For students of the Viking Age in Scotland the dominant paradigm has been that of the Norwegian expansion into the North Atlantic. The twin phenomena of colonisation ‘west over sea’ by Norwegian farmers and the subsequent efforts by the Norwegian crown to exert authority over these colonies, culminating in the annexation of Iceland in 1262 and the surrender of claims to hegemony over the Western Isles to the Scottish crown in 1266, have provided the narratives within which we have sought to contextualise our understanding of the Scottish experience. This western colonisation, however, was not the only Norwegian expansion in the early and central middle ages. Both archaeological and narrative sources bear witness to an expansion east, over Kjölen, into Jämtland and the adjacent provinces of what is now the Swedish Norrland (Illus. 15).

In his famous compendium of kings’ sagas, Heimskringla, Snorri Sturluson, writing in the mid-thirteenth century, tells of the settlement of Jämtland:

Eysteinn Upplendingakonungr, whom some call the Powerful, and some the Evil, harried in Trondheim and laid under himself Eynafylki and Sparbyggafylki… King Eysteinn committed many other atrocities against the Trønder. On account of this harrying and hostility many chieftains fled and many folk abandoned their patrimony. Ketilljamti, the son of Earl Önundr from Sparabú, travelled east over the Keel accompanied by a great many people, and they took their livestock with them. They cleared the forests and settled there many great districts. That [land] was afterwards called Jämtland. Ketill’s paternal grandson was called Thórir helsingr. He went east over the forest from Jämtland, on account of a killing, so that it came to pass that he settled there and many men followed him thither. And that [land] is called Hälsingland, going all the way to the sea. The Swedes settled the east of Hälsingland, by the coast. But when Haraldr Finehair extended his power [over Norway], then many men fled the land before him, Tronder and Namdaler alike, and they made their settlements in Jämtland and some went all the way to Hälsingland. (Håkgöð XII, my translation)
Illus. 15  Map of Scandinavia showing (Jemtland/Jämtland) (not to scale).