Preface

This book investigates the relationship between Norse and Saami peoples in the medieval period and focuses on the multifaceted portrayal of Saami peoples in medieval texts. It is a result of my three years of research on Norse-Saami relations at the brilliant Centre for Scandinavian Studies at the University of Aberdeen, from 2018 to 2021. Through a systematic analysis of the source material, influenced by postcolonial methodologies rooted in interpretations of archaeological material, it demonstrates the many possibilities for reading and including Saami peoples in our narration of medieval Fennoscandian history. I first became interested in the representation of Saami history during my undergraduate studies, when I conducted an analysis of the film *Sameblod* (2016) by Amanda Kernell. While writing my undergraduate thesis on the role of women in the feud narratives of medieval Norse texts, I came across the abundant source material describing Saami characters or culture(s) and was confronted with what I felt was a misrepresentation, or lack of representation altogether, of this material. This confrontation of the material in turn led to bigger confrontations, both personally and professionally, of representation, historiography, identity, and presence.

The book consists of seven chapters, all related to the themes above. Presenting the historiographic and political background of research into Norse-Saami relations in the medieval period, chapter 1 emphasises the need for employing postcolonial methodologies in such research and its current significance. Chapter 2 considers the various sources referring to the Saami from the classical period to the late fifteenth century and provides an overview of the development of the textual motifs associated with the Saami in this textual tradition. In chapter 3, I undertake a structural analysis of how these motifs specifically allude, directly or indirectly, to the Saami. Here, I also problematise the scholarly assumptions often inherent in the discussion of these particular motifs. Chapter 4 discusses spatial relations and geopolitics, primarily focusing on northern Fennoscandia and the portrayal of different northeastern groups. In chapter 5, I cover Norse-Saami trading affairs and employ decolonising tools to provide alternative readings of the source material and again emphasise the many possibilities for interpreting this material. The opportunities for reading Saami characters are further elaborated in chapter 6, which explores personal relationships between Norse and Saami peoples as expressed in the source material. Chapter 7 combines the decolonising tools employed throughout and here I challenge the often-assumed exclusive connection between the Saami and the far north by analysing the multitude of sources pointing to medieval Saami presence in the south.
Primarily, the study demonstrates the normalised, longstanding, spatially wide-ranging, varied, and significant presence of Saami people in medieval Fennoscandia. Overall, the book is both a personal and professional confrontation of the misrepresentation of Saami history in majority history writing and the historiography of the nation state. By writing the thesis and publishing this book, I hope to be able to contribute to a growing field of scholars who are readjusting the colonial episteme and reasserting Indigenous narratives in historiography.