



Haraldr Sigurðarson's arrival in Rus' and his participation in the campaign against Poland in 1031

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Abstract

In 1031, Haraldr Sigurðarson, also known as *harðráði*, started his mercenary career, soon becoming one of the most famous Varangians and, later on, the Norwegian king. Based on Old Norse and Latin sources as well as the Primary Chronicle, this article discusses the beginning of Haraldr's long-term stay abroad, when, after the battle of Stiklestad, he sought refuge at the court of the Rus' prince Yaroslav the Wise. Being aware of the convention characteristic of the saga narrative, the author outlines the political context behind the friendly reception that 15-year-old Haraldr and his companions received in Novgorod. The primary focus of the article is Haraldr's participation in the Rus' campaign against Poland that took place soon after he entered into the service of Yaroslav the Wise. Although there are several major research works in the Polish historiography concerning the crisis of the Polish state in the 1030s, they omit or merely touch upon Haraldr's role in these events. Taking the Old Norse sources (including skaldic poetry) into consideration casts new light on the campaign. It seems that the Rus' expedition was led along the main waterways linking the core parts of 11th-century Poland with Kiev, and that the decisive battle took place in Kuyavia or Mazovia. Although the Old Norse sources underline Haraldr's role in achieving victory, the part he played in these events cannot be overestimated. Haraldr was young and inexperienced but still an important political figure. Yaroslav therefore seems to have provided him with Eilífr, son of Rognvaldr Úlfsson, under whose guidance he could develop his own skills and authority – the campaign against Poland was a suitable occasion to do that.

Keywords

Harald Sigurdsson (Hardrada), Yaroslav the Wise, Mieszko II, Varangians

Haraldr Sigurðarson's activity as a Varangian and a king, preserved and praised in skaldic poetry, allowed saga writers to make him one of the most colourful figures rooted in the popular mind of medieval Norway. While his deeds are described at some length in saga tradition, he seems to be, to some extent, a literary figure recreated by saga writers based on pieces of history found in the skaldic poems. The source material, supported by texts from beyond the Norse world, does not provide a clear picture of his acts. Incoherence, lack of detail, a narrative typical for sagas, and their late origin as well as the shadowy wording of the skaldic verses all raise questions concerning various aspects of Haraldr's activity, including his deeds on the way from the Varangians to the Greeks. Nevertheless, the evidence concerning Haraldr's service in Byzantium – regardless of its questionable reliability – is rich in comparison to the first part of his Varangian career, i.e. his engagement in the Rus' forces of Yaroslav the Wise. Taking a closer look at the Norse sources – and skaldic poetry in particular – while studying Haraldr's first steps in his Varangian career casts new light on the events that led directly to the political crisis in Poland in 1031.

The turning point of Haraldr's life, and the starting point for his long-term stay abroad, was the battle of Stiklestad (29 July 1030), where he fought alongside his half-brother, King Óláfr Haraldsson (the Holy). According to the saga evidence, after the lost battle in which Óláfr fell, Haraldr fled to Rus', where he sought refuge at the court of Prince Yaroslav the Wise.¹ *Fagrskinna* and *Orkneyinga saga* (the narrative of the latter – as well as of *Morkinskinna* – in parts concerning Haraldr's flight is contained in *Flateyjarbók*) state that Haraldr went east with a considerable retinue of men, among whom a distinguished figure was Rognvaldr Brúsason, the son of Brúsi Sigurðarson (jarl of Orkney),² but the approximate strength of the group is not mentioned. The role of Rognvaldr Brúsason is also underlined in *Heimskringla*, *Morkinskinna* and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, which, as well as *Orkneyinga saga*, tell of Rognvaldr's help given to wounded Haraldr by removing him from Stiklestad and placing him at a certain farmer's house to convalesce.

According to *Fagrskinna* and *Orkneyinga saga*, the place that the retinue reached in Rus' was Hólmgarðr, but the date of its arrival remains unknown. *Fagrskinna* states that the Norwegians went east at the beginning of the winter, whereas *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* and Snorri Sturluson, the author of *Heimskringla*, place this event in the summer. *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* mentions the previous autumn as the season in which Haraldr came to Sweden, where he and the rest of the Norwegians spent the following winter before the departure to Rus'. *Heimskringla*, *Morkinskinna* and *Orkneyinga saga* also inform about Haraldr coming to Sweden, but only Snorri associates it with a longer period, telling that in the following spring Haraldr and Rognvaldr arranged a ship that they used in the summer to go east. The summer seems to be a more suitable season for this kind of journey than the winter, during which ice makes waterways barely navigable. The statement of the author of *Fagrskinna* that Haraldr went east in the winter («oc komo um vætren andværðan austr i Holmgarð») may refer to his journey to Sweden and only later, across the Baltic, to Rus'.

The prose narrative of most of the sagas telling of Haraldr's flight is supported by a stanza of a *drápa* about Haraldr composed by his court poet Bólverkr Arnórsson.³ The stanza reads as follows:

Mildingr, straukt of mækis
 munn, es lézt af gunni;
 holds vannt hrafn of fylldan
 hrás; þaut vargr í ási.
 En, gramr – né frákr fremra
 friðskerði þér verða –
 austr vast ár it næsta,
 orðuglyndr, í Gørðum.

Generous one, you wiped the sword's mouth when you had finished the fight; you filled the raven with raw flesh; the wolf howled on the hill. And, resolute ruler, the following year you were east in Russia; I never heard of a peace-diminisher becoming more distinguished than you (English translation by Kari Ellen Gade).⁴

1. *Heimskringla* III: 68–70; *Fagrskinna*: 217–218; *Orkneyinga saga*: c. 21; *Morkinskinna* I: 83–85; *Flateyjarbók* II: 408, III: 288–289; *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*: 129–132; *Ágrip*: c. 33.

2. Gade 2009: xciv.

3. Turville-Petre 1968: 17–18.

4. Bólverkr Arnórsson, *Drápa* about Haraldr harðraði: 286–287.

Bolverkr Arnórsson refers to Haraldr's participation in the battle of Stiklestad and his further stay in Rus', but his poem gives no evidence of the approximate date of Haraldr's arrival in Rus. *Heimskringla*, *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna* are more precise in this matter, though it cannot be excluded that their narratives were built up over Bolverkr's *drápa* and, when it comes to the former two, they just follow the saga convention (and logic) of going abroad in a favourable season. Although the details presented in the three sagas are not reflected in the given stanza, the above sources are in accord with regards to one question – Haraldr was in Rus' in the year following the battle of Stiklestad, i.e. 1031. And, as future events prove, it may be assumed that he reached Yaroslav's realm most probably in the summer that year at the latest.

According to *Heimskringla*, *Fagrskinna*, *Orkneyinga saga* and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, after the arrival Haraldr and his companions were welcomed by Prince Yaroslav. *Fagrskinna* and *Orkneyinga saga* declare that this event took place in *Hólmgarðr*, a town often associated (rightly or wrongly) with Novgorod. It is conventional for sagas to mention *Hólmgarðr* as a place of meeting of Rus' rulers with Scandinavian arrivals, and it is probable that mentioning *Hólmgarðr* in *Fagrskinna* and *Orkneyinga saga* is just a matter of saga convention as well. However, the state of political affairs in Rus' at that time may suggest that in the early 1030s it was Novgorod where Yaroslav may have spent most of the time.⁵ The aforementioned sagas state that Yaroslav gave Haraldr and his companions a hearty welcome. This is particularly underlined in *Orkneyinga saga*, according to which «tok hann út þeim forkunnar vel fyrir sakir hins hælaga Olafs konungs» («he [Yaroslav] welcomed them remarkably well for the sake of King Óláfr the Holy»). The source suggests that the hearty welcome was offered to the Norwegian guests thanks to the former acquaintance of Yaroslav with Óláfr Haraldsson and/or, as one may assume, the holy virtues of the latter. It would probably not be erroneous to suppose that the statement is again merely a matter of literary convention, but in all probability the former relation between the two rulers may be assumed as one of the factors that influenced Yaroslav's attitude towards Haraldr. The relationship was of both political and personal nature – over a decade before Haraldr's arrival in Novgorod Óláfr Eiríksson, the king of Sweden, gave his two daughters in marriage to the rulers of Rus' and Norway, which was aimed at forming an alliance that consequently proved to be sustainable.⁶ One of its

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5. In his research, Sigfús Blöndal suggests that Haraldr and his companions landed in Kiev, but presents no supporting arguments (Blöndal 1978: 54–55). Notwithstanding Kiev's leading role, Yaroslav's prolonged presence in this town would have provoked too much risk. Around 1024, his former enemy, Mstislav (a powerful prince of Tmutarakan and Chernigov), established his new headquarters in Chernigov, ca. 130 km north of Kiev. Being close to Mstislav's power centre would have exposed Yaroslav to a serious threat and securing his authority far away from Novgorod would have required large defensive forces able to withstand a potential attack. It would have been difficult to maintain such an army for a longer period, providing it with all necessary means and preventing it from causing trouble. What is more, Mstislav's raid from the north would have cut Yaroslav off from any support, especially from Novgorod, and prevented any retreat. There was also a threat almost halfway from Chernigov to Novgorod – Briacheslav, the prince of Polotsk (Franklin and Shepard 1996: 187), who had already once raided Novgorod (1021) forcing Yaroslav to leave Kiev (*Povest' I*: 99). If he had done it again, Yaroslav, being in Kiev but now threatened by Mstislav, would have been in serious danger. Therefore, it seems that staying in Kiev was too risky, and the most reasonable solution in the political situation that Yaroslav had to deal with was to govern his state from Novgorod with representatives embodying his authority in Kiev – the solution that Yaroslav had already applied after the lost battle against Mstislav near Listven ca. 1024 (*Povest' I*: 100). On Yaroslav's struggle against his brothers and beginnings of his rule in Kiev and earlier in Novgorod, see Franklin and Shepard 1996: 179–188.
6. Bolton 2009: 235–236, 242–245, 264; Lawson 2004: 94–96; Morawiec 2013a: 205, 229–242, 278–279, 287; Hazzard Cross 1929: 184; Birnbaum 1978: 8–9; Franklin and Shepard 1996: 202; on the details concerning Óláfr Haraldsson's foreign policy, see Moberg 1941.

outcomes was Óláfr Haraldsson's flight to Rus' and his decision to leave his son, Magnús, at Yaroslav's court shortly before the battle of Stiklestad.⁷

Haraldr was merely a newcomer in *Hólmgarðr*, but he and Magnús seem to be figures of the greatest significance among the Scandinavians that resided in Rus' at that time. Óláfr Haraldsson's half-brother and son, both still young – Haraldr was 15 or 16 years old, whereas Magnús was still a child – gave Yaroslav some opportunities to manoeuvre favourably in the arena of international relations. The two Norwegians, being potential successors of Óláfr Haraldsson, posed a substantial threat to the Danish regime in Norway as they could have been used as means to shift power in their fatherland. Although the death of the Polish King Bolesław the Brave (1025) and the subsequent crisis of his state loosened ties between Poland and Denmark (that had previously posed a danger to Yaroslav's state)⁸ and allowed the Rus' prince to pursue an offensive policy in the west,⁹ the presence of Óláfr Haraldsson's kin in Rus' could have conclusively deterred Cnut from intervening on behalf of Poland and given Yaroslav a free hand in taking further steps against his western neighbour.¹⁰ In turn, the future establishment of one of Óláfr's kin in Norway would have strengthened Yaroslav's position in the political affairs round the Baltic Sea. Therefore, Yaroslav's task seemed to be taking appropriate care over Magnús and Haraldr and reaping benefits from the relations he could establish with them. However, while taking care over Magnús was mainly a matter of fostering, Haraldr and his companions seemed to be useful in a more practical way.

The political conditions under which Yaroslav acted suggest that the hearty welcome given to Haraldr (or, earlier, to Óláfr Haraldsson¹¹) in *Hólmgarðr* may be perceived as something more than mere literary convention. However, these circumstances were not only confined to the foreign affairs round the Baltic Sea. Yaroslav's state was exposed to serious domestic dangers posed by Mstislav (the prince of Tmutarakan and Chernigov) and Briacheslav (the prince of Polotsk) – regardless of an apparent peace restored after conflicts between Yaroslav and his two kinsmen¹² – while its southern part bordered with vast steppe lands controlled by ominous, semi-nomadic Pechenegs. Kiev was particularly threatened – being the most prominent of all Rus' cities and located at the boundary where the forest zone meets the steppe, it attracted raiders lured by its riches.¹³ The foreign and domestic threats to Yaroslav's reign formed a set of challenges that were far from easy to deal with. In order to uphold his authority, the prince of Kiev and Novgorod could rely on his permanent, per-

7. *Heimskringla* II: 343; *Flateyjarbók* II: 324; *Olafs saga*: c. 72; *Fagrskinna*: 180; *Theodorici*: c. 16, 18; *Ágrip*: c. 26, 34–35.

8. The ties between Poland and Denmark were based on family relations – Cnut the Great was closely related to the Polish ruling dynasty – the Piast – through his mother and was probably Bolesław's nephew and a first cousin of Bolesław's son, i.e. Mieszko II. In 1035, the marriage between Cnut's daughter (Gunhild) and Emperor Conrad II's son (Henry) was announced as a sign of friendship between the two rulers – evidence that Cnut's relations with the Piast dynasty were in decline (Bolton 2017: 167ff.). On the Danish-Polish relations, see also Koczy 1934/2016: 83–90.

9. Before Bolesław's death, Yaroslav pursued cautious policies towards Scandinavian states. The domestic problems he had to face excluded him from engaging in conflicts with other rulers, among whom Bolesław, allied with Cnut and Yaroslav's brother, Sviatopolk, posed significant danger (on Bolesław's eastern policy, see: Kollinger 2014; Urbańczyk 2017: 224–242, 264–265, 271–291; on the struggles between Yaroslav and Sviatopolk see also Nazarenko 2011: 451–504). This is why he married Óláfr Eiríksson's daughter (Ingigerðr), carefully contributing to the power balance policy in the North, and married his own son to Cnut's sister, trying to achieve good relations with Denmark or even to form a temporary alliance against Poland (Franklin and Shepard 1996: 202).

10. It seems that Poland did not disappear from the Danish policy for a longer period – it is possible that in 1041 the Danes supported the rebel ruler, Mieclaw, against Kazimierz the Restorer, who tried to reinstitute the reign of his dynasty with the help of Yaroslav and the German king (Koczy 1934/2016: 88).

11. *Olafs saga*: c. 71; *Theodorici*: c. 16; *Heimskringla* II: 328, 339; *Flateyjarbók* II: 315–316, 321; *Fagrskinna*: 179.

12. Franklin and Shepard 1996: 187–188; see note 5.

13. Paroń 2015: 341–370.

sonal retinue, i.e. *druzhina*, assisted in their coercion by far more numerous local forces recruited occasionally from among his townspeople and, possibly, the rural population. As there was no broadly acknowledged system of succession, these two types of armed forces, treated jointly, constituted the source of authority and legitimacy for Yaroslav and other Rus' princes. However, for major conflicts these forces were insufficient, as is proved by wars waged by Yaroslav and his brothers, who engaged foreigners (Poles, Varangians, Pechenegs or Kasogians) in order to fight against each other. For Yaroslav, deeply rooted in the northern part of the Rus' lands, the 'natural' foreign force that supported him in pursuing his policy were Scandinavian mercenaries, whom he recruited several times following the manner of the previous Novgorodian princes (Igor, Oleg and Vladimir).¹⁴ His close links with Scandinavia, studied in detail,¹⁵ were to secure the free inflow of Varangians he could hire when applicable.

However, it was not entirely obvious that Haraldr would follow the line of Óláfr Haraldsson and stay by Yaroslav. In *Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar*, which tells a colourful story of a Varangian hero, Eymundr, there are some traces of the conflict between Yaroslav and Briacheslav (1021), during which, according to the source, Varangians left the former and joined the prince of Polotsk.¹⁶ There are not many grounds to doubt the risk of Briacheslav hiring Scandinavian mercenaries to attack the Novgorodian prince, poised between the north and the south. And it stands to reason that Haraldr could have presented an ambiguous attitude towards Magnús – his potential rival in a possible struggle for power in Norway.

It seems, therefore, that there were many grounds that prompted Yaroslav to greet the Scandinavians defeated at Stiklestad with open arms. Since they had nothing to lose and sought some preoccupation, both sides met their own expectations. Yaroslav's attitude towards Haraldr was all the heartier since he was once again in need of foreign support to pursue his policy.

According to the *Primary Chronicle*¹⁷ in 1030:

Ярославъ Белзы взять (...) Семь же лѣтъ иде Ярославъ на чюдъ, и побѣди я, и постави градъ Юрьевъ. В се же время умре Болеславъ Великий в Лясъхъ, и бысть мятежь в земли Лядьскѣ: вставше людье избиша епископы, и попы, и бояры своя, и бысть в нихъ мятежь.¹⁸

Yaroslav seized Belz (...) The same year Yaroslav attacked the Chudes, and beat them, and established the town of *Yuryev* [now Tartu in Estonia]. At the same time Bolesław the Great died in *Lyasëkh* [Poland] and there was a rebellion in the *Lyad'skë* land [Poland]: people rebelled and killed bishops, and priests, and their boyars, and the rebellion was there.

The given passage reports that in 1030, Yaroslav attacked Poland and seized Belz, which is a town associated with the region called (in the *Chronicle*) the Cherven Towns – a border area being a bone of contention in Polish-Rus' relations, subdued by Bolesław the Brave

14. Franklin and Shepard 1996: 185–204; Grekov 1953: 322–353.

15. See (with referential literature): Hazzard Cross 1929: 177–197; Birnbaum 1978: 5–25.

16. *Flateyjarbók* II: 118–134; cf. Hazzard Cross 1929: 186–190.

17. The *Primary Chronicle* is a fundamental work of the Russian historiography compiled in the second decade of the 12th century. On the details concerning its authorship, manuscripts and redactions, see Hazzard Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953: 3–23.

18. *Povest'* I: 101.

(also known as the Great) in 1018.¹⁹ Bolesław's death is set inaccurately in the *Chronicle* – five years after it took place. The Polish king was succeeded by his son, Mieszko II, who in 1028 engaged in a domestic conflict in Germany. As a result, an alliance of the Holy Roman Emperor, Conrad II, and Yaroslav the Wise – both aiming at reconquering the lands that their states had lost during Bolesław's reign – arose against Poland. The alliance was possibly mounted by Mieszko's brother, Bezprym, expelled to Rus' by the former (Mieszko's younger brother, Otto, may have also participated in this diplomatic endeavour).²⁰ The reported attack did not end with the subjugation of the Cherven Towns, but the seizure of their hinterland (i.e. Belz) set the stage for the decisive invasion.²¹

Mieszko's father had proven the military potential of Poland achieving many successes in his military campaigns, thus, in order to avoid the risk of another loss in clash with the Polish army (as it had happened on the river Bug in 1018),²² Yaroslav decided to prepare strong forces allying with his former enemy, Mstislav. This is attested by the entry of the *Primary Chronicle* for 1031:

Ярославъ и Мъстиславъ собраста вой многъ, ндоста на Ляхы, и заяста грады червеньскыя опять, и повоеваста Лядскую землю, и многы ляхы приведоста, и раздѣливша я. Ярославъ посади своя по Ръси, и суть до сего дне.²³

Yaroslav and Mstislav gathered many warriors, and attacked *Lyakhy* [Poles/Poland], and seized the Cherven Towns again, and they ravished the *Lyad'skuyu* land [Poland], and they brought many *Lyakhy* [Poles], and divided them. Yaroslav settled his captives along the Ros, and they are there to this day.

Annales Hildesheimenses suggest that the Rus' attack started about a month after Conrad II struck Poland with minor forces and took over the lands that Germany had lost to Bolesław the Brave.²⁴ The chaplain of Conrad II, Wipo of Burgundy, informs that both of the strikes constituted elements of a coordinated invasion.²⁵ The German attack on the Polish border territories took place in the second half of September and/or in the first half of October 1031 since, according to studies of Conrad II's itinerarium, on 14–16 September the emperor was in Belgren on the river Elbe, probably gathering forces to go further east, whereas on 24 October he was in Tilleda (Saxony).²⁶ This implies that the German attack and the consequent Rus' invasion took place shortly after the time of Haraldr's arrival in Rus suggested in *Heimskringla* and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*. Mieszko's engagement in arranging the defence against Germany allows one to presume that the Rurikids took advantage of this situation. Although the German forces were small, Mieszko gave up some of his western territories, making a truce with the emperor, which suggests that the major blow, against which Mieszko

19. On the controversies concerning the Cherven Towns, see: Wołoszyn 2017; Kollinger 2014: 267–285.

20. Labuda 1992: 62–84; cf. Borawska 1964: 57–81; Śliwiński 2014: 154–195.

21. Borawska 1964: 70.

22. *Povest' I*: 96–97.

23. *Povest' I*: 101.

24. *Annales Hildesheimenses*: 36

25. *Die Werke Wipos*: 48; although the chronology of the *Primary Chronicle* is imprecise up to 1061 (Jusupović 2017: 40–42, 48–49, 68–70, 76–77), the events described under the year of 1031 correspond to those presented under the same year in *Annales Hildesheimenses* and clarified by Wipo.

26. Labuda 1992: 80; Borawska 1964: 70; Śliwiński 2014: 173; Bresslau 1879: 328, 334; cf. *Die Urkunden IV*: 229–232.

had to act with most possible force and in a hurry, was struck from the east.²⁷ Unfortunately, apart from scant references in Wipo's *Gesta Chuonradi II imperatoris* and *Annales Hildesheimenses* – which inform not only about the strikes on Poland, but also Mieszko's consequent flight to the Duchy of Bohemia – there is no other information indicating Mieszko's involvement in the war with Rus'.

The *Primary Chronicle* tells nothing of foreign mercenaries hired to support Yaroslav and Mstislav in their campaign, but the scale of this undertaking makes it plausible.²⁸ The silence of the Rus' source in the matter of the foreign support seems to be compensated by a stanza assigned to the poem about Haraldr composed by his court poet Þjóðólfr Arnórsson²⁹ and quoted in the sagas.³⁰ The stanza reads as follows:

Eitt hǫfðusk at,
Eilífr þars sat,
hǫfðingjar tveir;
hamalt fylkðu þeir.
Austr-Vinðum ók
í ǫngvan krók;
vasa Læsum léttr
liðsmanna rétrr.

Two chieftains engaged in a single action, where Eilífr held sway; they lined up their troops in wedge formation. The East Wends were driven into a tight corner; the terms of the liegemen were not easy on the Læsir (English translation by Diana Whaley).³¹

The saga authors set the given stanza in their narrative in order to support their short accounts of Haraldr's service in Rus'. The stanza implies that Haraldr and a certain Eilífr were the chieftains who led their forces against the «East Wends» (*Austr-Vinðum*) / *Læsir*. In the battle «they lined up their troops in wedge formation» («hamalt fylkðu þeir», which may refer to the battle formation called *svínfylking*, the «swine array»³²), driving the «East Wends» / *Læsir* into a tight corner and, supposedly, beating them harshly.³³ Þjóðólfr Arnórsson uses the terms *Austr-Vinðr* and *Læsir* to denote the enemies against whom Haraldr and Eilífr fought. It is not difficult to determine the name *Vinðr* since it is known in the Old Norse tradition and refers to the West Slavic peoples inhabiting the southern shores of the Baltic – often *Vindland*, associated with the Jónsborg area and Poland.³⁴ However, Þjóðólfr Arnórsson specifies Haraldr and Eilífr's enemies adding the geographical term *austr*, which refers to the root *aust-* used by skalds and in runic inscriptions in 9th–11th centuries for the territories that belonged to, as Tatjana N. Jackson explains, the eastern quarter of the Old

27. Labuda 1992: 78–82; cf. Borawska 1964: 70–71; Śliwiński 2014: 173–174, 182–184, 189–191.

28. There are four of Yaroslav's expeditions to the Polish territories noted in the *Primary Chronicle* for the years 1030–1047 (*Povešt'* I: 101, 103–104), but only in case of the one held in 1031 is there a mention of gathering «many warriors» («вой много») by Rus', which may be assumed as an additional indication pointing to the large scale of the campaign (Borawska 1964: 72–73; see also Śliwiński 2014: 185–188).

29. Turville-Petre 1968: 10–17; Gade 2009: 57–58.

30. *Heimskringla* III: 70; *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*: 132; *Fagrskinna*: 218; *Morkinskinna* I: 85; *Flateyjarbók* III: 289–290.

31. Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *Runhent poem* about Haraldr: 103.

32. Munch 1855: 52; Foote and Wilson 1975: 275.

33. The last two lines of the stanza may also be interpreted as such that after the victorious campaign, the invaders imposed harsh terms on the «East Wends» / *Læsir*, as the word *rétrr* may stand for something between «right» / «law» and «situation» / «lot» (see *Notes* to Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *Runhent poem* about Haraldr: 104).

34. See Morawiec 2013b: 53–63.

Scandinavian «mental map», i.e. «the Baltic lands and the territories far beyond the Baltic Sea, such as Russia and Byzantium».³⁵ This suggests that Haraldr and Eilífr's enemies could have been the *Vinðr* inhabiting the lands located deeper into the continent, possibly close to the Rus' western boundary. This is clarified by the second notion used in the stanza – *Læsir*, which, as several scholars imply, refers to the Poles.³⁶ Another indication pointing to Haraldr's engagement in fights to the south of the Baltic is given by Þorgils fiskimaðr (according to the Old Norse tradition, Haraldr's foster-father and a participant of the battle of Stiklestad on Óláfr Haraldsson's side³⁷) in his *Lausavísur*, where Haraldr is called *Vinða mýgír* – «oppressor of the Wends».³⁸ However, the epithet may refer to his later struggle against a West Slavic people inhabiting the Baltic shore.³⁹

The above juxtaposition of the sources allows one to assume that shortly after the arrival in *Hólmgarðr*, Haraldr was engaged in the Rus' expedition against Poland. He seems to play an important role in the battle mentioned by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, contributing to the overall result of the campaign, which proved to be a success.⁴⁰ Mieszko decided to flee to the hostile Bohemians, whereas soon after the invasion began, the rebellion mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle* could have started, which, in combination with the Rus' military support, could have helped Bezprym to gain power.⁴¹ However, the territories on which Haraldr and the rest of the Rus' forces operated seem to be partly obscure.⁴² The *Primary Chronicle* tells of the seizure of the Cherven Towns and ravishing the *Lyad'skuyu* land – the land of *Lyakhy* (Poles). It would be logistically reasonable for Yaroslav and Mstislav to combine their troops in/near Kiev (or at the River Pripjat estuary) and then choose the easiest way to reach the Cherven Towns, sailing along the Dnieper, then the Pripjat, and then changing to the river Bug. This route could have enabled the Rurikids to procure a fast as well as surprising attack, and since Mieszko was engaged in the west, it may be assumed that the Cherven Towns were seized without fierce resistance.

However, the *Primary Chronicle* informs not only about capturing the Cherven Towns, but also plundering the land of *Lyakhy*, i.e. Poland. It seems, therefore, that after the seizure of the Cherven Towns the Rurikids directed their forces to the undisputedly Polish territories. The seizure of power by Bezprym as a result of the invasion suggests that the Rus' forces poured in deeply – to Greater Poland or Lesser Poland, where the most important

35. Jackson 2009: 211–220; see also Jackson 1993: 38–45.

36. Banaszkiwicz 2001: 9–23; Labuda 1964: 168; Rich 1964: 70; Metzenthin 1941: 62, 64; Munch 1855: 52–53. As it is mostly indicated, the word *Laesir* (the nominative plural basis from which the dative plural form *Læsum* stems) derives presumably from the old name for Pole – *Lyakh*. On the term *Lyakhy* see (with referential literature) Jusupović 2017: 38–40, 66–68. For further remarks on *Laesir* see *Notes* to Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *Runhent poem* about Haraldr: 104.

37. Gade 2009: 333.

38. Þorgils fiskimaðr, *Lausavísur*: 335.

39. Labuda 1964: 168; Jakub Morawiec notices slightly different epithets – *Vinða myrðir* («killer/murderer of the Wends») and *Vinðum háttir* («danger to the Wends») – found in skaldic stanzas with reference to other Scandinavian rulers (Haraldr Gormsson, Hákon Sigurðarson, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson) regarding their dealings with the Wends/Slavs or used to denote their warlike and victorious nature (Morawiec 2006: 707–717). Another epithet of this kind is *Vinða fergir* («vanquisher of the Wends») used by the skald Markús Skeggjason with reference to the Danish king Eiríkr inn góði and his struggle against Jómsborg pirates (Markús Skeggjason, *Eiríksdrápa*: 438).

40. It is worth noting that in *Morkinskinna* and its text reflected in *Flateyjarbók*, the first helmingr of Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's stanza is preceded by the information that Haraldr and Eilífr campaigned together with Yaroslav (*Morkinskinna* I: 85; *Falteyjarbók* III: 289–290; see *Notes* to Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *Runhent poem* about Haraldr: 104).

41. Labuda 1992: 78–86, 93–118.

42. Śliwiński 2014: 195–200.

towns enabling the seizure of power in the country were located. The easiest route to further the invasion was again the Bug, which leads the way to Mazovia⁴³ and flows through the river Narew into the river Vistula. From the Narew estuary it is possible to sail (via the Vistula) north-west to prosperous Kuyavia – at that time an important intermediary region linking the eastern and western as well as the northern and southern parts of Poland, playing a particular role as a transit area on the route from the dominant, core region of Poland, i.e. Greater Poland, to Kiev⁴⁴ – and south to Lesser Poland with its two major towns, Cracow and Sandomierz. The Bug-Narew-Vistula waterway appears to be a perfect route for the swift plunder procured by the Rurikids, and there seems to be archaeological evidence for that, namely temple rings of the 3rd type found at the river Ros, which, as Roman Jakimowicz suggests, may be remnants left by the Polish captives whom Yaroslav had taken with him, as is mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle*.⁴⁵ Jakimowicz seems not to notice another substantial agglomerate of the temple rings of the 3rd type found near Chernigov,⁴⁶ which may have belonged to the captives located there by Mstislav.

The Rus' forces encroaching on Greater Poland appears to be less plausible. The *Primary Chronicle* informs that in 1018 Bolesław the Brave took many Rus' captives while retreating from Kiev, and then, in 1043 Polish duke Kazimierz the Restorer (the son of Mieszko II), surrendered them as a wedding gift when marrying Yaroslav's sister.⁴⁷ It seems most probable that Bolesław located the Rus' captives far away from the eastern border and, since Silesia belonged to the Duchy of Bohemia in 1043, whereas Milceni region and Lusatia belonged to the Margravate of Meissen, this territory appears to be Greater Poland. Therefore, if the expedition of 1031 had reached this land, Yaroslav and Mstislav would have set the captives free and brought them back home.⁴⁸ Since the captives were still there in 1043, it may be assumed that Greater Poland was left intact by the Rus' forces.

The Rus' attack proved to be devastating and, as Wipo and *Annales Hildesheimenses* suggest, forced Mieszko to flee to the Duchy of Bohemia, where, according to Gallus Anonymus' *Gesta principum Polonorum*,⁴⁹ he was mutilated. The fact that Mieszko did not retreat to Greater Poland or Hungary and chose the south-western route to flee to the hostile Bohemians (without his family and regalia⁵⁰) allows one to presume that he was in dire straits – probably pushed by the invaders, whereas the western route⁵¹ and the route to Hungary⁵² were cut off. Since the sources lack details concerning Mieszko's struggles in 1031, it remains unknown whether his flight followed some fights or at least a single battle.

43. Borawska 1964: 73.

44. Bogucki 2014: 21–32.

45. Jakimowicz 1934: 58–59; when it comes to the territories of Poland under Mieszko II, this type of temple ring, characteristic of the West Slavic peoples, is found densely in Mazovia, Kuyavia, Greater Poland, Upper Silesia, but to a lesser extent in Lesser Poland (Musianowicz 1948–1949: 137). It would be difficult to substantiate the Rus' invasion on Upper Silesia even hypothetically, and, as is explained further in the text, the invasion seems to be unlikely for the territories of Greater Poland. Therefore, the temple rings of the 3rd type could have been translocated to Rus' with the Polish captives from Mazovia and Kuyavia (less possibly from Lesser Poland).

46. Musianowicz 1948–1949: 137.

47. *Povest'* I: 96–97, 103–104.

48. Cf. Labuda 1992: 113.

49. Anonim tzw. Gall: 40.

50. Borawska 1964: 74.

51. It is also probable that Mieszko's retreat to the west was precluded by the rebellion mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle*, which, as is generally assumed, mainly spanned the territories of Greater Poland (on controversies concerning chronology, territorial range and reasons of the rebellion, see Labuda 1992: 84–86, 93–118 with referential literature).

52. Labuda 1992: 84.

However, the predicament that left him no other option than to flee southwest seems to be a consequence of some dreadful and rapid event, possibly a decisive battle, and may be reflected in Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's stanza, which tells of Haraldr and Eilífr driving the Poles «into the tight corner». Therefore, the phrase *í qngvan krók* may refer to what happened during the single battle or/and other aspects of the campaign.

The battle with Mieszko's forces might have taken place either in Kuyavia or Mazovia as well as in Lesser Poland. However, the fact that the Rus' expedition did not reach the core part of Poland (Greater Poland), though it was so close, allows one to assume that the two armies clashed somewhere in Kuyavia or Mazovia and then invaders, cutting off the western route⁵³ (or just rushing after the fleeing Poles) and leaving Greater Poland intact, chased Mieszko south through the territories of Lesser Poland, simultaneously making flight to Hungary impossible.⁵⁴ The most effective escape route from Kuyavia or Mazovia was the Vistula, which leads almost directly to the Moravian Gate – a passage linking Czech and Polish territories. It was in the area of Sandomierz and Cracow where the expedition might have stopped, resulting in Bezprym's seizure of power, as there were no power centres in Kuyavia and Mazovia on the basis of which Bezprym could wield authority on a larger scale.⁵⁵

On the grounds of Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's stanza it may be assumed that Haraldr played an important role in those events. The skald considers him to be a chieftain who, together with Eilífr, led troops to victory over the Poles. The stanza underlies the passages in the sagas informing about Haraldr's status in Yaroslav's forces. *Heimskringla* and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* state that after the arrival in Rus', Haraldr became the chieftain charged with the defence of the country together with Eilífr, who, according to *Heimskringla*, was jarl Rognvaldr's son, but the source does not specify which Rognvaldr exactly.⁵⁶ The author of *Morkinskinna* tells of Haraldr becoming the commander of Yaroslav's defence forces, but does not mention Eilífr's status.⁵⁷ *Orkneyinga saga* does not ascribe such an important role to Haraldr, only stating that he, Rognvaldr Brúsason and Eilífr – considered by the author to be Rognvaldr Brúsason's son – were engaged in Yaroslav's defence forces.⁵⁸

Haraldr's high military status mentioned by the Norse authors does not correspond to the conviction that at the time of the battle of Stiklestad he was 15 years old,⁵⁹ which is presumably based on the information about Haraldr's age given by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson in *Sexstefja*.⁶⁰ It is not easy to assume that a person at this age was experienced enough to be trusted with so responsible a duty as is stated in the sources. Furthermore, if Eilífr had been Rognvaldr Brúsason's son – as the author of *Orkneyinga saga* claims – he should have been a child, since Rognvaldr Brúsason was about 20 years old at that time.⁶¹ However, some clues related to the confusing question of the high military status ascribed to Haraldr and Eilífr by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson may be found in *Fagrskinna*. According to the source, Yaroslav made

53. Or, presumably, knowing about the rebellion in Greater Poland – as Gerard Labuda assumes that people could have been incited there to revolt by Bezprym (Labuda 1992: 116–117).

54. Moreover, it would be time-consuming for Mieszko to switch to the land route and go further south.

55. There are no sources specifying territories over which Bezprym seized power. According to G. Labuda, these were Lesser Poland, Mazovia and Greater Poland (Labuda 1992: 88; since Kuyavia is located between Greater Poland and Mazovia, it seems to be included in G. Labuda's assumption), but the latter should be excluded on the grounds of the above reasoning.

56. *Heimskringla* III: 70; *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*: 132.

57. *Morkinskinna* I: 85; *Flateyjarbók* III: 289.

58. *Orkneyinga saga*: c. 21; *Flateyjarbók* II: 408.

59. *Heimskringla* II: 347; *Olafs saga*: c. 76; *Flateyjarbók* II: 326; *Ágrip*: c. 31; *Theodorici*: c. 18.

60. Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *Sexstefja*: 112.

61. Gade 2009: xciv.

Haraldr the second commander of his army. The author of *Fagrskinna* also states that Eilífr was a son of Rognvaldr Úlfsson – who died shortly before the described events – and took over the «earldom» (*iarlldomr*) that Yaroslav had granted to Rognvaldr Úlfsson in order to defend the prince's domain against «heathens» (*heiðnum mannum*).⁶² The author of *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* also considers Eilífr to be Rognvaldr Úlfsson's son.⁶³ Rognvaldr Úlfsson was an important political figure in Svealand and/or Västergötland⁶⁴ engaged in diplomatic relations between Sweden and Norway. According to *Heimskringla*, he left Sweden with Princess Ingigerðr while she was going to Rus' to marry Prince Yaroslav, and then he and his family (including his son named Eilífr) settled in Aldeigjuborg (Ladoga/Staraya Ladoga, to the north of Novgorod), which Ingigerðr bestowed on him with its adjacent lands.⁶⁵ It seems that Aldeigjuborg and its surroundings constituted the «earldom» which, according to *Fagrskinna*, Eilífr inherited. Although Eilífr's status in Yaroslav's forces is not mentioned in *Fagrskinna*, it may be inferred from the text that in the author's view he was the superior of Haraldr, who, according to the saga, was the second in command – the information that directly follows the short account concerning Eilífr, his father and their Rus' «earldom», and then is followed by the first helmingr of Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's stanza, which depicts the single military action carried out by the two chieftains and in which Eilífr's leading role appears to be underscored by the words: «Eilífr þars sat». These words seem to underlie the information about the Rus' «earldom» granted to Rognvaldr Úlfsson and inherited by Eilífr as the basic meanings of the verb *sitja* (an infinitive of *sat*) is «to sit», «to stay», «to abide», «to sojourn», and in connection with the word *þars* (*þar* + *es/er* = «there where»/ «where») the words «Eilífr þars sat» may be roughly translated as «where Eilífr sat» – referring to the place/region where Eilífr resided permanently – or «where Eilífr stayed», which denotes a temporal state of affairs. In the given sense of the word, *sitja* may also refer to reigning over some land/state (e.g. «s. at löndum»).⁶⁶ Thus «Eilífr þars sat» may refer to the place where Eilífr resided, wielding his authority permanently or temporarily. Considering that the author of *Fagrskinna* omits the second helmingr of Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's stanza, which denotes Eilífr and Haraldr's enemies (i.e. «East Wends» / *Læsir*), this understanding of the given words embedded in the first helmingr, depicting the military action only technically, allowed the author of *Fagrskinna* to suggest that Haraldr had been a chieftain that had fought beside Eilífr against «heathens» in the «earldom» governed by the latter. In this reasoning proposed by the saga writer, Eilífr is the leading chieftain, whereas Haraldr is the second in command, as is clearly underscored. The omission of the second helmingr raises questions about its reasons – did the saga writer have no access to this part of the stanza, or did he deliberately omit it, fitting the stanza to his prose narrative?

The abovementioned questions appear to be unresolvable. *Fagrskinna* is the only source containing information on Eilífr's «earldom». Snorri states only that Rognvaldr Úlfsson and his family settled in Aldeigjuborg, but provides no information on the further role of his son in this town and its surroundings. The words «Eilífr þars sat» and, supposedly, some information on Rognvaldr Úlfsson settling in Rus' preserved in oral/written tradition seem to be, therefore, the basis over which the author of *Fagrskinna* built the passage about Eilífr's role in his father's «earldom», suggesting his and Haraldr's engagement in fights against «hea-

62. *Fagrskinna*: 218.

63. *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*: 132.

64. Duczko 2002: 19

65. *Heimskringla* II: 146–148.

66. Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874: 530–531; Zoëga 1967: 361.

thens». However, the words «Eilífr þars sat» may well be interpreted as referring to the region over which Eilífr wielded his military authority, helping to secure the power newly seized by Bezprym. Moreover, the association of the word *sitja* with wielding authority is multifarious and depends on a context – the word often refers to the state of dealing with something or being in charge/control of something.⁶⁷ Therefore, as the first helmingr of Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's stanza depicts the single military action carried out by the two chieftains, the words «Eilífr þars sat» might well be interpreted as referring to the place where Eilífr was in charge of the battle as the leading commander – the superior of the other chieftain, i.e. Haraldr. Sigfús Blöndal, on the other hand, interprets the confusing words by referring them plainly to Eilífr's presence on the battlefield («Eilífr was there»)⁶⁸ Thus, following this interpretation, it may be assumed that Eilífr's role in the battle had been of considerable importance since Þjóðólfr Arnórsson decided to highlight his presence.

All this may help to understand the involvement of merely 15/16-year-old Haraldr in the battle – more in the role of a trainee than a real commander – who, being not an average youth, was given an opportunity to develop his own skills and authority at Eilífr's side. Eilífr is considered as a brother of Úlfr, both being sons of Røgnvaldr Úlfsson. Ove Moberg argues that the brothers were engaged in the Swedish-Norwegian invasion against Denmark in 1026 as commanders of the Swedish fleet.⁶⁹ Another clue pointing to Eilífr's military experience (and his engagement in Óláfr Haraldsson's military efforts) is Sigvatr Þórðarson's stanza, in which the poet states that Haraldr's half-brother seized a part of Norway (that had previously been governed by Sveinn Hákonarson) thanks to the support given by *lið frænda jarla, bróður Ulfs* («the troop of the jarl's kinsman, Úlfr's brother»)⁷⁰ There are diverse interpretations of this stanza, some of them being overly strained; however, according to the one that seems to be most plausible, straightforward and coherent with the prose sources, the word *jarla* refers to jarl Røgnvaldr Úlfsson, and *frænda jarla, bróður Ulfs* to his son, Eilífr. Thus Eilífr appears to be a military commander that contributed to Óláfr Haraldsson's victory in the battle of Nesjar in 1016.⁷¹ It may then seem that when Haraldr arrived in Rus', he was not a perfect stranger to Eilífr thanks to the latter's involvement in military efforts of the Norwegian king.

Yaroslav the Wise was aware of Haraldr's political importance and military potential of his companions; therefore, it seems reasonable for the Rus' prince to respond to the young warrior's ambition by entrusting him with some suitable task. Appointing Haraldr the second chieftain of the Varangian troops commanded by the more experienced Eilífr⁷² allowed Yaroslav to assure the proper guidance under which Haraldr could develop his own skills and authority. The first opportunity to do so was the Rus' campaign against Poland and, most probably, its decisive battle held in Kuyavia/Mazovia, where Harald could raise his warcraft abilities, simultaneously contributing to the fall of the Polish king. It may be this development that allowed Þjóðólfr Arnórsson to compose the following stanza:

67. Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874: 530–531; Zoëga 1967: 361.

68. Blöndal 1978: 54.

69. Moberg 1985: 13–15; cf. Lawson 2004: 94–95; Munch 1853: 733–735; Bolton 2009: 235–237; Morawiec 2013a: 231–233, 239.

70. Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Austrfararvísur*: 609.

71. See *Notes to Sigvatr Þórðarson, Austrfararvísur*: 610–611.

72. Cf. Munch 1855: 52.

Jarizleifr of sá,
 hvert jofri brá;
 hófsk hlýri frams
 ins helga grams.

Yaroslav saw in what direction the prince developed; the brother of the holy, outstanding king [Haraldr] distinguished himself (English translation by Diana Whaley).⁷³

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