



Рѹкописаніе, маґнѹша корола свѣнскаго | The Testament of Magnus, the Swedish King

Text Information

Author | Anonymous

Language | Old Russian

Period | 15th Century

Genre |

Source | Russian National Library, OP F.IV.211 Sofia I Chronicle of the younger edition, 214r-215r.

Collection |

URL | sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/testament_magnus/

Transcription, translation and introduction by Tara Wanda Merrigan.

Introduction to the Text

Composed in fifteenth-century Rus (a medieval, primarily Slavic civilization located in what is today Eastern Europe), the "Testament of Magnus" is a "manuscript" allegedly authored by Magnus Eriksson, king of Sweden from 1319 to 1363 and Norway from 1319 to 1355, during his dying days in an Orthodox monastery. A popular Novgorodian tale, the "Testament" recounts the Swedish king's unsuccessful military exploits in Novgorod—his 1348 campaign ended in complete defeat—and serves as a warning to his fellow Swedes to avoid going to war with the Rus people. Thus, the "Testament" promotes the Novgorod Republic's military prowess and its role in protecting Rus's interior lands from foreign invaders.

Dated to the year 6860 using the Mundane Era of Constantinople date system (1352 in the Julian calendar), the text opens with the explicit claim that it is the "Рѹкописаніе" (autograph manuscript) of King Magnus. The text recounts previous wars between the Swedes and Novgorodians dating back to the thirteenth century, namely failed exploits by Birger Magnusson and Tyrgils Knutson, both of whom were defeated by Rus princes (most notoriously, in the Battle of Neva in 1240 by Prince Alexander, whose attribute—Nevsky—derives from this victory). The second half of the text focuses on Magnus's unsuccessful 1348 campaign. The narrator (allegedly Magnus) admonishes himself for breaking a peace treaty with Rus and capturing Novgorodian land. Like his predecessors, Magnus was unsuccessful. Fleeing the approaching Novgorodians, Magnus and his army were shipwrecked. Magnus's misery continues: his lands suffer from civil war, illness, and famine. He goes insane and is locked up in a sanatorium. Magnus's son Hakon frees Magnus from his confinement, but Magnus is once again shipwrecked. Floating on a piece of the wrecked ship, Magnus, a Roman Catholic, is saved by Orthodox monks from Rus, who baptize him and initiate him into monkhood. (The real-life Magnus had attempted to convert Novgorodians to **Catholicism**.) The text implies that the converted Magnus will die soon after writing this manuscript.

The "Testament of Magnus" is notable for its religious imagery. The text grafts familiar Christian tropes onto the story of Magnus's sorrows. These sorrows begin first with Magnus's violation of "крѣтное целованіе" (kissing the cross), a medieval promise ritual popular in Rus. The narrating Magnus acknowledges multiple times that his suffering was due to violating the Peace Treaty of Nöteborg, which Magnus himself made with Novgorod in 1323. Like other important medieval oaths, the treaty was cemented by the kissing of the cross. Thus, God's retribution humbles Magnus, causing the Swedish king to convert to Orthodox Christianity. Notably, in recounting the second shipwreck, the narrator describes himself as floating, having been pinned or nailed down by wooden planks ("исторцнѣмъ пригвоѣхса"), when the Orthodox monks find him—an allusion to Christ's crucifixion.

Scholars today unequivocally reject the text's claims that Magnus was its author, though the true authorship of the "Testament" is unknown. Most historical accounts suggest that the Swedish king died in a shipwreck in 1374, so the "Testament" account of Magnus's final days and conversion are fictional. However, some of Magnus's life does track with the information given in the "Testament": it is known that Magnus was dethroned in 1363, imprisoned from 1365 to 1371 (as compared to the one year of confinement mentioned in the text), and freed by his son Hakon, who sought to bring Magnus to Norway. More broadly speaking, the historical material regarding Swedish-Rus relations is supported by contemporaneous chronicles from Rus and Sweden. As a forged manuscript the "Testament of Magnus" offers insight into the information ecosystem of medieval Eastern Europe and suggests the tenor of foreign relations between medieval Swedish and Rus peoples.



Introduction to the Source

The text used for this translation is taken from the **St. Sophia First Chronicle**, a fifteenth-century compilation written in Old Russian that belongs to a larger family of Novgorodian chronicles created during this period. This chronicle was named "St. Sophia" because nineteenth-century scholars had once (incorrectly) believed that the earliest versions had been composed by a fifteenth-century Novgorodian author in the St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod. Today, scholars think that the chronicle was composed by a Muscovite author.

The manuscript used in this translation is an example of the so-called "younger version" of the chronicle (a later copy of the St. Sophia First chronicle text). It is known as Tolstoy's **Sophia I Chronicle**, named after its owner, the collector Fyodor Andreevich Tolstoy (1758–1849). Today it is held by the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. In **the St. Sophia First Chronicle**, the "Testament of Magnus" spans 214r-a through 215r-a. It can also be found in other Novgorodian chronicles such as the **Novgorod Karamzin Chronicle and the Fourth Novgorod Chronicle**. It is likely that none of these three chronicles contains an original version of the "Testament;" they all seem to share a common textual source, today unknown. Overall, these chronicles preserve much of the same narrative content but each features omissions and additions. For example, the **First Sophia Chronicle and Fourth Novgorod Chronicle** track fairly closely up to entries dated 1418, when the main **body of the First Sophia chronicle ends while the Fourth Novgorod Chronicle continues in the mid-fifteenth century**. Furthermore, the **First Sophia Chronicle's content generally focuses less exclusively on Novgorod than the Fourth Novgorod Chronicle and Novgorod Karamzin Chronicle does**. (See John H. Lind's work in **Further Reading for a discussion of fifteenth-century Russian chronicles**.)

About this Edition

The transcription retains the graphic form of words used in the manuscript, including the superscribed letters and abbreviations that are indicated with a **"titlo"**. Spaces have been inserted to mark the beginning and ending of words. Original punctuation marks have been maintained for the transcription to retain the logical division of the text and introduce modern readers to medieval composition and reading style. The English translation uses punctuation in accordance with modern notions of sentence composition. Accent marks guiding pronunciation have not been retained.

Further Reading

Guimon, Timofei Valentinovich. "St. Sophia First Chronicle." *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, June 2016.

- **A useful encyclopedia entry that provides a brief overview of the St. Sophia First Chronicle.**
- Lind, John H. 'In the Workshop of a Fifteenth Century Russian Chronicle Editor. The Novgorod Karamzin Chronicle and the Making of the Fourth Novgorod Chronicle', in *The Medieval Text: Editors and Critics*, A Symposium held at Odense University 20-21 November 1989 (Odense, 1990), pp. 65-81.
- **A resource for information about the differences between manuscript versions of the testament of Magnus and, more generally, about similarities and differences between Novgorodian chronicles of the fifteenth century.**
- . 'The Russian Testament of King Magnus Eriksson - a Hagiographic Text?', in *Medieval Spirituality in Scandinavia and Europe A Collection of Essays in Honour of Tore Nyberg* (Odense, 2000), pp. 195-212.
- **A book chapter that extensively examines the "Testament of Magnus" and situates the text within Swedish-Rus political history. It also discusses the Tale of the Valaam Monastery at length.**
- Mikhailova, Yulia, and David K. Prestel. "Cross Kissing: Keeping One's Word in Twelfth-Century Rus'." *Slavic Review*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1–22. JSTOR, doi:10.5612/slavicreview.70.1.0001.
- **Provides a thorough English-language overview of the ritual of kissing the cross and its symbolic influences, albeit focused on an earlier century.**



Рукописание, магниша корола свѣискаго | The Testament of Magnus, the Swedish King

В лѣтѣ 860 . 3 ,

In the year 6860 (1352)

Рукописание , магниша корола свѣискаго Се азъ магнишь король свѣиский . нареченыи въ сѣомъ крѣпнии григории . ѿхода сего свѣта . пишуу рукописание при своемъ животѣ . а приказываю своимъ дѣтѣмъ . и своимъ братии . и всей земли свѣискою . не на (// 214r-b) стѣпайте на рѣсь на крѣпномъ целовании . занеже намъ не посабляетъ сѣ . первие сего подалъ сѣ мѣстеръ белгеръ . и вшелъ в невоу . и срѣте его кнѣзь великий алеѣандръ ярославъ . на нжерѣ рѣцѣ . и самого прогна , а ратъ его пови . и потѣ братъ мой маскалка . вше въ невѣ горѣ , постави на вхѣ рѣцѣ . и намѣстники свои посади со множествомъ нѣмцевъ . а самъ поиде за море . и прише великий кнѣзь анрѣи алеѣанровъ , горѣ възъ . а намѣстники и немецъ пови . и потѣ было на розмирие с рѣсью . ѿ , лѣтъ . и потѣ за . ѿ , лѣтъ с великѣи кнѣземъ юремъ даниловичемъ . възали есмы миръ вѣчныи на невѣ . земли есма и водѣ оучинили розѣлъ . комъ чимъ владѣти . и грамоты есма пописали и попечатали .

и потѣ за . ѿ , лѣтъ . азъ (// 214v-a) магнишь король . того не порада . подналъ сѣ есмь со всею землею свѣискою . и ше въ невѣ възъ горѣ вѣрховъ . и намѣстники свои есмь в городѣ посадилъ . а с ними нѣколько силы моея вставъ а самъ есмь пошелъ за море . и потѣ новгородци прише горѣ свои възали . а мой намѣстниковъ и немецъ побилъ которые были в городѣ . и азъ того не порада за ѿдинъ годъ впасть пошелъ к орѣхову . со всею свѣискою землею . и срѣте мѣ вѣсть что новгородци по вѣрховцемъ . и азъ опать пошелъ по копорю . и по копорю есмь ночевалъ . и прииде ко мнѣ вѣсть . новгородци на оукрѣ земли и азъ послышевъ повѣгль за море . ино , в валѣ , парусовъ не знати . вста вѣра сиана . и потопи рати моеи много . на оустъ (// 214v-b) неровы рѣкы . и пошелъ есмь в землю свою . съ встанкомъ рати .

И ѿ того веремани . наиде на нашу землю свѣискоюу погивель : потопъ , моръ , голодъ и сѣча межи собою . и потѣ приѣха сѣи мои сакнѣ , из мурманьские земли . и вына мѣ ис полаты . и веде въ свою землю мурманьскую и оудари на мене опать потопъ . корабля моя и люди моя истопи вѣтръ а самъ створи сѣ плаваа на днѣ корабленѣ . исторцнемъ пригвожихъ сѣ . три дни . и три ноци .

The Testament of Magnus, the Swedish King Behold I, Magnus, the Swedish King, named Gregory in holy baptism, departing this life, write a testament while still alive. I order my children and my brothers and all the Swedish land: Do not wage war against Rus after kissing the cross, because we will not have luck in it. Lord Belger was the first to wage war against Rus and enter into the Neva, and the Grand Prince Alexander Yaroslavich met him on the Izhora River, drove him away, and killed his army. And then my brother Maskalka, entering into the Neva, established a fortress-city on the Okhta River and appointed his viceroys among a multitude of Germans. And himself went across the sea. And the Grand Prince Andrei Alexandrovich came, took the city, and killed viceroys and the Germans. And then we had peace with Rus for 40 years. And then, in 40 years, Grand Prince Yuri Danilovich and I took an oath of eternal peace on the Neva. We divided land and water – who ruled what – and we wrote and sealed up charters.

And then, in 30 years, I, King Magnus, not honoring this agreement, arose with all the Swedish land and entered into the Neva and took the city of Orekhov. And I appointed my own proxies in the city, and left some part of my army with them, and I myself went across the sea. And then the Novgorodians came and took back their city and killed my viceroys and the Germans who were in the city. And not honoring my promise, one year later I went again to Orekhov with all the Swedish land. And I received a message that Novgorodians were near Orekhovets. And I went again to Koporye and I stayed the night at the foot of Koporye. And a message came to me: the Novgorodians are on the coast and I, having heard this, sped across the sea. But in the waves the sails were unmanageable, a powerful storm arose and drowned much of my army at the mouth of the Narova River. And I went to my land with the rest of the army.

And since that time doom has come to our Swedish land: flood, plague, hunger, and infighting. And then my son Sakun came from the Murmansk land, and took me out of the ward, and took me to his Murmansk land, and a flood struck me again. The wind shipwrecked my ships and my people, and I found myself at the bottom of the ship, and I floated for three days and three nights, pinned by a wooden plank.



и по бжю повелѣнню принесе ма вѣтръ по монастырь
стго сп в полную рѣкѣ . и снахоу ма съ доски
чернеци . и въ (// 215r-a) несе ма в монастырь
и постригоша ма в чернѣи и въ схиному . и сътвори
ма гѣ жива . гѣ , дни и . гѣ , ноци а все то мене бгѣ
казниа за мое высокоумие что есмь настѣпалъ на
рѣсь , а на крѣтномъ целованѣи . и ннѣ приказываю
своимъ дѣтемъ . и свои брати , не настѣпайте на
рѣсь , на крѣтномъ целованѣи а кто настѣпите . на
того бгѣ . и огнь и вода . имже мене казниа . а все
ми створиа то бгѣ к моему спнѣю —

And by God's command, the winds brought me to the monastery
of the Holy Savior on the Polnaia River. And the monks took me
off the plank and brought me into the monastery and tonsured
me a monk and into the schema. And the Lord kept me alive for
three days and three nights. And to all this God has subjected
me for my pride, because I waged war against Rus and broke
the oath sealed by the kissing of the cross. And now I order my
children and my brothers: Do not wage war against Rus after
giving an oath on the cross. For he who attacks — fire and water
will be against him, just the same way as God has punished me.
And all this God has done to me for my salvation.