

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.