

**EASTERN EUROPEAN ELEMENTS OF EGILS SAGA EINHENDA OK
ÁSMUNDAR BERSERKJABANA THROUGH THE PRISM OF GRECO-ROMAN,
AND GERMANIC MYTHS**

**LOS ELEMENTOS EUROPEOS OCCIDENTALES DE LA EGILS SAGA
EINHENDA OK ÁSMUNDAR BERSERKJABANA A TRAVÉS DEL PRISMA DE
LOS MITOS GRECORROMANOS Y GERMÁNICOS**

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Abstract: Fornaldarsögur is an interesting source for studying the historical memory of the Icelanders. These works absorbed cultural elements of different eras and inherited their own literary canon. The perception of Rus' and Eastern Europe is a good example to research such a canon. Information about these lands came to the North after centuries of intercultural communication between the Normans and the people of Eastern Europe. Moreover, the historical memory of the Scandinavians preserves the stories of the Great Migration era. These plots were directly related to this place, which gave it the characteristics of exceptional space. The involvement of the Scandinavian kingdoms in the European scientific tradition gave a new impetus to interest in these territories. European stories about Trojans, Scythians, Amazons, and other folks, penetrated Iceland in the 12th century. These stories have found fertile ground in the local tradition. That is how the myth of Eastern Europe was formed, which combined European and Germanic elements of cultural memory. Egils saga einhenda is an eloquent example of its genre. This work became the quintessence of these elements. The editor of this work skillfully combined the classic plots of legendary sagas and created his own image of the East. The purpose of this article is to describe Eastern European images and research their origin through the prism of the popular patterns and myths in the cultural memory of late medieval Iceland.

Keywords: Legendary sagas, Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana, Kievan Rus, Tartary

Resumen: Las sagas de los tiempos antiguos son una fuente importante para el estudio e la memoria histórica de los islandeses. Estas obras absorbieron elementos culturales de diferentes épocas y heredaron su propio canon literario. La concepción de Rusia y Europa Oriental es un buen ejemplo de la investigación de este canon. La información sobre estas tierras llegó al norte como resultado de siglos de comunicación intercultural entre los normandos y los pueblos de Europa del Este. Además, la memoria histórica de los escandinavos conserva las historias de la era de la Gran Migración. La implicación de los reinos

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escandinavos en la tradición científica europea dio un nuevo impulso al interés por estos territorios. En el siglo XII, las historias europeas sobre troyanos, escitas, Amazonas y otras criaturas y pueblos fantásticos penetraron en Islandia. Estas historias han encontrado un terreno fértil en la tradición local. Así se formó el mito de Europa del Este, que combinó mitos europeos y germánicos de la memoria cultural. Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana es un buen ejemplo de sagas legendarias. Esta obra se convirtió en la quintaesencia de estos elementos. El autor de esta obra combinó hábilmente las tramas clásicas de sagas legendarias y creó su propia imagen de Oriente. El estudio de esta imagen es el propósito de nuestro artículo. El objetivo de este artículo es la descripción de las imágenes de Europa Oriental, así como su investigación a través del prisma de los patrones y mitos populares en la memoria cultural de la Islandia bajomedieval.

Palabras clave: Sagas legendarias, Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana, Rus de Kiev, Tartaria.

Introduction

Collective ideas about the past are an important part of the functioning of any community. Their analysis helps historians not only to understand the nature of specific historical myths but also the community in which these myths were created. First of all, memorial clichés indicate the intellectual environment of the community. Through their prism, we can see intellectual influences, the development of scientific thought, the interaction of religions, etc. Also, the analysis of stereotypes related to the past gives us additional clues for understanding the political situation and how it changed under the influence of various factors.

At the current stage of the development of historical science, researchers actively use this approach to study medieval communities. They consider historical memory as a set of persistent representations related to real or mythologized experiences. The study of memory differs from the study of historicity. After all, memory is not so much about the past as it is, but about the construction of the past and its actualization. An important feature of these representations is that they are always closely related to contemporary events and help the community to actualize itself in the past. History was an essential tool for shaping the worldview of the community. It could justify the chosenness of certain communities, peoples, dynasties, or persons. It was used to form pre-modern identities or to explain the right to the territory. In addition, it was an important political and social tool that allowed individuals to increase their social importance. That is why historical memory is always a mirror of the

society in which it was created (Assmann, 2011b, pp. 5-6; Zelizer, 1995, pp. 217-218; Connerton, 1989, pp. 2-5).

Aleida Assmann in her study *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, shows that the memory of a community can easily change a person's memories. This phenomenon of our consciousness can be explained by the fact that the person's reproduction of the past depends on the present. The person rethinks his/her past experience under the influence of ideas that he/she learns in society. Thus, we cannot distinguish the past from the present, nor can we distinguish between individual and collective memory, because they complement each other by their nature (Assmann, 2011a, pp. 395-402).

The study of sagas from the perspective of historical memory analysis is particularly interesting, given the number and variety of these works. Icelanders were rightly considered the best history connoisseurs in the entire Northern World. This is indicated by the fact that Norwegian kings commissioned the writing of sagas about their ancestors from Icelandic authors, and the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus used Icelandic works during the creation of his chronicle *Gesta Danorum* (Meulengracht Sørensen, 2009, pp. 12-14). Separate genres such as *konungasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* were entirely devoted to events of the past and aimed to reinterpret key events in the history of the Nordic kingdoms.

Pernille Hermann is one of the main researchers of the collective memory of medieval Scandinavia. Referring to the "First Grammatical Treatise", the author expresses the thesis that sagas were a "storehouse of memories" for medieval Icelanders. The history of this country, especially its origins and legal system, was the basis of identity formation. Literature became a medium that allowed to cultivate this identity. For better memorization, it was put into verse form. Later, important texts began to be written down, which became a defense against oblivion (Hermann, 2009, Hermann, 2017).

The stories of legendary heroes and outstanding events of the past formed the basis of identity. This is evidenced by the huge number of copies of sagas that have come down to us from the Middle Ages. The fact that the noblest people of that time tried to be tangential to their creation means that the sagas were an important cultural capital. The authors formed and changed the memory of the past with the help of these texts. Thus, they could defend their own interests. The authors of that time were both the creators of the tradition and its product.

After all, it was the tradition that shaped the expectations from the text. However, the authors constantly developed this tradition, trying to adapt to constantly changing conditions (Mitchell, 2013; Andersson, 2008).

A large part of the legendary sagas contains information about the East. These territories became a kind of cliché, which was often used by contemporary authors to transfer the plot to distant exotic locations. These territories acquired a particularly fantastic image under the influence of intellectual traditions from continental Europe. Their descriptions contrasted strongly with the territories that contemporary authors identified as their own. At the same time, the territories to the east of the Baltic were part of the common Nordic space and were familiar to Scandinavians. This mainly concerns Rus', with which the Scandinavian kingdoms had close political and cultural ties. Analyzing these works, one gets the impression that Rus' is positioned as the eastern frontier of the Scandinavian world.

This question was explored in a recent publication by Hans Jacob Orning. Based on a manuscript that contained several legendary sagas, he examines the spatial perception of the lands east of Scandinavia. The historian starts from the position of the Nordic community, that is, the virtual space that united the intellectual environments of the Scandinavian kingdoms. The author shows that the Baltic was an important territory for this community, based on the late legendary sagas. In his opinion, the authors who described the adventures of the Vikings in Rus' extrapolated these images from their own experiences. The author connects the development of these plots with the foreign policy interests of the Swedish and Danish rulers in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 15th century (Orning, 2016).

One of the sagas analyzed by this author is *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*. This work is one of those that contributed to the formation of the peripheral territories' image of the East known for the late legendary sagas. This text paints a colorful picture of the Eastern Lands in the Viking Age. Rus' is just one of the kingdoms here, surrounded by many mysterious lands such as Húmland, Tattaríá, and Jötunheimr. At first glance, it may seem that the author simply selected well-known terms that could become scenery for a fairy tale. However, the experience of working with legendary sagas shows that even the most unrealistic episodes of these works had their meaning and were significant for the people of that time.



This article aims to explore the meaning of these episodes and their origins. I am going to examine the key patterns that have been used to portray Eastern Europe through the lens of the Nordic Community thesis. In addition, it is important for me to analyze the origin of the images of Rus' and other territories east of Scandinavia. To do this, I would like to analyze the intellectual culture that influenced the formation of collective ideas about the past and the politics of memory in Iceland during the late Middle Ages. This article does not claim to be exhaustive. Its main task is to outline the problem and determine further research prospects.

Rússía and Garðaríki - when different traditions met

Egils saga einhenda is a classic example of the legendary Icelandic saga. Its events, like in most similar works, take place in distant, semi-fictional lands. The story begins with usual geographical descriptions of the surroundings and the family tree of the characters. In general, the descriptions of Eastern Europe are not uncommon for sagas about ancient times, but this composition gives us atypical information. This saga begins its narrative with the story of Hertryggur, the king who governed the country of Rússía. The kingdom was located between Húnaland and Garðaríki (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda III. 3, 1830, s. 365). The uniqueness of this information is that Rússía, which should be identified with Rus', borders the country of the Huns and Garðaríki. The latter was a term used by Icelanders to refer to Rus'. This statement may surprise the reader because the creator of this saga claims that Rus' is a country bordering on Rus' and the land of the Huns.

The name Rússía to denote the state of Rus' is not typical for Icelandic writing. For the most part, when it came to these territories, the creators of the saga used the name Garðaríki. Less often, authors used the names Austrríki (Eastern State) or Austrveg (Eastern Way). The placename Rússía was inherent in Latin-language Scandinavian works or works of Latin origin. One striking example of such work is the anonymous *Historia Norwegiæ* (*Historia Norwegie*, 2006, p. 90) and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Oddr Snorrason (Джаксон, 2012, с. 136). The first work was written in Latin, the second was an Icelandic translation of the Latin original.



Icelandic geographical treatises is another group of works where we can find this name. This is a separate group of compositions that were translations of famous European works. The Icelanders adapted the content of these texts to their tradition. At the same time, they added local information which was not known to Europeans. In some cases, we can find remarks that show how European and Scandinavian scientific thought coexisted. For example, in the treatise *Her segir fra þui huersu lond Liggia i veroldenni* (What lands lie in the world), we see a similar clarification concerning the name of Rus'. The work declares that in Eastern Europe, there is the state of Rússía, which the Icelanders call Garðaríki (Мельникова, 1986, с. 62). This explanation indicates that the Icelanders identified these names. At least in some academic circles.

It is rather surprising that the editor of *Egils saga einhenda* distinguishes these concepts. However, this is not the unique case of such dualism. Another legendary saga, *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar*, describes how merchants from Rússía (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda III. 3, 1830, s. 529) came to King Eysteinn's court in Aldeigjuborg (northern Rus'). Based on this fact, Galina Glazyrina suggested that the author of the saga distinguishes the northern and southern parts of Rus', which is a certain historical period when it could have been different political formations (Глазырина, 1996, с. 103).

Information about the separation of different Rus' parts can be found in *the Gøngu-Hrólf's saga*. In this work on the territory of Rus', the editor separates Kænugarðar (Kyiv) and Hólmgarðaríki (Novgorod land). He adds that the latter is also called Garðaríki, and clarifies that there are Jötunheimr, Ermland, and many other countries nearby (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda III. 3, 1830, s. 362). Mentioned saga was one of the sources for writing *Egils saga einhenda*. Probably its creators tried to form a similar image of Rus' or used the same sources. Accordingly, Hólmgarðr became Garðaríki, and the Kyiv land got the Latin name Rússía. Also, we should not exclude possible confusions that naturally arose during the recording of different versions of sagas. Local names and toponyms have been often changed during the work with such texts.

Such terminological, chronological, and sometimes even logical inconsistencies are an integral feature of legendary sagas. They arose during the layering of different layers of culture and cultural memory, which rethought existing knowledge. Furthermore, sagas often

underwent a long evolution before reaching the pages of manuscripts. The comprehension of the origins of such semantic differences will help us to understand the nature of legendary sagas. Their research can provide hints about the place of Rus' in the collective ideas of medieval Icelanders. *Egils saga einhenda* is a perfect example of different stories formation in late legendary sagas. The episode with the confusion of Eastern European toponyms is interesting and eloquent. The study of its preconditions may point us to different patterns in the collective ideas of the people of that time.

This example is a good illustration of how Icelanders combined their concepts with European influences. The Norse tradition formed its canon connected with Rus' and the surrounding territories during the long years of intercultural communication between the Scandinavians and the peoples of Eastern Europe.

Modern researchers believe that the connections of the Scandinavians with the peoples of Eastern Europe should be traced back to the beginning of the Viking Age. It was at the end of the VIII century when the penetration of the Scandinavians into the lands of the Eastern Baltic is dated. These territories became the key to a developed system of river routes that connected the Nordic countries with the Arab East and Byzantium. Rus' became an important transit point that provided trade with an annual volume of millions of silver coins. Modern researchers can claim that the number of people who traveled to the East outweighed the number of travelers to the West based on archaeological findings (Noonan, 1986).

Surplus profits from Eastern trade stimulated the economic development of the Eastern European region. The place of trading factories began to be occupied by developed cities, where the Scandinavian component played a significant role. The famous Swedish archaeologist Ingmar Jansson proved that there were not only warriors and merchants among the Normans in Rus'. He singled out a stratum of the so-called Rural Vikings: people who moved to the East for agricultural colonization of the lands (Jansson, 1997). All these processes contributed to permanent intercultural communication (Makarov, 2021; Androshchuk, 2008; Shepard, 2008; Hedenstierna-Jonson, 2009, Duczko, 2004).

The rulers of Rus' were also most likely of Scandinavian origin and often turned to the Scandinavian Vikings for help in resolving internal conflicts. In addition, the leaders of Rus' were connected by matrimonial ties with Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian kings. This

information was well known to the Icelanders and preserved in the literature of that time (Jackson, 2019). Thanks to these connections, the cities of Rus' were an important intermediate point for northern mercenaries who served in the special Varangian Guard of the Byzantine emperor. All the listed factors influenced the fact that a lot of news about Rus' and Eastern Europe reached Iceland. This information was not only of geographical interest but directly related to the history of the Nordic kingdoms. That is why they became part of cultural memory. According to Sverrir Jakobsson, the service of Icelanders in the army of the Eastern Roman Empire greatly influenced the perception of the East and the Eastern images that we find in the Icelandic sagas (Jakobsson, 2006; Jakobsson, 2016).

In contrast to empirical knowledge, geographic information from continental European centers reached Iceland. Moreover, it was interpreted locally and often turned into myths. Instead, European literature formed another layer of knowledge that formed collective ideas about these territories. European works, according to Stefka G. Eriksen, had a significant influence on the formation of the Icelandic literary tradition. Icelandic students brought back to their homeland scientific approaches, trends, frameworks, and an academic worldview along with scientific knowledge and knowledge of Latin. It was this that influenced the final form of Icelandic literature, which in many respects imitated European. Along with this, historical myths that local authors have adapted to their history entered Iceland (Eriksen, 2016. p. 1-2).

In these cases, there is a certain symbolism, because Rus' could be both Gardariki and Russia. The first is a Scandinavian creation, part of its own cultural space and a generally known territory. The second is a borrowed Latin concept that was much less known and associated with the European tradition. The fact that these terms were distinguished is an example of how the author tried to understand and reconcile different traditions. The reasons for this step may have been hidden in previous versions of the work, or in the works that the editor used as a source for writing his own. Nevertheless, this case is interesting and calls for further research into how these two traditions coexisted in Icelandic literature.

Hunaland and implementation of Germanic myths in late sagas

We find interesting the study of another toponym - Húnalands. Typically, this term is used to indicate the land of the Huns. This title is mentioned only twice and contains almost no additional information. Its depiction next to Rus' looks even more strange. However, this idea was not unique. The usage of Germanic motifs was common in the Icelandic literature of that time (Guðmundsdóttir, 2012, p. 60-61). Narratives related to the Great Migration have become one of the pillars of the Scandinavian identity formation. Memory fragments of this period existed in Iceland in the form of epic poetry, which was later recorded as part of legendary sagas. Thanks to this we received key names, toponyms, and events of that time.

We can find hints of Germanic motifs at the beginning of the Egils saga. Princesses of Rus' who became wives of the main characters are mentioned in it. The names of the princesses were Brynhildr and Hildr and apparently, they were not chosen by chance (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda III. 3, 1830, s. 365). These names are of ancient Germanic origin and could be found in *Nibelungenlied*, *Völsunga saga*, *Poetic, and Prose Eddas*, *Völsunga saga*, *Darraðarljóð*, and other skaldic poems. The author appealed to notable stories and tried to meet the audience's expectations by using them. These names were well-known and associated with universal female images. They suited well for the legendary story that happened in an abstract place and time. Simultaneously the usage of these characters pointed out the Germanic myths and the ancient past.

The idea of the Huns' Land in the sagas was a marker of legendary times. The geographical dimension of this concept often varied from work to work or was even outside of the actual coordinates. The Icelandic geographical treatise *Her segir fra þui huersu lond Liggia i veroldenni* is the only work that contains a clear localization of this country. According to it, the land of the Goths and Huns was in the east of Poland, not far from Rus' (Мельникова, 1986, c.62). The location of this legendary country is not mentioned in other Icelandic works and can be localized intuitively, based on the different markers in the plot.

The kingdoms of the Goths and Huns also exist in the same dimension as Rus' in one edition of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*. In the mentioned saga the lands of the Huns are located on the banks of the river Danparstoðum (The Saga Of King Heidrek The Wise, 1960, p. 46). This is a rather archaic term indicating the antiquity of the saga's source. Researchers identify this

name with the Dnieper, but later the word fell into disuse and was replaced by the hydronym Nepr. The abbreviated toponym Danpar is also found in Poetic Edda. The editor uses it to describe the battlefields of the Goths and Huns (De Gamle Eddadigte, 1932, s. 306). Some researchers, such as O. Pritsak, see in these episodes the evidence of existing collective memory about the migration of Germanic tribes into the territory of contemporary Ukraine (Прицак, 1997, cc. 261-265). This idea was supported by Russian historian Elena Melnikova who proved that this myth penetrated Iceland with the Anglo-Saxon tradition (Мельникова, 2012, cc. 123-126). The *Hervarar saga* is an excellent example of combining specific fragments of Germanic poetics and late medieval scholarly tradition. The existing few versions of that composition show us how it could change under the influence of political and cultural conditions.

The kingdoms of the Goths and Huns became the personification of the fantastic-heroic past. It symbolized the homeland of the Scandinavians. They were literary constructs that the editor tried to actualize in his story. These plots are extremely important in terms of the formation of politics of memory. Scandinavian rulers considered themselves descendants of famous Germanic leaders, and historians of that time substantiated the historical origins of their contemporary kingdoms. The memory of the Germanic past made Eastern Europe a special place for Scandinavians. It added another magical peculiarity and made these lands the Home of the Gods. After all, the memory of the Migration Period directly correlated with stories about the migration of the gods. As a result, there is a mention of the geographical proximity of Rus' and the lands of the Huns in sagas and geographical treatises.

The myth of Tattaríá

Tattaríá is another important toponym of our saga. This toponym is found during the story of Ásmundar's travels and is not accompanied by any geographical details. We only know the names of the ruler of this kingdom Róðíán, and his son Aran. In addition, the editor notes that one of the heroes goes from Rus' to the east to visit his brother in Tattaríá. From this, we can assume that in the editor's mental map these lands were in the eastern part of the world. Another mention of these areas is found at the end of the saga. It points out that its heroes became rulers in various states, and Egill received Tattaríá in his possession.

The concept of Tattariá was borrowed from the European scientific tradition and successfully superimposed on the Greco-Roman picture of the world at that time. Just during the writing down of these sagas in the European tradition, the term Tattariá appeared to denote the lands of the Eurasian Steppe. This term became especially important with the arrival of the Genghis Khan horde. It became a symbol associated with the image of the "Wild East" (Connel, 2016, p. 105-109). Medieval Europeans treated Mongols as the horsemen of the apocalypse, who came to punish them for their sins.

Many legends have been created around the Tattariá people. Matthew Paris mentioned that they were imprisoned by Alexander the Great (Macedonian) in the Caspian mountains and had to be discharged only before the apocalypse (Westrem, 1998, p. 65-67). The use of the name Tattariá, which is derived from the ancient Greek word Tartarus, is noteworthy. People of that time used it to indicate a place in hell where sinners suffered. This concept was very apt to mark the most remote corners of the old-established oikumene.

The toponym Tattararíki used in the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* had the same meaning. The editor of this saga adds interesting details which can clarify some points. We can assume that this territory was also close to Rus' because the rulers of these states had territorial disputes. The text of this saga contains few details, but one thing could not escape our attention – it is the name of the ruler of this mysterious kingdom. This land was governed by King Menelaus, according to the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda III. 3, 1830, s. 284). Evidence of Menelaus, the Spartan king, was borrowed from European books on the Trojan War. The story of the destruction of Troy Dares Phrygius, which in Icelandic translation was called the *Trójumanna saga*, penetrated Iceland right at that moment. Interest in this book was part of a pan-European trend of fascination with the Trojan past (Faulkes, 2000, p. 97-100). Historians of that time often inserted the Trojan myth in their own *Origo Gentis*. The Scandinavians, who substantiated their Trojan origins, followed these tendencies. Snorri Sturluson noted that Odin was a Trojan and came from a Country of Turks (Snorri Sturluson *Edda Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 2005, p. 5-7). In one of the oldest Icelandic texts *Íslendingabók* we found a story about Yngvi, the founder of the Royal House of Ynglings. Similarly to Odin, he came from a land of the Turks identified with the Trojans (*Íslendingabók, Kristni saga. The book of the Icelanders, The story of the Conversion*, 2006, p. 14). One of the main goals of using Trojan

plots by Norse authors is to embed Scandinavian history into the context of pre-modern histories of other European states.

We can explain the mention of Menelaus, the ruler of the Tattararíki in the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* knowing this Greek perspective. In the *Egils saga einhenda* the king of this land is Róðían (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda III. 3, 1830, s. 375-376). This name is also unique and probably of Greek origin. Thus, the editors interpret European myths about Tartars and Trojans and embed them in their own mental map of the world. These stories found fertile soil in a rich complex of Scandinavian oral and written traditions. It completed an already formed picture of the world. Consequently, we can find a mixture of different lands and kingdoms that existed in the same dimension. *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* is a good example of such a mixture. It contains information about Kyiv and Novgorod lands that came from Scandinavian tradition. At the same time, it describes the Jötunheimr, a land from the old Germanic legends, and Tattararíki which became a Latin interpretation of Greco-Roman myth. This picture of the world was similar to *Egils saga einhenda*, where Garðaríki, Rus', Jötunheimr, as well as the countries of the Tartars and Huns existed nearby.

Border images of Eastern Europe

Egils saga einhenda forms the idea of the Rus' border. Saga's mental map is divided into real and virtual worlds, which should be correlated with the perception of alien and native areas. Its creators imagined territories inhabited by different people and supernatural creatures outside of their own community. This was an unknown and mysterious area, and Rus' was the eastern outpost of this world - beyond its borders began a different imagined place.

The Eastern area in this saga was occupied not only by legendary historical countries like Húmland, but often we can find territories with magical and mythical peculiarities. The daughters of the King of Rus' were kidnapped by fantastic beasts - a gigantic bird and a dog, according to the saga. Egill and Ásmundr, the main characters, decided to rescue the princesses. The basis of the storyline is their journey through legendary lands that begins after our heroes left Rússía. Jötunheimr is the endpoint of this trip. It was a land of jötnar - supernatural entities, usually identified with giants. The rescue of the sisters, which were

captured by giants, is the culmination of this saga. They came back to Rus' after and celebrated the wedding.

The editor of the saga does not give us precise coordinates of Jötunheimr, but from the context, we understand that it was a part of the eastern area. Stories about this region are taking their roots in Germanic mythological tales about the origin of the world and the gods. This virtual territory became a myth that had the meaning of an area inhabited by beings with supernatural abilities in general in the late Icelandic sagas. The inhabitants of this legendary kingdom were giants or sorcerers mostly. But they are not necessarily related to the specific type of creatures or people. The authors used this image when they wanted to distinguish between the real and the fantasy world.

A similar idea of Jötunheimr was used by the editor of the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. We can find geographical details about the land in this work. It is located near Kænugarðar and Hólmgarðaríki, which we can identify with Kyiv and Novgorod. A lot of glorious Vikings traveled there. Despite the proximity, this land was not a part of Rus' (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda III*. 3, 1830, s. 362). It was a place outside of the usual community and had indications of an alien area. We can assume that many Jötunheimr inhabitants were giants or descendants of giants based on the context. Also, it was a land rich in gold and precious stones. The same reflections were used in *Egils saga*, which also stressed the extraordinary wealth of these territories and the supernatural origin of its inhabitants.

The concept of the supernatural is essential for *fornaldarsögur*. It has different dimensions and was perceived as a necessary component of this genre. Margaret Clunies Ross pays attention to the importance of such plots from the perspective of tradition and the creation of narratives. She claims that even the most fantastic episodes had a sense and their own logic for the people of that time. Icelandic authors could use mythical motives when they struggled to explain something or did not have enough information. We should perceive it as a mirror reflecting the Icelandic society of that time. Medieval writers used this tool to explain the world through implicit comparison, hyperbolizing, and contrast. M. Clunie Ross mentioned that the concepts of *fornaldarsögur* were both alien and familiar, remote in time but simultaneously understandable for medieval people (Clunies Ross, 2009, pp. 320-323).

The geographical dimension of the supernatural and exotic fragments is eloquent from the perspective of a mental map. It can clarify how different territories were perceived in terms of the Nordic community. Hans Jacob Orning pointed out that giants and other monsters were markers of the periphery. Saga creators used ogres to outline territories outside of their community. According to this characteristic, Rus' is located on their eastern border. It was a part of a common cultural space. At the same time, the surrounding areas are depicted in a radically opposite way (Orning, 2016, p. 357).

The idea of Eastern Europe as a territory on the border of the mythical and real worlds is vividly illustrated in the works of famous Icelandic writer Snorri Sturluson. His collection *Heimskringla* greatly influenced the formation of legendary sagas. The first chapter of this work is the *Ynglinga saga*. It is a prologue to the history of Norwegian kings that contains important information about the genesis of Scandinavians and Norse royalty. There Snorri describes the beginning of the northern countries' history which is taken from the myths of the god Odin. Territories of Eastern Europe and Asia occupy a prominent place here because this is where the journey of Odin, the founder of the Scandinavian royal dynasties, began. The lands of Eastern Europe are called Svíþjóð hin mikla (Svitjod the Great). The home of Vanir, one of the groups of Germanic gods, was situated just here, in the north of the Black Sea. The description of these territories impresses with images of dragons, giants, and dwarfs. The author mentions amazing folks speaking different languages, as well as extreme climatic conditions (Snorri Sturluson *Heimskringla* volume 1. The beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason, 2011, p.6).

This description is very reminiscent of the testimony of European historians who were inspired by the works of ancient Greek and Roman authors. East was an exotic and sacred place for the Europeans of that time. As a result, the myth of the East appeared in Latin medieval culture. It stated that Asian lands were full of gold and precious stones, and mythical animals and human-like monsters guarded them. Paradise was in the eastern part of the earth according to the works of contemporary scientists. This myth became especially important in the popular culture of that time after the start of the Crusades. It caused not only interest in the literature about the East but also encouraged people to travel to these sacred lands.

Stories that mythologized the East penetrate Iceland together with the works of Isidore of Seville and Bede the Venerable. The Latin term “Scythia” in Icelandic translation turns out to be Great Svitjod. It became a symbol of the Latin perception of Eastern Europe. However, these myths were not absolutely new to local tradition. They were superimposed on their own knowledge and created a dualistic image of Eastern Europe. Such paradoxes are well traced in the already mentioned geographical treatises. For example, in the treatise *Her segir fra huui huersu lond Liggia i veroldenni* Eastern Europe is described as a known territory. The author adds a description of Rus’ and its largest cities. In other descriptions of oikumene, the Great Svitjod appears as a land inhabited by bizarre creatures and amazing people. The work which was named *Stjórn* mentions panottis - creatures with huge ears that covered the whole body. In addition, there lived ancropagi - chimeras that ate human bodies and drank their blood (Мельникова, 1986, с. 142-143). According to another treatise, Svitjod the Great was inhabited by white giants with golden eyes, as well as militant women living without men (Мельникова, 1986, с. 178).

The plots of legendary sagas were often based on fragments of their historical experience. The information about Rus' came to the North after numerous contacts between the Scandinavians and the peoples of Eastern Europe. Therefore, the authors often subconsciously reproduced the image of the dual perception of Eastern Europe, which combined their own and book knowledge borrowed from continental European authors. For example, *the Örvar-Odds saga* mentions journeys of the legendary Viking Arrow-Odd in the East. The plot of this work is reminiscent of *Egils saga einhenda*. The editor describes Rus’ as an ordinary kingdom and lists the principalities. However, the neighboring lands are depicted fantastically. The reader can find mentions of giants, pagan sorcerers, giant animals, and half-blood people born after the intercourse of humans and monsters. (*Örvar-Odds saga*, 1892, 187).

Related descriptions are found in *Yngvars saga víðfjrla*. The editor of this work describes the adventures of the Swedish Viking Yngvars in the eastern lands. The protagonist first arrives in Rus’ and becomes a guest of the local king Jarizleifr (Yaroslav the Wise). Then he travels to the surrounding lands and gets into mythical countries. This plot became an interpretation of a real expedition of Swedish Viking Yngvar into Eastern lands. The argument that confirms the historicity of this journey is the runestone inscriptions that mention people

who participated in Yngvar's expedition to the Eastern lands. The number of runic stones proves that it was a great campaign that became important from the perspective of collective memory. The reasons for this trip and its endpoint are still under discussion. J. Shepard and M. Larsson argued that Ingvar led the Varangian army to the territory of the Caucasus. They refer to the Georgian chronicle which indicated that 700 Varangians joined the troops of Georgian king Bagrat IV (Shepard, 1985, pp. 274-276). Other historians consider that the main goal of this journey was the Byzantine empire or territories of the Arabic caliphate near the Caspian Sea.

Nevertheless, these events took on new meanings in the interpretation of Icelandic writers. The creation of the main saga character was influenced by continental tradition and followed the image of European pilgrims. The depiction of the Eastern part of the world in the saga is similar to descriptions of *Egils saga einhenda*, *Ynglinga saga*, and geographical treatises. There is a mention here of dragons guarding treasures, giants cooking in silver cauldrons, pagan sorcerers, and incredibly rich marble cities (The Saga of Yngvar the Traveller). The editor used Greek names of cities such as Citópoli or Heliópóli, which had no real prototypes but formed associations with the East. These pilgrimage stories were skillfully intertwined with the memory of the real connection of Vikings with the lands of Eastern Europe. All these conditions influenced the image of Rus' as the frontier of the Nordic community outside of which an unknown magical world began.

Conclusion

The plots of *Egils saga einhenda* also followed the idea of Great Svitjod. They became the quintessence of European, Greco-Roman, and Germanic images that were popular in Iceland in the 13th-14th centuries. These images penetrated the composition from other legendary sagas, which became a source of inspiration for the editors. They received pre-treatment and partially lost their original meaning. That is why some things, at first glance, could contradict each other or may seem like coincidences or misunderstandings. For the creator, such references are an element that proves the truth of the plot. He adjusts these images and tries to justify the right of his own story to exist.

Eastern European plots were well known to the Scandinavians before the era of legendary sagas. We can find them in *konungassögur*, historical treatises, and even on runestones. However, their use became widespread in the 13th and 14th centuries when *fornaldarsögur* were most popular. During this period, a new literary canon was characterized by a special interest in fiction and the application of important historical markers. Such markers were often legendary leaders or significant events of the past. Eastern Europe becomes a key space for the embodiment of both vectors of this canon's development.

We can draw preliminary conclusions, based on the analysis of the saga and the intellectual environment in Iceland at that time:

- Much of the plot of *Egils saga einhenda* was borrowed from *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* or another text that was a common source for the two pieces.
- Eastern European elements of *Egils saga einhenda* largely resonate with other episodes of legendary sagas. They were created according to certain patterns that corresponded to the expectations of listeners and readers.
- The text imitates the Nordic community image in which Eastern Europe is a frontier on the border of its own space and foreign peripheral land. In this scheme, Rus' was a territory beyond which another world began. The descriptions of its inhabitants are one of the land characteristics outside of their own space. For the most part, they were different from ordinary people and had supernatural abilities or origins. In addition, statements of incredible riches often appear in descriptions of exotic lands.
- One of the factors that caused the dualistic image of Eastern Europe was the mutual influence of local and Scandinavian traditions. Eastern European plots became part of the collective memory of medieval Icelanders thanks to the close political and cultural relations between Rus' and the Scandinavian kingdoms. The Latin tradition formed a different, more sophisticated image of these territories, based on Greco-Roman plots.
- The appearance of such concepts as Russia and Tattarariki in the sagas can be explained by influences from continental Europe. These terms acquired a new meaning in the Icelandic tradition and were adapted to the local picture of

the world. Their use was aimed at imitating the *Origo Gentis* of the European model, which entailed delving into Greco-Roman plots.

- Greco-Roman concepts in their European interpretation combined with Scandinavian mythology and Germanic tribes' memory of the past in the territory of Eastern Europe contributed to the formation of this land's image as one that was both close and distant to the medieval Icelanders. It was a known part of its history and, at the same time, an unexplored sacred territory. This region was considered part of the Nordic community but was far enough to be a suitable location for the fairy-tale adventures of the legendary characters.

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