

Beyond Medieval Europe



EASTERN EUROPE IN ICELANDIC SAGAS

By
TATJANA N. JACKSON

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TATJANA N. JACKSON



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To those I love—
my family and friends,
living and dead—
with tenderness dedicated



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PREFACE

In 1968, the Soviet historian Vladimir Pashuto published his *Foreign Policy of Old Rus'*. This book, based on the broadest—Russian/Soviet and foreign—historiography of the problem, became a landmark in the Soviet study of the Old Russian state. A year later, Pashuto became the head of a newly organized department at the Institute of History of the USSR concerned, mainly, with the publication of the serial edition “The Oldest Sources for the History of the Peoples of the USSR.” I had the honour and pleasure to be part of this project; my responsibility in it was the “Icelandic kings’ sagas as a source for the history of the European part of the USSR.” From the very beginning, the aim of my work was not only collecting passages containing stories and separate mentions of Old Rus’ scattered over the corpus of sagas, but also developing methods of analysis to test the reliability of sagas as a historical source. Working in this field for decades, along with a large number of articles and monographic studies, I prepared three separate volumes (published in different years) of the kings’ sagas’ data on Eastern Europe, and then, having reworked and expanded the material included, put it in one book (Jackson 2012).

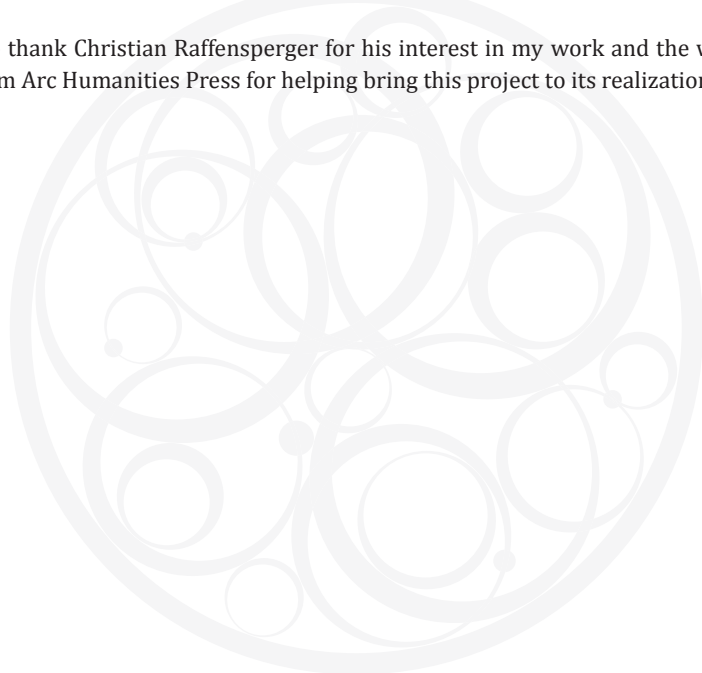
The majority of my publications are in Russian. A kind invitation from Professor Christian F. Raffensperger to prepare a volume for the book series *Beyond Medieval Europe* gives me an opportunity to bring my scholarship to Anglophone academia. My studies are in two senses “beyond medieval Europe,” as both Old Rus’ (a territory in Eastern Europe that interests me mostly) and Iceland (a place where practically all my sources had originated) are two medieval regions lying beyond medieval Europe in the traditional sense of the term.¹

My research aims to investigate the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas, chronicles, and other texts from the point of view of their validity as a historical source for scholars of the history of Eastern Europe, and Old Rus’ in particular. This is an issue that has not previously been studied comprehensively within the framework of Old Norse studies. Particular questions of East European and Russian history reflected in the sagas have been discussed in scattered scholarly works that will be indispensable to this book. Those who came closest to specifying the significance of Old Norse literature, among other written sources, for the history of Old Rus’ were the Russian scholars Feodor (Friedrich) Braun (see Braun 1924) and Elena Rydzevskaya (see Rydzevskaya 1922, 1924, 1930s, 1935, 1940, 1945). However, for their own reasons, neither of them conducted the investigation of this issue in full. I hope my work fills this gap. The book opens with an introduction to the sources in question and continues with fourteen chapters in two parts.

¹ Cf. Gísli Sigurðsson’s statement that “life in Scandinavia lies beyond the horizons of most courses in medieval studies, based as they are almost entirely on ecclesiastical sources from continental Europe” (Gísli Sigurðsson 2008, 1).

This book is my own translation of my previous works written in Russian. No single chapter is a verbatim translation: the material has been reorganized, improved, and rewritten with due regard for a different audience. Unless otherwise stated, translations into English, particularly from publications in Russian, are my own.

I wish to thank Christian Raffensperger for his interest in my work and the wonderful team from Arc Humanities Press for helping bring this project to its realization.



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INTRODUCTION: SOURCES, AIMS, CONVENTIONS

"Writings of the twelfth century and later can, if used critically, yield important information about the Viking period."

(Sawyer 1982, 24)

"I would be inclined to argue that while a text revealing a thirteenth-century view of the past may, and probably can, tell us something about the writer's own time, it must also tell us something about that past itself."

(Foote 1993, 141)

THE TITLE *EASTERN Europe in Icelandic Sagas* does not mean that this book deals only with the sagas, and not Old Norse-Icelandic literature in general. Scandinavian written monuments constitute one of the largest groups within the corpus of foreign sources relating to the history of Eastern Europe, and Old Rus' in particular. In addition to sagas, the Scandinavian materials include skaldic poetry, runic inscriptions, chronicles, homilies and saints' lives, geographical treatises, and annals. With the exception of runic inscriptions (mostly Swedish) and a small part of *fornaldarsögur* ("sagas of ancient times"), these works belong to the Icelandic-Norwegian, or West Scandinavian, circle. Of the above genres, three (skaldic poetry, runic inscriptions, and sagas) do not occur in other regions and cultures; being a specific product of Scandinavian mentality, they require special attention. Icelandic skalds composed simultaneously with the events described, and their poems, according to the most widely accepted view, were transmitted orally in an unchanged form during several centuries before they were recorded. The runic inscriptions are a multitude of "authentic materialized messages from the period in question," as Kristel Zilmer has put it (Zilmer 2005, 14), while sagas, according to her, offer "a kind of backward look at the events" from the distance of several hundred years (Zilmer 2005, 15). This is how Judith Jesch describes the earliest two types of sources:

And so, from the mid-tenth century, we have Scandinavian evidence for Viking activity in England from two groups of contemporary sources: runic inscriptions from mainland Scandinavia (but mainly Sweden), and the skaldic verse composed in honour of Scandinavian leaders and preserved in Icelandic texts, mainly the historical sagas of the kings of Norway. The same sources also provide evidence of Viking activity on the European continent *and in the east* [my emphasis].

(Jesch 2005, 124)

The italicized words are especially important for us. Turning to the characterization of the three genres, I must first of all emphasize that in no way do I pretend to embrace the vast body of scholarship concerning Old Norse-Icelandic literature. To begin with, a

number of comprehensive publications have appeared in the last three decades (Clover, Lindow 1985; Pulsiano 1993; Faulkes, Perkins 1993; McTurk 2005), while all other references will follow as necessary.

Skaldic Poetry

In Old Norse, the word *skáld* served as a term for poet. However, skaldic poetry is difficult to define.¹ It has been suggested that the term *skaldic verse* should be applied “to all West Norse alliterative poetry that is neither Eddic nor belonging to the Icelandic *rímur* genre, and that is composed before about 1400” (Fidjestøl 1993, 592; see also Whaley 2005, 480–81). The earliest preserved pieces of skaldic poetry go back to the first half of the ninth century. Most skaldic poetry has come down to us only in fragments, for the greater part in the form of quotations in prose works from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, mostly within sagas. Poetic texts incorporated into the prose narrative are, as a rule, not whole poems, but separate strophes called *vísur*. Before being written down, skaldic poetry must have been transmitted orally, as is told by the Icelandic historian of the thirteenth century Snorri Sturluson in the prologue to his *Heimskringla*: “Með Haraldi konungi váru skáld, ok kunna menn enn kvæði þeira ok allra konunga kvæði, þeira er síðan hafa verit í Nóregi” (“There were skalds (poets) with King Haraldr [inn hárfagri], and people still know their poems and poems about all the kings there have been in Norway since”) (*Hkr* 1941, 5; *Hkr* 2011, 3).²

Skaldic poetry has an extremely elaborate form, regulated in rhyme, metre, and the number of syllables and lines; along with strictly regulated alliteration, skaldic poetry often uses internal rhyme. Skaldic verse varies its vocabulary by using *heiti*, poetical synonyms, and *kennings*, a poetic device where one noun is substituted by two, the second being a definition to the first. Lee M. Hollander gives a vivid illustration of this device, which is worth citing here:

Let us say that Haki is the name of a sea king of old. Then *Haka dýr* (the animal of Haki) can stand for “ship”; and *Haka dýrs blik* (the glamour of the animal of Haki) for “shield”—shields were fastened on the railings of a Viking ship; and *Haka dýrs blik dynr* (the tumult of the glamour of the animal of Haki) for “battle”; and *Haka dýrs blik dyns sæðingr* (the gull of the tumult of the glamour of the animal of Haki) for “raven” or “vulture”; and finally *Haka dýrs blik dyns sæðinga hungrdeyfir* (the appeaser of the hunger of the gulls of the tumult of Haki’s animal) for “warrior”, “king!”

(Hollander 1968, 13)

Kennings may be split and separated, and several clauses are frequently interlaced within the limits of the half-strophe. Skaldic poetry, by virtue of the extreme complexity

¹ Cf. Frank 1985, 160; see a vast bibliography on pp. 185–96; see also Whaley 2005 and Vésteinn Ólason 2006.

² Here, as well as in similar notes to texts with translations, the first reference is to the original text, while the second one is to its English translation.

of its poetical form, has always been regarded as a creation of individual authors. That is why tradition has preserved the names of most skalds. This also resulted in the fact that both in oral presentations and in writing a skaldic text was, as a rule, a fixed, correctly reproduced, text. Snorri Sturluson says in his, “fuller and more probing,” prologue to the *Separate Saga of Saint Olaf* (longer version) that “þau orð, er í kveðskap standa, eru in sömu sem í fyrstu vāru, ef rétt er kveðit, þótt hverr maðr hafi síðan numit at öðrum, ok má því ekki breyta” (“the words in the poems are the same as the original ones if the recitation is correct, even though each man has learned from another, because [the form] cannot be changed”) (*Hkr* 1945, 422; Andersson 2008, 6).

Skaldic content is much simpler than its form. Skalds never mentioned facts that were of no artistic interest for them and that lay beyond the sphere of their creative activities. This content was not chosen by skalds but was predetermined by the genre itself and also by reality. Composed immediately after an event by its witnesses or contemporaries, panegyric poems (*drápur*, sg. *drápa*, the main subgenre of skaldic verse) would give the name and kin of a person in question, the number of the battles he had won, and praise his boldness and generosity. Still, the very purpose of these praise-poems made the choice of facts related in them tendentious. Panegyric poems described not merely the events that had taken place, but only those that served to the glorification of an addressee of a poem. This was determined by the idea of the due and heroic, typical of medieval Scandinavian society. Bjarne Fidjestøl has characterized a praise-poem as follows:

A praise-poem is thus “contemporary”, because the poet has chosen actual events as his *yrkisefni* [...], but it is not “historical”, because the temporal dimension is alien to it. The dimension must be supplied by the historian. The brief summaries in the prose thus combine “referential” statements abstracted from the text of the verse and chronological statements drawn from its context.

(Fidjestøl 1997b, 273)

Skaldic Poetry As a Historical Source: Attitudes Towards Skaldic Poetry in the Middle Ages and Today

Skalds often became court poets with the Norwegian kings. They were both their king's bodyguards, who fought alongside other warriors, and historiographers of the illiterate times. The kings themselves, taking care that their fame should be known to subsequent generations, highly estimated skaldic poetry. Snorri Sturluson tells in *Heimskringla* how Óláfr Haraldsson was preparing himself for his last battle, the Battle of Stiklestad):

Svá er sagt, at þá er Óláfr konungr fylkði liði sínu, þá skipaði hann mönnum í skjaldborg, er halda skyldi fyrir honum í bardaga, ok valði þar til þá menn, er sterkastir vāru ok snarpastir. Þá kallaði hann til sín skāld sín ok bað þā ganga í skjaldborgina. “Skuluð þér,” segir hann, “hér vera ok sjā þau tíðendi, er hér gerask. Er yðr þā eigi segiandi saga til, því at þér skuluð frá segja ok

yrkja um síðan.” [...] Þá mæltu þeir sín á milli, sögðu, at þat væri vel fallit at yrkja áminningarvísur nökkurar um þau tíðendi, er þá mundu brátt at höndum berask.

(Hkr 1945, 358)

(We are told that when King Ólaf drew up his men in battle array, he formed some into a shield-castle to protect him in battle, and for that purpose chose the strongest and most valiant. Then he called up his skalds and ordered them to enter the shield castle. “You are to be here,” he said, “and witness all that will happen here. Then you will not need to be told, but can tell of it yourselves and compose verses about it later on.” [...] Afterwards the three discussed matters between them and said it would be a good thing to compose some memorial verses about the events which were likely to happen soon.)

(Hkr 2014, 239)

Skaldic poetry was regarded as a reliable historical source as early as the thirteenth century. Stanzas appear as source material in the sagas, at least in the kings’ sagas. In the same passage in his prologue to *Heimskringla*, Snorri expressed his attitude towards these poems:

Ok tókum vér þar mest dæmi af, þat er sagt er í þeim kvæðum, er kveðin váru fyrir sjálfum höfðingjunum eða sonum þeira. Tókum vér þat allt fyrir satt, er í þeim kvæðum finnsk um ferðir þeira eða orrostur. En þat er háttr skálda at lofa þann mest, er þá eru þeir fyrir, en engi myndi þat þora at segja sjálfum honum þau verk hans, er allir þeir, er heyrði, vissi, at hégómi væri ok skrok, ok svá sjálfr hann. Þat væri þá háð, en eigi lof. [...] En kvæðin þykkja mér sízt ór stað færð, ef þau eru rétt kveðin ok skynsamliga upp tekin.

(Hkr 1941, 5–7)

(And we have mostly used as evidence what is said in those poems that were recited before the rulers themselves or their sons. We regard as true everything that is found in those poems about their expeditions and battles. It is indeed the habit of poets to praise most highly the one in whose presence they are at the time, but no one would dare to tell him to his face about deeds of his which all who listened, as well as the man himself, knew were falsehoods and fictions. That would be mockery and not praise. [...] As to the poems, I consider them to be least corrupted if they are correctly composed and meaningfully interpreted.)

(Hkr 2011, 3–5)

We are confronted here with what nowadays is called “source-criticism.” As Bjarne Fidjestøl has put it, “this source-criticism of his, spelt out in the prologues to *Óláfs saga helga* and *Heimskringla*, is one of the outstanding intellectual achievements of our Northern Middle Ages, perhaps only to be compared with the phonological analysis of the ‘First Grammarian.’ In either case one might well decide that only in the present century has modern scholarship attained a similar height” (Fidjestøl 1997b, 256). Snorri

mentions two criteria for the veracity of sources, namely the authority of wise men (*fróðir menn*, “knowing, learned, well-instructed”) and the inability of telling a deliberate lie, or flattery, in somebody’s face. The latter statement grew out of the old Icelanders’ understanding of the functions of skaldic poetry (poetry as a way of transferring information), and of their belief in the magic power of words (a lie being an encroachment upon the well-being of a person flattered).

For a long time prevalent opinion held that skaldic poems, composed some centuries earlier than the sagas, had been sources for those sagas. But in 1933 Sigurður Nordal, in his introduction to *Egils saga*, stressed that the skaldic strophes in it were not quoted as evidence (like in *Heimskringla*), but were part of the narrative. Bjarni Einarsson further developed this idea and showed that in some other sagas about skalds strophes were rarely quoted as historical evidence (Bjarni Einarsson 1961). He also pointed to the substantial difference between *Íslendingasögur* (“sagas of Icelanders”) and *konungasögur* (“kings’ sagas”) in the attitude of their authors towards skaldic verse: while in the former (with rare exceptions) stanzas were quoted “for entertainment only,” were part of the story, and had to be considered as an element of the context as a whole, in the kings’ sagas strophes were mainly taken from poems in praise of the Norwegian kings composed by their court poets, or contemporary skalds, and were quoted as evidence (Bjarni Einarsson 1974). Today scholars distinguish between two main types of verse quotation in the sagas, namely “evidence” vs. “part of the story” (Bjarni Einarsson 1974, *passim*), or “substantiating verses” vs. “non-substantiating verses” (Foote 1976, 186), or “reports” vs. “speech acts” (Jesch 1991, 240–41), or “authenticating verses” vs. “situational verses” (Whaley 1993a, *passim*).

Modern scholars recognize skaldic poetry as source material for sagas if the strophes are quoted as evidence, and have more faith in them than in the sagas themselves: these strophes, in their opinion, “contain specific information (personal names, place names, numerical or chronological information, ‘pregnant remarks,’ etc.) that serve to verify similar information in the prose text” (Andersson, Gade 2000, 25–26). This is explained by a number of reasons, and first of all, by the fact that the elaborate metrical form, specific word order, and complicated poetical language made it practically impossible to distort skaldic verses, or to supplement them with some new information, in the process of their oral transmission and written fixation.³ As Gabriel Turville-Petre remarks, “the rigid form” of skaldic poetry “was a safeguard against corruption during oral transmission” (Turville-Petre 1976, lxvi–lxvii). The content of skaldic poetry is, however, simple and straightforward. If one substitutes *heiti* and *kennings* with synonyms, improves the word order and retells in prose strophe after strophe, the poem will be reduced to an enumeration of some facts and events that are generally considered to have been real. As a rule, this content is so fragmentary, accidental and concrete that it

3 Still, there are scholars who call the authenticity of skaldic verses as ancient works into question. Thus, Shami Ghosh, based on studies by Russell Poole, Diana Whaley, and Christopher Abram, demonstrating some cases of variability in the texts of skaldic poems, concludes that “twelfth- and thirteenth-century scribes were capable of understanding and modifying verse within the constraints of putatively archaic metre and language,” and that “poets/scribes/editors of the

is hardly clear without a comment in prose. Sometimes skaldic verses bear a personal name or a place-name, but in most cases they do not even name the hero in question, therefore “their attachment to a particular event or particular poem often rests on the prose context in which they are preserved” (Whaley 2005, 482). Many scholars believe that verses were transmitted with accompanying explanatory prose (*Begleitprosa*) (Beyschlag 1953). In Bjarne Fidjestøl’s opinion, “even the most critical historian must allow for some minimal prose accompanying the strophes, enough at least to give the name of the poet and to identify the subject-matter of his lines” (Fidjestøl 1997c, 277). The accompanying prose is thus of special interest for the study, since skaldic strophes did not exist separately, but formed a nucleus of a wider tradition (cf. Beyschlag 1950; Wolf 1965; Hofmann 1971; von See 1977; Fidjestøl 1997b; Danielsson 2002, 379–83; Whaley 2005, 481–82).

Skaldic Poetry on Eastern Europe

About forty strophes, composed by twenty skalds of the ninth through the twelfth centuries are devoted to expeditions, military and peaceful, of Scandinavian jarls or kings to the lands beyond the Baltic Sea, and/or contain East European place-names (cf. Pritsak 1981, 251–301; Jackson 1991, 79–108). The latter fact is extremely significant. The toponymic layer that is revealed in skaldic poetry is evidently the earliest one in the Old Norse sources. It is recognized by scholars that skaldic poetry had been formed as a genre by the middle of the ninth century, but it was deeply traditional and did not undergo any great changes throughout the centuries. Consequently, the toponymic nomenclature of these poems had to remain nearly permanent, reflecting an earlier stage—up to the ninth century—of Scandinavians’ familiarity with the region in question.

The major part of skaldic strophes in what we might call the East European fragments of the sagas are quoted as confirmation of the story. As a rule, saga authors use all the information from each skaldic stanza, so that a stanza and the prose in which it is embedded are in close agreement. However, there are cases when a place-name used in a stanza is substituted in the prose text by a more modern place-name (for instance, *Garðaríki* of the prose text stands for the skaldic *Garðar*). Nonetheless, there is every reason to believe that saga fragments based on the aforementioned forty strophes have a certain documentary basis, and the information they contain is more trustworthy than that of the other parts of the same saga. For instance, the study of saga material concerning the visits of four Norwegian kings to Old Rus’ (see part 2) still does not

twelfth century or later could competently alter works that are supposedly of an earlier period” (Ghosh 2011, 48–49). In his opinion, the assignment of verses to “authenticating” or “situational,” “cannot help us in the least with regard to assessing the authenticity of the verse, the accompanying prose, or the prosimetrum as a whole” (Ghosh 2011, 95–96). Luckily, this hypercritical attitude has not garnered a great deal of attention, and the international team of *The Norse-Icelandic Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* continues their most fruitful and useful work publishing volume after volume in which they give grounded conclusions as to the authorship, dating, and wording of each skaldic poem or separate strophe.

convince that these stories were not an invention of their authors, a literary cliché, since Russian sources do not mention them. Skaldic poems, nevertheless, clearly confirm the fact that all the four kings visited Rus’.

In several cases a strophe quoted in a saga bears some extra information, not reflected in the prose text. A good example would be the strophe by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson that tells not only about the participation of Scandinavian mercenaries of the Russian Prince Yaroslav the Wise in the defence of his country (as the prose narrative puts it), but also, in all probability, about the military campaign of Yaroslav and Mstislav against the Poles (*Læsir*), related in the Russian chronicle under the year 1031, in which the Scandinavians of Yaroslav could have participated (see below, p. 159).

Extra information results from a complex analysis of skaldic poems dedicated to the eastern connections of Scandinavians vis-à-vis the whole corpus of skaldic poetry. For instance, *Heimskringla* has 601 skaldic strophes, among them 510 Scandinavian proper, and only twenty-three with East European material. The small number of skaldic strophes among the “eastern” subjects is likely to reflect the specific character of Scandinavian journeys to the east; as shown in the sagas, Scandinavians did not always go to Eastern Europe solely for plunder, and their trips did not always result in bloody battles, one of the favourite topics of the skalds. Skaldic poetry was composed mainly during the Viking age and praised military expeditions of Scandinavian kings and jarls, so correspondingly strophes were quoted in the sagas when great campaigns and battles were being described. It is worth noting that about 75 percent of stanzas in *Heimskringla* describe different kinds of military activities. Still, in the East European material, the correlation of “peaceful” and “military” skaldic stanzas is just the opposite: only about 25 percent of strophes relate Scandinavian attacks on “eastern” lands.

All these poems are from the ninth to the first quarter of the eleventh centuries; they describe events no later than the first decade of the eleventh century, thus marking the 1010s as the boundary of Viking activity in the “east.” Only one of these strophes is dedicated to an attack on the territories within Rus’. This is a strophe in *Bandadrápa* by Eyjólfur daðaskáld composed ca. 1010, telling about the burning down of Aldeigja (Old Ladoga) by the Norwegian jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson, which is generally supposed by scholars to have happened in 997 (see below, pp. 86–88). According to the skalds, East Baltic territories were the main objective of Scandinavian military attacks before the eleventh century. Consequently, saga authors held the same attitude: sagas describing events of the time before the late tenth century would often say that their hero “herjaði í Austrvegi” (“waged war in the Eastern way,” i.e., in the Baltic), or “fór (sigldi) í Austrveg ok herjaði þar um sumarit (á sumrum)” (“went (sailed) to the Eastern way and waged war there summer after summer”). The “peaceful” strophes pertaining to the first half of the eleventh century, on the contrary, contain data about Rus’ only. This points to primarily peaceful relations between Old Rus’ and Scandinavia at that time. Moreover, skaldic poems dedicated to the four Norwegian kings that had lived in Rus’ reveal the fact that in the late tenth and early eleventh century the relations between the Old Russian state and the Scandinavian countries ceased being the result of activities of individuals or groups of armed people, and gradually developed into inter-state relations (cf. Melnikova 2008).

The East European ethno-geographical nomenclature (see Jackson 1993, 2003b; Zilmer 2005) of skaldic poems is limited. The skalds mention *Eystrasalt* (the Baltic Sea), *Eysýsla* (the island of Saaremaa), and *Eistir* (Estonians). In the north of Eastern Europe the skalds name the river *Vína* (generally understood as the Northern Dvina), *Gandvík* (the Arctic Ocean, or the White Sea) and the tribes of *bjarmar*. In the territory of Old Rus' they once mention *Aldeigja* (Ladoga) and consistently use the place-name *Garðar* as a designation of Rus'. One should also notice the order in which East European ethno-geographical material was fixed in skaldic poetry (judging by the chronology of the poems' composition): the first to become known to Scandinavians were the Baltic lands, then the north and only then Rus'. This is quite natural, of course, since a number of sources testify this sequence in the advancement of Scandinavian warriors and merchants through these lands. The fact that in skaldic poetry Rus' bears its earliest Scandinavian name *Garðar*, and that out of a number of Russian towns only Ladoga is known to the skalds (in the form of *Aldeigja*) makes us believe that, being highly conservative, skaldic poetry fixed and preserved the toponymy of the earliest period of Scandinavian infiltration into Eastern Europe. Even the skalds of the eleventh century, who visited Rus' with their kings, used no other designation of the country, but this traditional name.

Runic Inscriptions

The term "runic inscriptions" refers to inscriptions in runic script that occur on memorial stones erected in the period from the end of the tenth to the end of the eleventh centuries; they differ from most Old Norse written sources in that they are nearly contemporary with the events that are mentioned in them. Typically, a record, extremely laconic in content, reports of a military campaign, a battle, or a trade trip in which a person in whose memory the stone was erected had perished. Of all the Old Norse sources "only runic inscriptions (those among them that have been preserved until this day) can indeed be studied in their authentic form on a first-hand basis" (Zilmer 2005, 36). While writing with the Latin alphabet, throughout the Middle Ages, was used mainly by clerics and nobility, the ability to read and write runes is likely to have been widespread.⁴ In spite of the potentially high level of their reliability, these texts can easily be misinterpreted due to the ambiguity of signs, their sometimes bad preservation, and some cases of misreading (see Melnikova 1977b, 1998, 2001).

Runic Inscriptions Connected with Eastern Europe

Runic inscriptions on memorial stones dealing with Eastern Europe comprise a confined group of 122 texts, out of more than 3,500 runic inscriptions found to date in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Their major characteristics are as follows: they date to the late tenth and eleventh centuries; they supersede fourfold the number of Scandinavian memorial runic inscriptions connected with western activities; they come mostly

⁴ For more information and literature see Knirk, Stoklund, and Svärdström 1993.

from the territory of Sweden (113 out of 122), particularly the Mälaren area, Gotland, and Östergötland, which points to the closer contact that Sweden achieved with East European lands; their information is limited in content, but, as a rule, it is contemporary with the events described; apart from mentioning some trade and military enterprises, runic inscriptions on memorial stones have preserved valuable place-names, as well as ethnic and proper names. They point to good acquaintance of Scandinavians with the East European territory, and mostly with the main sea and river routes from the Baltic to the Black and the Caspian Seas, as well as to various long-established contacts between Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (see Melnikova 1998).

Sagas

Saga is the term for an Old Norse-Icelandic prose narrative (see Andersson 1978; Schach 1993). Sagas began to be recorded in the middle of the twelfth century. They were created and written down mostly in the second half of the twelfth and through the thirteenth century, but they continued being rewritten for centuries, and are preserved in manuscripts of a much later time. Until recently, medieval Icelandic sagas used to be studied “as texts individually written by single authors,” but in the last two decades they started being treated by some scholars “as products of a manuscript culture” (Boulhosa 2005, 23). Patricia Boulhosa explains this term with reference to Bernard Cerquiglini’s statement that a literary work in the Middle Ages “is a variant,” its consequence being that each written saga is viewed as one of the saga versions within the multiplicity of its texts (Boulhosa 2005, 21–31). As a result, conventional dating and authorship that had been for decades applied by scholars to the sagas is now being rejected (a written saga being but one of the many variants of the saga which simply “had had a chance” of being fixed on parchment), and sagas are dated on the basis of the manuscripts in which they have reached us. But this is still not universal. For instance, Theodor M. Andersson keeps choosing “the first Icelandic king’s saga” out of the late twelfth-century Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and the *Oldest Saga of St. Óláfr* (Andersson 2004), while for Ármann Jakobsson *Morkinskinna*, on which he has been working for about twenty years, is still a saga that “emerged during a particularly fertile period of composition of Icelandic kings’ sagas, around 1220” (Ármann Jakobsson 2014, 11).

Scholars distinguish between several saga sub-genres according to their content and chronology. These are *postola sögur* (“apostles’ sagas”) and *heilagra manna sögur* (“saints’ lives”), anonymous translations of Latin biographies of apostles and saints, the earliest being from about 1150; *konungasögur* (“kings’ sagas”) devoted to the history of Norway, from ancient times to the late thirteenth century; *Íslendingasögur* (“sagas of Icelanders”) devoted to the history of Icelandic families, beginning with the settlement in the late ninth century; *fornaldarsögur* (“sagas of ancient times”), heroic legends and adventure tales about events in Scandinavia until the end of the ninth century; *biskupa sögur*, namely tales of Icelandic bishops from the eleventh to the fourteenth century; a huge compilation about the events in Iceland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries known under the name of *Sturlunga saga*; and so on (see Schier 1970).

A debate on the form and importance of oral tradition as the basis of the sagas (between the adherents of *Freiprosa*- and *Buchprosalehre*) has lasted for nearly two centuries. More than half a century ago the most flexible point of view was formulated by Theodor Andersson: “The writer undoubtedly could and did use written sources, supplementary oral sources, his own imagination, and above all his own words, but his art and presumably the framework of his story were given him by tradition. The inspiration of the sagas is ultimately oral” (Andersson 1964, 119). Since then, study of the orality of the Icelandic sagas has been a backbone and a very promising direction in saga studies. Theodor M. Andersson (2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2012), Hermann Pálsson (1999), Tommy Danielsson (2002a, 2002b, 2008), and Gísli Sigurðsson (2002, 2004, 2008) have demonstrated the existence of oral components in the sagas, and that “the sagas are part of a continuum in which both traditional and literary components evolve over time” (Andersson 2006, 20). It is a difficult task to differentiate between what is to be believed and what is pure fiction, what goes back to the oral background of the sagas and what had been added in the process of oral transmission and written “performance” of a text. Still, there is hope that memories from the distant past can be revealed in the sagas. What gives us hope is, for example, the fact that “however many doubts we have about individual minor points such as names, dates and events, the overall picture presented by the old texts of the human settlement of the islands of the north Atlantic is pretty much the same as the picture that emerges from archaeological research” (Gísli Sigurðsson 2008, 26).

Sagas as a Historical Source

All the stages that saga source-criticism has passed through can be correlated with the pan-European development of historical science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Mundal 1977, 1987). Changes of attitude to the historical value of sagas can be illustrated by the kings’ sagas (see also Whaley 1993b, 55–56), since their picture of Norwegian history over a huge period of time could not but draw the attention of historians of Norway. While scholars concentrated on presenting the course of political events, the process of unification of Norway and strengthening its political power, their writings relied mainly on the analysis of narrative monuments, and the kings’ sagas in particular. Leading Norwegian historians, such as P. A. Munch, Rudolf Keyser, and Ernst Sars, the authors of multi-volume general works on Norwegian history, accepted saga reports without reservations (Munch 1851–59; Keyser 1866–70; Sars 1873–91). At the turn of the twentieth century, however, as the interest in social and economic history grew, historians concentrated on other sources, such as official acts, archaeological data, numismatics and toponymics, and runic inscriptions. The attitude towards sagas also changed radically: they began to be evaluated as works of literature in which a reliable historical basis, transformed both in multiple oral transmission and in the process of written fixation, was in practice impossible to obtain in its pure form. Confidence in the sagas was shattered by the works of Gustav Storm (see Storm 1873) and other Norwegian scholars, but mostly by those of the Swedish historian Lauritz Weibull (see Weibull 1913). The founder of the so-called Lund school of Swedish historians, Lauritz

Weibull put forward a demand for radical criticism of historical sources, including the Icelandic sagas. According to him, sagas were literary and artistic works that were, above all, not synchronous with the events described in them. Discussing the understanding of a number of events of political history of Scandinavian countries prevailing in historiography and based on the sagas, Weibull debunked many generally accepted views (Weibull 1911; see also Source-Criticism 1972). An advocate of similar ideas in Norwegian historiography was Halfdan Koht: he not only found a considerable number of distortions and inaccuracies in the sagas, but also revealed in their interpretation of the material a strong influence of political views of the time of saga recording (Koht 1913). Yet, Norwegian historians, such as Gustav Storm, Halfdan Koht, Edvard Bull, Fredrik Paasche, and Johan Schreiner (Storm 1873; Koht 1921; Bull 1931; Paasche 1922; Schreiner 1927) were less radical about the sagas than Lauritz Weibull. In spite of the evidence—through internal criticism of the kings' sagas, as well as their comparison with foreign sources—that sagas contained a significant number of errors and anachronisms, they concluded that, with necessary precision and reservations, the kings' sagas could still be used as sources even for political, factual history. They found most reliable those saga reports that had been based on skaldic strophes quoted in them. The way saga authors “worked” with the skaldic material was carefully investigated (Finnur Jónsson 1934; Lie 1937). In the middle of the twentieth century, the possibility of applying a retrospective method in the study of the history of law (Rehfeldt 1955) and social and economic relations in medieval Norway began to be discussed in scholarly literature (cf. Holmsen 1940–42).⁵ Historians gradually became convinced that much in the kings' sagas was still trustworthy,⁶ and therefore “it was not a question of whether to use sagas or not, but of *how* to use them in order not to make a mistake” (Gurevich 1977, 154).

The specific character of saga literature makes it necessary to take into account a number of factors in the process of historical study. First, sagas are characterized by a synthesis of truth and fiction (“syncretic truth,” in the words of M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij 1973), and the understanding of historical truth at the time when sagas were recorded was fundamentally different from ours. Second, like the majority of traditional medieval genres, sagas are characterized by a hierarchy of stereotypes that penetrate everything, from *Weltanschauung* to language. While revealing stereotyped formulas in the sagas, one discovers the historical background both in the fact of their existence and in the very deviations from the stereotyped scheme. Third, the nature of information is influenced by the “official” tendentiousness of *samtidssgaer* (“sagas of modern times,” according to

⁵ Similarly, Henryk Łowmiański believed that the information of the sagas could not be authoritative for evaluating Scandinavian expansion to the east in the eighth to the ninth centuries: only the application of a retrospective method could enable the acquisition of some valuable data (Łowmiański 1957).

⁶ A vivid example of such attitude towards the kings' sagas is given by a number of works, including Helle 1964, Gurevich 1967, Blom 1968, Andersen 1977, Gurevich 1977, Sawyer 1982, Franklin, Shepard 1996.

Sigurður Nordal's classification) (Sigurður Nordal 1953, 181)⁷ trying to ground the right for power of the impostor Sverrir's dynasty, and by the "everyday" tendentiousness that becomes apparent in an attempt to embellish one's achievements, trips and victories, or to glorify the king whom the saga is dedicated to. Finally, there is a lag of more than two hundred (sometimes even five hundred) years between the deed and the word, that is, between the events described and the time of written fixation. Therefore, data that had been orally transmitted for no less than a century inevitably underwent great changes and literary overworking. Among other things, this resulted in the "modernization" of the early history. In Halfdan Koht's words, people from olden days were depicted in the sagas in the costumes and with the weapons of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Koht 1913). Based on a genealogical principle, sagas in practice do not contain absolute chronological landmarks. The pivot of a narrative is the life of a hero or the rule of a king. Moreover, sources often contradict one another. The dating of events described in the sagas has been achieved mainly through their comparison with non-Scandinavian sources. The above features of saga as a genre preclude the isolated use of saga extracts. In historical research, fragments of saga texts should not be extrapolated; they must be studied in the fullest context possible, to make its place and role within a saga evident. Moreover, "literary analysis is a precondition for historical analysis if the sagas are to be used as a statement of reality" (Meulengracht Sørensen 1992, 34).⁸ Among saga data on early history most reliable are considered those based on the information of skaldic stanzas of the ninth through the eleventh centuries.⁹ It is also necessary to compare saga data with other materials: archaeological, numismatic, toponymic, as well as with those preserved in other Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian written sources. "The degree to which these sources are to be trusted or distrusted depends not only on the historian's own subjectivity, but also on the way he uses other available sources to understand the historical moment he is analyzing" (Boulhosa 2005, 41–42).

Sagas as a Source for the History of Eastern Europe and Old Rus'

Using sagas as a source for the early history of Rus' is impeded by a variety of circumstances. The first problem is the fact that saga authors had a one-sided interest

⁷ See also the *fortidssagaer*, telling of events between ca. 850 and 1100, and *oldtidssagaer*, referring to the time before ca. 850.

⁸ See also Patricia Boulhosa, who claims that "within the diversity of manuscript culture, the researcher must be aware that he has an almost endless choice of comparative material to hand" (Boulhosa 2005, 32).

⁹ Shami Ghosh, who admits that "the broad outlines of the sagas" are "not avoided" in "political histories" written by such historians as Sverre Bagge, Eric Christiansen, Claus Krag, and Kurt Helle, still believes that "until better methods have been found for determining the extent and nature of the independence of the poems from the prose, we cannot really claim that the narratives we write based on the verse have any greater claims to historical accuracy than the histories composed by the authors of the compendia" (Ghosh 2011, 99–100). This hypercritical attitude is likely to leave us with the absence of Old Norse sources before the twelfth century, but, as far as I know, historians are not in haste to work out any "better methods."

in their choice of events worth being described, so that “positive data” in the sagas pertained to Scandinavian countries only. The remoteness of Rus’ from Norway, and even more so from Iceland, made the process of bringing information about the events taking place in Eastern Europe to these lands close to impossible. The question concerning who bore this information is still open. The stay of Scandinavian kings, their bodyguards and their skalds in Rus’, as well as bilateral political, economic, trade, and other types of contact between Old Rus’ and Scandinavian countries, created the conditions for bringing the stories from north to south and from south to north, although some similar legends and motives could have appeared as a result of synchro-phased development of the early Russian and early Scandinavian societies. East European history is dealt with in the sagas only when it is necessary for the plot. Since sagas concentrated on Scandinavian history, their authors were attentive to Scandinavian geography, but when the action takes place somewhere outside Scandinavia, we can never be sure that the saga author had not used some conventional stereotyped place-names. One must also recognize the fact that social terminology in the sagas is mostly Scandinavian. We must be aware that stereotypes, normally used for the description of Scandinavian realities, were also applied to the East European material. All this makes the necessity of comparison with manifold additional source material still more essential.

About this Book

The length of this book forced me to make a serious selection of my material. As a result, the book falls into two completely different parts.

The image of Eastern Europe *in toto*, and of Old Rus’ in particular, which is discussed in part 1, can be called both historical and geographical. Here, an attempt is made through reading Old Norse texts to formulate the idea of the Scandinavian oecumene, to reconstruct a mental map of medieval Scandinavians, and to imagine the place of Eastern Europe on this mental map, to see Old Rus’—with its ways, rivers and towns—through the eyes of medieval Scandinavians. It is obvious that in search of geographic evidence it would be useless to confine oneself to geographical treatises only. On the one hand, there are not many of them (see Melnikova 1986; cf. Pritsak 1981, 503–50), on the other hand, to study spatial ideas, the spatial *imaginaire*,¹⁰ it is necessary to turn to sources that Jacques Le Goff has described as “les documents indirects, inconscients, ou involontaires” (Le Goff 1983, 813) (“indirect, unconscious, or involuntary documents”)—including works of literature, in our case to sagas. They provide rich material for the study of spatial ideas, but at the same time they pose difficult methodological questions: “how to understand geographical evidence and how to use indirect documents” (Michelet 2006, 32).

¹⁰ The term *l’imaginaire* in this scholarly context was introduced by Jacques Le Goff (1985); see also Michelet 2006.

Scandinavian Vikings became acquainted with the geography of Eastern Europe as a result of their first trips to the east,¹¹ although it is hardly possible to date this process with any precision.¹² The knowledge of rivers and their currents, location of settlements, the customs and traditions of the peoples inhabiting different parts of the waterways, and so on, was vitally important for the success of expeditions. This information was passed by word of mouth. As Gísli Sigurðsson notes rightly, “one of the functions of stories in an oral tradition, like those that undoubtedly stood behind the Icelandic sagas, is to preserve and pass on information about the outside world” (Gísli Sigurðsson 2015, 477). Numerous expeditions to and continuous stay in Old Rus’ of merchants and warriors who participated in the military enterprises of the Russian princes accumulated and enriched geographical information that started to serve as a background for stories of Viking activities in Eastern Europe and was even organized into more systematic descriptions—lists of rivers, towns and so on—which occur in later geographical treatises and sometimes in the sagas. This knowledge could not be acquired from books, so it definitely was the result of a living oral tradition.¹³ It is evident that old Scandinavian society had a fairly stable circle of ideas about Eastern Europe, reflected in skaldic poetry, runic inscriptions, sagas, chronicles, and geographical treatises. It should be noted that the extent of ethnic names and different place-names of the Eastern Baltic region, Old Rus’ and European north was considerably larger in the Scandinavian tradition than the information this tradition possessed about the countries of Western Europe, including England and France. To some extent this was a picture of the world of the time when the sources under consideration were being recorded, but there is no doubt that some background knowledge and general geographical ideas of the Viking Age have been preserved in it.

In part 2 the reader will find some information on the history of Russian–Norwegian political relations of the last third of the tenth and the first half of the eleventh century from saga stories about the stay in Rus’ of four Norwegian kings. Here the situation is much more complicated. Close contacts between Old Rus’ and Scandinavian countries in the tenth through the thirteenth centuries could not go unobserved by the sagas. The forms this information acquired were numerous, varying from detailed descriptions to mere mentions of some names or details. The Old Russian material of the sagas is distributed chronologically rather irregularly. It mostly refers to the tenth through the late eleventh century, the period of formation of a relatively united Old Russian state. Information preserved in the sagas concerns the reign of two princes, Vladimir Svyatoslavich, the

11 Why the Vikings first came to Eastern Europe is explained in the illuminating paper by Thomas Noonan (1986).

12 Still, there is a reliable chronological boundary, a *terminus ante quem*, for determining when Scandinavians had already acquired their knowledge of Rus’ geography. This is the year 839 of the *Annales Berthiniani*, offering the earliest evidence of Slavic–Scandinavian relations as already existing (see Lebedev 1985, 190).

13 Compare Gísli’s similar conclusions concerning the picture of Ireland and the British Isles in the sagas (Gísli Sigurðsson 2015, 488).

great prince of Kiev in 978–1015, and his son Yaroslav the Wise, the prince of Novgorod in 1010–1016 and the great prince of Kiev in 1016–1054. Sagas, despite their focus on genealogies, seem not to know the predecessors of Prince Vladimir and call him either “konungr Valdamarr,” or even “Valdamarr inn gamli” (“Valdamarr the Old”). Several saga narratives refer to the time earlier than the tenth century and relate Viking expeditions to the east, to the Baltic lands, and to the north, to the White Sea region. Finally, there are some mentions of the Russian princes and princesses in the genealogies of the Danish kings, as well as some information about the reign of the great prince Alexander Nevskiy (1250–1263). Each individual detail requires careful and meticulous verification. And, in the end, it turns out that the volume of reliable historical information in these sources relating to the depicted time is minimal.

To a large extent unique is the information from Old Norse sources on the matrimonial ties of the Russian princely family with the ruling houses of Scandinavia from the eleventh to the mid-twelfth century (see Figure 2 on p. 120). A number of such marriages are described in the sagas—to be more exact, seven—in the interval between 1019 and 1154. We learn from the sagas of two Swedish kings’ daughters who came to Rus’ and became Russian princesses, as well as of five Scandinavian queens of Russian origin. The marriages in question are those (1) of Yaroslav the Wise (the *Jarisleifr* of the sagas) to Ingigerðr, the daughter of Óláfr scenski (the Swedish) Eiríkrsson, king of the Swedes (1019); (2) of their daughter Elisabeth (*Ellisif*) to the future Norwegian king Haraldr inn harðráði Sigurðarson (ca. 1044/1045); (3) of Vladimir Monomakh’s son Mstislav (called by the sagas *Haraldr*) to Kristín, the daughter of Ingi Steinkelsson, king of the Swedes (ca. 1095); (4) of Mstislav-Haraldr’s daughter Málmfriðr to the Norwegian king Sigurðr Jórðsalafari Magnússon (ca. 1111) and (5) to the Danish king Eiríkr eimuni Eiríkrsson (1133); (6) of another of Mstislav-Haraldr’s daughters, Ingibjörg, to Eiríkr’s brother Knútr lavarðr Eiríkrsson (ca. 1117); and (7) of their son Valdemarr (Danish king Valdemar I) to Suffía, the daughter of Volodar’ Glebovich, prince of Minsk (1154) (see Pashuto 1968; Jackson 1982; Nazarenko 2001; Jackson 2008). Besides the Old Norse-Icelandic sources of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (such as *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* by Theodoricus monachus, *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum*, the *Legendary Saga of St. Óláfr*, *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, *Óláfs saga helga* and *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson, *Knýtlinga saga*, *Ágrip af sögu danakonunga*, and Icelandic annals), some of these marriages are mentioned in *Gesta hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* by Adam of Bremen (marriages 1 and 2 in my list), in *Genealogia regum Danorum* by Wilhelmus abbas (3—with a mistake—and 6); in *Historia ecclesiastica* by Orderic Vitalis (4); in the anonymous *Genealogia regum Danorum* (6); in *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus (6 7); in the Danish annals (7). However, none of these marriages is described (or even mentioned) in Old Russian sources. Only the *First Novgorodian Chronicle*, when it records the death of Mstislav’s wife in 1122, mentions her name as “Мъстиславляя Хръстина” (“M’stislavlyaya Khr’sтина”) (NPL 1950, 21, 205) (unlike the *Lavrent’evskaya* and *Ipat’evskaya chronicles* where she is called just “Mstislav’s princess”). This fact is remarkable: Old Russian princes had close relations with the royal representatives of Catholic countries—not only of Scandinavian kingdoms, but of Poland, Germany, and France—while the Orthodox church never approved of

those marriages (cf. Nazarenko 1999, 260–61). Nonetheless, “the record of dynastic marriages,” as Franklin and Shepard have noted, “shows that piety took second place to policy” (Franklin, Shepard 1996, 296). But that was in real life, while in chronicles, which, like all other literature, were in the hands of the clergy, traces of these marriages are rare; no doubt, the Russian chronicler often knew more than he could or wanted to share with his readers. Saga material on this matter deserves attention, but I do not include it in the book, since much has been written after my articles on this topic were published (see Nazarenko 2005, 2011; Litvina, Uspenskiy 2006, 2012; Dąbrowski 2008, 2015; Raffensperger 2010, 2016). Equally unique are saga data on the sojourn in Rus’ of the four Norwegian kings, the analysis of which I have chosen for part 2 of the book.

Some Conventions

The first convention—namely, the dating of sources—has been discussed above. I adhere to the traditional dating of skaldic poems, chronicles and sagas, and a corresponding chronological sequence of their origin, the latter confirmed by a relative unity of the toponymic nomenclature of runic inscriptions, skaldic strophes, and the early kings’ sagas (see chapter 2).

Another convention is also chronological; it is connected with the dates of the rule of Norwegian kings.¹⁴ Absolute dates do not exist; the chronology of the history of Norway up to 1000 is approximate. Icelandic annals, having based their chronology on Icelandic sagas, often disagree. Nevertheless, the dates of the annals are often used in saga editions and commentaries. Therefore, not forgetting the conventional nature of this assumption, I consider it possible to follow those scholars who accept the dating of *Annales Regii* in denoting the reigns of Norwegian kings.

The very “reign” of early kings is a complicated question. Thus, Claus Krag claims that such Norwegian kings as Óláfr Tryggvason, Óláfr Haraldsson, and Haraldr Sigurðarson were certainly not the descendants of the first Haraldr (the Fine-Haired), that a genealogical line coming from this legendary ruler is only the creation of medieval Norwegian historians who sought to represent the Norwegian kingdom as a hereditary possession, and that the realm of King Haraldr did not extend territorially beyond western Norway and in effect ceased to exist with the death of his grandson Haraldr gráfeldr (Grey-Cloak) ca. 975, which was the result of the restoration of the power of the Danish monarchy under King Haraldr Bluetooth (Krag 2003). Birgit and Peter Sawyer also consider the dynastic line coming from Haraldr the Fine-Haired as fictitious and claim Haraldr the Harsh Ruler to be the real founder of the dynasty of Norwegian kings (Sawyer, Sawyer 1996, 61). Sverrir Jakobsson also asserts that none of the sources contemporary to Haraldr the Fine-Haired sheds light on the personality or deeds of this ruler; that skaldic stanzas’ information is vague and unreliable, and their interpretation is based on the prose that accompanies them; he—just like Claus Krag—assesses Haraldr as a mythical

¹⁴ Cf. Andersson 2006, 2: “There should be no illusion, however, about the certainty of the dates given here.”

person (Sverrir Jakobsson 2002). At the very least, according to him, the real Haraldr and the saga character are far from each other. I will again walk here in the traditional footsteps and introduce the four kings within their imaginary family.

In order to avoid overloading the book with references to papers in Russian, I regularly refer readers to my papers that include vast bibliographical lists. In quoting saga texts, I give preference to *Íslensk fornrit* editions with normalized spelling. In other cases—like with *Flateyjarbók*—I reproduce the non-normalized texts of the corresponding editions. As far as the English translations are concerned, not being a native speaker, I tried, where possible, to use somebody else's translations, in rare cases with emendations concerning place-names (for instance, preferring *Garðar* to *Russia*).

The last, but not least, convention concerns the image on the front cover of the book. Art historians are prone to see in this painting by Nicholas Roerich of 1910 the figure of the Norwegian king Haraldr Sigurðarson at the moment of either his wooing the Russian princess Elisabeth, the daughter of Yaroslav the Wise, or his farewell to Elisabeth at the departure for his last battle. Not being able to say with certainty who the main characters of this painting are, I prefer sharing the art historians' view and seeing here a story told in the sagas—that of the romantic love of a Norwegian king towards a Russian princess—as illustrating the central topic of this book.

