

Ne tol'ko sagi... Rannyya istoriya Norvegii v srednevekovykh pamyatnikakh [Not only sagas: The Early History of Norway in medieval Monuments]. Introductions, translations, and comments by S. Yu. Agishev, I.I. Anikyeu, P.V. Lapo, and A. Yu Chernov. Edited by S. Yu. Agishev. Saint Petersburg: "Nauka", 2017. 469 pp.

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The interest towards sources on early Norwegian history is traditional for Russia, and Russian specialists on Viking and Medieval Norway, such as Mikhail Steblin-Kamensky, Aron Gurevich, Elena Mel'nikova and Tatyana Dzhakson are known both in Russia and abroad. However, these scholars have mainly focused on the sagas. As a result, Norwegian chronicles are less familiar to the Russian audience. The anthology "Not only sagas..." fills this gap.

The book consists of Russian translations of medieval Norwegian historical works, mostly written in Latin and Old Norse. It includes such masterpieces of medieval history writing as the anonymous chronicle *Historia Norwegie* and the work *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagensium* by Theodoric the Monk. The anthology also includes translations of the compendium known as *Ágrip af Nóregs konungasögum*, the account on the journey to the Promised Land, *De profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam*, and some smaller works.

Each translation is preceded by an introduction containing a description of the source and an overview of the scholarly discussions. The translators touch upon the major problems such as the date and place of composition and the targets of the author; alongside with that, they pay attention to particular issues, such as the debate on the time and place of Saint Olaf's baptism. The book has a general preface where the authors reflect on the methods of translation and the principles of transliteration.

Acknowledging the high quality of the book, I would like to express some criticism, however. Although the translations match a high level, some mistakes still occur. For example, on p. 127 we read: "Norway is an excessively vast country" ("Norvegiya – chrezmerno obshirnaya strana"). In fact, the medieval author does not proclaim that Norway is too big; he only says that it is a huge country – *regio vastissima*. On p. 136 the authors misinterpret the account of the death of king Dag. According to the translation, Dag was killed in a battle "when he attempted to avenge a tiny offence" ("kogda pytalsia otomstit' za nichtozhnyuyu obidu"). This is the way the

translators interpret the phrase *dum passeris iniurias vindicare conaretur*. However, the Latin text contains the construction *genitivus objectivus*, and the meaning is the following: “when he attempted to avenge an injury inflicted on a sparrow”. The *Ynglinga saga* tells that Dag understood the birds’ language and that he had a sparrow who told him many different things. When this sparrow was killed in Denmark, Dag took the field to avenge him.

Although the authors pay attention to the details of the texts translated, some interesting features have been omitted. Translating the phrase *Iunior vero Ricardus pater erat Willelmi Bastardi* (“Richard the Young was father to William the Bastard”) the authors stress the fact that this statement is wrong. Unfortunately, they do not mention the hypothetic reconstruction which is present in some editions (Storm 1880: 91; Ekrem & Mortensen 2003: 68): “Iunior vero Ricardus <habuit filium Robertum, qui> pater erat Willelmi Bastardi” (“Richard the Young had a son named Robert who was the father of William the Bastard”).

On pp. 112–113 the authors mention two manuscripts with excerpts from the *Historia Norwegie* which are preserved at the Royal Library (Stockholm) and at the State Archives of Sweden. Unfortunately, the authors do not pay attention to the fact that one of the extractions contains a corrupt text. The scribe’s mistakes gave birth to a peculiar Swedish narrative tradition regarding the Ynglinga kings. For instance, the Latin word *nanum* (‘a dwarf’) was mistakenly read as *manum* (‘the hand’), and the story of king Sveigðir who chased a dwarf was transformed into the story of king Sverker whose hand was stuck in the stone (see especially Munch 1850).

Throughout the book, the contributors punctually indicate their sources; yet there are some exceptions from this rule. On p. 114, commenting on the chronicle *Historia Norwegie*, the translators argue: “... it still remains uncertain when, by whom, for whom and on what purpose it was composed”. In fact, this is a slightly restyled quotation from Inger Ekrem: “Nevertheless it remains to be established when, why, for whom and by whom it was written” (see Ekrem 1998: 65, 49). The fact is that that the Russian translators have not indicated the author and the source.

On p. 112 the authors remark that judging from the text, *Historia Norwegie* should be quoted as *Ystoria Norwagensium*. The readers may assume that this is the authors’ own idea. Yet the conclusion mentioned was made by the Scandinavian scholars (Ekrem & Mortensen 2003: 8, 112 and 157); still, the authors of the anthology have not mentioned the predecessors in this case.

Some of the authors’ statements need correction or can be put into question. On p. 61 the authors counterpose the chronicles and the sagas, and declare that the chronicle writers realized the significance of their contribution as authors while the

narrators of the sagas were not aware of their individual authorship. These speculations are based on the ideas of Mikhail Steblin-Kamensky, the Russian specialist on Old Norse texts. However, as we all know, there are scholars who do not share Steblin-Kamensky's views concerning the sagas, and it is an obvious fact that at a number of sagas were texts composed by people who were aware of their role as authors.

On p. 150 the translators explain that Adam of Bremen must have interpreted the place name *Kvennland* as *Kvinnoland* (The Land of Women), and that he presented it as the land of amazons in his chronicle. This is a well-known hypothesis; however, the authors make a mistake when they present it as a proven fact. On p. 156 the authors state that the people whom the medieval historian described as the Finns dwelling in Norway must have been the Norwegian Saami. However, the author could mean both the Saami and the Norwegian Finns.

On p. 432 the authors mention the so-called götistic theory according to which the Swedes were regarded as the descendants of the Goths and were supposed to be superior to other peoples. The authors explain that the theory mentioned emerged in the sixteenth century. Yet it would be more accurate to say that it reached its golden age in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while in its essential traits it was established in the fifteenth century by the Swedish authors Nicolaus Ragvaldi, Ericus Olai and the anonymous author of the so-called *Prosaic Chronicle*.

Thus, the anthology *Not only sagas...*, is not free from drawbacks. Generally, however, it produces a positive impression. It must be acknowledged as a competent scholarly work and a valuable contribution to Russian studies of medieval Scandinavia.

Bibliography

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