

STUDIES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Volume XLII

A NEW LOOK
AT THE
OLD SOURCES OF
HAMLET

by

MARION A. TAYLOR
Southern Illinois University



1968
MOUTON
THE HAGUE PARIS

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Mouton & Co. N.V., Publishers, The Hague.

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 68-17895

Printed in The Netherlands by Mouton & Co., Printers, The Hague.

INTRODUCTION

As scholars know, the immediate source for Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was François de Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* (variously dated 1570, 1576, 1582), which was freely translated from the *Historia Danica*, written by the Danish monk Saxo Grammaticus between 1180 and 1208, at the behest of one Absalon, a Danish archbishop.

Not satisfied with these sources, Shakespearian scholars have searched endlessly for the tale of *Hamlet* elsewhere in story and song. But they have seldom explored history.

Furthermore they have tended to seek out Hamlet in Scandinavia and Western Europe, turning their backs on Russia and the Near East. Yet a study of the history and literature of the early Russians, the Byzantines and above all the Varangians in the ninth century A. D. can produce some amazing results apparently never pointed out by English and American scholars.

It is these results, which sent Dr. Marion Taylor searching in libraries in America and in museums in the capitals of Scandinavia, in Leningrad, Moscow, Novgorod, Kiev and Istanbul, that comprise the chapters of this book.

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THE RUSSIAN WATER-WAYS



Zerox of map by Gerald J. Cuny: *The Varangian Water-Way as an Eastern Commercial Route in the Early Middle Ages.*
(See bibliography.)