This short survey aims to recapitulate the most important moments in the history of Old Norse studies in Poland and highlight the perspectives of future research in the field. Such an overview, hopefully, will reveal its impact and importance for general medieval studies in our country and beyond. Despite the fact, that saga studies have never been institutionalized in more advanced way in Poland, local academia has shared some enthusiasm and interest in Old Norse accounts finding sagas, especially kings’ sagas as valuable addition to source data in research on early medieval Poland and, in wider perspective, territories of Western Slavs.

Consequently, one can label as characteristic feature of scholarly interest in Old Norse accounts in Poland the fact, that sagas had for long time remained attractive mainly for historians, even archeologists, with very marginal attention from both linguists and literary historians. It resulted with very dominant approach to sagas as historical accounts and negligence of purely literary aspects of the genre. Both lack of access to original editions and texts of particular sagas and very scarce knowledge of Old Norse language had been another important features of the phenomenon. Most of the research and first translations, used to rely mainly on German editions. Obviously, these factors had heavily influenced scope Old Norse studies in Poland being at the same time important point of reference for present and planned-in-future endeavors.

Joachim Lelewel (1786-1861) is traditionally considered as the godfather of Polish historiography but he can be also treated the same way considering Polish Old Norse Studies. The acknowledged politician and historian became very passionate about history and religion of Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia already during his studies at the Vilnius University. This interest resulted with his first publication on both, the Poetic and Snorri’s, Eddas (Edda czyli Księga religii dawnych Skandynawii mieszkańców – Edda it is the Book of religion of ancient inhabitants of Scandinavia)¹. Although the study was in large extent recapitulation of Paul Henri Mallet’s research on eddaic lays and Snorra Edda, Lelewel was able to provide his own conclusions, especially regarding the importance of Scandinavian mythology for wider European cultural legacy. The work included samples of translations from both Eddas (fragments of Völuspá, Hávamál, Gylfaginning and Skáldskaparmál respectively).

Lelewel continued his interests in Eddas during his work as the professor of history at the Vilnius University. It was marked by his second study on Eddas (Edda to jest Księga religii dawnych Skandynawii mieszkańców)², that to some extent meant reworking of his previous publication. Lelewel corrected the text and provided some critical comments. Following the original text, he divided Snorra Edda into three parts: Dámesagas (mythological stories), Kenningar and Skállda³. In fact Lelewel was interested particularly in Dámesags and translated only this part of the Edda. According to his division, Gylfaginning and “Braga-rádr” were separate stories of the first part, despite the fact, that actually the latter constitutes beginning

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¹ Lelewel 1807.
² Lelewel 1828.
³ Lelewel 1828, 103-104.
of Skáldskaparmál. Lelewel found two following parts as mainly dedicated to skalds. Thus one can assume that what he called Kennigar was the main part of Skáldskaparmál and Skalld corresponding to Háttatal.

Lelewel’s second study was supplemented by his own essay on Germanic and Scandinavian pagan beliefs. The text proves that it’s author was fully aware of current trends in Nordic studies. It includes, among others, question of originality of vision of pre-Christian beliefs in the North in Snorr’s Edda. Obviously, most of Lelewel’s conclusions lost its accuracy however both his contributions leave no doubt that he did his best to obtain his sources and was well orientated in scope of Old Norse legacy and current research on it. It is real pity that another wave of Eddas researchers in Poland appeared after almost 150 years gap.

Although Lelewel’s contributions could not find immediate followers, intellectual circles in 19th century Poland continued being fascinated by Old Norse legacy. One should mention direct influences of Völuspá and other eddaic lays visibly seen in Julisz Słowacki’s Lilia Weneda and Król-Duch. The first Polish edition of Helmod’s Chronicle by Jan Papłoński, featured some additional material, among others a study on Wolin/Jomsborg, written by Russian scholar, Timofiej Granowski. His text included translations of parts of Jómsvikinga saga. These fragments were used year later by Józef Granowski, who composed tripartite poem “Wikingi z Wolina” that, in poetic form, recapitulates story of Jomsvikings, at least in version available to the author. The poem was published in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, one of the most popular Warsaw journals, but did not reach wider reaction and quickly remained in oblivion. One cannot however ignore the fact that Grajnert’s poem is evidence of relatively early knowledge and fascination in legend of Jomsborg, that although too intriguing to be avoided, did not find quick and wider scientific resonance.

Grajnert’s poem is good example of obvious limitations in growth of interest in Old Norse sagas, mainly caused by lack of access to wider scope of editions and translations. This important obstacle in promotion of medieval Scandinavian literature was partly overcome by initiative undertaken by Artur Górski (1870-1959), who in 1931 published collection of Icelandic sagas, translated by him into Polish. Görski’s main attempt was to provide stories that, in poetic form, recapitulates story of Jomsvikings, at least in version available to the author. The poem was published in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, one of the most popular Warsaw journals, but did not reach wider reaction and quickly remained in oblivion. One cannot however ignore the fact that Grajnert’s poem is evidence of relatively early knowledge and fascination in legend of Jomsborg, that although too intriguing to be avoided, did not find quick and wider scientific resonance.

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Kazimierz Wachowski, Józef Widajewicz, Zygmunt Wojciechowski and Leon Koczy, contributed their numerous studies to Scandinavian factor in the history of early Piast monarchy8. Special attention was drawn to Burzileifr, who was mainly identified with Boleslaw Chrobry, sometimes with Mieszko I9. Saga accounts had been found then as an important and reliable supplement to source data, providing crucial pieces of information regarding Pomeranian policy of Polish rulers and their contacts with contemporary Scandinavians. Enthusiasm towards content of particular sagas was even more as they seemed to prove that first Polish rulers were powerful enough to play important role not only in the Western Pomerania but also in the whole Baltic zone. It explains great interest in stories of Jömsviking, Sigvaldi, Styrbjörn and Olaf Tryggvason and their contacts with Slavs. Scholarly enthusiasm was accompanied by very low level of source criticism and understanding of the nature of saga narratives. Obviously, it was mainly due to lack of any saga studies in Poland at that time and access to contemporary research on Scandinavian medieval literature10.

This attitude was quite abruptly questioned and neglected by Gerard Labuda, whose research in this aspect should be seen as part of wider anti-Normanism movement, so active in Soviet block at that time11. In numerous works, Labuda did his best to criticize former views of Polish historiography regarding sagas and their importance in research on early medieval Poland12. According to him medieval Scandinavian sources in general were late and corrupted and thus absolutely unreliable. Stories listed above should be treated as legends fictitious tales and effects of medieval imagination and not as reflex of real events in the Baltic zone. Paradoxically, in the case of Labuda, grand criticism towards saga accounts was accompanied by deep interest in the genre, relatively good recognition of its nature and some, although still limited, access to contemporary saga scholarship13. Labuda’s prominence and position among polish medievalists resulted with almost total negation of saga research in Poland and stopped any attempts to use its data in historical studies for few decades, with the effect very similar to effect Weibull’s theory on Scandinavian historiography.

Despite this, mid-20th century also brought more and more interest in Scandinavian literature among Polish readers. It resulted also with new attention on Icelandic sagas, this time however seen only as an examples of cultural and literary legacy justifying rise of Nordic literatures as separate phenomenon. This new period was marked by translations of few sagas prepared for Polish publishing houses by Apolonia Zaluska-Strömberg, a philologist living in working in Sweden (Stockholm, Uppsala). For the very first time, new translations were to be made by a specialist who was undertaking her own research on medieval language and literature of the North, who knew original language of the sagas and had constant access to contemporary scholarship of the field.

Between 1968 and 1974 translations of following sagas were released: Gunnlaugs saga, Njáls saga, Egils saga Laxdœla saga14. The first one was published by Ossolineum, the rest by Wydawnictwo Poznańskie. Due to different publishers, character of these editions also vary.

Translation of Gunnlaugs saga supposedly meant to be like in a type of critical edition with introduction and apparatus. Rest of editions lacks most of these features, being addressed to more general reader. One has to note, that, considering the size of most of these sagas, translation process was a huge effort. Apolonia Zaluska-Strömberg confirms that in her correspondence with Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz. Additional element, that heavily influenced the final effects, was the fact, that Zaluska-Strömberg resided in Sweden and her cooperation with both publishers, especially with Wydawnictwo Poznańskie was far imperfect and meant constant communication and editorial problems.

Zaluska-Strömberg’s translations provide much better representations of original texts and allow reader to be better orientated in nature of the genre. Zaluska-Strömberg was fully aware of necessities in this case, that’s why her introductions to both Gunnlaugs saga and Poetic Edda refer not only to these particular pieces but to the whole literary and historical background decisive for rise of literacy in the North.

Both didactic and popularizing aspects of these translations affected its, sometimes low, quality. Apolonia Zaluska-Strömberg herself thought that Polish translation of Egils saga does not have to contain Sonatorrek, protagonist’s poem voicing his mourning after death of his sons, as Polish reader can fully understand Egill’s emotions knowing Kochanowski’s Treny. Her policy of translation and edition of skaldic poetry seems to be controversial as well. Gunnlaug’s stanzas are rather paraphrased than translated.

8 Szañiocha 1858; Balzer 1895; Wachowski 1914; Wachowski 1931; Zakrzewski 1921; Zakrzewski 1925; Koczy 1932; Koczy 1934; Widajewicz 1931; Widajewicz 1935; Widajewicz 1953; Wojciechowski 1939.
9 Widajewicz 1933-1934.
10 Undoubtedly, Koczy’s study Polska i Skandynawia za pierwszych Piastów may be considered as the most coherent analysis of Polish-Scandinavian relations in the Viking Age and complete overview of attitude towards Old Norse narratives of that time.
11 Polish perspective of the Norman controversy has been recently summarized by Boroh 2013.
13 Labuda 1960; Labuda 1961; Labuda 1999 (features excerpts from skaldic poetry). Labuda was also said to prepare his own translation of Jomsvikinga saga, the project that had never seen the light.
as Zaluska-Strömberg’s ambition was to render as much as possible specifics of the genre. Numerous inconsistencies, errors and cuts (genealogies and poetry in Njáls saga) regarding geography and history of the North, inappropriate vocabulary and lack relevant commentary prove, that Wydawnictwo Poznańskie did not know how to edit and publish properly such specific narratives as Icelandic sagas.

Fortunately, translation of Poetic Edda meant Apolonia Zaluska-Strömberg’s reunion with Ossolineum. It was definitely decisive for much better quality of the edition, especially as one can deals with much more complicated and sophisticated piece than “classic” sagas15. Although most saga readers in Poland have come across Zaluska-Strömberg’s translations, very often as a moment of initiation in discovering saga world, the editions did not have wider impact on both saga studies and further translations in Poland then. Moreover, for various reasons, Zaluska-Strömberg’s name had been gradually left on the margins and almost put into oblivion. It is not until recently when the first serious attempts to continue and distinguish her achievements appeared.

As I have noted above, Labuda’s criticism discouraged following generations of historians to use sagas in their research. However, the last two decades of the last century brought important changes in this tendency. Among features that enabled these changes was development of archeological studies on Scandinavian presence among the Slavs16. Studies on settlement, trade connections, material culture and funerary rites to list only those most important problems, revealed how strong were ties within the whole Baltic zone17. Obviously early medieval settlement in Wolin appears here as the special case, being the most eminent representative of material, cultural and political interchange between Scandinavian and Slavs – relations recorded in both material and written sources18. What seems to be especially important, is the fact, that studies on various aspects of Scandinavian culture appeared to be a good occasion to find references in Old Norse literature and Polish archaeologists often find it as important aspect of their research.

Development of research on mutual contacts within the Baltic zone in the Viking Age included also comparative studies on pre-Christian religions and beliefs. The latter topic is mainly represented by works of Leszek Słupecki, who provides important works on both Slavonic and Scandinavian paganism. It includes studies on Nordic mythology, rituals and cosmological concepts and its main written reservoir, namely Old Norse narratives19. Słupecki’s studies heavily influenced revival of Polish interest in sagas as important sources for political, social and cultural developments in medieval Scandinavia20. At some point he managed to patronize generation of young scholars, representing various disciplines (history, history of literature, archaeology), who followed his example in exploration of Old Norse narratives within their own studies. It is important to note, that Słupecki’s guidance has been crucial for internationalization of Polish research and making it part of global trend21.

It seems justified to speak about quite lively Old Norse scholarly circle in Poland, that has prospects to grow and is able to make important additions to both Polish medieval studies and general studies in noristics. Nowadays one can easily observe some consolidation and integration of so far separated activities22. Self-awareness of necessity of interdisciplinary and international approach to undertaken studies seems to be important advantage of contemporary generation of Old Norse scholars in Poland. It is not so difficult to point at the effects. Just to list only few: series of international conferences and projects, systematic participation in Saga Conferences, new translations of Icelandic sagas, and last but not least, separate studies on various aspects of history and literacy of medieval Scandinavia.

There are of course some postulates for the future. Old Norse studies in Poland need more institutional support. It means a need to create a centre of such studies and more regular inclusion of Old Norse topics within study programmes of history, archaeology and philology. Despite recent important contributions still much is to be done in the field of saga translations. Polish editions of big compendia of kings’ sagas (Morkinskinna, Fagrskinna, Heimskringla, Knýtlinga saga, Jómsvikinga saga) will be undoubtedly very useful for all medievalists in our country. Problem of Slavonic presence in Old Norse narratives also needs further studies, this time including our knowledge on nature and specifics of the genre. The latter element requires constant internalization of research undertaken here. Evidence of recent years show that one can be quite optimistic in that matter.

16 Scholarship on that subject is too large to be listed here but has been recently summarized by Duczko 2013.
17 Duczko 1997a; Duczko 1997b; Duczko 2000; Bogucki 2004; Gardela 2011; Gardela 2013.
18 Filipowiak 1985; Filipowiak 2004; Filipowiak and Gundlach 1992; Duczko 2000; Stanislawski 2007; Stanislawski 2013a; Stanislawski 2013b.
20 Special importance should be credited to his contribution on Jomsborg legend, see Słupecki 2000b.
21 It is enough to mention series of international conferences on Paganism and Christianity in medieval Scandinavia in Rzeszów and Zakopane between 2007 and 2011. Most of the proceedings has been published, see Słupecki and Morawiec (eds.) 2009; Simek and Słupecki (eds.) 2013.
22 Among results of this consolidation one should mention the first Polish handbook on Old Norse literature, that will be published in September 2015, see Morawiec and Neubauer (eds.) 2015.
Old Norse Studies in Poland. History and Perspectives

**Literature**


Streszczenie

Badania nordystyczne w Polsce. Ich dzieje i perspektywy na przyszłość

Dzieje badań nordystycznych w Polsce tworzą od początku dwa główne płaszczyzny: badania historyczne, w których sa, przede wszystkim sa królewskie, stanowią ważny element dostępnej bazy źródłowej w studiach nad wcześnieśredniowieczną Polską i Skandynawią oraz badania literackie, których istotnym przejawem są tłumaczenia sa na język polski oraz promocja tego gatunku wśród badaczy oraz generalnego odbiorcy. Obie płaszczyzny są nadal rozwijane. Co odróżnia ich dzisiejszy stan od przeszłego to zdecydowanie większe nastawienie na interdyscyplinarność i koherentność badań oraz ich wymiar międzynarodowy. To powoduje, że studia nordystyczne w Polsce, wciąż z możliwościami do rozwoju, stanowią ważną część krajowej mediewistyki.