

Excellencies!
Ladies and Gentlemen!

Warm welcome to all of you on behalf of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. It is my pleasure to open the seminar „Silverwhite Route: following Pytheas and Lennart Meri“. With this seminar, the Estonian Academy of Sciences marks the 80th anniversary of late President Lennart Meri (1929-2006), member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences.

One of the books written about Lennart Meri is entitled „Life Devoted to Estonia“. It describes mostly his activities on the political arena as a brilliant and distinguished statesman. But actually all Lennart Meri's life was devoted to Estonia - his books, his films, his all activities over so many years. His interest was, however, wider, he wanted to understand the world as a whole, with all its past and present and possibly also its future. Today we shall focus on his iconic work, the book „Silverwhite“, published more than 30 years ago in 1976 (followed by „More Silverwhite“ in 1984) which has shattered the intellectual life in Estonia. I agree with Professor J.Kivimäe who compared „Silverwhite“ in some sense with the celebrated „The Two Cultures“ of C.P.Snow(1959). Lennart Meri said himself about „Silverwhite“: „our travel story could be a bridge between poetry and science“.

It is a pity, that „Silverwhite“, to my knowledge, has been translated only to Finnish and not to other languages, including English. Following the ancient routes of Pytheas, al-Idrisi and others between Caspian/Black Sea areas and the Baltics, Lennart Meri finds a focus in a story about the Kaali meteorite. The book describes antic history, archeology, ethnography, folklore, linguistics, geography, geology, astronomy, Arabic studies, navigation and so on. Lennart Meri tries to explain the old texts not only linguistically but also by essence and meaning. It is difficult to restore the history, it is even more difficult to restore the thoughts of people who lived thousands years ago and the way how they passed their knowledge and understandings about Nature to next generations. What is truth, what is probability – sometimes it is not easy to understand. Bold hypotheses about the information embedded in travellers' stories, interpretations of past events in folklore related to real historical and geological data need to be analysed and clarified by contemporary studies.

Today we try to make a step towards understanding the world of Pytheas and Lennart Meri, a great thinker. The distinguished speakers will explain several aspects of the story from the viewpoint of genetics, geology, folklore, they draw the parallels from studies at another continent and stress the importance of transdisciplinarity.

The texts will be later published in „European Review“, which is an interdisciplinary journal of Academia Europaea published by Cambridge University Press.

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