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Introduction to the thematic number ‘Fighting for the East’

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Introduction to the thematic number ‘Fighting for the East’

JENS E. OLESEN, KURT VILLADS JENSEN, KIRSI SALONEN

This issue of *Mirator*, entitled ‘Fighting for the East’, is a Festschrift in honour of the eminent Danish historian and Slavicist, Dr. Phil. John Howard Lind, who celebrates his 80th birthday on the third of April 2025. Over the past more than five decades, he has focused particularly on Scandinavian-Finnish, Baltic and Russian history during the high Middle Ages. Throughout the years, he has published extensively, especially on the Vikings (Rus’) in the East, the Baltic crusades, medieval borders, the Chronicles of Novgorod, northern and eastern elites/dynasties, saints in early ‘Rus’ as well as religious-cultural influences between East and West.

John H. Lind studied history and Russian, as well as Finno-Ugric languages, at the University of Copenhagen and completed his studies in 1973 (cand. mag. in history/Russian). During his university studies, he established contact with the renowned Finnish historian Jarl Gallén (1908–1990), who had initiated a project to analyse the border between Sweden and Novgorod as stipulated in the peace treaty of Nöteborg-Orekhovskij from 1323. Since Jarl Gallén could not read the original Russian sources, John Lind was employed in the project to do that. Jarl Gallén had published the first volume on the eastern medieval border of Finland in 1968. John Lind completed the great project with new and lasting results (including maps) in two volumes published in 1991. The impressive work was defended as a dissertation at the University of Copenhagen in 1993. In an article from 2017 in a book on Danish-Finnish relations in 1917–2017, John Lind wrote vividly about his teamwork with Jarl Gallén and his many visits to Gallén’s private house, filled to the roof with books and prints.

Finnish history has continued to occupy John Lind over the years. Among other themes, he has published on the political-religious landscape of medieval Karelia, the first and second Swedish crusades to Finland, Bishop Thomas as well as the famous Monastery of Valamo, which, as documented, was not founded until the beginning of the fourteenth century.

In 1989, John Lind published a book with the title *Mellem “venska” og “vinska”. Finsk – Fra almuesprog til statsbærende kultursprog* (= Between (S)wedish and (V)Finnish. Finnish from the language of the common population to state-constituting language). The aim of the publication was to strengthen the position of Finnish studies at the University of Copenhagen. The book importantly stressed the political and cultural history of the Finnish language, with a natural emphasis on the ‘language-strife’ from the mid-nineteenth century up to the present day. Three years later, the publication was followed up by an anthology of linguistic articles on Finnish and Finno-Ugric languages, edited by John Lind and Olli Nuutinen.

The crusades in the Baltic and towards Novgorod (Alexander Nevsky and the Battle on the Neva in 1240) are other topics that John Lind has addressed. Together with colleagues, he has published extensively on the Baltic crusades. In a book from 2019 dealing with Danish-Estonian

relations, he presented new viewpoints on the Danish crusade towards northern Estonia, which he showed to have started years before 1219.

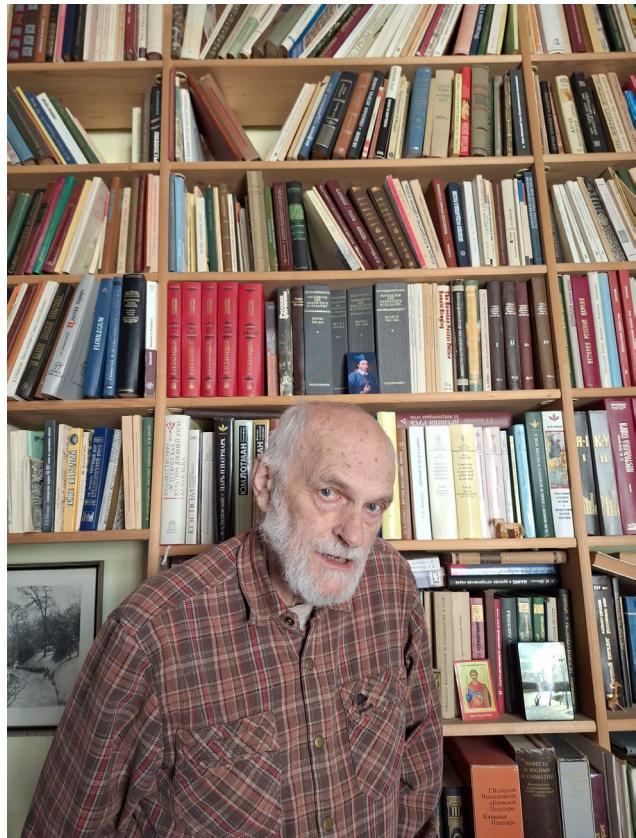
John Lind has further analysed the Chronicles of Novgorod, especially the well-known Rus' problem, and also the so-called Vikings have been in focus of his works. Here as well as in his border studies, John Lind has continued to document how old and false romantic national fictions, interpretations and opinions have persisted up to the present day. His latest studies focus on Vikings in the East, concluding that this term is of younger origin and should be replaced by the correct term 'Varangians'.

The cultural relations between Denmark/Scandinavia and Byzantium have also been studied by John Lind, who has highlighted the political role of the Danish Queen Margaret Fredkulla as a patron of the Danish church and her impact on Danish Romanesque church frescoes at the beginning of the twelfth century. The strong influence from Byzantium, which he has documented, is still generally neglected by many present-day scholars in Scandinavia.

It is not possible here to comment on all themes and topics studied by John Lind. Besides his books and studies mentioned above, he has published more than 300 articles in the Danmarks Nationalleksikon, and he has contributed to other *lexica* as well. Many of the Danish entries deal with themes concerning Finland and Novgorod.

Over the years, John Lind has been employed and has worked at several research institutions and universities in Finland, in the Soviet Union, in Sweden, and in Denmark both at University of Copenhagen and at Odense University, later University of Southern Denmark. Already since 1980, he was an active and productive member of the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Southern Denmark. Since 1992, he has been a corresponding member of the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland.

Many of John Lind's works can be found on the internet and are accessible for free. It has been a matter of principle for John Lind and of great importance to him as a devoted disseminator of scholarly knowledge. In this way, John Lind is a thoroughly modern scholar, always willing to share his viewpoints and opinions with others in order to advance research and among the first to see the possibilities in new digital tools and fully take advantage of them. To honour his lifelong work, we have asked several of his colleagues and friends to write articles that discuss old viewpoints and open new perspectives. And in his spirit, they are published online and in direct open access.



John Lind at home with his huge book collection. Photo: Natasha Okhotina Lind.

This volume commences with a presentation of John Lind as a scholar analysing borders, authored by Henrik Stenius. The subsequent eleven articles represent different aspects of scholarly interests of John Lind.

The first section comprises studies addressing topics from the high medieval era. Lars Kjær scrutinises the three Valdemarian Danish Kings and their use of marriage alliances to secure loyalty from the local elites of the Slavs. Carsten Selch Jensen discusses the role of the Order of the Sword Brothers in Livonia and explores how it recruited men to its service. Sini Kangas analyses how Henry of Livonia's Chronicle portrays children, an often-overlooked theme in the history of the crusades. Jukka Korpela challenges the conventional depiction of Alexander Nevsky (d. 1263) as a military hero and a saint of the Orthodox Church, revealing him as a significant leader of Eastern Rus' and a loyal vassal of the Tatar rulers, akin to other contemporary princes. The subsequent article by Johnny G. G. Jacobsen discusses a possible Dominican (and Franciscan) involvement in the mission towards the Estonians, Finns, Tavastians and Karelians – and perhaps even towards the Orthodox Russians. Kirsi Salonen examines the historiographical background of an event known as the 'rebellion of the inhabitants of Häme (Tavastia) 1236–1237 against the Catholic Church'. She argues that it has never taken place and suggests a re-assessment of the history of the 'Second Crusade to Finland'. Stefan Brink discusses the original meaning of two titles of officials in the royal administration in Norway and Sweden in the high Middle Ages.

The second section focus on themes from the later Middle Ages. Jens E. Olesen examines the frequently employed interpretation of Eric of Pomerania as a 'Pirate-King' on Gotland in 1436–1449, demonstrating that this romanticised image is misleading and requires substantial modification. Kurt Villads Jensen presents extensive notes for a lecture by Ericus Olai from 1484 at the University of Uppsala, illustrating how he interpreted the Book of Revelation as a prophecy concerning Muhammad and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. This new source material broadens our understanding of attitudes towards Islam in Northern Europe and of stereotypes about Muslims. Janus Møller Jensen analyses how the North was perceived and described during the Renaissance, particularly in the early years of the sixteenth century. His article primarily focuses on descriptions made by Archbishop Erik Valkendorf (c. 1465–1522) and demonstrates how existing knowledge was disseminated through international networks of scholars, diplomats and clergymen. The final article by Lars Bisgaard examines Danish folk ballads, which modern scholars generally assert were composed during the latter half of the sixteenth century. By analysing four ballads commenting on events from the reigns of Kings John (r. 1481–1513) and Christian II (r. 1513–1523), new interpretations are proposed, suggesting a novel approach to utilising ballads as historical sources.