

Rus' and Scandinavia: the Orthodox–Latin Division in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and in Reality

by Tatjana N. Jackson

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the religious differences between Scandinavia and Rus' were of little importance for the Icelandic saga writers of the twelfth to the early thirteenth centuries, just as they were of little importance for the ruling dynasties in both Rus' and Scandinavian countries from the eleventh to the mid-twelfth centuries. A number of sagas style the Greek emperor as 'the throne king' and 'the head of Christendom', and they depict him as having the authority to appoint an individual as 'overseer and ruler of all the Kings in Russland and the whole realm of Garda'.¹ The sagas also describe how those Icelanders and Norwegians who had visited Greece preached Christianity in Eastern Europe, founded monasteries there and converted Rus' to Christianity in the late tenth century. In contrast to early Rus' sources, the sagas preserve information on Rus'-Scandinavian dynastic marriages of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Consequently, in the following discussion I will also consider the reliability of this data and the attitude to such marriages in early Rus' in light of the relationship between the Latin and Orthodox churches.

All of what we know of Old Norse-Icelandic literature was written (or at least written down) after the Great Schism of 1054,² but this event and its consequences leave practically no traces in the Icelandic sagas. In his paper entitled 'The Schism That Never Was', Sverrir Jakobsson attests to only one 'unambiguous mention of "the great schism" in medieval Icelandic sources', preserved in the saga of bishop Arni — *Arna saga biskups* — and in a number of annal entries from the year 1274.³ This is the story of the 'assembly in Lyon' where 'the Greeks had reverted to true Christianity, from the contentious position that they

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1 'sva sem foringi e(ðr) valldz maðr skipaðr yfir alla konungá Ruz landi ok i öllu Garða Riki', *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, Editiones Arnarnænar, ser. A, 1, ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1958), p. 300. The English translation is from *The Saga of King Olaf Tryggvason Who Reigned over Norway A. D. 995 to A. D. 1000*, trans. by J. Sephton (London: David Nutt, 1895), p.187.

2 See, for example, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica*, 45 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985).

3 Sverrir Jakobsson, 'The Schism That Never Was: Old Norse Views on Byzantium and Russia', *Byzantinoslavica: Revue internationale des Études Byzantines*, 66, 1–2 (2008), 173–88 (p. 175).

had temporarily adopted, on the wise counsel of Pope Gregory'.⁴ Consequently, Sverrir Jakobsson concludes, the Icelanders scarcely had much knowledge of the disagreement. Similarly — and with reference to Henrik Janson's dissertation⁵ — he asserts that Adam of Bremen also 'appears not to know of a great schism'.⁶ However, I doubt that this was the case with Icelandic saga authors; I would say rather that the disagreement was beyond the sphere of their interests, for sagas seldom go into details regarding religious matters. For instance, the sagas use the adjective *heiðinn* 'heathen' to describe the peoples living along the *Austrvegr*,⁷ the Muslims of the Volga Bulgaria region⁸ and those from the southern part of the Iberian peninsular.⁹

The case of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Odd Snorrason

Lars Lönnroth put forward a suggestion¹⁰ shared by other scholars,¹¹ that the celebration of Olaf Tryggvason (995–1000) by the monks Odd († 1200) and Gunnlaug († 1218 or 1219) was mainly the result of an Icelandic national interest in promoting the king who was responsible for the conversion of Iceland as being equal to King Olaf Haraldsson (1014–28) who was considered to have brought Christianity to Norway. The *fróðir menn* ('learned men') in Iceland were aware of the fact that Iceland had been converted during the time of Olaf Tryggvason (in the year 1000), which why in the late twelfth century 'a Latin biography was written in which Óláfr was pictured as a holy warrior and *rex iustus*, empowered by Divine Grace to destroy paganism in the northern countries and establish the Kingdom of God'.¹² Thus, in his *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, Odd Snorrason creates an image of a king who may rightly be called the apostle of the Northmen ('er at retto ma kallazt postoli Norðmanna').¹³

4 Sverrir Jakobsson, 'The Schism That Never Was', p. 175.

5 Henrik Janson, *Templum nobilissimum: Adam av Bremen, Uppsalatemplet och konfliktlinjerna i Europa kring år 1075* (Göteborg: Historiska institutionen i Göteborg, 1998), pp. 152–62.

6 Sverrir Jakobsson, 'The Schism That Never Was', p. 176.

7 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 3, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit, 28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1951), p. 403; and *Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4º*, ed. by Gustav Indrebø (Kristiania: Den Norske Historiske Kildeskriftkommission, 1920), p. 120.

8 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 2, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit, 27 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1945), p. 339.

9 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 3, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 242.

10 Lars Lönnroth, 'Studier i Olaf Tryggvasons saga', *Samlaren*, 84 (1963), 54–94 (p. 93).

11 Cf. Theodore M. Andersson, 'King's Sagas (*Konungasögur*)', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, pp. 197–238 (p. 226).

12 Lars Lönnroth, *European Sources of Icelandic Saga-Writing: An Essay Based on Previous Studies* (Stockholm, 1965), p. 17.

13 *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar av Oddr Snorrason munk*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Gad, 1932), p. 261 (chapter 78, redaction U).

As far as Olaf Tryggvason's missionary activity is concerned, not only Odd¹⁴ but also a number of other twelfth-century sources — *Noregs konunga tal*,¹⁵ *Ágrip af nóregskonunga sögum*,¹⁶ *Rekstefja* by Hallar-Steinn and the anonymous *Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar*¹⁷— depict Olaf as the king who converted several countries to Christianity, namely Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Shetland, Orkney and Faeroe Islands.¹⁸ The historical accuracy of this statement has been called into question by scholars, although its apparent factual shortcomings might be mitigated by Odd's own remark: 'Sua ær at virþa sem Olafur konungur hinn fyrri æfnaði oc setti grunduollinn cristinnar með sinu starfi. En hinn síþarri Olafur reisti ueggi' ('We may consider that the first King Olaf prepared and established the foundation of Christianity with his labor, but the latter Olaf raised the walls').¹⁹

Olaf is also over-generously credited by Odd with the conversion of Rus'. Although this story contradicts the information provided by many reliable historical sources and does not stand up to scrutiny, there is no doubt that Odd included descriptions of Olaf's involvement in the baptism of the Rus' prince and the conversion of the early Rus' people in order to glorify his hero.²⁰

According to Odd (as well as some other saga authors), Olaf Tryggvason was also an active participant in the conversion of Denmark. In historical fact, Harald Gormsson and the Danes were baptized under the influence of the German

14 In chapter 52 of redaction *A* we read: 'En þat er sagt at Olafur konungur T. s. cristnaði fim lond' ('we are told that King Olaf Tryggvason converted five countries'), however further six, but not five, countries are named: 'En þessi eru heiti landa þeira er hann cristnaði Noregr. Hialtland. Orkneyar. Færeyiar. Island. Grönland' ('These are the names of the lands he converted: Norway, Shetland, Orkney, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland'), *ibid.*, pp. 154–55. The English translation is from *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* by Oddr Snorrason, trans. by Theodore M. Andersson, *Islandica*, 52 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 101–2.

15 Five countries are mentioned (but not named) in the twelfth-century *Noregs konunga tal* that goes back to Sæmundr inn fróði's lost work: *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, B: 'Rettet text', 1: 800–1200 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1973), p. 578.

16 In *Ágrip af nóregskonunga sögum*, c. 1190, with which the translator of Odd's Latin text into Old Icelandic is supposed to have been familiar, it is said of Olaf that 'kristnaði hann fimm lönd: Nóreg ok Ísland ok Hjaltland, Orkneyjar ok it fimmta Færeyjar' ('he Christianised five countries: Norway, Iceland, Shetland, Orkney and the fifth, the Faeroes'), *Ágrip af nóregskonunga sögum*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson, *Íslenzka fornrit*, 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1985), pp. 3–54 (p. 22). The English translation is from *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. and trans. by M. J. Driscoll (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1995), p. 31.

17 In *Rekstefja* by Hallar-Steinn (*Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, B, 1, pp. 527–28) and in the anonymous *Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar* (attributed by Finnur Jónsson to Hallfréðr vandræðaskáld Óttarsson, *ibid.*, p. 570). Cf. Kate Heslop's edition <<http://www.skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php?if=default&table=poems&id=36>> [accessed 21 February 2011], wherein the following countries are enumerated: Iceland, Greenland, Norway, the Orkneys and the Shetland Islands.

18 See Tatjana N. Jackson, 'Norvezhskii konung Olaf Tryggvason – 'Apostol Russkikh'? (istochniko-vedcheskie zametki)', *Slavianovedenie*, 2000, no. 4, 46–48.

19 *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar av Oddr Snorrason munkr*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson p. 156; *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* by Oddr Snorrason, trans. by Andersson, p. 102.

20 See Tatjana N. Jackson, 'The Role of Óláfr Tryggvason in the Conversion of Russia', in *Three Studies on Vikings and Christianization*, ed. by Magnus Rindal, KULT's skriftserie, 28 (Oslo: University of Oslo, 1994), pp. 1–17.

Emperor Otto I (936–73), according to German, English and Danish chroniclers including Widukind, Saxo Grammaticus and Adam of Bremen. Furthermore, it is likely that Gunnlaug Leifsson and/or Odd Snorrason were familiar with a synopsis of Adam's description of the event. In spite of this, the saga authors permit a certain degree of anachronism, since in the sagas Otto has Olaf Tryggvason to thank for his victory over the Danes. Since Olaf lived from *c.* 965 to *c.* 1000, it is obvious that the Old Norse-Icelandic sources have replaced Otto I with Otto II (973–83) or even Otto III (983–1002). The main requirement for the Emperor is that he must be a contemporary of Olaf Tryggvason, so that this Otto can defeat the Danes following Olaf's advice and with God's help.²¹

Yet how does Odd describe Olaf's own path to God? According to Odd (chapter 13), when Olaf was in Rus' he heard a voice speaking to him in a vision. The voice told him to go to Greece: 'and there the name of the Lord your God will be made known to you. And if you obey His commandments, you will have eternal life and bliss. When you have the true belief, you will turn many others away from the error and toward salvation, for God has assigned you to convert many peoples to him'.²² So Olaf went to Greece, and he met there 'excellent and devout teachers', and they 'taught him the name of the Lord Jesus Christ', and instructed him in the true faith. There in Greece Olaf received his *prima signatio*.²³ After that, he returned to Rus' and directed the Rus' prince and all his people towards Almighty God, before departing to visit a prophet 'on a certain island called Scilly, not far from Ireland'.²⁴ At that time and in that place he was sanctified with holy baptism, 'and in answer to his prayers he was enabled by God to become the enlightener of many minds'.²⁵

We can look at this text in three different ways. Firstly, we might conclude that, although the saga was written in around 1180–1200 (i.e. nearly a century and a half after 1054),²⁶ it does not differentiate between the Greek and the Irish preachers, demonstrating that, in the eyes of Odd and his audience, the 'Northern' and the 'Eastern' religions had the same roots in Greece. Even when describing Olaf's possible life after the battle of Svold, Odd locates him in a 'munclifi i Girlandi eða Syrlandi' ('a monastery in Greece or Syria').²⁷ Secondly, we might note that, according to Odd, Greece is only the place of Olaf's *prima signatio*, for he was

21 For more information, see Tatjana N. Jackson, 'The Fantastic in the Kings' Sagas', in *The Fantastic in Old Norse / Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of The Thirteenth International Saga Conference*, ed. by John McKinnell and others (Durham: Durham University, 2006), 1, pp. 426–34.

22 *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason by Oddr Snorrason*, trans. by Andersson, p. 54.

23 *Ibidem*.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

26 Theodore M. Andersson, 'Introduction', in *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason by Oddr Snorrason*, trans. by Andersson, pp. 1–27 (p. 4).

27 *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar av Oddr Snorrason munkr*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, p. 242; *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason by Oddr Snorrason*, trans. by Andersson, p. 136.

fully baptised in Ireland, thus placing this Catholic country above Greece from the point of view of religious concernment. Thirdly, it is possible that Odd and his audience were well aware of the fact that Olaf Tryggvason had lived before the Great Schism, which is precisely why Odd divided Olaf's baptism between Greece and Ireland and made him the enlightener of both the northern peoples and Rus'. However, only the first hypothesis seems likely, as, judging from the other sagas that we now turn to, the separation of the Eastern and Western churches was of no concern to the Icelandic saga authors, who traditionally lived in an indivisible Christian world.

Sagas about the far-travellers

One additional saga is ascribed to Odd Snorrason, and this is the saga of Yngvar the Far-Traveller (*Yngvars saga víðförla*). Marina Mundt has highlighted the fact that there are five characters in the sagas nicknamed 'far-travellers', and all of them travelled through Rus'.²⁸ They are: Yngvar the hero of *Yngvars saga víðförla*,²⁹ Eirik of *Eiriks saga víðförla*,³⁰ Thorvald of *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla*³¹ and two less important figures, Brand in *Kristni saga*³² and Arrow-Odd in *Ørvarr-Odds saga*.³³ Three long narratives about the far-travellers (two sagas and a *þáttur*) were written down even later than Odd's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. Odd wrote *Yngvars saga víðförla* in Latin in the last decades of the twelfth century, while in the thirteenth century this original was translated into Icelandic and heavily reworked on the basis of oral traditions that had developed in Sweden after the unsuccessful end of Yngvar's campaign.³⁴ *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla* is thought to have been written by another monk in the Thingeyrar monastery, Gunnlaug Leifsson, in around 1200. The *þáttur* is preserved in three redactions of the text written before 1250; its fourth redaction is found in *Kristni saga* from the thirteenth century.³⁵

28 Marina Mundt, 'Oriental Pictures in the Old Norse Legendary Sagas', in *Proceedings of the 33rd International Congress of Asian and North African Studies, Toronto, August 19–25, 1990* (Queenston, Ontario: Edwin Mellen, 1992), pp. 208–14 (p. 213).

29 *Yngvars saga víðförla jámte ett bihang om Ingvarsinskrifterna*, ed. by Emil Olson (Copenhagen: Møller, 1912).

30 *Eiriks saga víðförla*, ed. by Helle Jensen, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ, ser. B, 29 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1983). Only two manuscripts (B and C) out of four mention Eirik's travels through Rus', but they are considered by the publisher to have been the older ones (*ibid.*, pp. 7–9).

31 *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla*, in *Biskupa sögur I*, ed. by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson and others, Íslenzk fornrit, 15 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2003), pp. 49–100.

32 *Kristni saga*, in *Biskupa sögur I*, pp. 1–48.

33 *Ørvarr-Odds saga*, ed. by R. C. Boer (Leiden: Brill, 1888).

34 Galina Glazyrina, 'The Viking Age and the Crusades Era in *Yngvars saga víðförla*', in *Sagas and Societies: International Conference at Borgarnes, Iceland, September 5–9, 2002*, <http://tobias-lib.uni-tuebingen.de/volltexte/2004/1068/pdf/14_gal~1.pdf> [accessed 23 February 2011]; and ead., 'Put' na vostok – put' k khristianskomu spaseniiu: Siuzhety íslandskikh sag o skandinavakh-puteshestvennikakh', in *Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy, 2009 god* (Moscow: Indrik, 2010), pp. 384–404 (pp. 391–95).

35 Glazyrina, 'Put' na vostok', pp. 395–402.

Additionally, *Eiríks saga víðförla* was written probably around 1300.³⁶ All these texts have been preserved in still later manuscripts.

The presence of such figures in the sagas invites a number of questions. What kind of travellers are they? Where and why are they travelling? *Yngvars saga* is based on a historical campaign dating to the early eleventh century that is also reflected in around thirty runic inscriptions on memorial stones erected in Sweden, mostly in Södermanland and Uppland.³⁷ *Þorvalds þáttur* is also based on real historical facts concerning the activities of the first missionaries to Iceland in the 980s, one of them (Thorvald) ending his days in a monastery that he founded in Greece or Rus'.³⁸ *Eiríks saga* is different, more a literary fabrication than a reflection of reality, for its hero, the son of King Thrand of Thrandheim, travels in search of the heathen 'Ódáins akr' ('pasture of immortality').³⁹ Galina Glazyrina has argued convincingly that these three texts are united by the fact that their heroes (the Swede, the Icelander and the Norwegian) are anxious to save their souls, an undertaking that they accomplish through their trips to the Eastern part of the world. Since this matter is discussed in several sagas from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it is possible that the idea of achieving salvation by travelling to the 'East' via Rus' occupied a certain place in the collective consciousness of medieval Icelandic society during this period.⁴⁰

Another question to consider is: where specifically within the Eastern part of the world did these characters travel to? Ingvar went to *Garðaríki* (Rus') and further into the *Austrhálf*a (the Eastern part of the world), as did his son Svein after him. From a geographical perspective it is not possible to identify their route with any certainty; the saga states that they traveled from *Garðaríki* down the Great River, and although several scholars have suggested possible candidates for this river, none of these have proved conclusive.⁴¹ Thorvald went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Byzantium, and from there to Rus', where he ended his life in a

36 Glazyrina, 'Put' na vostok', pp. 402–4.

37 Elena A. Melnikova, 'Pohod Ingvara v shvedskikh runicheskikh nadpisiakh', in *Saga ob Ingvare Puteshestvennike: Tekst, perevod, kommentarii*, ed. by Galina V. Glazyrina (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2002), pp. 168–90.

38 The missionary activities of the *þáttur*'s main character Thorvald Kodransson and the Saxon bishop Fridrek are also described in Ari Thorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* and in *Landnámabók*, *Grönlendinga saga* and *Grettis saga*. The dates when Thorvald lived are difficult to ascertain, but it seems that he started preaching Christianity in Iceland in around 981 and left the country in 985. See *Priadi istorii: Islandskie sagi o Drevnei Rusi i Skandinavii*, trans. by I. B. Gubanov and others (Moscow: Vodolei Publishers, 2008), pp. 167–92 and 221–22.

39 See Galina V. Glazyrina, 'V poiskakh raia: prostranstvo v Sage ob Eireke Puteshestvennike', in *Vostochnaia Evropa v drevnosti i srednevekovie, XVIII Chteniia pamiati ... V. T. Pashuto* (Moscow: Institut vseobshchei istorii RAN, 2008), pp. 26–32.

40 Glazyrina, 'Put' na vostok', p. 404.

41 For more information see Tatjana N. Jackson, 'Tri reki tekut s vostoka cherez Gardariki, i samaia bolshaia ta, chto nakhoditsia posredine', in *Russkaia reka: Rechnye puti Vostochnoi Evropy v antichnoi srednevekovoi geografii*, ed. by Tatjana N. Jackson and others (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kultur, 2007), pp. 316–25.

monastery. Eirik journeyed to Constantinople, and from there continues his voyage further East.

Furthermore, were these far-travellers baptized before, during or after their eastern voyages? In the case of Ingvar this issue is clouded by another uncertainty: the origin of Ingvar and Svein's Christian piety. There is not a word in the saga to indicate how and where they were baptized, and the only hint might be in the description of Yngvar's departure on an expedition from Rus', where 'a bishop consecrated the steel and flint for him'.⁴² This may perhaps suggest that Yngvar was in fact baptized in Rus'. In the case of the other far-travellers, Thorvald had been baptized before his pilgrimage by the Saxon bishop Fridrek, and together they tried to bring the true faith to the Icelanders. Eirik adopted Christianity in Constantinople, after putting his questions to the Emperor and receiving all the answers necessary to satisfy him.

Miklagarðskeisari

The latter two texts (*Þorvalds þáttr* and *Eiríks saga*) introduce the *Miklagarðskeisari*, the Emperor of Constantinople. In the context of the current discussion, his role is of particular interest. If Olaf Tryggvason, according to Odd, went to Greece to meet 'excellent and devout teachers' and 'an excellent bishop' who could 'administer holy baptism, which he had long desired',⁴³ then it is significant that in *Eiríks saga* the instructor in the true faith is the Emperor himself. As Sverrir Jakobsson puts it, 'he is a fully-fledged Christian *doctor* or *didaskalos*, who instructs the young Nordic prince in the fundamentals of Christianity. [...] A Nordic man is thus made to seek his education about the Christian world view in Byzantium'.⁴⁴ On the one hand, it seems that the educated clerics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries — which the saga authors undoubtedly were — recognized the significance of Eastern Christianity. Yet on the other hand, the Emperor is portrayed by *Eiríks saga* as a person of authority in the distant Eastern part of the world: travellers receive from him a kind of charter or travel document, written in many languages and sealed by the Emperor himself, while in *Þorvalds þáttr* and *Kristni saga* the Emperor has the authority to appoint Thorvald as 'overseer and ruler of all the Kings in Rusland and the whole realm of Garða'.⁴⁵

In the introduction to his edition of *Kristni saga* and *Þorvalds þáttr*, Bernhard Kahle describes the latter story as a fable,⁴⁶ while elsewhere Hilda Ellis Davidson suggests that Emperor Basil II (976–1025) could have sent Thorvald to Rus' as

42 The English translation is from *Vikings in Russia: Yngvar's Saga and Eymund's Saga*, trans. by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), pp. 44–68 (p. 51).

43 *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason by Oddr Snorrason*, trans. by Andersson, p. 54.

44 Sverrir Jakobsson, 'The Schism That Never Was', p. 178.

45 See note 1 above.

46 *Kristni saga*, ed. by B. Kahle, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek, 11 (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1905), p. xviii.

a missionary.⁴⁷ Siân Grønlie supports the theory put forward by Sigfús Blöndal and Benedikt Benedikz that ‘if there is any historical reality behind all this, then Thorvald was perhaps among the clerics who arrived in Rus’ after the marriage of Princess Anna, sister of Basil II and Constantine VIII, to Volodimer of Kiev in 989’.⁴⁸ No matter how much reality is reflected in the story of Thorvald, what is important for us is that it was written down in around 1200 at the earliest and has been preserved in a number of manuscripts dating to the fourteenth century, which means that, returning to Sverrir Jakobsson, ‘at the end of the 14th century Icelanders still looked upon the Byzantine Emperor as the “leader of all Christendom” who was in a position to grant Nordic men worldly and spiritual eminence’.⁴⁹

Sverrir Jakobsson cites an instance from another sub-genre of saga literature, the saga of Charlemagne (*Karlamagnús saga*), a collection of Old Norse prose translations of texts about Charlemagne, most of them Old French *chansons de geste* dating to the thirteenth century. This chivalric romance describes Charlemagne’s crusade to the Holy Land where he fights by the Byzantine Emperor’s side. When he asks the Emperor for permission to travel home, the Emperor instead offers to give him Constantinople and bestow upon him the privilege of becoming a royal vassal. Charlemagne’s answer is what attracts our attention, for he responds: ‘God forbid me to do that because you are Emperor and lord of all Christendom’.⁵⁰ Again, therefore, the saga emphasizes the superiority of the Greek Emperor, not only in terms of his political authority but also his position as a religious leader.

‘Personal associations with Byzantine emperors’

Using material from the *riddarasögur*, Geraldine Barnes has demonstrated that, after the Schism, Icelanders continued to recognize the Byzantine emperor as the undisputed ruler of Christendom. In her opinion, ‘key factors were the apparent irrelevance of the Schism, the cultivation by Norwegian kings of personal associations with Byzantine emperors, and the prestige associated with service in the Varangian Guard’.⁵¹ To illustrate these ‘personal associations’ we should men-

47 Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Viking Road to Byzantium* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976), pp. 254–55.

48 *Íslendingabók, Kristnisaga: The Book of the Icelanders, the Story of the Conversion*, trans. by Siân Grønlie (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1996), p. 69, note 90; cf. Sigfús Blöndal and Benedikt S. Benedikz, *The Varangians of Byzantium: An Aspect of Byzantine Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 197–99.

49 Sverrir Jakobsson, ‘The Schism That Never Was’, p. 182.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 178–79. See *Karlamagnús saga. Branches I, III, VII et IX*, ed. by Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1980), p. 95; the translation is that of Sverrir Jakobsson.

51 Geraldine Barnes, ‘Byzantium in the *riddarasögur*’, in *Á austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia: Preprint Papers of The 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9th–15th August 2009*, ed. by Agneta Ney and others (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), 1, pp. 92–98. A somewhat similar idea has been formulated by John Lind, who states: ‘the split between Rome and Constantinople, which culminated in 1054 and was aggravated during the crusades, did not yet lead to a similar split between the churches of Scandinavia and Rus’ [...] This friendly attitude towards the west may well

tion the descriptions in the Old Norse sources of two prominent pilgrims who visited, in addition to Rome and Jerusalem, Constantinople. According to *Knyttlinga saga*, the Danish king Eirik Sveinsson the Good (1095–1103) visited by foot the holy cities of Rome, Venice and Bari in the early part of his reign, and at the end of his days decided to go to Jerusalem, although he only got as far as Cyprus before he ‘contracted a sickness which led to his death’.⁵² But his road this time went through Constantinople, and there he was given ‘a great welcome’ by ‘Alexios, King of the Greeks’ who offered him ‘a choice of gifts’, and finally presented him with ‘half a ton of gold’, ‘clothes that he himself had worn, of great value, as well as fourteen warships, and many other princely gifts’.⁵³ The veracity of this encounter is made evident for us by the saga’s inclusion of the skaldic poem *Eiriksdrapa*, composed by Markus Skeggjason in 1104.⁵⁴ *Knyttlinga saga* notes that ‘this same King Alexios of the Greeks later gave Sigurd the Crusader, King of Norway, a similar choice’, and he chose the Padreim Games.⁵⁵ Three large compendia of the Kings’ sagas (*Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*) written down a century after Sigurd’s death give a detailed description of his trip to the Holy Land (which can be dated to 1110), and also mention his visit, on the way back, to Constantinople. There he was met as an honourable guest by the emperor, to whom he gave all his ships, and the gilded dragon heads from the ship that he had steered were set on St Peter’s Church in Constantinople. Once again, the information provided by the saga is based on the poems written by the contemporaries of the events described: the skalds Thórarinn *stutfeldr*, Einarr Skúlason and Halldórr *skvaldri*.⁵⁶ Scholars have stressed the intergovernmental nature of these two trips, suggesting that rather than being private enterprises undertaken by individuals, the trips were conducted on a state level with the backing of the highest

reflect the unbroken traffic of Scandinavian Varangians along the Rus rivers to Constantinople, which we have seen continued long after the Viking Age and did not finish before 1204, at the earliest’, John Lind, ‘The Importance of Varangian Traditions for East-West Collaboration and Confrontation in the 12th–13th centuries’, in *Expansion – Integration? Danish-Baltic contacts 1147–1410 A. D.*, ed. by Birgitte Fløe Jensen and Dorthe Wille Jørgensen (Vordingborg: Narayana Press, 2009), pp. 27–37 (p. 34). I would add to this ‘Varangian traffic to Constantinople’ also trade traffic, polyethnic trade and handicraft settlements on these river routes, where there were all necessary conditions for a sojourn of numerous ethnic and confessional groups of people. Correspondingly, these contacts were part of a day-to-day life of tradesmen, warriors and other travellers, and the details were of no interest for the sagamen.

52 *Knyttlinga saga*, ed. by Bjarni Guðnason, Íslenzk fornrit, 35 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1982), pp. 93–321 (pp. 235–39); The English translation is from *Knyttlinga Saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark*, trans. by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), p. 122.

53 *Knyttlinga Saga*, trans. by Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, pp. 121–22.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

56 *Morkinskinna*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: J. Jørgensen & Co, 1932), pp. 331–37; *Fagrskinna. Noregs konunga tal*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1985), pp. 57–373 (pp. 319–20); and Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 3, pp. 249–54.

authorities.⁵⁷ Consequently, if these far-travellers were acting as representatives of their country rather than autonomous adventurers, it seems likely that in the early twelfth century religious differences did not hinder wider political contacts.

Matrimonial ties

A good illustration of these strong political contacts is the matrimonial ties of the Rus' princely family with the ruling houses of Scandinavia from the eleventh to the mid-twelfth century. Seven such alliances are described in the sagas, taking place between the years 1019 and 1154. We learn from the Norse-Icelandic sources of two Swedish kings' daughters who came to Rus' and became Rus' princesses, as well as of five Scandinavian queens of Rus' origin. The marriages were of: (1) Iaroslav the Wise (*Jarizleifr* in the sagas) to Ingigerd, the daughter of Olaf *sænski* Eiriksson, king of the Swedes (1019), (2) their daughter Elisabeth (*Ellisif*) to the future Norwegian king Harald *inn harðráði* Sigurdarson (c. 1044), (3) Volodimer Monomakh's son Mstislav (called by the sagas *Haraldr*) to Kristin, the daughter of Ingi Steinkelsson, king of the Swedes (c. 1095), (4) Mstislav-Harald's daughter Malmfrid first to the Norwegian king Sigurd *Jórsalafri* Magnusson (c. 1111), and afterwards to (5) the Danish king Eirik *eimuni* Eiriksson (1133), (6) another of Mstislav-Harald's daughters, Ingibjorg (Engilborg), to Eirik's brother Knut *lavarðr* Eiriksson (c. 1117) and (7) their son Valdemar the Great to Sophia, the daughter of Volodar Glebovich, prince of Minsk (1154).⁵⁸

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 Olaf Haraldsson*, *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, *Óláfs saga Haraldssona* and *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson, *Knýtlinga saga*, *Ágrip af sögu danakonunga* and the Icelandic annals), some of these marriages are mentioned in other sources from further afield. Marriages 1 and 2 — according to my list — appear in *Gesta Hamma-burgensis ecclesiae pontificum* by Adam of Bremen, marriages 3 and 6 (the former recorded with an error) are mentioned in Abbot William's *Genealogia regum Danorum*, marriage 4 is featured in the *Historia ecclesiastica* by Ordericus Vitalis, while marriage 6 is in the anonymous *Genealogia Regum Danorum*. This

57 See, for instance, Elena A. Melnikova, 'Baltiiskaia politika Iaroslava Mudrogo', in *Iaroslav Mudryi i ego épokha* (Moscow: Indrik, 2008), pp. 78–133.

58 See Vladimir T. Pashuto, *Vneshniaia politika Drevnei Rusi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1968); Tatjana N. Jackson, 'Islandskie korolevskie sagi o russko-skandinavskikh matrimonialnykh svyaziakh', *Skandinavskii sbornik*, 27 (1982), 107–15; Natalia I. Shchhaveleva, 'Polki – zheny russkikh kniazéi (XI – seredina XIII v.)', in *Drevneishie gosudarstva na territorii SSSR, 1987 god* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), pp. 50–58; Aleksandr V. Nazarenko, *Drevniaia Rus' na mezhdunarodnykh putiakh: Mezhdistsiplinarnye ocherki kulturnykh, torgovykh, politicheskikh svyazei IX–XII vekov* (Moscow: Iazyki russkoï kul'tury, 2001); and Tatjana N. Jackson, 'Riurikovichi i Skandinaviia', in *Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy, 2006 god* (Moscow: Indrik, 2008), pp. 203–27.

same marriage appears in *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus, while both Saxo and the Danish annals include information on marriage 7. However, none of these marriages is even mentioned in early Rus' sources. Only the *First Novgorod Chronicle*, when it records the death of Mstislav's wife in 1122, mentions her name as 'Мъстиславляя Хръстина' ('Mstislav's Kristin')⁵⁹ (unlike the *Lavrentevskaia* and *Ipatevskaiia Chronicles* where she is referred to only as 'Mstislav's princess').⁶⁰ This fact is significant, for while early Rus' princes clearly formed matrimonial alliances with the royal representatives from Catholic countries — not only the Scandinavian kingdoms, but also Poland, Germany, Czechia and France — the Orthodox church never approved of such marriages.⁶¹ The Kievan Metropolitan John II in the 1080s even insisted that it was 'unworthy and improper' for an Orthodox prince to give his daughter to a Latin Christian in marriage.⁶² However 'the record of dynastic marriages' — as Franklin and Shepard have noted — 'shows that piety took second place to policy'.⁶³ Nevertheless, when it came to the official recording of events in the chronicles, there were rarely traces of such marriages, for the chronicles, like many types of literature, were in fact in the hands of the clergy; no doubt the Rus' chroniclers often knew more than they were willing to share with their readers.

As Aleksandr Nazarenko demonstrates,⁶⁴ the specific character of this prohibition is easy to explain in light of a condition written into a marriage treaty from 1495, when Elena, daughter of Ivan III — the grand prince of Moscow and the ruler of all Rus' — was given in marriage to Alexander, the grand prince of Lithuania. The condition was that Elena should neither be proselytized nor forced to become a Catholic, but rather provided with everything necessary to practice her Orthodox faith comprehensively. According to Sigismund von Herberstein, the Lithuanians took it upon themselves to build Elena Ivanovna an Orthodox church within the fortress of Vilno, and allowed the bride to be accompanied by a number of women who shared the same beliefs. This was the practice in the late fifteenth century, but in the eleventh and twelfth centuries no special churches were built for the newly arrived brides, and the Rus' wives of the Latin husbands (like the

59 *Novgorodskaiia pervaiia letopis' starshego i mladshhego izvodov*, ed. by A. N. Nasonov, PSRL, 3 (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1950), pp. 21 and 205.

60 *Lavrentevskaia letopis'*, ed. by A. F. Karskii, PSRL, 1 (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1926–28), col. 292; *Ipatevskaiia letopis'*, ed. by A. A. Shakhmatov, PSRL, 2 (St Petersburg: Tipografiia M. A. Aleksandrova, 1908), col. 286.

61 See Aleksandr V. Nazarenko, 'Zapadnoevropeiskie istochniki', in *Drevniaia Rus' v svete zarubezhnykh istochnikov*, ed. by Elena A. Melnikova (Moscow: Logos, 1999), pp. 259–407 (pp. 260–61).

62 *Tserkovnoe pravilo mitropolita Ioanna k Iakovu Chernoriztsu*, in Makarii (Bulgakov), *Istoriia Russkoi Tserkvi* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Spaso-Preobrazhenskogo Valaamskogo monastyria, 1995), II, pp. 571–76 (ch. 13, p. 572): 'Иже дщерь благоверного князя даяти замуж в ину страну, идеже служат опресноки [...] недостойно зело и неподобно правоверным'.

63 Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus: 750–1200* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), p. 296.

64 Aleksandr V. Nazarenko, "'Zelo nepodobno pravovernym": Mezkhkossionalnye braki na Rusi v XI–XII vv.', *Vestnik istorii, literatury i iskusstva*, 1 (2005), 269–79.

Latin wives of the Rus' princes) had to become part of the local church life, even if they brought with them their own confessors. This meant that — willing or not — they had to communicate ('*сообщатися*') with representatives of a different belief (with those who '*опресноком служат*' — 'use the unleavened bread in Eucharist'), thus violating another prohibition formulated by the Metropolitan John II in his *Church Rule*.⁶⁵ Consequently, it is evident why the Metropolitan had nothing against the Catholic wives of the Rus' princes — after all, they were compelled to join the Orthodox Church when they came to Rus'. However, as stated above, the head of the early Rus' Orthodox Church failed to influence the foreign policy in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. The grand princes of Kiev continued to give preference to foreign policy advantages over the strict observance of church canons. It is perhaps significant to note that five of the seven aforementioned marriages were contracted after these prohibitions had been formulated by the Metropolitan.

To explain how this could have happened despite the church hierarchs' strict attitude to these matters, Alexandr Nazarenko has noted that the Rus' princes had their own court clergy who, though under the jurisdiction of the local bishop, preferred to yield to the prince's will in controversial cases. The example he cites is the description of marriage of Prince Sviatoslav Olgovich (1136) in the *First Novgorod Chronicle*. The prince 'was wedded by his own priests' because the Novgorodian bishop Nifont refused to wed him and even forbade priests or monks to go to the wedding saying: 'It behoves him not to take her [we do not know who or why — *T. J.*] to wife'.⁶⁶

Thus, it seems that the Rus' court existed in an atmosphere of religious indifference, which should not be confused with active religious tolerance. Theological matters receded into the background when political interests were at stake, and in the first two centuries after the Great Schism of 1054 the episcopacy, in spite of all its efforts, failed to suppress or even limit the matrimonial ties between Rus' princes and West-European ruling dynasties. As Nazarenko points out, the situation changed only in the first half of the thirteenth century, when the crusade movement began to turn its gaze to the Rus' lands.⁶⁷ Still, around 1250, conflicts at the northernmost borders of his lands forced Prince Alexander Nevsky to negotiate with the Norwegian king Hakon Hakonarson; as part of the peace settlement a marriage was negotiated between the Orthodox Rus' prince and the Catholic Norwegian princess. Written immediately after the events described (in

65 'И си же опресноком служат [...] сообщатися с ними или служити не подобает. Ясти же с ними, нужею суще, Христовы любве ради не отинудь възбранно', *Tserkovnoe pravilo mitropolita Ioanna k Iakovu Chernoriztsu*, ch. 4, p. 571.

66 *Novgorodskaia pervaiia letopis'*, p. 24; the English translation is from *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016–1471*, trans. by Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes, Camden Third Series, 25 (London: Offices of the Society, 1914), pp. 14–15.

67 Aleksandr V. Nazarenko, "'Zelo nepodobno pravovernym'", p. 279.

1264–65), *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* expressed no doubts as to the possibility of such a marriage. The reasons why it never occurred fall beyond our present sphere of interests.⁶⁸

Conclusion

This paper has focused on one of the numerous aspects of the world view of medieval Icelanders. Strange as it may appear to modern minds, it seems that in the eyes of Old Norse-Icelandic learned men — those who wrote and copied sagas from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries — the world remained an indivisible whole, despite having been split by the Great Schism of 1054. Thus, Odd Snorrason does not differentiate between Greek and Irish preachers in his *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, demonstrating that for him and his audience the ‘Northern’ and ‘Eastern’ religions had the same roots, and those roots were in Greece. In twelfth- and thirteenth-century sagas about far-travellers anxious to save their souls, the heroes achieve this through their travels to the Eastern part of the world, suggesting that the idea of achieving salvation through travelling to the ‘East’ occupied a certain place in the collective consciousness of the medieval Icelanders. Many sagas picture the Byzantine emperor as ‘a fully-fledged Christian *doctor* or *didaskalos*’ and the undisputed ruler of Christendom. Important factors for the preservation of such a world view included: the personal relationships between Scandinavian kings (such as the Danish king Eirik Sveinsson the Good and the Norwegian king Sigurd Magnusson the Crusader) and Byzantine emperors, the prestige associated with service in the Varangian Guard, ‘Varangian traffic’ to Constantinople — trade activity along the river routes of the East-European Plain through polyethnic settlements (where different religious and ethnic groups would naturally come into contact with each other) — and matrimonially forged political alliances between the Scandinavian countries and the early Rus’, the benefits of which outweighed all confessional differences and prohibitions set down by the Church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In the case of the last of these factors, while early Rus’ sources have preserved no traces of these marriages, the Icelandic sagas paint a vivid picture of them. Thus, to my mind, it seems that the sagas could reflect a way of life that was above religious contradictions and theological discord.

68 Cf. Tatjana N. Jackson, ‘Aleksandr Nevskii i Hakon Staryi: obmen posolstvami’, in *Kniaz Aleksandr Nevskii i ego épokha: Issledovaniia i materialy* (St Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1995), pp. 134–39; and ead., ‘On the Date of the First Russian-Norwegian Border Treaty’, *Acta Borealia*, 2004, no. 2, 87–97.