounds, that may be remains of Viking Age visits. In 2005 some structures that may be related to Ingvars journey were investigated. The background is that the expedition in 1036-1041 was not successful. Most of the crew died from some kind of disease that spread among them, but thanks to that many rune stones were erected in Sweden to honor their memory. According to the saga, the deceased were buried before the ships reached the realms of the queen in Kutaisi.



Fig. 8. Site with grave-mound like structures at Simoneti by Kvirila river. Photo, Gunilla Larsson.

Well, after this, Yngvar made ready with all haste and left with all his men, and they go on their way now, and travel night and day now, as fast as they can. But such a sickness begins to spread in their crew that all their best people died, and more died than lived. Yngvar took sick too, and by then they'd come to the realm of Silkisif. He called his men to him then and told them bury to those who were dead.

It is thus mainly upstreams Kutaisi, by Kvirila, Tscheremila or Mktvari that we may expect to find burials of Scandinavian type. In Central Sweden in the 11th century there were beside every village a cemetery with small earth-covered burial mounds, some low and hardly visible, while other are a little bit higher (fig.). This was the burial tradition for ordinary people. Kings and chieftains were buried either under bigger burial mounds, in their ships in so called boat burials such as Valsgårde outside Uppsala, or in chamber graves. Ordinary people had little or no grave gifts in their burials. In the 11th century the former cremation burials were replaced with Christian inhumation burials without grave gifts at all. In contrast with south Sweden, in Central Sweden the Orthodox tradition of continuing to bury Christians on the pagan burial sites, sometimes under mounds, was practiced until the 12th century. The formula on the runic inscriptions and cross decoration, show that Ingvars family and crew were Christians.



Fig. 9. Typical 11th century burials at a village cemetery in Gottröra, Uppland, Sweden. Photo, Gunilla Larsson.

At Simoneti by the Kvirila river, was one of several sites observed in 2004 along the rivers on the route for Expedition Vittfarne, where suspected burial mounds of Scandinavian type had been observed. In 2005, I returned to perform the first joint Swedish-Georgian excavation at this site. It was on the shore of the river Kvirila, at a place where a small stream runs into the river. The site was chosen because it was the only site that we had the exact position of and could mark on a map to get permission. The maps brought on the earlier expedition on the boat were not detailed, and a special survey with GPS is planned for the future especially to locate other sites with burials. This was also the easiest place to reach with excavation equipment. Unfortunately it was also very close to the central road through Georgia, and during restoration work on the road after 2004, material had been dumped on the excavation site. Heavy machines had passed over it, trees had been cut down and the site had been heavily disturbed.

Six mounds were excavated. Four of them were only vast material from activities in the vicinity, but two of them were constructed in exactly the same manner as Swedish burials of the 11th century. The soil-covered mound contained a central stone packing covering a layer of soot and bone meal, and in one of them were 4-cm-long iron oxide colourings in the clay – the remains of corroded rivets or nails. No bone or wood was however preserved to be used for 14C – datings. The recent activities in the area may also make such dating hazardous.



Fig. 10. Section of mound during excavation. Photo: Gunilla Larsson.

The structure and stratigraphy in two of the mounds, indicate that we here have the remains of Swedish burials, that may have been made for members of Ingvar's expedition, but without dates we cannot confirm it. Future investigations will be made on mounds situated in more sheltered sites to shed more light on the Scandinavian visits in the Caucasus, and the fate of the participants of Ingvar the Fartravellers journey.

An alternative interpretation of the route through the Caucasus

Some peculiarities in the saga may open the way for an alternative interpretation of the last part of the route taken by Ingvar the Fartraveller and part of his expedition in AD 1040–1041. A possibility that is revealed by a closer analysis of the saga is that Ingvar's expedition reached Rioni and Mktvari, but after that followed Araxes upstreams and from this river in Armenia reached the sources of the Euphrates, which is very close, and followed it downstream to the Caliphate, passing Turkey and Syria to Iraq. It is evident from the large amount of Arabic silver coins found in Sweden that there was a lot of contact with these areas in the 9th to 11th centuries. The water routes here have never been investigated and compared with the written sources.

There is no doubt that the expedition by Ingvar the Far-Traveller 1036-1041 reached the Caucasus. Placenames mentioned in the text in the Icelandic "The Saga of Yngvar the Traveller", such as Citopolis (Kutaisi) where the expedition stopped and stayed during the winter, firmly confirm this. The saga also tells that:

"Yngvar follows the river now for many days. Then towns and big buildings rose into view, and

then they see a magnificent citadel. It was built of white marble." (chapter 5).

The castle of Kutaisi by the time for Ingvar's visit was only a few decades old and the marble was probably shining white, which gave a lasting impression on the varangians. The information in the saga that they came to Kutaisi and rested there, is also supported by the Georgian Chronicle, where the Varangians are also said to have made a stop and established a camp at Bashi, the port of Kutaisi, before a contingent of them continued across the Lichti mountains. But concerning the continuation of the journey I do not agree with the reconstruction of the journey made by Mats G. Larsson, following the Mktvari all the way to the Caspian Sea. As I have shown in the earlier article, there is some information given in the Icelandic text that points in another direction. In this text, the placename Hierapolis, the name Julf (reminiscent of town name Julfa?), the occurrence of round boats that the expedition is said to have encountered, as well as described reed islands all indicate that instead the route Mktvari-Araxes-Euphrat was used before the expedition returned.

The only base for the Caspian Sea – hypothesis, is the mentioning in the saga of a

place called Gapi, which means “the big throat”, that causes Larsson to identify Gapi with Kara Bugaz in the Caspian Sea a Turcemic word that can be translated with “the Black throat” because the narrow passage into the lower bay of the sea (Larsson 1983:100). However, the place of the watershed on the route to the headwater of Euphrat is known as Gürcü Boğazi which may be translated as “the Georgian Throat”, a significant place on one of the main trade routes through Caucasus (Bryer & Winfield 1985:60). This watershed on the high mountain plateau of Eastern Anatolia, an area known as Anti-Taurus, also was the meeting place for several trade routes and the place for the origins of rivers running into the Black Sea, the Red Sea and the Caspian Sea, which corresponds well with the information in the saga, as we will see.

When the expedition stayed over the winter with the queen in Kutaisi, they probably received information about different possible routes to continue, and the here suggested chosen route from Araxes to Euphrat is an old, well established trade route (Bryer & Winfield 1985:58; Hewsen 2001:65). When the expedition continued in the spring, the saga tells that they had to pass a mountainous area on the way:

“Yngvar continued upriver till he came to a great waterfall and a narrow ravine. There were high cliffs there, so they hauled their ships up with ropes. Then they lowered them back to the river and went on like this for some time without seeing anything of note.” (chapter 5)

The route was most probably at first the Rioni, the Kvirila and the Tscheremila, as also Mats G. Larsson has correctly identified it and the mountains are the Lichti mountains. The route is mentioned as a trade route early. We find it described already by Strabo and Plinius, who tells us that ships were used on the Rioni (Phasis) and the Kvirila up to the Sarapana (present Shorapani), from which a driving road was leading across the mountain to the Kura. It was obvious during the expedition, that also bigger merchant ships may probably have been able to navigate the river up to the Shorapani, after which it becomes more shallow with many rapids. Marco Polo also supplies the information that boats were also hauled across the mountains in his description of Georgia. He tells us that the Genovians in the 13th century brought their ships on land to the Caspian Sea, but does not specify the exact route. According to information given 2004 by the History

teacher in the local school in Zuare, there existed an oral tradition about boats being pulled from Tscheremila by Zuare and following the old road across the mountain to Kura, the same way as was taken by the expedition Vittfarne this year. The location of the old trade routes used across these mountains have been identified by Tamaz Beradze, and the remains can still be seen today.

Ingvars expedition continued on rivers in spring and summer. When the summer came to a close they came to a town called Heliopolis/Hierapolis and king Julf in the saga, identified as Tbilisi by Larsson (1983:88), but may as well have been Julfa or Hierapolis. Tbilisi is too close, according to the experience from the Vittfarne expedition in 2004 this distance would only have taken about three weeks. Both Julfa and Hierapolis are more likely. The Varangians stayed in town through the winter, and as they probably had done earlier, they took the opportunity to get information about the water routes where they were heading:

“Yngvar asked Jolf if he knew where that river came from, and Jolf said he knew for sure that it flowed from the spring, “which we call Lindibelti. Another river also flows from that spring to the Red Sea, to the great whirlpool there which is called Gapi. Between the sea and the river lies the headland of Siggeum. The river doesn’t have far to flow before it plummets over a cliff into the Red Sea, and we consider that the ends of the earth.”

It seems quite clear that Lindibelti, the area where he will go to, is the Eastern Anatolian plateau with the watershed “Georgian throat” in the Anti-Taurus where the springs are not only for the river Araxes (where Julfa is situated), but also the Mktvari running in to the Caspian Sea, the springs of the Euphrat and the Tigris that runs into the Red Sea, as well as some rivers that runs to the Black sea. Ingvar continues up the river in spring and comes to a mountainous area again with many high cliffs, waterfalls and rapids:

“And when they’d been going for a while, they came to a great waterfall of such ferocity they had to make for the shore. But when they reached the land, they saw the footprint of a terrible giant. It was eight feet long. The cliffs were too high there for them to haul their ships up with ropes, so they steered on alongside the cliffs to where the river curved with the current.” (chapter 6).

It is also said that one time when they found a gap between the cliffs where the ground was more flat and damp, they hauled up their ships there, fell trees and made a channel beside the river to a place where they could

launch them in the river again. Probably they here fell trees to make a portage with logs as runners beside the rapids, a normal procedure that was used until the 19th century in northern Sweden for the boats to pass on land beside rapids as well as between rivers and lakes. The sources of the Araxes and the Euphrat are very close to one another, and would have necessitated only a shorter portage. An interesting note about the passage through the Eastern Anatolian (?) mountains is found in the end of the saga:

“Some say that Yngvar and his crew went for two weeks where they saw nothing unless they lit candles, because the cliffs closed in over the river, and it was like rowing in a cave for a fortnight. But wise people think that can't be true, unless the river flowed through such a narrow gorge that the cliffs met overhead, or the woods were so dense the branches touched between the overhanging cliffs. But although this is possible, it's not very likely.”

Although the author of the Icelandic saga is sceptical, the description fits well with several places along the mountain routes, and especially the along the river Tortum, a tributary to the Euphrat situated close to the watershed. North of Lake Tortum it descends for the most part in gorges for a long distance until it meets the river Glaukos (Bryer & Winfield 1985:60). Here was an important route, part of the Silk route, and connecting the historical Tao-Klarjeti that was also ruled by the Bagratids and a base for the struggle against the Arabs.

According to the information given in the saga, after the visit at Silkesiv in Kutaisi, Ingvar is said to want to investigate the length of the river, and he makes the difficult journey along mountain rivers. He came to a rapid with narrow cliffs, sometimes so narrow and high that they could not see the sun, pulled the boats up and later down into (another ?) river. After a long journey, later in the summer, the expedition encountered a lot of boats that ‘were all round with oars around...’ and went as fast ‘as the bird flies’ (my transl.). The description resembles the modern quffa very much (cognate with Akkadian quppa), which is a circular and very light boat (fig.171), the boat that through millennia has been the typical vessel of the Euphrates. It is made of reed bundles covered with bitumen (McGrail 1981:45). The first time it was noted was on the river Euphrates in the late 17th century (Hornell 1970:104), but the boat type has a much longer tradition in the area. The earliest reference is an inscription from 2300 BC in which Sargon of Akkad says that he, as a baby, was placed in the river in a basket of

rushes sealed with bitumen (Andersson 1978:49). The story is familiar from the bible where Moses was treated in a similar way (Exodus 2.3), but is also described by Strabo concerning the boats in Babylonia in the 1st century AD. Whether these boats were round or elongated is not known; both types of boats are documented in ethnographic descriptions. Boat-shaped boats made in a similar way with rushes covered with bitumen in the marshes of southern Iraq were taradas (Layard 1853:552), but also the zaima (Thesiger 1978:128) and the jillabie were fashioned in this way (Heyerdahl 1978:35).



Fig. 11. Quffa on Euphrate.

Other round boats may also have been in use on the Euphrates. Round skin-boats are depicted in Assyrian reliefs from the 7th century BC (fig. and described by Herodotus from his visit to Babylon in the 5th century BC. Hornell described ‘circular boats of basketwork covered with skins’ in use near Baghdad in the early 19th century (Hornell 1970:104). We don't know whether the skin-boats mentioned by Strabo for crossing the Red Sea were round as well, but otherwise the boat type seems closely connected with the Euphrates-Tigris area.

This is the first indication that the expedition either followed the Mktvari upstream to the sources in Armenia and pulled the boats over to the nearby sources of the Euphrates in Armenia, or that via the tributary of the Mktvari called the Araxes they reached the sources of the Euphrates in the same area. The Euphrates then runs a long way from Armenia, first to present-day Turkey westwards, then south to Syria, and thereafter eastwards through Iraq, where it finally arrived at the lowland where the quffa is mainly used.

Another indication that the expedition may have reached the Euphrates is the mention of the town *Heliopolis*, in some variants *Hieriopolis*. This can hardly be identified as Tbilisi. The expedition has, as Larsson has concluded in line with the historical sources, travelled on the Mktvari; and when they did so I agree that they naturally must have made a visit to this important town as well, and participated in the battle at Sasireti not far west of the town. *Heliopolis* is, however, probably one of the known towns with this name. *Heliopolis* is known from, for instance, Greece and Palestine, and *Hierapolis* from Asia Minor and Syria. The last town is of great interest, since this town (also known as Bambyke) is only 20 km west of the Euphrates via a tributary.

The third indication that the Euphrates is intended in the saga is that Ingvar comes to the sources of the river, and that it is mentioned that in this area also another river has its sources, running in to 'the Red Sea'. In the mountain plateau of Armenia, the rivers Mktvari, Araxes and Euphrates all have their sources, close to each other and possible to change between with only short land passages, which Ingvar's expedition may have done. From these mountains other rivers run into the Mediterranean, called *Reid havet* in the runic inscription in Rök, Östergötland.

A fourth indication is that, on the river passing Heliopolis, the saga says that bandits are travelling on vessels covered by reeds and looking like islands. Inhabited reed islands are well known into the 20th century among the marsh Arabs on the lower Euphrates.

Other strong evidence is the name *Şarkland*. It is still used for Kurdistan, to denote an area consisting of parts of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia and Syria, of which the river Euphrates passes through the last four countries. Earlier it is said to have included also the Caucasus area, which has not yet been verified.

Based on all these indications that leads to this alternative reconstruction of the journey, the author is planning another expedition following this path. The present circumstances are however not much better than the past, and conditions requires that the hostilities in the area must be settled before launching the expedition. As a preparation, survey along the route needs also to be done. The most important prerequisite for this journey, the boat, will also be built first. As I have shown in my thesis, the boats and ships

built by Viking methods with radially split planks following the fibres in the wood, were both lighter, stronger and endured more tension than boats built with contemporary methods using sawn, heavier planks that easily brakes (2007). Hopefully, by the 2018-2019, the boat may be finished and next expedition following the trail of Ingvar the Fartraveller will be ready to leave to continue the investigation of his journey to Särkland.

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