

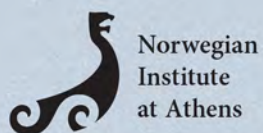
PAPERS AND MONOGRAPHS FROM THE NORWEGIAN INSTITUTE AT ATHENS

VOLUME 14

Vikings in the Mediterranean

Editors

Neil Price, Marianne Hem Eriksen, Carsten Jahnke



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NORWEGIAN INSTITUTE AT ATHENS, VOLUME 14

Vikings in the Mediterranean

Proceedings of an International Conference Co-organized
by the Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish Institutes at Athens,
Athens, 27-30 November 2019

Editors

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ATHENS 2023

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Preface

Neil Price, Marianne Hem Eriksen, and Carsten Jahnke

THIS BOOK collects the proceedings of the first-ever academic conference on the Vikings in the Mediterranean, held in Athens on 27-30 November 2019. The meeting was jointly organised by the Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish Institutes there, in collaboration with the Swedish Research Council project *The Viking Phenomenon* (2015-00466), based at Uppsala University. Over the three days of the conference, some 27 papers were presented by 29 speakers, interspersed with receptions and functions spread across the venues of the Nordic Institutes.

The volume is organised in three thematic sections, beginning with Iberian reflections. The western Mediterranean is probably one of the most academically neglected regions of the Viking diaspora. A handful of publications – mostly in Spanish or Portuguese – have appeared specifically concerning Scandinavian operations around the coasts of Iberia, parts of North Africa and the southern shores of Frankia, but this situation is changing fast. Several papers here take up the challenge, including the opening keynote which also begins this volume, setting out part of the research history of the Vikings in the Middle Sea, reviewing the literature and also exploring some of the larger Scandinavian expeditions launched into Iberian waters and the Mediterranean from the west. Other contributions explore Norse perceptions of Mediterranean geography, Arab records of Viking activities, later saga accounts, the archaeology of the raids and their aftermath, and also less violent forms of contact such as the evidence for possible diplomatic relations.

We then move to eastern connections. Naturally, many scholarly publications have appeared relating to the Byzantine world, its relations with the Scandinavians and especially the Rus', and the activities of the Varangians. Although primarily focussed around the Black Sea, the orbit of Byzantine power and military campaigns included Greece and the eastern Mediterranean, which is reflected in a number of the papers presented in Athens and published here. We follow the careers of several famous Vikings and Varangians, exploring the logistics of their service and the varied influences that they brought back to the North. The unintended consequences are also examined, including legacies of trauma and the experience of coming home to places that had moved on in their absence. Interactions and encounters are a common theme, unlocking how the Scandinavians in the eastern Mediterranean connected with the wider worlds of the Steppe and the Caliphate.

Finally, we reflect on the complex legacies and wider ramifications of Norse engagements with the Mediterranean. Identity forms a major strand here, with considerations of gender and warriorhood as articulated among the southern Rus'. The papers also disentangle the complex material narratives attaching to objects such as the Piraeus Lion, that once stood in the harbour of Athens but since 1687 has guarded the entrance to the Arsenal in Venice. The authors also consider issues of transmission and reception, as the Viking-Age past has been adapted and (re)presented from early modern times down to today's museum displays.

The papers presented here are a starting point for a scholarly journey that will continue, and they begin to fill in one of the last blanks on the map of the late Iron Age Scandinavian world: the memory of the Vikings in the Mediterranean, and this northern encounter with the south, is here to stay.

Acknowledgements

Particular thanks must go to the 2019 directors and staff of the three Nordic Institutes in Athens: Jorunn Økland (Norway); Kristina Winther-Jacobsen (Denmark); and Jenny Wallensten, Eleni Androvic and Katerina Gabierakis (Sweden). The conference was superbly coordinated by Žarko Tancosić of the Norwegian Institute, whose local knowledge, company and conversation also made a hugely positive contribution to the delegates' (and editors'!) experience; he has our warm thanks.

The event received generous financial support from the Helge Axson Johnson Foundation, to whom we extend our grateful thanks. We would also like to acknowledge the Scuola Archaeologica Italiana di Atene for the use of their lecture room for the opening keynote event.

In addition to the papers in this book, presentations were made in Athens by Zanelle Tsigaridas Glørstad, Ionna N. Koukuni, Christian Krötzl, Peter Pentz, Leif Inge Petersen, Jens Eike Schnell, Aggeliki A. Trivyzadaki and Antonia Vafiadou. In the event, it was not possible to include all the papers, while some were more suitable for publication elsewhere, but we thank all who contributed to making the conference such a success.

The papers submitted have been peer-reviewed by the editorial team, with recommendations for revisions where necessary; our thanks to all the authors for their constructive and (mostly!) timely responses during this process. We would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Roland Scheel for his critical review of the text. Scandinavian names have been standardised into Old Norse (thus Sigurðr, not Sigurd), and the editors are grateful to the authors for their understanding in this regard.

From Nørvasund to Grikkland: The Vikings in the Middle Sea

Neil Price

Introduction

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, a gradual but significant change has come over the academic study of the Viking Age. Where once almost every synthesis of the period discussed the Scandinavians in discrete terms of their ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ activities overseas, the removal of political barriers to scholarly communication has brought new understandings of a Viking world without such borders.¹ In the 21st century, this has joined with an innovative focus on diaspora, rather than the models of a processual ‘expansion’ that had previously been the norm.² Taken together, we can better perceive the three centuries of social transformation whereby the same individuals of (in)direct Scandinavian origin could range over the whole of this vast expanse that ultimately stretched from the eastern seaboard of North America to the Asian steppe.

Despite this revisionist perspective, it is still the case that some regions of the Viking diaspora have been less intensively studied than others. In western Europe, this was long the case with Wales and Brittany, for example, and to an extent also the cultures of the southern Baltic littoral. In the east, the sheer scale of the territory and the consequent research challenge mitigate against effective synthesis, and even now, Northern contacts with the Abbasid Caliphate and the peoples of Central Asia represent something of a new frontier in Viking studies. However, alongside these exciting possibilities there is also one other, remarkably extensive field that has so far evaded sustained scholarly attention: the Viking encounter with the Mediterranean.

Of course, in one sense it is familiar terrain, in that its north-eastern waters formed an anchor-point for the riverine trade-world of the Rus’, with its connections to the Baltic and Scandinavia. The ‘Viking road to Byzantium’ has long been a mainstay of research,³ not least in Russia where for over a century academic debate was dominated by the so-called Normanist question of Rus’ ethnicity and the relative political influence of Scandinavians and Slavs.⁴ More recently, nuance has returned to the field with contributions from both western and eastern scholars that have resulted in a new understanding of the Rus’ polities, in creative tension not only with Byzantium but also with the early Medieval European powers.⁵ The involvement of Viking-Age Scandinavians in Byzantine military

1. Price 2020, 25-26, 400-401.

2. Abrams 2012; Jesch 2015.

3. E.g., Blöndal 1978; Ellis Davidson 1976.

4. For summaries of these nationalist debates, with deep-seated implications for contemporary Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and Baltic political narratives, see Klejn 2013 and Melnikova 2013. Some scholars have argued that there never was a Normanist problem, only an ideologically-driven anti-Normanist position.

5. For key, well-referenced works, see Androshchuk 2013; Duczko 2004; Franklin and Shepard 1996; Makarov, ed., 2017; Raffensperger 2012; 2017.

politics and trade was multi-layered and complex, with spatial extensions into the Aegean, Ionian, and Adriatic Seas; the so-called Varangian Guard, and other Northern mercenaries, naturally played a key role in these interactions.⁶

While Viking relations with Byzantium certainly form a part of this present volume – not least in relation to the famous career of Haraldr Sigurðarson, and iconic objects such as the Piraeus Lion that once stood in the harbour of Athens – there is no doubt that they formed a terminus of a much larger sphere of activity oriented in part towards the north, through the territories of what is now the Ukraine and north-western Russia. As its title suggests, the focus in this essay will instead be on Viking contacts with the cultures of the Mediterranean proper (including those of its southern shore), with an emphasis on incursions from the west.

Power and politics in the Middle Sea

From the early 8th century onwards, the political geography of the western and southern Mediterranean was determined by the Arab conquests in Iberia, and their consequences.⁷ In 711, Berber forces of the expansionist Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd I landed at Gibraltar, and over the next six years fought their way north as far as the Pyrenees. The Visigothic kingdom of Hispania crumbled in a series of military defeats, leaving only the Cantabrian mountains of the north as a last Christian holdout, where the tiny Kingdom of Asturias was established. The rest of Iberia was settled by the Berber armies, bringing the region firmly into the caliphate as the province of al-Andalus. It was initially ruled by governors appointed by the emir of Al Qayrawān in what is now Tunisia, part of the Umayyad territory of Ifrīqiya. Córdoba was established as the capital, a status it would retain for centuries (**Fig. 1**).

By 732 the conquest of Iberia was largely consolidated, but Muslim raiders also ventured far into Frankia. Their forces crossed the mountains to attack Aquitaine and southern Gaul, and also struck from the Mediterranean coast to assault Provence and the Rhône. Parts of the Empire were occupied even into the 750s, before the invaders were driven back by the Carolingians. As part of these decades of fighting, the Asturians were able to regain some of the former Visigothic lands that had been lost, incorporating Galicia and León into a substantially larger state. A depopulated buffer region in the Douro separated the Kingdom of Asturias from the Muslim territories to the south.

At about this time there was a rebellion of local clans within the western provinces of the caliphate, resulting in a declaration of independence by the Maghreb and al-Andalus, broadly coinciding with the fall of the Umayyad dynasty of Damascus and their replacement by the Abbasids who would eventually make Baghdad their centre. In Iberia, the rebellion was in turn overtaken by disaffected remnants of the Umayyad regime in al-Andalus, in alliance with incoming exiles from the collapse of the Damascus caliphate. In 756 their leader, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, proclaimed the Emirate of Córdoba as effectively a rump state of the Umayyad regime, in defiance of the Abbasids. Having fought off an attempted Abbasid reconquest, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ruled until his death in 788, and the emirate continued to prosper under his successors in the following decades. In 822 the emir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II came to power in Córdoba, and it was during his reign (which lasted until 852) that the first contacts with Scandinavians were made.

The southern shore of the Mediterranean was likewise under Muslim control, but as we have seen, politically distinct from the polity of al-Andalus. Much of what is now Morocco, including the southern side of the Gibraltar strait, was a kingdom ruled by the Idrisid dynasty, with the exception

6. For the latest synthesis, see Androshchuk, Shepard and White, eds. 2016.

7. For thorough historical overviews of early Medieval Iberian history, see Collins 1989; 1995; 2012; Glick 2005.

of the coastal region of the Rif which was the seat of the small Kingdom of Nakūr. Idrisid territory stretched south-west along the Atlantic coast as far as Salé (where it bordered the Barghawata kingdom), and south inland to the trading city of Sijilmassa. East along the Mediterranean shore, Idrisid power extended through much of what is now Algeria, to slightly east of modern Algiers. From that point onwards, the entire southern shore was formally incorporated into the Abbasid Caliphate, governed as the provinces of Ifrīqiya, Barqah (modern eastern Libya), and Egypt.

Thus, by the time of the first Viking ventures into the Mediterranean in the 9th century, much of Iberia, both sides of the Gibraltar passage, and the southern shore of the Mediterranean were all under Muslim control – albeit in a form less unified than the first conquests. The northern approach to this sphere of Islamic influence began in the Vikings’ bases in Frankia and passed the long shorelines of the Kingdoms of Asturias and León. Voyaging into the Middle Sea and leaving al-Andalus behind, any fleet would move between the southern Frankish Empire in what is now Languedoc and Provence, the territorially disputed Balearic Islands, and onwards further east into the waters of Byzantine Italy and Greece. The opposite, southern shore was held by the outliers of the Abbasids. This was a strikingly different world, not least in socio-political terms, from what the Scandinavians had earlier encountered in north-western Europe and on the eastern rivers.

The Vikings and Miðjarðarhaf

The extent of Scandinavian knowledge about the Mediterranean is hard to gauge. Their name for it, *Miðjarðarhaf*, is recorded in Medieval sources and is a literal rendering of the word we still use in English – the ‘middle-of-the-earth-sea’, preserving a decidedly ancient understanding of geography. It is hard to know how old the Norse placenames for the region really are, but many of them arguably seem to have an element of other-worldliness about them.⁸ *Miðjarðr* is very close to *Miðgarðr*, and the echo of the waters bordering the realm of humans may have been a conscious one. The Gibraltar strait was known as *Nqrvasund*, the ‘Narrow Sound’, but here too another meaning has been proposed by Melnikova, relating to *Nqr*, the father of Night in Norse mythology, a figure with Óðinnic connotations. It may be that the western gateway to the Middle Sea was a vague and uncertain region of the Norse mental map – one of the edges of their world – perhaps in a similar sense to wherever it was in the East that Yngvarr víðfqrli led his fleet in the early 11th century. The comparison is an interesting one, as Yngvarr’s expedition and its literary afterlife is one of the closest parallels to how the Viking ‘Great Raid’ of 859-861/2 (see below) was understood by later generations of Scandinavians,⁹ while the unique runestone record attests to its core realities.¹⁰

The paucity of artefactual material relating to Scandinavian operations in Iberia is a recurring theme of several papers in this volume. Besides the famous antler container housed at the Basilica of San Isidoro de León,¹¹ there is no direct archaeological reflection of their presence, and we are forced instead to rely on the indirect evidence of placenames, possible landing sites and refuges, fortifications constructed against them, and similar.¹²

In contrast to the dearth of material culture, Viking activity is attested in an abundance of written sources, but of such a tangled nature that it is very hard to build up a clear historical narrative of events. Imagination, especially an excess of it, is a key factor here. Víctor Aguirre sums up the situa-

8. Elena Melnikova, in the lecture delivered at the conference on which this volume is based.

9. Larsson 1990a; Pálsson and Edwards 1989.

10. Larsson 1990b; see Krakow 2021 for a discussion of dating issues around Yngvarr’s expedition.

11. Roesdahl 2010; Franco Valle 2016 and this volume; Wicker 2020.

12. See García Losquiño, this volume, for a referenced overview of this material.

tion well, “These texts are bewilderingly vivid, yet ... they lack geographical accuracy, are driven by political agendas and mix historical details with fictional stories”.¹³

There is a useful baseline of near-contemporary Christian chronicles, though these are not without their complications; Arabic texts from the 10th and 11th centuries and after also shed light on earlier events.¹⁴ However, a great deal of the later textual record of the Vikings’ exploits in the Mediterranean takes the form of fanciful, legendary exaggeration and embellishment, ultimately from as far afield as Ireland, Normandy, and Iceland. It is in this context that we must view several episodes that have been problematically enshrined in the ‘history’ of the Vikings in the Middle Sea, and which we shall explore further below.¹⁵

Despite these issues, several previous synthetic treatments of the Vikings in the Mediterranean have been published, working from a variety of vantage points. A number of studies explore the conflicts in Iberia, taking account of the Arab sources but often with an emphasis on the Christian polities of the north,¹⁶ while two works have focussed specifically on the territory of modern Portugal.¹⁷ Until recently, Aguirre’s was the most comprehensive analysis,¹⁸ looking more closely at the two major raids of 844 and 859-861/2, to which we shall return below. This situation changed with the 2015 publication of Ann Christys’ book *Vikings in the South*, which unlike Aguirre’s volume included direct work with the Arabic sources. Although serious studies of the record from Muslim Iberia had appeared in the first half of the 20th century,¹⁹ Aguirre and Christys presented the first comprehensive English-language surveys of modern times, illuminating the complex inter-relations of the texts, issues of chronology and reliability, and more. For all the source-critical problems, we are now better placed than ever to examine the long-term trajectory of Viking ambitions with the Mediterranean.

Broadly speaking, Viking contacts with Iberia can be meaningfully seen in four primary sequences of events from the mid-9th century onwards: the first, apparently abortive raid of 844; its possible diplomatic aftermath; the ‘Great Raid’ of 859-861/2; and the raids of the 10th century and later, which can of course be explored individually as well. This chapter is not intended as a detailed overview of these events (presented in the literature cited above, and in other papers of this volume) but instead to highlight problems and potentials in approaching the Viking saga of the Mediterranean.

First contact? The raid of 844

Strictly speaking, the first Viking movement into Iberia did not reach the Mediterranean at all, in that the Scandinavians were stopped just short of the Gibraltar Strait. The whole adventure is neatly summed up by the *Annales Bertiniani* entry for the long year of 844:

844. The Northmen sailed up the Garonne as far as Toulouse, wreaking destruction everywhere without meeting any opposition. Then some of them withdrew from there and attacked Galicia, but they

13. Aguirre 2013, 8.

14. The sources for the 9th-century raids are reviewed in Aguirre 2013 and Christys 2015, the latter with an excellent annotated glossary of the relevant histories and historians.

15. Many Viking scholars (including, sadly, me – Price 2008) have tended in the past to take elements of this mythologised narrative far more seriously in historical terms than is wise – though in their (and my!) defence, this was in the long absence of contextualised critical studies of the textual sources in question.

16. Aguirre 2015; Bramsen 2004; González Campo 2002a; Morales Romero 1997; 2004; Pons-Sanz 2001; Price 2008.

17. Pires 2007; 2013.

18. Aguirre 2013.

19. Birkeland 1954; Stefánsson 1909; and especially Melvinger’s monumental study from 1955, a crucial work that is absent from Christys’ bibliography.

perished, partly because they met resistance from missile-throwers, partly because they were caught in a storm. Some of them, though, got to the south-western part of Hispania, where they fought long and bitterly with the Saracens, but were finally beaten and withdrew to their ships.²⁰

It is not clear where Prudentius, the annalist, got his information,²¹ but the picture is repeated along the Vikings' southwards path. The various versions of the *Asturian Chronicles*, compiled c. 881-883, not only support the Frankish account but add trustworthy detail.²² The *Chronicon Rotensis* mentions how a 'naval army' came from the north, from the pagan *nordmanni* who, it is claimed, were previously unknown in those seas. They seem to have entered Iberian waters on 1st August, according to the so-called *Prophetic Chronicle*. Other aspects of the Frankish sources may also be fleshed out, such as the use of fire against the Viking ships (perhaps the *ballistae* of the *Annales Bertiniani*?); this is also mentioned in one version of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, from c. 884, which places the battle at a place that might be the lighthouse at A Coruña.²³

The defence mounted by the Asturians may have been stronger than anticipated, or perhaps a continued voyage was always the intention, but the Viking fleet left for the south. No contemporary Arabic sources survive, and the relations of both the large-scale raids of the 9th century come from texts written at least a hundred years afterwards, preserved in compilations later still in date. Notwithstanding the source-critical issues of these texts, a broadly coherent narrative can be traced.

The size of the Viking fleet is given precisely, but at a considerable chronological remove. The 10th-century Andalusian chronicles of Aḥmad al-Rāzī and his son have not survived in their original form, and their integrity as sources is compromised by the uncertain path by which they have been preserved only in later texts, especially the writings of Ibn Ḥayyān who died in 1076.²⁴ Here, the *Majūs* (a term commonly used for the Vikings, but also referring to infidel foreigners in general) are said to have arrived in 54 ships, each with its own smaller tender; although this has been dismissed by some Arabists as an exaggeration, it accords well with contemporary fleet sizes in Frankia.²⁵ A variant text has 80 ships.²⁶ One of Ibn Ḥayyān's more obscure source selections, from al-Qurashī, makes it clear that the Andalusis knew the fleet had come from the land of the Franks.²⁷

In another interesting detail, the *Kitāb al-buldān* – the 'Book of Countries' written c. 891 in Cairo by al-Ya'qūbī – notes that the attackers were "the *Majūs*, who are also called *ar-Rūs*". This is one of the very first, and contemporary, indications that those they encountered equated the Rus' with the Scandinavians raiding in western Europe.²⁸

In early September, the Vikings reached Lisbon and besieged the city for thirteen days. Al-Rāzī says that it was the town governor who alerted the emir to the presence of the fleet, and thus sounded the alarm for al-Andalus. Continuing onwards along the coast, the Vikings perhaps attacked Cádiz and the region around Jerez, during which time they fought at least one battle with the Andalusī militias. This was a prelude to the key event of the raid, which was a full-scale assault on the major city of Seville.

20. Translation Nelson 1991, 60.

21. Christys 2015, 30.

22. See Aguirre 2013, 13-21 for these Asturian sources.

23. Christys 2015, 32. A detailed, if speculative, analysis of the Asturian itinerary and motivations for the 844 raid is given by Aguirre 2013, 50-59.

24. Christys 2015, 36-37.

25. Christys 2015, 38; Price 2021.

26. Aguirre 2013, 31.

27. Aguirre 2013, 33; Christys 2015, 39.

28. Christys 2015, 31.

The Viking attack and eventual occupation is described in several Arabic accounts – some quite lurid but others more plausible. Among the latter is the *Ta'rikh* of Ibn al-Qūṭīya, a 10th-century writer whose work was collated by his students and preserved in a later manuscript.²⁹ According to him, the Vikings' occupation of the western coast had been so extensive that, on turning into the River Guadalquivir and approaching the city, the inhabitants panicked and fled, enabling the raiders to enter almost unopposed.

There are several descriptions of the events in and around Seville, often richly detailed but hard to parse. Al-Ya'qūbī says that the Vikings fell upon the city “with plunder, destruction, and killing”. Ibn Ḥayyān relates how they stayed for seven days, murdering the men and enslaving the women and children. Some remained in the city, while others secured their line of supply by holding a temporary base they had made on the Isla Menor at the estuary of the Guadalquivir; they also sacked Coria on the west bank at this time. Several settlements in the interior were attacked by ‘raiding parties’ (Ibn al-Qūṭīya is clear that the Vikings divided their forces at this point), including Constantina, Fuente de Cantos, Moron, and even the road to Córdoba itself. Other sections of the fleet reoccupied Seville, and the scene inside the city was chaotic. Again according to Ibn al-Qūṭīya, the governor had held out in the citadel while the main town was overrun. A rather unlikely story is also related of the Vikings' unsuccessful attempts to fire the roof of the Great Mosque, thwarted by one of the faithful in the days immediately prior to the Andalusī army's arrival (in other sources, no such heroic resistance occurs, and the Vikings just slaughter everyone inside the mosque).

On 1st November (in another of Ibn Ḥayyān's accounts) an Andalusī relief force finally arrived, under the command of Muza, a client nobleman. Either on that date or shortly after, his army met the Vikings in battle at a place called Ṭalyāṭa, of uncertain location but probably either near the city or more towards the river mouth (other versions add two further names, Tejada or Ṭablada, which may have been additional skirmishes or confusions with the same event). It was a disaster for the raiders: al-Rāzī says that a thousand Vikings were killed, 400 captured, and 30 ships (out of 80) were abandoned in the retreat. Ibn Idhārī, a Medieval historian writing in the Maghreb, adds the grim detail of Viking prisoners hanged from the palms on the battlefield, or executed in Seville; their ‘general’ was among the dead.

The Viking occupation had lasted 42 days, and while over at last, it had clearly shaken the regime in Córdoba. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān sent the heads of 200 Vikings, including that of their commander, to the tribes across the Gibraltar strait, emphasising that he still had control of the region, and perhaps also to alert them to a threat that might return.

Some of the *Majūs* escaped, however, joining raiding parties that had been away from the city when the army arrived. They took to the river and linked up with the Vikings left behind on the insular base. The rather desperate state of their withdrawal is indicated by negotiations with the relief force, who agreed to let them pass when they offered to surrender their Muslim prisoners in return for food and provisions. The Vikings' expulsion was an Andalusī victory that had wider dimensions in that the whole force turned back for the north. We do not know if they ever intended to enter the Mediterranean – and perhaps their plans were *ad hoc* anyway – but it is clear that the disaster in Seville closed down this option. They plundered the Algarve on the return journey, attacking Niebla and making an unsuccessful attempt to take Lisbon, before returning to their bases in Frankia.

29. For Ibn al-Qūṭīya's debateable trustworthiness, see Aguirre 2013, 22-25 and Christys 2015, 33-36. Aguirre, *contra* Christys, suggests that the many details that appear only in his text derive from oral history passed on through his family connections with Seville, and should therefore be taken seriously. My summary of the various Arabic sources related in the section that follows is largely based on Christys' analysis (2015, chapter 3).

As a final image of the 844 raid, we can take a comment by Ibn Idhārī, writing centuries later with an evocative description of the Viking fleet as it approached the emirate, as their sails “filled the ocean with dark red birds”.³⁰

A gazelle at court

Perhaps the strangest episode of all Viking contacts with Muslim Iberia seems to have been a consequence of the 844 raid, in the form of an embassy sent in the opposite direction. It serves as a useful case study in interpretive complications, not least because many scholars contend that it never happened at all.

The only record comes from a single source of the late 13th century, the *al-Muṭrib fī aṣ'ār ahl al-Maḡrib*, an anthology of poetry compiled in Egypt by an Andalusī, Ibn Dīḡya.³¹ According to him, the aftermath of the attack on Seville included a peace overture from the Vikings, who invited ‘Abd al-Raḡmān to send a diplomatic envoy to the ‘king’ of the *al-Majūs*. In late 844, or perhaps 845, the expedition accordingly set out under the command of a resourceful man named Yaḡyā ibn Ḥakam al-Jayyānī, whose slim build and good looks earned him the nickname by which he is more commonly known, al-Ghazāl, the ‘Gazelle’. In Ibn Dīḡya’s account, the Andalusīs sailed north in their own ship, accompanied by a Viking escort vessel. Having been caught in a storm in the Bay of Biscay and briefly stopped at an island for repairs, they finally arrived at their destination in the form of a large island in the sea: ‘Innumerable *Majūs* were there, and near were many other isles, small and great, inhabited by *Majūs* and the continent up there also belongs to them. It is a large country and takes several days to pass through it.’³²

The embassy is described as a diplomatic success, with obvious exaggerations of the impact that the Andalusians made on their hosts. Several trunks of ‘costly presents’ were handed over, and a letter read out from the emir to the Viking ruler (no mention is made of interpreters, but one must assume they were present). Al-Ghazāl seems to have fascinated the Viking queen, whose name is given as Nūd, perhaps a version of the Norse Auḡr or Iḡunn. They play an intricate game of alternating coyness and increasingly bold flirtation, interleaved with his recital of poems, that ultimately seems to have unnerved the seasoned diplomat. In the course of their conversations, the queen makes some interesting statements about gender relations and sexual morality at the court. The implications for female emancipation and agency are considerable, and for this reason al-Ghazāl’s embassy has attracted focussed attention from Viking scholars.³³ After twenty months away, the Andalusian mission finally returned to Córdoba.

There is no doubt that al-Ghazāl was a real person, an accomplished poet attested in several sources.³⁴ He seems to have had form as a diplomat, having journeyed to Constantinople in 840 as part of tentative negotiations to form an Andalusī-Byzantine alliance against the Abbasids.³⁵ As we have seen, however, Ibn Dīḡya is the only author to mention his embassy to the Vikings. As his source he cites a 9th-century history of al-Andalus by Tammām ibn Alqama, a text now lost.

30. Christys 2015, 1, 41.

31. The embassy has attracted a considerable literature. For translations and discussions, see Allen 1960; Birkeland 1954, 83-88; González Campo, ed. 2002b; el-Hajji 1970, 166-203; Hermes 2014; Pons-Sanz 2004; Stefánsson 1909, 37-40; Wikander 1978, 24-30.

32. Christys 2015, 25, after Stefánsson 1909.

33. E.g., Jesch 1991, 92-96; Price 2020, 161-162. If we are to take the account at face value, the Viking queen also makes reference to hair dye, which has been curiously overlooked in discussions of personal grooming.

34. Varying takes on al-Ghazāl’s life can be found in Dietrich 2004; Harvey 2003; Huici Miranda 1965.

35. Cardoso 2015; Lévi-Provençal 1937.

Arabists have objected to Ibn Dihya's account on many grounds, including anachronisms in al-Ghazāl's supposed itinerary,³⁶ the author's over-active imagination, and his general unreliability which seems to have been acknowledged even in his lifetime.³⁷ It has also been argued that al-Ghazāl's mission to the Vikings is an invented reworking of his earlier embassy to Byzantium,³⁸ and that the description rather has its place in Medieval literary genres exploring Andalusī identity in the context of external contacts.³⁹ In particular, al-Ghazāl's relationship with the queen has been explored as 'the object of a textual strategy housing both barbarian and female otherness', as Christys puts it. She summarises the critique at length, and is wholly dismissive: 'the [literary] point of the embassy was to travel but not to arrive ... Al-Ghazāl's destination was simply 'somewhere else, not here' and his story contributes nothing to the discussion of Viking ethnography'.⁴⁰

There are problems with this hyper-critical perspective. As Judith Jesch has pointed out,⁴¹ aside from the scepticism of Arabist researchers, there is actually nothing in the text that is intrinsically anachronistic from the point of view of Viking scholarship. Moreover, its compelling relations on gender, while clearly exaggerated to a degree, accord rather well with other sources on Scandinavian social structures. The flowery compliments exchanged between al-Ghazāl and the queen are of a kind familiar from many such diplomatic interactions, but they also have a realistic edge in that they contain what could be seen as veiled threats, and skirt the borders of what is socially wise. His companions caution al-Ghazāl that he is seeing too much of Nūd, and he initially heeds their advice. On returning to al-Andalus, he gives an account of their talks that is far more grounded in Realpolitik: it is clear that the queen was fully aware of this, and that there was mutual respect between them. There are also interesting specifics in other parts of the text, which seem like odd things to have invented, such the Viking ship acting as an escort for al-Ghazāl's own craft, which might well be read as a combination of security and intimidation.

Two primary locations have been put forward for the Viking court, each with several proponents. Some favour Ireland and the territory controlled by the Norwegian commander Turgeis (perhaps Þórgestr or Þórgisl),⁴² while others prefer the Danish royal seat of Lejre on Sjælland.⁴³ The latter seems more likely in political terms, and much better fits the text's geographical description of islands extending around an extremity of the continent.

None of this is unrealistic or requires reformatting into the motifs of later literary discourse (though this remains a possibility, of course). Moreover, the description of al-Ghazāl's embassy finds a ready place within early Medieval Muslim notions of the Other in such a way that its arguable veracity is not undermined.⁴⁴ Lastly, there are the political realities. It has been suggested that the 844 expedition may have been a tentative (or at least ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to exploit a western, Andalusian gateway into Arab trading networks, particularly for slaves.⁴⁵ This would certainly explain why the Vikings might seek to establish some form of diplomatic relations after the debacle at

36. Pons-Sanz 2004, 21.

37. Granja 1971.

38. Lévi-Provençal 1937, 16.

39. Pons-Sanz 2004, 19.

40. Christys 2015, 25-27, which includes all the quotations I give here. Pons-Sanz 2004 develops most of these arguments at length, and Aguirre (2013, 8) also has his doubts.

41. Jesch 1991, 95.

42. Allen 1960; Dunlop 1957, 13; Pons-Sanz 2004, though she is sceptical of the whole account.

43. First proposed by Stefánsson in 1909, supported by Vasiliev 1946, 44-45; el-Hajji 1970, 193-201; Wikander 1978, 15-17.

44. Hermes 2014. See also Bennison 2007 and Hermes 2012. The embassy's veracity is also maintained by Morales Romero 2004, 87-88.

45. John Hines, pers. comm.

Seville, and would also match well with an overture from Denmark. That the emir of Córdoba would see potential in this is not surprising, nor that he would find a ‘king’ of the *al-Majūs* a more credible proposition than the splintered reality of command in Viking raiding fleets might warrant.

The ‘Great Raid’: problems and potentials

The 844 expedition had another very practical consequence in al-Andalus, besides the possible embassy to the Vikings: the fortification of vulnerable settlements against attack from the sea. Al-Qūṭīya records how the emir ordered the building of a wall around Seville, specially commissioned from a Syrian client, and in addition the establishment of a shipyard in the city: ‘He [the emir] got together sailors from the coasts of al-Andalus and enlisted them and paid them well. He made ready engines and naphtha.’⁴⁶ Another source notes how the emir’s advisors regarded improving the defences of Seville as a greater funding priority than the extension of the Great Mosque in Córdoba.⁴⁷ It is hard to know to what degree these precautions were effective, but it seems significant that Iberia was untroubled by Viking raids for more than a decade, as several Asturian texts make clear.⁴⁸ When the fleets returned, it was in force and with much greater ambition.

Our sources, with all their problems, are largely familiar. The earliest record of what can fairly be called the ‘Great Raid’ is again from the *Annales Bertiniani*:

859. Danish pirates [*Pyratae danorum*] made a long sea-voyage, sailed through the straits between Hispania and Africa and then up the Rhône. They ravaged some *civitates* and monasteries, and made their base on an island called the Camargue.⁴⁹

Its starting point is not mentioned, but Vikings had been gathering at this time on the Loire, and perhaps the Garonne; it is very unlikely that they originated on the Seine.⁵⁰ Nor is the raid’s conclusion directly described in the Frankish texts, but there is a brief note in the entry for 862, relating how the ‘Danes’ then attacking Brittany ‘were joined by the ones who had been in Hispania’.⁵¹ It is clear that the Frankish annals only record part of the fleet’s itinerary in this three-year period, and – as we shall see – a fuller picture can only be gleaned from incorporating other Christian sources from northern Iberia, and from the Muslim territories to the south. As before, there are many source-critical problems to be overcome, including some frustrating ambiguities at crucial junctures, but when all these writings are considered together the Viking expedition can arguably be seen to have ranged over the entire length of the Middle Sea. There seems little doubt that this was one of the most ambitious Viking raids in history (**Map 1**).

The size of fleet is unclear. According to Ibn Ḥayyān’s 11th-century compilation, 62 ships were counted as they entered Andalusian waters⁵² – a similar figure to the 844 raid, and again in line with

46. Aguirre 2013, 25.

47. Aguirre 2013, 37.

48. For example, the Albeldense version of the *Asturian Chronicles*; Aguirre 2013, 18.

49. Translation Nelson 1991, 90.

50. For Viking activity on the Frankish rivers, see Coijmans 2020; Price 2000; 2013; Renaud 2000. It is possible, though unlikely, that the Mediterranean raid began in 858, as this is the date given (as 896, according to the reckoning of the Hispanic Era that counted from the *Pax Romana* of 38 BCE) in the 9th-century *Prophetic Chronicle*, which also notes that the Vikings reached Lisbon in July of that year; a similar approximate date is also repeated in later Arabic sources. See Aguirre 2013, 19, 25, 60 for notes on these texts.

51. Translation Nelson 1991, 99.

52. Christys 2015, 49.

contemporary Viking force strengths recorded in Frankish annals.⁵³ A Galician text from the late 10th to 12th centuries, the *Chronicon Iriense*, mentions a round figure of 100 vessels.⁵⁴ If we take the lower figure as plausible, which I believe it is, then even a conservative reckoning of crew sizes would suggest a Viking force of up to two thousand and perhaps more, a very substantial army indeed. By extension, this has interesting implications for the force's command structure and logistical support,⁵⁵ and not least, its planned objectives.

The identity of the fleet's commanders has long been open to question and has become inextricably entangled with the whole story of the raid. In truth, no named figures are attached to the expedition in any textual source until the 11th century, a gap of more than 150 years.

The Norman chronicler Dudo of St. Quentin claims that the Vikings were led by 'Alstignus', a Latin version of the name Hásteinn. The historical reliability of Dudo's text is debateable, to say the least, but there were clear Scandinavian influences in its creation and content.⁵⁶ A war leader named Hasting appears in the 9th-century Frankish sources, described as commanding Viking forces on the Continent in the 880s: he was clearly a real individual, but we have nothing to link him securely with the Mediterranean raid. Another Norman historian, William of Jumièges who was writing c. 1070, also mentions 'Hastings' but adds a second commander, whom he called Bier Coste Ferree, approximating to Bjørn Ironside. Again, there is no direct contemporary link to the 859 raid, but a man called Berno (the Latin arguably equating to the Norse Bjørn) appears in Frankish sources as a fleet commander, a major figure in the Seine army, and a battlefield leader. He is active in the years 856-858, but then disappears from the Frankish record – a tantalising coincidence given that the fleet left imperial waters in 859 (or even conceivably late in 858). The *Annales Bertiniani* also seem to imply that the force which headed south at that time was the same one that 'Berno' had previously commanded. A third and deeply problematic text, the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, is broadly contemporary with Dudo but has been much distorted in later copying. Interestingly, this includes a quite comprehensive description of the raid with the intriguing detail that it was led by the two (unnamed) 'oldest sons of Ragnall'. This not only repeats the idea that two men commanded the 859 expedition, but for the first time makes them relatives and also links them with the semi-legendary figure of Ragnarr loðbrók.⁵⁷

These associations would be expanded upon in ever-widening circles of elaboration for centuries to come, but at this juncture we can simply note that the fleet *may* have had two commanders, one of whom *may* have been called Bjørn (possibly with a dramatic nickname), and the other might have been Hásteinn but more likely not. Furthermore, these men *may* have been related, and *perhaps* also to other leading Viking commanders of the 9th century.

Whoever led the fleet, the Viking expedition that launched in 859 encapsulates all the problems of studying Scandinavian interventions in the Middle Sea. A virtually non-existent material record must be balanced against a difficult, multicultural palimpsest of textual sources across several centuries, spanning the elusive borders between memory, history, and legend – all of which in turn can only be understood (from a Viking perspective) in the wider archaeo-historical context of the diaspora.

53. Price 2021.

54. Christys 2015, 48.

55. For discussion of these factors for large Viking forces, see Price 2014; Raffield et al. 2015 and Raffield 2016.

56. Van Houts 1983.

57. The identity of the Viking commanders is discussed in passing by Christys (2015, chapter 4), but more extensively by scholars who have tried to unravel the tangled story of Ragnarr and his family; full reviews of the relevant sources can be found in McTurk 1991; Rowe 2012; and for the later English connection, Parker 2018. See also Price 2021.

The water-road to the Narrow Sound

On their way south, the Vikings seem to have plundered in Aquitaine, and then made rapidly for the Galician coast. A number of the Christian chronicles recorded Viking attacks on the region during the short reign of Ordoño I (850-866), while a later entry in the *Chronicon Alberdensis* says that they came in July 858.⁵⁸ The same source adds the name of the commander who fought the raiders, a count Pedro, but we know almost nothing of him.⁵⁹ It is hard to gain real clarity here, but it seems that Pamplona, A Coruña, and Santiago may all have been attacked in 859, as well as Lisbon.

The problems of the Arabic sources on the raid have been discussed extensively by Christys, especially relating to Ibn Ḥayyān's compilation of accounts. Following the work of an earlier editor (Maḥmūd Makkī) she uses interpolations from the later texts of al-'Udhri and Ibn Idhārī to attempt a coherent Muslim view of the 859 raid as it hit the emirate.⁶⁰ Aguirre argues that another late source is of particular value here, the 13th-century *Al-Kamīl fī al-tār'ikh* or 'Complete History' of Ibn al-Athīr, a member of Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn's retinue in Syria. The book is in several parts, and those dealing with al-Andalus in the Viking Age are reliant on al-Rāzī but absent the influence of Ibn Ḥayyān.⁶¹

There is rich, circumstantial detail in these accounts, beginning with a patrol squadron of the Andalusī fleet surprising two Viking ships in a Beja harbour south of Lisbon, and seizing 'money, goods, and prisoners'. Although forewarned of their approach, little could be done against the main Viking fleet which continued along the coast and turned into the Gulf of Cádiz, all the way to the mouth of the Guadalquivir. Again, the path to Seville lay open, and initially it must have seemed that a repeat of the 844 disaster was imminent, but the whole countryside was quickly raised against the incoming raiders and the emir also sent a land army to support them. The walls constructed after the earlier attack now also came into play, and Ibn Ḥayyān notes how the townsfolk went to meet 'the enemy at the gates'. Various Muslim commanders are given credit according to which account one reads, but it seems that the Vikings were turned back before they could make a serious attempt on the city. According to Ibn al-Qūṭīya, 'they were confronted at the mouth of the river of Seville and defeated, with some of their ships being burnt before they made off'.⁶²

What happened next is consistent across many sources, all of which make no particular point of what to modern eyes is perhaps the most singular event: the Viking fleet passed unopposed through the Gibraltar Strait and thus became – so far as we know – the first organised Scandinavian expedition to enter the Mediterranean from the west.

Into the Middle Sea

The first act of the Viking force seems to have been a concerted attack on Algeciras, immediately to the west of the Gibraltar Rock. Noted across several sources, they occupied the town and burned the congregational mosque. Ibn al-Athīr adds that they berthed offshore and looted the surrounding countryside. A very late source, the 14th-century geographer al-Ḥimyarī, notes that a medium-sized place of worship to the south-east of Algeciras was known as the Mosque of the Banners, because it was where the Vikings planted their standards when they came ashore. He adds that one of the mosque's

58. Christys 2015, 47. See n. 50 on this early date for the launch of the raid.

59. Aguirre 2013, 18; Christys 2015, 47.

60. Christys 2015, chapter 4.

61. Aguirre 2013, 40-42.

62. Aguirre 2013, 25.

doors has jambs made of wood from the raiders' ships. Christys dismisses this as a 'flight of fancy on al-Ḥimyarī's part',⁶³ but her assertion is unsubstantiated and need not necessarily be the case.

After Algeciras the fleet then passed another historical milestone by turning south 'for the opposite shore', and thus became the first Vikings to raid on the continent of Africa. Ibn Idhārī says succinctly that they 'took possession of it and took possession of its coasts',⁶⁴ while Ibn al-Athīr specifies that their destination was the tiny Kingdom of Nakūr (**Fig. 2**).⁶⁵ It is clear that the news of the Vikings' passage through the Strait and their attack on what is now Morocco even reached the Christian kingdoms of the north. The *Chronicle of Alfonso III* (in both its versions), was written some 25 years after the events but tells us some of the Galician understanding of the expedition after it left their waters:

The Northmen pirates attacked our coasts again around this time. Then they continued their way through Spain and destroyed all its seas with sword and fire. Later on, they sailed the sea and attacked Nacchor [Nakūr], a city in Mauritania, and there they killed a vast number of Muslims.⁶⁶

The most detailed account of what happened in Nakūr comes (as ever) from a difficult source, al-Bakrī's geographical treatise completed in c. 1068, and often reliant on earlier writers. He is vague about his terms, not least *al-Majūs*, but he includes an extended passage on the Moroccan raid:

Majūs – God curse them – landed at Nakūr, in the year 244 [858-859]. They took the city, plundered it, and made its inhabitants slaves, except for those who saved themselves by flight. Among their prisoners were Ama al-Rahmān and Khanūla, daughters of Wakif ibn-Mu'tasim ibn-Ṣāliḥ. [The emir] Muḥammad ransomed them. The *Majūs* stayed eight days in Nakūr.⁶⁷

Fragments of the same story are quoted by Ibn Idhārī, Ibn al-Qūṭīya, and Ibn Khaldūn, the latter adding that the Vikings were driven off by a combined force of Barānis and the men of Sa'īd. The *Historia Arabum* from c. 1245 and translating an unknown Arabic source, also mentions the Vikings' diversion to Africa, 'where they drove out many people from their homes'.⁶⁸ One further text, the problematic *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* mentioned above, includes an (in context) unlikely but also oddly plausible description of the attack on Nakūr, which is unique in also relating one of its tragic long-term consequences:

They [the Vikings] afterwards crossed the Gaditanean Straits, i.e. where the Mediterranean Sea goes into the external ocean, and they arrived in Africa and there fought a battle with the Mauritanī, in which a great slaughter of the Mauritanī was made ... After this the Lochlanns [one of the *Annals*' terms for Vikings] passed over the country, and they plundered and burned the whole country; and they carried off a great host of them [the Mauritanī] as captives to Erin ... Long indeed were these blue men in Erin.⁶⁹

The plunder of Nakūr either does not seem to have been enough in itself to warrant a prolonged sortie along the Moroccan shore, or it may have been that the Idrisid territories surrounding it proved to be a challenge. The negotiations with the emir of Córdoba in any case steered the fleet back towards al-Andalus. Returning to Iberia, the Vikings began to follow the east coast northwards. The region around Murcia was attacked, and the fortress of Orihuela taken. Although the exact chronology is unclear, the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* notes that 'then they assaulted Mallorca and Menorca and left them devastated', which would fit with the general northward path of the fleet after they returned to

63. Christys 2015, 53.

64. Christys 2015, 49.

65. Aguirre 2013, 41.

66. Aguirre 2013, 21; Christys 2015, 47-48.

67. Christys 2015, 53-54.

68. Christys 2015, 52.

69. Christys 2015, 56.

al-Andalus and headed towards the southern coast of Frankia. Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's 13th-century account adds Ibiza and Formentera to the targets.⁷⁰

Perpignan and Narbonne were attacked as the fleet began to cruise along the Frankish shore. As we have seen, the *Annales Bertiniani* then picks up the story, and in the entries for 859 and 860 mentions an attack on the Rhône and its settlements, a base established in the Camargue, further raiding at Nîmes, and upriver to Arles, reaching inland as far as Valence.⁷¹ Turning to other sources, Ermentarius of Noirmoutier also notes that the 'Northmen' who had attacked Spain then went on to the Rhône. Christys sees the Frankish references to the Vikings on the Rhône as part of a general focus on foreign incursions into the southern Empire, not least by Andalusis, but their presence is supported by Arabic sources too. Ibn Ḥayyān notes how they continued into the southern reaches of Frankia, describing how they over-wintered there into what would have been 860, pillaging the region of both captives and plunder; his account is echoed by Ibn al-Athīr.

In tracking the Vikings' operations after passing Gibraltar, and not least the disjointed sequences of events in the textual record (even beyond its cultural variations and source-critical issues), it may be worth considering that the fleet divided at this point, some plundering in Nakūr while others turned north for the coast of Valencia, the Segura river and Orihuela.⁷² This should not surprise us, as exactly the same happened on multiple occasions in Frankia right after the Mediterranean raid. Thus the *Annals of St. Bertin* for 861, 'so they split up according to their brotherhoods [*solidalitates*] into groups allocated to various ports, from the sea-coast right up to Paris', and again the following spring, 'the Danes made for the open sea, and split up into several flotillas which sailed off in different directions according to their various choices'.⁷³ A division of this kind would also explain the base in the Camargue, as an agreed-upon place to rendezvous and recoup over the winter of 859-860.

The Viking fleet's activities from the spring of 860 onwards present possibly the most difficult interpretive challenges of the entire expedition. At this point, the Muslim sources make an unacknowledged leap in time and have the Vikings turning directly back towards al-Andalus and attempting the return passage of Gibraltar,⁷⁴ but from other records it is clear that this did not occur until much later in 861. What did they do for the intervening year?

To Italy and beyond

The Frankish sources are fairly unanimous – and, it must be said, geographically plausible – in claiming that the Viking force left for new opportunities further east along the coast. The *Annales Bertiniani* put it succinctly as ever in the entry for 860: 'the Danes who had been on the Rhône made for Italy, where they took Pisa and other *civitates*, sacked them, and laid them waste'.⁷⁵ Ermentarius says much the same, continuing his sentence about the Vikings' Rhône depredations to relate how next 'they devastated Italy'.⁷⁶ There seems little doubt that the fleet's first port of call after leaving Provence was indeed northern Italy, almost certainly Tuscany, and that their visit included plunder and assault of

70. Christys 2015, 59.

71. Nelson, trans., 1991, 90; the annal omits any mention of attacks in al-Andalus or North Africa, however.

72. See García Losquiño, this volume.

73. Nelson, trans., 1991, 861 annal.

74. Aguirre 2013, 42, 62 – he considers that the fleet divided at this point, some turning back from the Rhône as the Arabic sources describe, while others continued east; Christys 2015, 49.

75. Translation Nelson 1991, 93.

76. Christys 2015, 59. Note that Ermentarius places this in 857, but in other respects his account dovetails with that of Prudentius.

the familiar kind. But was there more to their Italian adventure? This is the point at which the textual record of the ‘Great Raid’ begins to accelerate into speculation, with later sources painting the Vikings’ operations in terms of wild exaggeration.

The 11th-century Norman historians Dudo of St. Quentin and William of Jumièges have been mentioned above, in the context of their naming versions of Bjørn and Hásteinn, the alleged commanders of the Viking fleet. These same accounts also include dramatic continuations of the raiders’ activities in Italy. According to Dudo, on entering Italian waters ‘Alstingus’ (i.e. Hásteinn) ‘spoke by himself on behalf of the others ... “let us go to Rome, and force it to submit to our dominion like Frankia”’.⁷⁷ Thus begins a colourful episode in which, confused by bad weather and sundry mishaps, the Vikings arrive ‘at the city called Luna’ and set about its capture, clearly mistaking it for Rome. There follows an improbable series of events, whereby the Vikings gain entry to the city through requesting an episcopal baptism for their allegedly dying commander, only for him to spring to life once inside the walls. The inhabitants of Luna are slaughtered, and it is only at this point that some unfortunate informs the Vikings that the tiny settlement is not Rome after all. William relates much the same story, but – as we have seen – adding Bjørn to the Viking command roster.

The Viking raid on ‘Rome’ has become an indissoluble part of the 859-861/2 expedition narrative, but it is unlikely ever to have occurred for a number of reasons. First, it is impossible to believe that an experienced Viking force, which must have included some very well-travelled individuals indeed, could have mistaken a place like Luna for the former capital of the Western Empire. In the mid-9th century, Luna (sometimes written Luni) was a small port town that had seen distinctly better days, and its prosperity belonged to a Byzantine past that had fundamentally changed with the Lombard takeover about two centuries prior to the Vikings’ arrival. Second, the complicated Viking stratagem to take the city is not unique to this story, but appears in similar form in connection with three other early Medieval rulers.⁷⁸ The raid on Luna, and its confusion with Rome, also reappears a hundred years later still in Icelandic sources, by which time the whole episode has become firmly incorporated into the expanding saga of Ragnarr loðbrók and his many sons.

If the Vikings never attempted an assault on Rome itself, this does not mean that they never attacked the actual Luna. It lies not far from Pisa, mentioned in the Frankish sources, and had certainly been the target of coastal incursions before.⁷⁹ Fiesole may also have been raided at the same time, and the cluster of these three sites makes geographical sense if we see the fleet moving east around the northern Mediterranean shore after leaving the Rhône. But where did they go next? There are several options, and there is also the possibility that the Viking fleet again divided to pursue a variety of different objectives simultaneously.

The *Chronicle of Alfonso III* relates how, after the Vikings left the Balearics, ‘later on, they advanced to Greece, and after three years they returned to their homeland’.⁸⁰ This is not as geographically specific as it might first appear, in that ‘Greece’ could be taken literally or else to refer to almost anywhere within the immediate orbit of the Byzantine Empire of the ‘Greeks’. There was a recorded Rus’ attack on the suburbs of Constantinople in 860 or thereabouts, and while most scholars believe this to have been a raid coming from the north, it has also been suggested that the perpetrators were

77. Christensen 1998, 17-20.

78. Christys 2015, 61, with reference to tales associated with Robert Guiscard, Haraldr Sigurðarson, and the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II.

79. Christys (2015, 61) argues that the recorded attacks on Luna by Arabs, and perhaps others, may have been responsible for Dudo’s selection of the site as a likely objective for his semi-fictional Hásteinn, but there is no reason why this could not equally reflect an actual raid.

80. Christys 2015, 59.

the Vikings of the Mediterranean expedition.⁸¹ Whether or not they reached the Byzantine capital, it would certainly have been possible for the fleet to have continued along the Italian coast into imperial waters. Whatever they did there, it must also have taken time, in order to account for the months between leaving the Rhône in the spring of 860 and the return passage of Gibraltar in 861.

One single account adds a further remarkable detail, which if true opens up an entirely new frontier of the ‘Viking world’. Ibn al-Qūṭīya, whose 10th-century history has been mentioned above, follows his note on the Nakūr raid with an extraordinary sentence: ‘Then they [*Majūs*/Vikings] ravaged the two coasts completely until they reached Rome-Land and Alexandria’.⁸² As above with Greece, ‘Rome’ is synonymous with the Eastern Empire, and in this context could refer to Greece, the Black Sea region, or even literally Italy. This does not conflict with our other sources, but the reference to Egypt is unique. Some scholars take this seriously, such as Aguirre who argues that this ‘is evidence that in the erudite circles of the court of al-Ḥakam II (961-976) the expedition was known to have reached Alexandria’.⁸³ Absent any possibility of proof one way or the other, it must be acknowledged that a Scandinavian force in the Mediterranean could indeed have reached the delta of the Nile. *If* they did (a big ‘if’), what an extraordinary addition to the frontiers of the diaspora; imagine them walking in the streets of Alexandria, past the dog-headed statues, the pharaonic monuments, and the temples covered with intricate picture-writing.

The battle for the Strait, and the home run

The Viking force seems to have returned to their former base in the Camargue sometime early in 861 or possibly late the previous year. We do not know where they over-wintered, and it might have been there. Equally, as previously, this may have been a rendezvous where the disparate flotillas could meet and combine before attempting the return passage of the Strait. In any case, there are references to renewed raiding in Provence early in 861, which might represent foraging for supplies.

After leaving the Rhône for the second time, there is no record of the Vikings’ activities before they approached Gibraltar, and they seem to have been making directly for the Atlantic and thus the homeward voyage. However, unlike their smooth entry into the Mediterranean, this time the Vikings found the Strait passage blocked by an Andalusī fleet.

It is at this point that they reappear in the Arabic sources, such as Ibn Ḥayyān’s compilation, which as we have seen tends to jump directly from the Vikings’ 859-860 sojourn in southern Frankia to their return to al-Andalus. With the additions from Makki’s edition, we can take up their story when they are met by the Andalusī fleet under the command of Qarqāshīsh ibn Shakrūḥ and the admiral Khashkhāsh. The detail is compelling but with a sequence of events that is hard to grasp.

It seems that there were several brief initial engagements, with first two Viking ships captured and burned, then two more, their crews slain. In a later passage of the same text, apparently out of sequence, the loss of 14 Viking ships to ‘a naval attack from the direction of Algeciras’ is also mentioned, and this may be part of the same event. Another writer in Ibn Ḥayyān’s compilation, the otherwise unknown Mu’āwiya ibn Hishām, adds that the Vikings ‘found the landing places uncertain, and a trap’.⁸⁴ It is hard to know what to make of this, but it certainly suggests that the Vikings met with a sustained series of difficulties on their return to the Atlantic, which reinforces the sense of Andalusī preparedness.

81. Christys 61-63; cf. Vasiliev 1946.

82. Christys 2015, 53.

83. Aguirre 2013, 21.

84. Christys 2015, 52.

Ibn Ḥayyān describes how the Vikings tried to evade the Muslim fleet, presumably while making for the open sea, but there was clearly close enough combat to result in the death of admiral Khashkhāsh, who ‘fought them from the prow of his ship’. The Andalusī vessels were filled with ‘tightly packed ranks of archers’, and also carried ‘a flask of Greek fire and many kinds of naval armaments’, which may explain why ‘more than forty [Viking] ships were destroyed’.⁸⁵

If these figures are correct, it would seem that roughly two thirds of the Viking force was lost in the running battle to clear the Strait of Gibraltar, or even more if this figure does not include the 2+2+14 ships listed as destroyed elsewhere in the text. One should be cautious in extrapolating too much from the relatively spare accounts, but the image of burning longships and showers of arrows is a vivid one, not least in terms of scale, with dozens of ships being lost together with their crews and plunder, presumably including captives.

The Vikings who survived the Andalusī blockade seem to have made swiftly for the Christian territories of the North, perhaps aided by a storm wind (though the sources are vague as to the timing of this). Al-Bakrī, author of the detailed account of the depredations in Nakūr, makes an intriguing note that the bad weather forced them in to Aṣīla, a coastal town on the African shore just west of the Strait. He also claims that Vikings had visited this place once previously, *before* the 844 raid; some have dismissed this account, but it must remain an open question, and also a possibility that the 844 raiders crossed briefly to the African side.⁸⁶

We know little of what happened with the survivors on their way home. A brief annalistic mention of ‘ravaging the coasts’, implies running attacks along what is now the Portuguese shore as the Vikings continued north. The most vivid detail of their return journey comes from two accounts collated by Ibn Ḥayyān, relating how the fleet made one last, concerted assault before leaving Iberia completely. Its target was Pamplona, though it is unclear whether the attack was on the city itself, the outskirts only (both involving a short journey up the Ebro), or even whether the whole kingdom of Navarre is meant.⁸⁷ Wherever it was they went, the Vikings allegedly managed to capture the ‘emir’ (i.e. governor) of Pamplona, García Iñiquez, after destructive raiding among the Basques. The sum paid for his release, 70,000 dinars or nearly 300 kilos of gold, is enormous and of course impossible to verify. In a nasty coda, the Vikings seem to have kept his two sons as prisoners ‘because of some deferments in the payments’.⁸⁸ After this, the fleet disappears from the record and the raid was over: only a handful of Vikings seem to have survived, including presumably the commanders, but they returned to Frankia immensely rich, in reputation as well as portable wealth.

Assessing the ‘Great Raid’

It is probably significant that the greatest Viking incursion into the territory of the emirate occurred during a period of weak domestic rule there. Muḥammad I had been crowned emir of Córdoba in 852, only seven years before the great expedition was launched, and already at that time he was faced with multiple rebellions in al-Andalus. Although he kept power until 888, his reign was one of marked instability, and there is little doubt this affected the Andalusī response to Viking attacks. Nonetheless, it is clear that the defensive measures put in place after the raid of 844 – the walls of Seville, and not least the construction of a rapid-response fleet – played a significant role in at least moderating the

85. See Christys 2015, 49-50 for all quotations here from Ibn Ḥayyān.

86. Christys 2015, 54.

87. The sources are discussed by Christys (2015, 63-64), including the assertion by some scholars that the attack was actually launched from Aquitaine by a completely different force of Vikings.

88. Aguirre 2013, 38; Christys 2015, 50.

Viking impact. This is particularly the case, of course, in the destruction of so many ships in their return attempt of the Strait.

A striking feature of the Viking operations, appearing across several Arabic sources, is the practice of kidnapping prominent political figures (and/or their families) for ransom. Ibn Ḥayyān mentions ‘Abd al-Malik and ‘Abd Allāh, the two sons of Muḥammad ibn Maslama, who were captured during the first attack on the Beja region (one was released, the other enslaved). There is also the local official S’adūn al-Surunbāqī who was kidnapped and ransomed, as well as the royal women from Nakūr, and (perhaps) the governor of Pamplona as we have seen. Few of these people could have been caught by chance, which implies considerable prior knowledge and tactical planning on behalf of the Vikings. The 859-861/2 expedition raises many such suggestive questions, not the least of which concerns basic logistics of supply – how did 2000 or so Vikings ensure a constant supply of basic foodstuffs and other necessities? Plundering the countryside is unlikely to have been a consistently viable option over the course of nearly three years. The difficulties of Iberian coastal topography have probably also been underestimated in relation to the Vikings’ preferred tactics of riverine assault.⁸⁹ Clearly, there was probably rather more to the ‘Great Raid’ than we can read from the surviving sources, but we are perhaps unlikely ever to know its full dimensions.⁹⁰

In reviewing the sometimes-intense critical debates and general scepticism of textual scholars, there can be a tendency to forget that somewhere behind the complexities of the (mostly) later sources lay a 9th-century reality of lived experience, and what was by any standards a very dramatic sequence of events indeed. The Galicians’ repeated struggle against coastal incursions, and the impact of a Viking presence over the longer term; the cultural encounter of Andalusis and Scandinavians, and its many possible contexts; the carnage in Seville; the plundering of the Moroccan shore; the slave-taking; the impenetrable fog of Viking activity in the eastern Mediterranean, as accessed from the west; the battle at the Strait. Whether they involved one or several Viking forces (or perhaps several, sub-dividing from and recombining with one, larger fleet) these events were clearly real, and deserve serious scholarly acknowledgement. Even with regard to their later embellishment, it is surely unlikely that events of no significance would give rise to such an enduring edifice of tales.

Drawing a comparison from closer to our own times, it is enough to consider the famous characters of the American frontier, individuals such as Wyatt Earp, Calamity Jane, ‘Wild’ Bill Hickock and the rest. They were all real people who earned their dramatic reputations, but the mythic enhancement of their stories began even in their lifetimes.⁹¹ Within a century, fuelled by the proliferation of printed literature, film, and other media, their reincarnation as Heroes of the Old West was complete. This is stated plainly in a scene towards the end of John Ford’s celebrated 1962 Western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. A timid storekeeper, played by James Stewart, is celebrated for his bravery in ridding his town of the titular thug who has long terrorised them all, when it is revealed to a few that the fatal shot was actually fired from the shadows by John Wayne’s gunslinger. Stewart’s upright character, who had not known of this, wants to set the record straight. The local newspaper proprietor has other ideas, expressed in a famous line, “This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend”.

89. Aguirre (2013) devotes considerable space to analysing the shorelines of modern Portugal in particular.

90. The diversity of scholarly takes on the raid can be instructive: for example, Aguirre (2013, 59-69) considers the expedition to have been a peripheral venture, made up of several flotillas that each undertook only limited operations, and that its entire Iberian section was merely an episode *en route* to their actual destination of southern Frankia; I disagree, but his reading is not untenable. Christys (2015, chapter 7) gives an admirably cautious overview of the problem.

91. A process neatly captured in the revisionist meta-narrative of Clint Eastwood’s film *Unforgiven* (1992), in which the ageing gunfighter English Bob travels accompanied by his own biographer. Reinvented as the ‘Duke of Death’ in the writer’s serialised pulp, Bob knowingly cultivates his legend in the full knowledge of its exaggerations. The comparisons to Viking-Age lords and their skalds are not far away.

In remembering the ‘Great Raid’, its commanders and their adventures, we must accept that the later Arabic and Norman sources, the Icelandic sagas – and a host of other media even down to the present⁹² – very much printed the legend (**Map 2**). But for Björn and Hásteinn, just as for Billy the Kid, one should not assume from this that there was nothing behind the story at all.

The 10th century and after

Following the departure of the much-diminished fleet from Andalusian waters in 861 or 862, there is no evidence that any major Scandinavian force entered the Mediterranean from the west until after the Viking Age. Indeed, a century would elapse before any further Viking raids seem to have been launched on Iberia at all. In this time the political landscape of the region changed dramatically, most clearly so in al-Andalus which emerged as the independent Caliphate of Córdoba in the wake of the Fatimid rise in North Africa and their tensions with the Abbasids. This same period saw increased military preparedness in the Muslim polities, partly in anticipation of possible attacks from the sea on the 9th-century model, but also in the context of civil conflicts. These improved defences may to a degree have been responsible for the long hiatus in Viking operations in Iberia, and there is good evidence that the Andalusian rulers were aware of the need to protect the Douro coast especially. Similar preparations were made in Galicia, not least at settlements such as Santiago de Compostela and at riverine blockades as at the Torres del Oeste on the Ulla (**Fig. 3**).⁹³ However, this was also a period when Viking army operations had largely shifted from the Continent to the wars with Wessex and the other English kingdoms, followed by extended campaigns in Ireland.

When Viking attentions turned again to Iberia, it is hardly surprising that the Christian states of the north – so close to Frankia – bore the brunt of renewed raiding aggression.⁹⁴ The raids of the 10th and 11th centuries were confined to the Atlantic coasts, but can be summarized briefly here.

There were clearly intensive attacks around Santiago and the Ulla river in the early 960s, with uncertain reports of several monasteries being laid waste. A major incursion seems to have begun in 968, which according to 12th-century records resulted in a three-year occupation of large parts of Galicia; the bishop of Santiago is also reported to have been killed in battle at Fornelos. His successor, Rosendo, is still revered in Galicia today for his struggles against the (pagan) Vikings, though these belong at least as much to folklore as history. Several other Galician ecclesiastics would be similarly elevated as defenders of the faith in later writings, their retrospective achievements being hailed as late as the 16th century. The degree of historicity in this, if any, is hard to ascertain, but as Christys has observed, ‘it showed that repulsing Vikings was one of the things that good bishops were supposed to do’.⁹⁵

92. Curiously, the comparative academic neglect of the Vikings’ Mediterranean adventures has not been reflected in popular media, as Björn’s expedition has been widely referenced in the *Vikings* TV drama series (in which he is a major character) and even in comic-book form, Woerhel et al. 1999.

93. This period, and the complicated chronologies of the Muslim defences, are analysed in depth by Christys (2015, chapter 5).

94. Later Viking contacts with the Christian kingdoms of northern Iberia have to a degree enjoyed an academic focus – and certainly a popular one – out of proportion to their engagement with the region as a whole, largely due to language barriers in accessing Arabic sources. Perhaps surprisingly to outside observers, the Viking encounter with Spain in particular remains a source of enormous public fascination, resulting in a handful of scholarly works (referenced above) and a considerable overburden of enthusiastic but often wildly inaccurate or speculative popular accounts; see Aguirre 2013, 44-48.

95. Christys 2015, 86. Chapter 6 of her book provides a thorough historical overview of the 10th- and 11th-century raids, including a close analysis of the tangled source material deriving largely from the respective centres of Santiago and Córdoba.

Either as independent agents, or else operating from temporary Galician bases, Vikings also seem to have troubled the western coast of al-Andalus in the 10th century. A force of 28 ships was sighted in 966, made landfall at Lisbon, and fought several engagements with Muslim troops (according to Ibn Idhārī). They were driven off after ship-borne fighting on the River Silves, though with losses on both sides, and there are references to the freeing of Muslim captives – slaving was apparently once more on their agenda.

Another Viking flotilla arrived from the north in 971, described in a long, and academically somewhat neglected, account by Ibn Ḥayyān, and pieced together from its disparate elements by Christys.⁹⁶ On receiving advance warning of the fleet's appearance, the Caliphate mobilised naval and land forces, sent out with some ceremony from the palace at Madīnat al-Zahrā' outside Córdoba (Figs. 4 and 5). News seems to have been received that the Vikings had penetrated the Douro river, perhaps even to the region of Santaver north-east of Madrid; as Christys notes, this was very far inland indeed, but there are precedents for such range in the Vikings' Frankish raids. Through late July and August that year, the Andalusi fleet searched for but failed to locate the Viking force, though there is a suggestion that they acted as a deterrent. A military triumph was arranged for the 'victorious' wazīr on his return to Córdoba, despite his not having encountered a single raider. In 972, apparently prompted by the previous year's events, the caliph sent out a proactive force against Viking incursions – again dispatched with ceremonial pomp – but once more failed to find any.

There is a believably ridiculous quality to these inconclusive descriptions, which also belies the evident fact that Vikings really were seen as a more or less constant menace to the Algarve coast.⁹⁷ Moreover, the two events of 966 and 971-972 may also mask a much longer, more regular sequence of maritime harassment along the western coast, as the sources make clear that such raids were 'their custom' and there is mention of updated news of Viking movements arriving constantly at the Córdoba court.

There is one curious coda to Viking operations in 10th-century Iberia, relating to the earlier part of the century prior to the 966 raid, and involving an unexpected appearance by one of the most famous Vikings of them all. Eiríkr blóðøx – King Erik Bloodaxe of Jórvík – is usually accepted to have been killed in an ambush at Stainmore in northern England in 954, during a period of civil unrest. However, two 12th-century Scandinavian sources, the *Ágrip* and the *Historia Norvegiae*, both state that, having been forced abroad, he actually died while raiding in Spain.⁹⁸ This information must simply stand as it is, but the possible implications are quite startling.

Galicia and the Douro river basin seem to have been raided again in 1008, 1015 or 1016, and 1028. The fact of the attacks is less interesting than the compelling details of their human consequences, as revealed in the charters and other records of the region. This is especially true of episodes relating to the kidnap of wealthy citizens for ransom, which as we have seen was also a feature of the 859-861/2 raid, and indeed of Viking operations elsewhere.⁹⁹

One such human tragedy, albeit with a positive outcome, is revealed in a charter recording a sale of land near San Salvador de Moreira in northern Portugal, sold to cover a debt incurred by one Amarelo Mestaliz. He writes, 'A great number of Vikings [*Lotnimis*] arrived in July [1015] and occupied the territory between the rivers Douro and Ave for nine months. These Vikings [*Leodemanes*] captured my three daughters, called Serili, Ermesenda and Faquilo, and reduced me to poverty, for, when they

96. Christys 2015, 88-93.

97. Christys (2015, 92) makes the interesting speculation that talking up the Viking threat may also have provided a convenient justification for maintaining the caliphate's military on high alert.

98. Christys 2015, 98.

99. See Raffield 2019.

were about to sell their captives, I had no choice but to pay to Vikings [*Lotmanes*] a ransom of silver for them'. This account is interesting because of what it implies about the communication systems that were either in place, or that rapidly evolved, in order to effect such negotiations. Not least, it is clear that ransom sums could be raised on behalf of individuals who were otherwise unable to find the required funds quickly, on the understanding that they would later be repaid. In another such episode, property was similarly sold by a woman living near Porto, to repay a Viking ransom for herself and her daughter, who had been held onboard one of their ships. The transaction is remarkably detailed, the payment being a cloak, a sword, a shirt, three pieces of linen, a cow, and some salt. Sometimes the exchange could go the other way, as in 1028 when a Christian man fled political difficulties in Galicia by taking to the sea 'in Viking ships'. As in Frankia and England, there were evidently many layers of relations between the raiders and their victims, that may in some cases have involved actual complicity. At around the same time, Vikings also seem to have hired on as mercenaries in Spanish civil disputes.¹⁰⁰

There are later encounters, including an extended period of conflict with the Santiago bishops from the 1040s as late as 1066, but it is at this point that the saga narratives of Christian Norse kings take over – the mythical adventures of figures such as St. Ólafr Haraldsson (who may, just possibly, have raided in Iberia when young¹⁰¹). With the crusading career of King Sigurðr Jórsalafari in the early 12th century, the era of properly Viking incursions into the Middle Sea was over, or perhaps, can be said to have taken new form (**Map 3**).

Scholars still argue as to whether the Viking encounter with the Mediterranean cultures was 'peripheral' or not, but regardless of historical hindsight it can hardly have felt that way to those who experienced the slaughter, slaving, economic loss, and general destabilising uncertainty of the raids. Whoever led the great expedition of 859-861/2, whether in a single massive fleet or repeatedly subdividing flotillas, there is no doubt that their combined achievements earned them a chapter of their own in the Viking story. This may have appealed to those 'eager for fame', the classic trope of the Viking mindset, but it certainly brought a profit, albeit only for the survivors. A different legacy can be seen in the poignant account of Amerelo, who ruined himself to rescue his daughters, and in the ransom paid for the royal women of Nakūr; but also in the unwritten and forgotten stories of all those who disappeared into the slave systems of the North, or whose graves are no longer marked.

The Vikings in the Mediterranean wrote a saga all their own and left an impression that survives in Iberian folklore even to the present, but they were not missed when they passed on.

100. These accounts are given by Christys (2015, chapter 7), who summarises these sources and contrasts them with the later exaggerations and mythologizing of the sagas.

101. See Bandlien, this volume.

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Fig. 1. A panorama of the city of Córdoba, seen from Las Ermitas. Photo by kallerna, Creative Commons.



Fig. 2.
Part of the Kingdom of Nakūr (now the Rif coast of Morocco), raided by the Viking fleet in 859. Photo by Sebaso, Creative Commons.



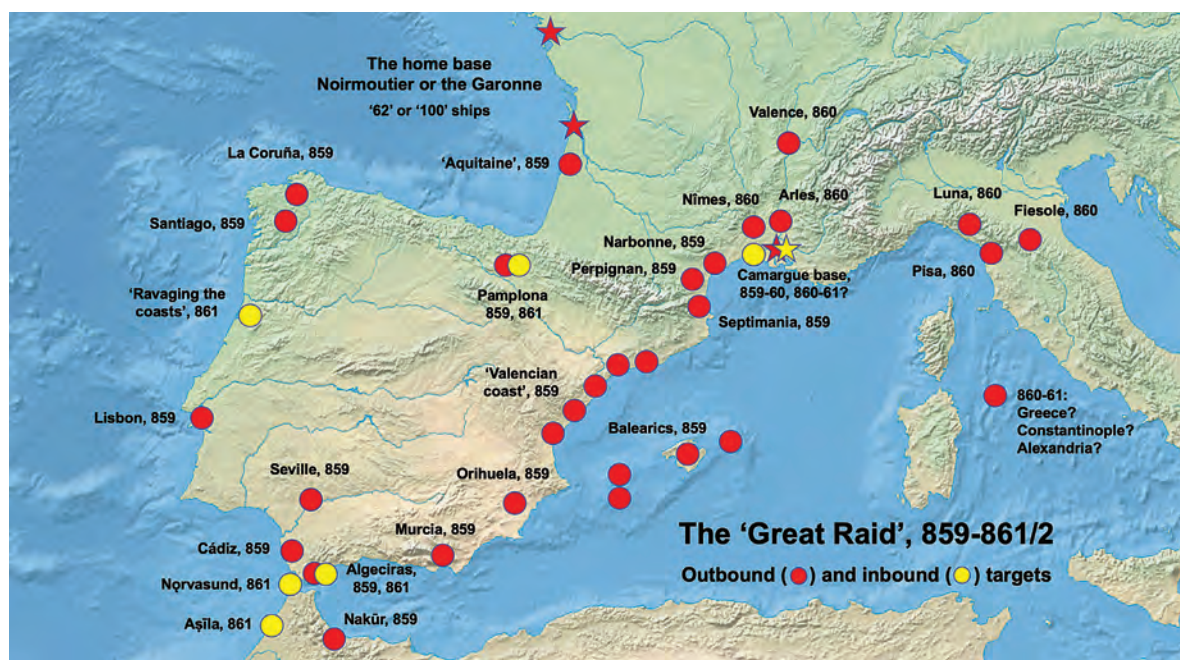
Fig. 3.
Ruins of the Torres de Oveste fortified bridge, blockading the River Ulla downstream from Santiago de Compostela. Photo by Neil Price.



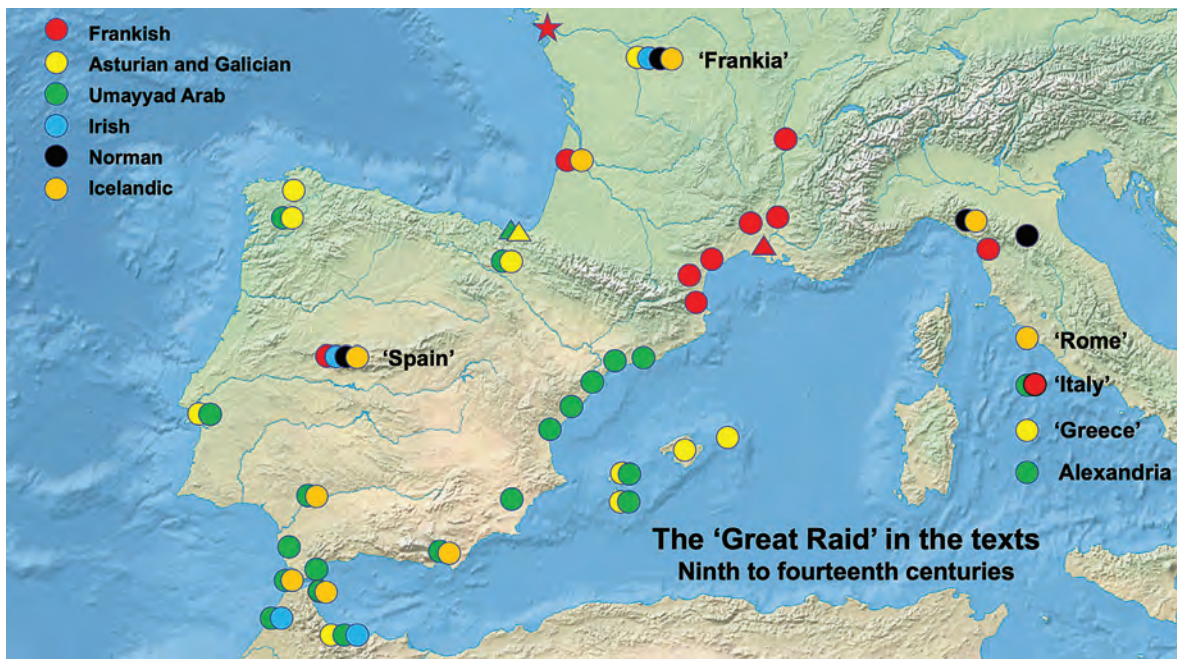
Fig. 4.
The palace at Madīnat al-Zahrā' outside Córdoba, centre of operations for the Caliphate in its struggles against the Vikings. Photo by kallerna, Creative Commons.



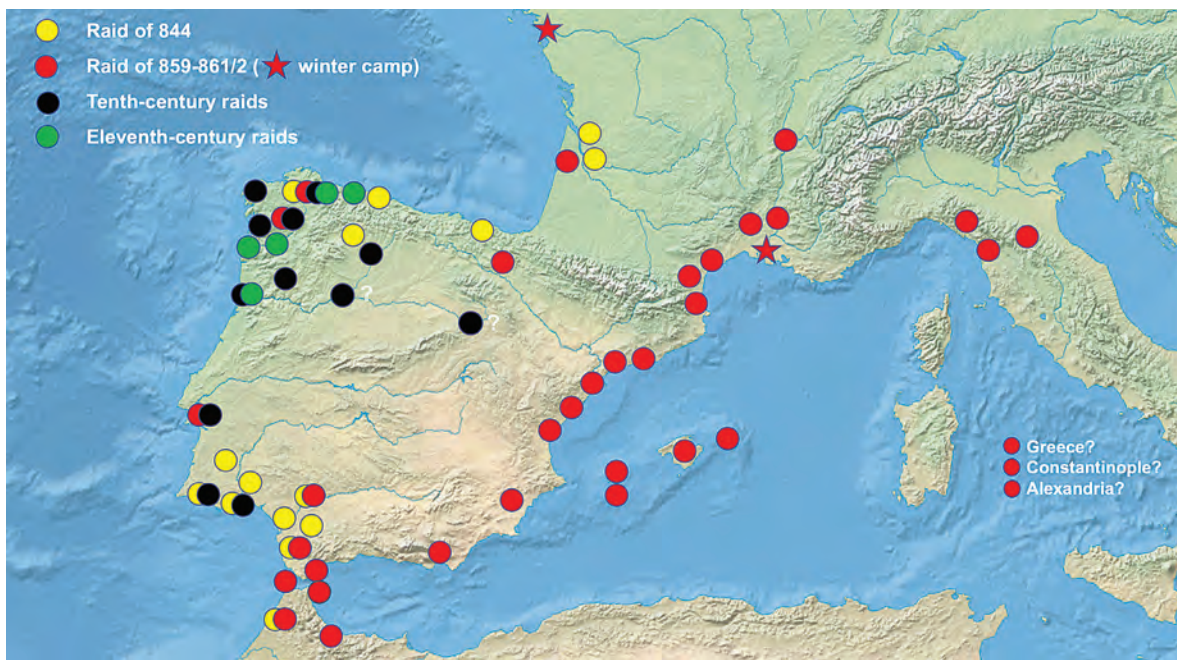
Fig. 5.
The Great Gate at Madīnat al-Zahrā', through which the Andalusi army marched out to meet the Vikings in 971. Photo by Daniel Villafruela, Creative Commons.



Map 1. The 'Great Raid' of 859-861/2, showing places and regions targeted during its inbound and outbound phases. Map by Neil Price.



Map 2. The events and targets of the 'Great Raid' of 859-861/2 as they appear in textual sources of the 9th to 14th centuries. Map by Neil Price.



Map 3. Viking raids in the western Mediterranean, 9th to 11th centuries. Map by Neil Price.

The Mediterranean in the Old Scandinavian Image of the World

Elena Melnikova

Abstract

The geographical knowledge of the habitable world in Medieval Scandinavia was based on two main sources: the lore going back to the experience of Vikings' raids and the European learning derived mainly from the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville. The former constituted the geographical background of the sagas; the latter was incorporated in Icelandic geographical treatises and similar texts that systematically described the habitable world. The information on the Mediterranean consisted mostly of placenames designating lands, parts of the Mediterranean Sea, islands, and cities. Since the main route from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean was the *Austrvegr*, the East Mediterranean as far as Sicily was much better known than any other region. The largest concentration of placenames is connected with Byzantium, and some of them were Old Norse in origin. Many of the names, like *Grikland*, *Miklagarðr*, *Jórsalaborg* and *Jórsalaland*, *Serkland*, etc., became deeply enrooted in the Old Norse perception of the world. The placenames in other regions of the Mediterranean became known in the North only if they were incorporated in retellings of the voyages by Scandinavians and seldom occurred outside their original context.

One of the results of voyages of the Vikings was their accumulation of a large quantity of geographical information about the surrounding world.¹ Their knowledge was based on their acquaintance with lands they visited as raiders and traders and it was spread in the North together with the stories about the deeds of the Vikings abroad. Many of these stories became incorporated in the Icelandic sagas in the 13th and 14th centuries.² The spatial horizon of the Scandinavians by the end of the Viking Age greatly surpassed that of the Europeans and even the Arabs. Their world stretched from the Cola peninsula in the north down to North Africa in the south and from Newfoundland and New Anglia in the west to the Volga in the east. (**Map 1**). These lands, however, were familiar to the Vikings to varying degrees depending on the frequency with which they visited them.

By the 13th century when the geographical lore started to be put into writing, the Scandinavian geographical horizon widened further because of the penetration of European learning into the North after the adoption of Christianity. Besides the Bible, liturgical texts, lives of saints, etc., Scandinavians gained access to most authoritative works on various topics, including geography. Great encyclopa-

1. For a general survey, see Simek 1990; Melnikova 1986, 3–18; 1998, 170–207.

2. I base this article mostly on the Kings' and Family sagas and use the Legendary sagas only sporadically, leaving aside *Riddara sögur* and historical compilations like *Veraldar saga* and *Romverja saga*. On the geography in *Fornaldar* and *Riddara sögur*, see Simek 1990, 331–366.

dias – the *Etymologies* of Isidor of Seville (d. 636) and *De imagine mundi* of Honorius Augustodunensis (d. 1156) – supplied information about territories far beyond the Vikings’ reach. This information, however, had little practical value. Isidor drew his information from the Bible and the Late Roman and early Christian geographies, and Honorius mostly repeated Isidor’s text.³ As a result, the new knowledge brought to the North included both real and legendary data about such lands as Africa, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and further east as far as Central Asia and India. Thus the perception of the habitable world of Scandinavians of the 13th and 14th centuries consisted of two essentially different images that Icelandic learned men (*fróðir menn*) tried to reconcile.⁴ The results of their efforts were represented first and foremost in a number of specialized geographical treatises, while common lore was reflected in saga stories about the Vikings expeditions. The former presented a systematized image of the whole known world whereas the latter, except for rare occasions, only named lands, cities, or other geographical objects. The geographical information in the sagas was thus casual and dispersed.

Old Scandinavian geographical literature

Specialized geographical literature appeared in Iceland in the 12th century; the first extant specimen is the *Leiðarvísir og borgarskipan* (“A Guide and List of Cities”) by abbot Nikulás of the Benedictine monastery of Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður, Iceland – an itinerary from Iceland to Jerusalem via Germany, Rome, and Brindisi.⁵ According to Icelandic annals, Nikulás returned from his journey in 1154 and he died in 1159.⁶ Like most itineraries, it mentions mostly the places where the traveller stopped on his way and churches with holy relics. The maritime part of the voyage from Brindisi to Akra (modern Akko) is described also by naming places where Nikulás stopped, both towns and islands, and the only part of the Mediterranean Sea mentioned is the Gulf of Venice: ‘In a gulf of the sea, after that is Venice, there is the patriarch’s cathedra...’ (*I hafsbötn þadan ero Feneyiar, þar er patriarcha stoll...*).⁷ The overwhelming majority of information in this and other itineraries, however, did not affect public geographical knowledge.

Of much greater importance are specialized geographical treatises and notes presenting the combination of excerpts from *Etymologies* of Isidor of Seville and *De imagine mundi* of Honorius Augustodunensis⁸ with local geographical lore. There exist four general descriptions of the world. The earliest one, *Landalýsing I* (*Inc.*: ‘*Sva er kallat sem iordin...*’),⁹ was probably written in the last two decades of the 12th century or around 1200.¹⁰

Another treatise is preserved in the AM 544,4to (fol. 2r–4r), a part of the *Hauksbók* compiled and mostly written in his own hand by Haukr Erlendsson, an Icelandic lawspeaker (d. 1334), in 1302–

3. Wright 1925; Melnikova 1998, 67–83, 127–136.

4. Melnikova 1991; 1998, 176–186.

5. The earliest manuscript containing a fragment of the itinerary, AM 736, 4to, (c. 1300); the full text is preserved in AM 194, 4to, 1387. It is published in Kålund, ed., 1908, 12–23; Simek 1990, 478–490, 262–296; Melnikova 2001a, 369–413.

6. It is generally believed that *Nicholas aboti* who is said in the *Leiðarvísir* to have dictated the itinerary (*allr þessi fróðleikr er ritinn ath fyrir-sogn Nicholas abota*: Kålund, ed., 1908, 23) and the abbot Nikulás of the annals are the same person. The authorship and the date of the itinerary, however, have recently been called in question by Arngrímur Vídalín 2018.

7. Kålund, ed., 1908, 20.

8. The quotes are given in the commentaries to the treatises in Melnikova 1986, *passim*.

9. In AM 736 I, 4to, fol. 1r (c. 1300) and with additions in AM 194, 8vo (1387) and in later copies. See Melnikova 1986, 72–84; Simek 1990, 428–435. The title is my own.

10. Melnikova 1986, 73. Simek dates it to the 12th century: Simek 1990, 160.

1310.¹¹ It is titled *Her segir fra þui huersu lond liggia i veroldenni* ('It tells here about what lands are in the world').¹² Like *Landalýsing I*, it is based on Isidor and Honorius and includes a number of *mirabilia* borrowed from them while the description of Europe, especially its eastern part, is original and much more detailed than in other treatises.

Two other treatises, *Landalýsing II* (Inc.: [*I upphafi*] *þessa litla annala bæklings skulo ver...*)¹³ and *Landalýsing III* (Inc.: '*Upphaf allra frasagna i Norræna tungu...*')¹⁴ are preserved in AM 764 4to fol. 1r – 1v and 39–40, respectively. The manuscript dates to the second half of the 13th century and thus it is the earliest one containing geographical treatises. The texts, however, are not original and they mostly derive from *Landalýsing I* with some additions.

The information about the northern lands, from Northern Germany (*Saxland*) up to Greenland and North America is contained in a small note under the title *Gripla* in two 17th century manuscripts (AM 115, 8vo and DG 21).¹⁵ It is also based on *Landalýsing I* but does not follow its text minutely.

The same tradition is represented in the introduction to *Ynglinga saga*, the first saga in *Heimskringla*, and the Prologue to *Prose Edda*,¹⁶ both written by Snorri Sturluson in the 1220s – 1230. Snorri also combines learned information with local geographical lore but introduces additional data, both borrowed (e.g. about the temperate and hot climatic zones, monstrous nations, etc.) and local (names unknown to treatises like *Svíþjóð inn kalda* or *Norvasund* – Gibraltar). He also substitutes some Latin names used in the treatises with the original Old Norse ones: e.g. he changes *Euxinum sjór*¹⁷ to *Svartahaf* (the Black Sea).¹⁸ The major difference between Snorri and the authors of geographical treatises lies in the perspective from which they view the world: Snorri's mental map is dominated by water basins, seas, and their gulfs, while the geographers' attention is concentrated on lands and peoples. Snorri therefore names more water objects than the treatises and provides unique names for them.

Maps of the world (*mappae mundi*) constitute the last group of geographical sources based on the Western European learned tradition. Most of the maps in Scandinavian Medieval manuscripts¹⁹ are copies of European maps. The most informative (and original) one is preserved in GKS 1812 III, 4to fol. 5v – 6r and is dated to c. 1250 (**Map 2**).²⁰ It is a T-O map with no contours of the continents but with columns of placenames in Latin (c. 100). A group of Scandinavian and Eastern European names has no parallels in geographical literature.

Designation of large water basins in Scandinavian literature

The geographical treatises as well as the sagas pay little attention to water basins; their main concern is peoples, lands and, rarely, towns. The larger water basins that are now labelled as oceans and seas seem not to have been perceived as unified features by Scandinavians.

Two main designations of larger water basins were *haf* and *sjór*,²¹ which were interchangeable (*Miðjarðar haf* and *Miðjarðar sjór*). Either of these appellatives could be attached to the name of

11. Stefán Karlsson 1964, 114–121.

12. Finnur Jónsson, ed. (1892-1896), 153–156; Melnikova 1986, 56–72; Simek 1990, no. 12, 449–456, 175–183.

13. Pritsak 1981, 532–533, 535–536; Melnikova 1986, 84–92; Simek 1990, no. 10, 436–444.

14. Melnikova 1986, 92–101; Simek 1990, no. 11, 445–448.

15. Melnikova 1986, 157–160; Simek 1990, no. 22, 505–507.

16. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1941; Faulkes, ed., 2005, 4. See also Simek 1990, no. 7, 8.

17. In *Landalýsing III*: Melnikova 1986, 86; Simek 1990, 437.

18. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1951, 88.

19. Simek 1990, no. 4–6, 406–424, 58–75; 102–124.

20. Pritsak 1981, 514–516; Melnikova 1986, 103–112; Simek 1990, no. 6, 419–424, 70–72.

21. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1975, 228, 535.

the sea as a topographic formant. The Latin *Oceanus* was used several times in geographical treatises and maps. Snorri seems to perceive the ‘Ocean’ (*útsjór*) as the water surrounding the habitable world (*‘Ganga hof stór ór útsjánnum inn í jorðina’* – ‘Large bodies of water run from the ocean into the land’)²² in agreement with both European geography and the mythological Scandinavian notion of the External Sea (*Úthaf*) or the Surrounding Sea (*Úmsjór*). The combination of both traditions is explicitly stated in the *Gripla*:

‘Milli Vynlandz ok Grænlandz er Ginnungagap, það geingir ur hafi því er Mare Oceanium heiter, þar hverfur um allan heim.’

‘Between Vinland and Greenland there is Ginnungagap, which detaches from that sea which is called Sea-Ocean and surrounds the whole world’.²³

Sometimes the *úmsjór* was identified with the Atlantic Ocean, which was also viewed as the mythological *Ginungagáp* – an abyss, the primordial chaos. Only once is it called ‘Great Sea’ (*Mikla haf*) in the description of the borders of Europe in *Stjórn*, a Norwegian translation of the first books of the Old Testament.²⁴

A sea was usually named after the land on its shores or an island in it: *Íslands-haf*, the sea between Iceland and Norway, *Grænlands-haf*, the sea between Greenland and America, *Englands-haf*, the English Sea, i.e. the North Sea or its part between England and Norway, *Álanz-haf*, the gulf of Bothnia,²⁵ etc. A specific variant presents the name of the (Eastern) Baltic – *Eystrasalt* (‘Eastern Sea’, in which *salt* ‘salt’ was a metaphoric designation of a sea).²⁶ The earliest usage of the *haf*-names occurs in a Swedish runic inscription of the second half of the 11th century.²⁷ Thus, the common pattern used both in sagas and geographical treatises was the isolation of parts of seas more or less familiar to Scandinavians from unnamed larger expanses of water.

The Mediterranean in the Old Scandinavian literature

The name of the Mediterranean Sea in Old Scandinavian literature was borrowed from Latin geographical literature. The maps reproducing Western European models use the traditional *Mediterraneum mare*. The authors of treatises and saga writers translated the name into Old Norse as *Miðjarðar-haf* or *Miðjarðar-sjór* with the same meaning ‘the Middle-earth Sea’. On one of the maps, it is called also *Megin haf*, ‘the Central Sea’.²⁸

The Mediterranean was regarded the centre of the world in ancient Greek and Roman geography and the notion of its centrality continued to be preserved in the Middle Ages. For Icelanders of the 13th and 14th centuries the Mediterranean was the political, cultural, and spiritual centre of the habitable world with three great cities, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Rome, symbolizing holiness and material well-being.²⁹ It was also the geographical centre of the habitable world. Its centrality was manifested on the T-O maps by its placement in the middle part of the scheme (**Map 3**).

22. Bjami Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1941, 9; Finlay and Faulkes, trans., 2011, 6.

23. Melnikova 1986, 159; Simek 1990, 506, 507.

24. The passage was borrowed from Isidor’s *Etymologies*. Melnikova 1986, 143, 150.

25. For references, see Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1975, 228.

26. It occurs only a few times in sagas: Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1975, 136.

27. U 214 (*Sveriges runinskrifter* VI/2, 1943, 325–329); Melnikova 2001b, 321–322.

28. Melnikova 1986, 122.

29. Sverrir Jakobsson 2009, 920–922.

The knowledge that the Mediterranean sea separates two parts of the tripartite world,³⁰ Africa and Europe, also reached Scandinavia, and relevant passages borrowed from Latin texts were included in descriptions of the world (*‘Midiardar-haf skilr Affrikam ok Europam’*).³¹

In *Ynglinga saga* Snorri characterizes the Mediterranean Sea as a whole:

Kringla heimsins, sú er mannfólkit byggvir, er mjök vágskorin. Ganga hof stór ór útsjánnum inn í jörðina. Er þat kunnigt, at haf gengr frá Nørvasundum ok allt út til Jørsalalands. Af hafinu gengr langr hafsbötn til landnorðs er heitir Svartahaf. Sá skilr heimsþriðjungana. Heitir fyrir austan Ásía, en fyrir vestan kalla sumir Evrópá, en sumir Eneá.

‘The disc of the world that mankind inhabits is very indented with bays. Large bodies of water run from the ocean into the land. It is known that a sea extends from Nørvasund (the Straits of Gibraltar) all the way to Jørsalaland (Palestine). From the sea a long gulf called Svartahaf (the Black Sea) extends to the north-east. It divides the world into thirds. To the east is the region called Asia, and the region to the west some call Europe, and some Enea.’³²

Snorri is the only one to describe the location of the Mediterranean Sea (which he does not name) based, probably, on local lore. For him (and other learned Icelanders?) the Mediterranean Sea is perceived as a large bay of the *umsjör* that stretches from west to east, and the entrance to it is a strait that has received a special name in Icelandic tradition – *Nørvasund*. Snorri’s description was probably suggested by the story about the voyage of Sigurðr Jørsalafari to the Holy Land, which Snorri told in *Saga of the sons of Magnus the Barefoot* in *Heimskringla*.

The knowledge of different parts of the Mediterranean Sea and the lands around it was by no means uniform in Scandinavia. There was a sharp difference between Scandinavians’ familiarity with its western and eastern regions.

The perception of the West Mediterranean

The acquaintance of Vikings with the West Mediterranean began in the 9th century with their first raids on Spain.³³ The historical memory of Scandinavians, however, preserved no remembrances about these events except a legend about the seizure of Luna, a small town north of Rome, by the sons of Ragnarr Loðbrók who sailed there from Francia – that is by the *Vestrvegr*, ‘the Western route’, around the Iberian peninsula.³⁴

The new wave of voyages to the West Mediterranean seems to have started in the late 11th or early 12th century. Icelandic sagas describe three major occasions when Scandinavians sailed to Palestine along the *Vestrvegr* and thus brought back information about the West Mediterranean. The earliest one, dated to the last years of the 11th century, is the voyage of a Norwegian *lendrmaðr* Skofti Ögmundarson who reached Rome via Gibraltar with five ships. Snorri writes that ‘people say that Skopti was the first of the Norwegians to sail through Nørvasund and that journey became most famous’ (*‘Þat er sögn manna, at Skopti hafí fyrst siglt Nørvasund Norðmanna, ok varð sú ferð hin frægsta’*).³⁵

30. The original, Scandinavian tradition divided the habitable world into four parts according to the cardinal points, *austr*; *sudr*; *vestr*; *norðr*. See Jackson 2019, 21–24.

31. Melnikova 1986, 76; Simek 1990, 430. It is worth noting that Latin endings are preserved.

32. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1941, 9; Finlay and Faulkes, trans., 2011, 6.

33. They are reported only in Arabic writings. See Price 2008; Christys 2015. For bibliography, see González Campo 2002.

34. The legend is told in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, Kap. 14 (Ebel, ed., 1997) and it is mentioned in several other sagas as well as in the *Leiðarvísir* of abbot Nikulás.

35. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1951, 232; Finlay and Faulkes, trans., 2015, 141.

Several years later the Norwegian king Sigurðr Magnússon, later nicknamed *Jórsalafari* (d. 1130), set off to Palestine to participate in the Crusade. Sigurðr set sail in 1107 with a fleet of 60 ships, entered the Mediterranean Sea via the Straits of Gibraltar, reached Jerusalem, and returned home in 1111 having visited Constantinople on his way back to Norway by land.³⁶ His feats in the Mediterranean are described in *Magnússona saga* in *Heimskringla*.³⁷ Snorri's narration about Sigurðr's voyage is based on *Útfarardrápa* by the skald Halldórr skvaldri (the Talkative).

The third voyage to Palestine was undertaken by the Orkney jarl Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson (d. 1158). This was a pilgrimage that started in 1151 and finished by Christmas 1153. The pilgrims followed the same route as Sigurðr and also visited Constantinople. The voyage is reported in *Orkneyinga saga* and in *Haraldssona saga* in *Heimskringla*.³⁸ Rognvaldr was a skilled skald himself and he and his skalds composed a number of verses memorialising events that occurred during his voyage.

The information about the West Mediterranean in these narrations consists of placenames mentioned because they belonged to locations of important events (mostly battles). All of them (except those mentioned in the narration about Skofti) are included in skaldic poems. Describing each victory of Sigurðr and Rognvaldr, their skalds invariably name exactly where it took place and Snorri repeated the placenames in his text.

‘Þá fór Sigurðr konungr fram á leið ok kom til eyjar þeirar, er Íviza heitir, ok átti þar orrostu ok fekk sigr. Sú var in sjaunda. Svá segir Halldórr skvaldri:

Margdýrkaðr kom merkir
morðhjól skipa stóli,
fúss vas fremðar ræsir
friðslits, til Ívizu’.

‘Then King Sigurðr went forward on his way and came to the island that is called Íviza, and there fought a battle and was victorious. This was his seventh. So says Halldórr skvaldri:

The death-wheel marker (= warrior) moved,
much glorified, his ship-fleet –
keen for fame was peace-fracturing’s
forwarder (= warrior) – to Íviza’.³⁹

Both Sigurðr's and Rognvaldr's routes in the West Mediterranean are marked by battles with ‘pagans’ (*heiðnir menn*) whom Snorri also calls the Vikings (*víkingar*), i.e. ‘pirates’. Having entered the Mediterranean Sea via the Straits of Gibraltar (*Norvasund*), they continued along the African coast (*Serkland*) and then turned northward. Sigurðr sailed to the island of *Forminterra* (mod. Formentera), then to *Íviza* (Ibiza), *Manork* (Menorka), and further to *Sikiley* (Sicily). From Sicily Sigurðr moved eastward and sailed to Jerusalem. Except for Sicily, which is mentioned also in connection with the activities of Harald Sigurðarson about a century earlier and in other texts,⁴⁰ none of these islands are ever mentioned again in Icelandic writings. Rognvaldr's sailing from *Serkland* to *Jórsalaland* is described more concisely: having passed the Gibraltar, he came nearer to the island of *Sardínarey* ‘though they did not know there was land there’. Describing the naval battle with the Arabs there, the saga author comments on the nationality of Rognvaldr's adversaries: ‘*Á drómundinum vóru Saraceni. Þat kollum vér Maumets vnn. Þar var mart Blámanna*’ (‘The people on dromond were Saraceni. That collum were Maumets vnn. There was many Blámanna’).

36. Bergan 2005.

37. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1951, 240–254.

38. Gudbrand Vigfusson, ed., 1887, 159–179; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1951, 324–325.

39. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1951, 246–247; Finlay and Faulkes, trans., 2015, 150.

40. Metzenthin 1941, 95–96; <http://onp.ku.dk/>: Sikiley. Last accessed 25.05.2021 .

cens, whom we call infidels of Mohammed, among them a good many black men...').⁴¹ After that Rognvaldr passed *Kríttr* (Crete) and headed to *Jórsalaland*. It is also mentioned that a companion of Rognvaldr, Eindriði, parted from the expedition and sailed to *Marssellia* (Marseilles).⁴² Besides the rather well-known Sicily (*Sikiley*), which is also mentioned in geographical treatises,⁴³ the retelling about jarl Rognvaldr's voyage adds only one placename that is not attested, as far as I know, in other sources: Marseilles.

The placenames and ethnic names that occur in other texts are *Norvasund*, *Serkland*, *Saraceni*, and *Blámenn* ('Black men'). Snorri mentions the former in several contexts including the description of the habitable world in the beginning of *Ynglinga saga*.⁴⁴ This name differs fundamentally from other West-Mediterranean placenames in that it is an original Old Norse name (like *Blámenn*), in contrast to others that transliterate their native designations. The name consists of OI *norr* 'narrow' and *sund* 'a strait, channel', thus meaning 'a narrow strait'.⁴⁵ The geographical treatises and maps, however, follow the Latin tradition and define the Straits *Gadis* (Kadis), or *Stólpasund* (Pillars [of Hercules] straits) combining Latin specifying definition with Old Norse topographic term.⁴⁶

The name *Serkland* has a long history. Well known in the Northern world, *Serkland* is mentioned in many texts including skaldic verses.⁴⁷ It first appears in Swedish runic inscriptions of the mid-11th century commemorating the participants of the ill-fated expedition of Yngvarr the Far-Traveler and in several other runic texts. The inscriptions designate *Serkland* as the farthest region Yngvarr managed to reach but it is not mentioned in the saga account of his voyage.⁴⁸ The localization, as well as the etymology of *Serkland* is disputed. In the 13th – 14th centuries literature the name refers specifically to the lands under Arab domination, from Mesopotamia to the west of North Africa, and it is therefore connected with the Latin designation of the Arabs *Saraceni* (> *Ser*). The ethnic name *Serkir*, however, could designate both the Persians and the Saracins.⁴⁹

The ethnic name *Saraceni*, a general designation of Muslims borrowed from Latin, was very rarely used.⁵⁰

The *Blámenn*, 'black people', designated Sub-Saharan Africans and it was a rather common word applied to different nations living in Africa.⁵¹

Thus, the western part of the Mediterranean was scarcely known to Scandinavians except for the entrance to the sea through the Straits of Gibraltar. That is the only object that received an original Scandinavian name. The geographical information about the West Mediterranean consists almost exclusively of placenames. It is casual, unsystematic, and it is tightly connected with the contents of the

41. Gudbrand Vigfusson, ed., 1887, 172; Hermann Palsson and Edwards, trans., 1978, 175.

42. Gudbrand Vigfusson, ed., 1887, 168–169; Hermann Palsson and Edwards, trans., 1978, 172–173.

43. Metzenthin 1941, 95; Melnikova 1986, passim.

44. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1941, 9. *Norvasund* is mentioned in Old Norse literature nine times (<http://onp.ku.dk/>: *Norvasund*. Last accessed 25.05.2021). Especially interesting is its usage in the *Völsunga saga* where warriors from *Norvasund* (*mikit lið ór Norvasundum*) arrive to help Helgi in his fight with Granmarr. It seems that *Norvasund* here is viewed as a legendary region (*Völsunga saga*, chapt 9: Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., 1943).

45. The word *norr* was used in several placenames in Scandinavia, like *Norvöen*, a small island in Söndmör, Norway, with a settlement *Nörve* (Bugge 1904, 349).

46. Melnikova 1986, 95–97, 143, 147. *Stólpasund* or *Stólpa sundum* also occurs three times in *æventýra sögur* of the 14th century (ONP: <http://onp.ku.dk/>: *Stólpasund*. Last accessed 25.05.2021).

47. Metzenthin 1941, 94–95; Melnikova 2001b, 75–77; Thunberg 2014.

48. Olsen, ed., 1911; Glazyrina 2002. See also Larsson 1990; Melnikova 2001b, 48–62.

49. Metzenthin 1941, 94.

50. Metzenthin 1941, 94. *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* notes only two cases of its usage (ONP: <http://onp.ku.dk/>: *Saraceni*. Last accessed 25.05.2021).

51. Metzenthin 1941, 11–12. Another ethnic name to denote the population of Africa was Latin *Ethiopes*, *Æthiopes* (Melnikova 1986, 118, 119, 134).

sagas. It was conveyed to saga authors by the skalds who praised the deeds of the voyagers. Most of the West-Mediterranean placenames were not used outside these stories.

The perception of the East Mediterranean

The acquaintance of Scandinavians with the East Mediterranean began in the first decades of the 9th century.⁵² The first reliably attested presence in Byzantium of Scandinavians (who had probably already settled in Eastern Europe) dates some time before 839 when the Swedes who called themselves the *Rhos* appeared at the court of Louis the Pious in Ingelheim on their return from Constantinople.⁵³ In 860 the first large-scale attack on Constantinople by the Rus', i.e. Scandinavians settled in Eastern Europe, took place and, according to Byzantine sources, the Rus' elite adopted Christianity several years later.⁵⁴ From the beginning of the 10th century, hundreds of the Rus'⁵⁵ are recorded to have participated in Byzantine naval operations against the Arabs and their number grew with time. Byzantine authors record 700 Rus' sailors participating in the naval expedition of the Byzantine naval commander Imerios to Crete in 911–912 (probably a group of the Rus' was in his fleet already in 904); the presence of 415 northern seamen in 7 ships in the Byzantine navy is reported in 935, and 584 with 45 servants in 949.⁵⁶ The voyages of Icelanders to Byzantium are mentioned for the first time in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* and date to 937–944 (Þorkell Þjóstarsson) and before 950 (Eyvindr Bjarnarson).⁵⁷ The number of Scandinavian warriors in Byzantium reached its peak by the mid-11th century.

At that time the road to Byzantium from Scandinavia ran along the rivers of Eastern Europe – the 'Road from the Varangians to the Greeks' as the meridional system of river communications from the Baltic to the Black Sea and Byzantium was called in the Old Russian *Primary Chronicle*.⁵⁸ This route was mentioned already by the Byzantine emperor Leo VI (d. 912) who wrote that the *Ῥῶς* arrived down the rivers; in the mid-10th century Constantine VII specified that their main road was downstream the Dnieper.⁵⁹

Due to the participation of hundreds of Scandinavians in military activities of Byzantium in the East Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and Palestine, rich and diverse information about the East Mediterranean was accumulated, spread and inculcated in the historical and geographical lore of Scandinavians. The pilgrimages to Constantinople and the Holy Land from the 11th century on added a new complex of information about this region of the world.

The information about the East Mediterranean consisted mostly of names of different geographical objects but also of descriptions of some of them. It was partially borrowed from Latin texts but most of it reflected remembrances of those who had visited Constantinople or Jerusalem. The geo-

52. Sigfús Blöndal 1978; Scheel 2015.

53. Grat *et al.*, eds., 1964, 28–30; Shepard 1995.

54. Kuzenkov 2003. This expedition is also described in the Old Russian *Primary Chronicle* composed in the 1110s. It names its (legendary?) leaders, the princes of Kyiv, Askold (< OI *Hǫskuldr*) and Dir (< OI *Dyrr* or *Dyri*): Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., 1953, 60.

55. The Byzantine sources do not distinguish between those Scandinavians who came directly from Scandinavian countries and those who had settled in Eastern Europe, since both came by the same route. By the mid-10th century at latest the contingent of the Rus' in Eastern Europe started to include also the Slavs and, probably, the Finns, and the name *Rus'* became a designation of the Rus' princes, elite and an ethnically heterogeneous retinue of the Rus' princes (Melnikova and Petrukhin 1991).

56. Sigfús Blöndal 1978, 32–40; Shchavelev 2020, 87–114.

57. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., 1950, chapt. 4, 3.

58. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., 1953, 53.

59. Dennis, ed., 2010, 19.77; Jenkins and Moravcsik, eds., 1967, 56–61.

graphical objects that were mentioned or described in Old Scandinavian writings varied. These were the names of parts of the Mediterranean Sea and islands in it, lands located on its shores, and cities.

Since the goal of most of the Scandinavians going south in the 11th and 12th centuries was service in the Byzantine army or a pilgrimage to Constantinople or to Jerusalem reached via Constantinople, the majority of mentions were connected with Byzantium, and the names designating the empire and its capital, Old Norse in origin, were common knowledge throughout Scandinavia.

The widespread and virtually only designation of the Empire was *Grik(k)land*, a derivative from the ethnic name *Grik(k)jar*, Pl. ('the Greeks') with the formant *-land*.⁶⁰ This was the typical pattern for formation of names of lands, countries, and states in Old Norse (cf. *Svealand, England, Frakkland, Serkland*). The name *Grik(k)land* occurs in sagas, geographical treatises, and other texts from the 12th century on. In runic inscriptions and skaldic verses of the 10th and 11th centuries, however, the most common name for Byzantium was the single ethnic name *Grik(k)jar*, Pl.⁶¹ Two phrases were used to denote the stay of a Scandinavian in Byzantium. The most frequent one, used 21 times, was *fara / vera í grik(k)jum* ('go to / be in the Greeks'). The name *Grik(k)land* in this phrase occurs only three times. The second in frequency, 6 times, was *vera með grik(k)jum* ('to be with, or among, the Greeks'). The ethnic name is used as a land-name even in contexts where the usage of a land-name is supposed. For example, *Grik(k)jar* are mentioned in a list of places visited by (?), or known to, the author of the inscription on a mould from Gotland: **krikiaR iaursaliR islat serklat** ('the Greeks, Jerusalem, Iceland, Serkland').⁶² The 11th-century skald Arnórr Þórðarson Jarlaskáld calls Christ 'a valiant defender of the Greeks and Garðr', i.e. Rus' (*snjallan Grikka vörðr ok Garða*), combining an ethnic name and a country-name.⁶³

Grik(k)jar is a unique case of using an ethnic name as a politonym in Old Norse geographic nomenclature. Nor does it have parallels in the Western European geographical tradition in which Byzantium was usually called *Romania*. The only correspondence to the Scandinavian *Grik(k)jar* is found in the Old Russian designation of Byzantium the *Greeks* (*Греку, Греци*, Pl.). Thus the *Primary Chronicle* records that prince 'Oleg attacked the Greeks' and besieged Constantinople, and that afterwards 'the Greeks assented to these [Oleg's] terms and prayed for peace lest Oleg should conquer the lands of the (*Грецькие земли*)'. In 1043 Kievan prince 'Yaroslav the Wise sent his son Vladimir on the Greeks'.⁶⁴ This pattern of formation of names of lands and states was typical for Old Russian toponyms usually an ethnic name in the plural designated a land (*Русь* – the 'Russians' and 'Russia', *Ляхи* – the 'Poles' and 'Poland', *Узру* – the 'Magyars' and 'Hungary', etc.); less often a term *land* was added (*Руськая земля* – the Rus' land, Rus', *Лядьская земля* – the Poles' land, Poland, *Угорьская земля* – the Hungarians' land, Hungary). The most common expression 'to go to the Greeks' meaning a voyage to Byzantium is analogous in Old Russian (*поити въ грекы*) and Old Norse (*fara í Grik(k)jum*). Considering that the main route to Byzantium ran through Eastern Europe, it seems highly likely that the name of Byzantium was borrowed by Scandinavians in Rus' and brought to the North by the Varangians returning home after their service in the Byzantine fleet and army.⁶⁵

The Old Norse designation of the capital of Byzantium, *Miklagarðr*, 'Great city', seems to have the same origin. It was one of the names with the formant *-garðr* denoting the most important cities on

60. Metzenthin 1941, 36–37. Byzantium was called *Romania*, the name usual in Western European geography and literature, only in a few cases. Usually it denoted Northern Italy (Metzenthin 1941, 87).

61. On the reflection of connections with Byzantium in runic inscriptions, see Melnikova 2005; Källström 2016.

62. G 216 (*Sveriges runinskrifter XI/2*, 1978, 233–238); Melnikova 2001b, 299–300.

63. Finnur Jónsson 1973, 326 (Arnórr Þórðarson Jarlaskáld. *Haralds Erfdrápa*, 17).

64. *Lavrent'evskaja letopis'* 1997, col. 29, 30, 154 respectively; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., (1953, 64, 138 respectively). In the latter case they translate the Old Russian 'Греку', literally 'the Greeks', as 'Greece'.

65. See Melnikova 2020.

the ‘Road from the Varangians to the Greeks’: *Hólmgarðr* (Novgorod the Great), *Kænugarðr* (Kyiv), *Miklagarðr* (Constantinople). The group of the *-garðr* placenames included also the name of Rus’ – *Garðr* or more frequently *Garðar*, Pl.⁶⁶ It appears for the first time in the *Óláfsdrápa* by Hallfreðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld, which was composed in 996, and in the 11th century it is mentioned in five runic inscriptions in a phrase ‘*austr í Gørðum*’ (‘east in *Garðar*’).⁶⁷ Later, in the sagas and geographical treatises the common name of Rus’ became *Garðaríki*.⁶⁸ The Old Russian name for Constantinople was *Царьград* (‘the tzar’ city, i.e. the emperor’s city) which implied its greatness, physical, political, economic, and spiritual. Old Norse *Miklagarðr* could be the translation or reinterpretation of the Old Russian name.⁶⁹

The Scandinavians, both warriors striving to serve in the Byzantine army and pilgrims to the Holy Land, could not pass Constantinople without stopping there and that made the city’s most important places known in the North. The first to attract their attention was Hagia Sophia cathedral which was called *Ægisif* (*Egisif*) < *Ἁγία Σοφία*. The strong impression made by the cathedral is reflected in its description in *Landalýsing I*:

‘Nest Garda-riki til út-sudrs er Grickia konungs riki, hofut-stadr þess rikis er Constantinopolis, er ver kollum Miclagard. I Miklagardi er kirkia su, er aa þeira lydzku heitir Agiosophia ok Nordmenn kalla Egisif. Su er kirkia dyrliguz ok itarliguz allra kirkna i heimnum ath gerd ok vegsti.’⁷⁰

‘Near Garðaríki to the southwest there is the state of the Greek konung, the capital of this state is Constantinopolis that we call Miklagarðr. In Miklagarðr there is a church that their people (i.e., the Greeks) call Agiosophia and the Northmen call Egisif. This church is the most magnificent and famous in its appearance and size of all the churches in the world’.

A similar description of Hagia Sophia is preserved in *Veraldar saga*:

‘Jvstinianvs let gera i Miklagardi gvþs mvstari þat, er a Girka tvngv heitir Agia Sophia, en ver kollvm Egisif, ok er þat hvs bazt gert ok mest i ollvm heimi, sva at ver vitim’.⁷¹

‘Justinian ordered to make a God’s temple in Miklagarðr that is called Agia Sophia in the Greek language and we call Egisif, and that building is the best in its appearance and the largest in the whole world as far as we know’.

Hagia Sophia is mentioned in other geographical treatises and several sagas about Scandinavians in Constantinople. Other places are named contextually only within the stories about a person’s stay in Constantinople, first of all those of Haraldr Sigurðarson and Sigurðr Jórsalafari; they are *Polotur*, Pl., the emperor’s palace; *Paðreimr*, the Hippodrome; *Gullvarta*, the Golden gates a stone dungeon where Haraldr Sigurðarson was imprisoned; St Óláfs church build by Varangians. Somewhat better known was the Golden Horn with the chains blocking the entrance to the bay, which received an Old Norse original designation *Sjáviðarsund* (literally ‘Seawood strait’).⁷²

The *Hversu lond* contains a list of several other Byzantine cities:⁷³ Adenas (Athenas), Corinthos (Chorintus), Þebas, Thesalonica, Dyrakr. The list must derive from a Latin source judging by the spelling of the names. Another Byzantine city is mentioned in an 11th-century Swedish runic inscrip-

66. Melnikova 1977.

67. Sö 148, Sö 179, Sö 338 (*Sveriges runinskrifter* III/1, 1924, 111–112, 153–156; III/4, 1936, 323–330); U 209, U 636 (*Sveriges runinskrifter* VI/2, 1943, 315–316; VIII/1, 1953, 76–77); Melnikova 2001b, 305–306, 305, 312–314, 323–324, 327–328.

68. Jackson 2019, 65–69.

69. Jackson, 2019, 74.

70. Kålund, ed., 1908, 10.

71. Benediktsson 1944, 65.

72. This was reflected in Old Russian name for the Golden Horn, *Суд* (Sud).

73. The treatise also includes a similar list of Russian cities.

tion, commemorating a sailor who reached *Grikkhofn* ('the Greek harbour').⁷⁴ It is not specified where this harbour was, but it might be Piraeus from which Byzantine fleets departed for naval expeditions. The presence of Scandinavians there is attested by three inscriptions on the so-called Piraeus lion that is now in Venice.⁷⁵

The parts of the East Mediterranean Sea were named according to the traditional pattern. The name *Griklandshaf* ('the Greek sea') became more widely known and was used in various texts. It had no strict meaning. First it designated the Aegean Sea, but it could also be applied to the East Mediterranean as a whole. Thus, the *Hversu lond* states that *Syrland* (Syria, Palestine) lies at the *Griklandshaf*.⁷⁶ In cases when a voyage to Jerusalem is reported, the adjacent part of the Mediterranean Sea could be called *Jórsala(borg)haf*. It was also known that another sea could be reached from the East Mediterranean, and that sea was called in the treatises traditionally *Euxinum sjór*⁷⁷ but in Snorri's *Ynglingasaga* it was called *Svartahav*. Snorri's source might have been the story about Haraldr Sigurðarson's escape from Constantinople recounted later by Snorri 'Með þessu komsk Haraldr út af Miklagarði, fór svá inn í Svartahaf' ('Thus Haraldr got out from Miklagarðr and so sailed into Svartahaf').⁷⁸ However, the earliest attestation of the name in European, Russian, or Arabic sources seems to be in a bilingual treaty between the Byzantine Emperor Michael Palaeologus and the Venetian doge Raynerio Geno (1265) – *Mauritalassae / Mare nigrum*, but the origin of the name (Turkic according to some scholars) is uncertain.⁷⁹ Its early appearance in Snorri's text raises a question whether the name emerged in a Scandinavian-Turkic-Byzantine milieu.

Occasionally, again in connection with a story, Cyprus, Crete, and Sicily were mentioned.

The eastern littoral of the Mediterranean was connected in the minds of Scandinavians with *Jórsala(borg)* (Jerusalem), therefore it received the name of *Jórsalaheimr* or *Jórsalaland*.⁸⁰ Jerusalem occupied a place of paramount importance as the sacred city where Jesus Christ preached, suffered, found his death, and resurrected. The itineraries, especially the one written by abbot Nikulás, describe in detail the places connected with the earthly life of Christ in Jerusalem and its vicinities. Maps of Jerusalem were popular (in Old Icelandic manuscripts of the 14th century), depicting the walls of the city, main streets, gates, a number of churches (*templum domini*, *templum sancte marie*, *templum salomonis*, etc.), Golgotha, and some other places.⁸¹ The runic inscriptions and sagas, however, mention Jerusalem very seldom and usually in connection with a pilgrimage.

Conclusion

The perception of the Mediterranean, the sea and the islands, the lands and the countries on its littorals, the cities and the peoples, seems to differ in the minds of the *fróðir menn* ('the learned') and the commoners, and this was determined by the way the information about it arrived in Scandinavia. The bookish knowledge of the world reached the North with the encyclopaedic literature in which the Late Roman and Biblical geographical ideas had merged into a new Christian geography. It defined the mental map of those Scandinavians who had access to either Latin encyclopaedias or the renderings

74. U 1016 (*Sveriges runinskrifter* IX/1, 1953, 222–233); Melnikova 2001b, 336–337.

75. Melnikova 2001b, 259–272; Snædal 2014.

76. Melnikova 1986, 61; Simek 1990, 451.

77. In *Landalýsing III*: Melnikova 1986, 86; Simek 1990, 437.

78. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1951, 88. Finlay and Faulkes, trans., 2015, 52. The same text is in *Morkinskinna*.

79. For details, see Bukharin 2013.

80. Metzenthin 1941, 51.

81. Simek 1990, 513–517.

of popular Latin writings in Old Icelandic like *Veraldar saga* or *Trojumanna saga*. Their image of the world was represented in specialized texts, geographical treatises, introductions to ‘histories’, maps, etc. In these texts the Mediterranean Sea was viewed as a part of the Ocean surrounding the habitable world; it occupied the central part of the populated universe, stretched from west to east, and divided Africa and Europe.

Concrete geographical information about the region reached the North together with the stories about the voyages of Scandinavians to the Mediterranean. Snorri summarized the location of the Mediterranean Sea stretching from *Norvasund* to *Jórsalaland*, two extreme points in the west and east. Nevertheless, the name of the sea, *Miðjarðar sjór*, was seldom used as a designation of the whole expanse of water outside the geographical treatises, but instead specific names were given to its parts. Those who reached the Mediterranean Sea by the *Austrvegr* (through Eastern Europe) found themselves in the *Griklandshaf*, and if their goal was the Holy Land, they sailed to the *Jórsalahaf*. Those who navigated along the *Vestrvegr* (around Europe) passed through *Norvasund* (the Straits of Gibraltar) into an unnamed sea until they reached the *Griklandshaf* or the *Jórsalahaf*.

The information on the Mediterranean consisted mostly of placenames designating lands, islands, and cities. Since the main route from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean was the *Austrvegr*, the East Mediterranean as far as Sicily was better known than any other region. The largest concentration of placenames relates to Byzantium, and some of them were Old Norse in origin. Many of the names, like *Grikland*, *Miklagarðr*, *Jórsalaborg* and *Jórsalaland*, *Serkland*, etc., became deeply embedded in the Old Norse perception of the world.

The placenames in other regions of the Mediterranean became known in the North only if they were incorporated in retellings of the voyages of Scandinavians based on poems of the skalds who participated in these voyages and almost never occurred outside their original context.

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Map 1. The Viking world according to the geographical treatises (drawn by the author).

IBERIAN NETWORKS

Arabic Sources on Vikings in the Mediterranean and Beyond

Thorir Jonsson Hraundal

Introduction

The earliest indication that Vikings had reached the Mediterranean is found in the Annals of St Bertin for the year 839. The ‘Rhos’, as the annal documents their name, were taken with an embassy from the Emperor in Byzantium to meet Louis the Pious at Ingelheim on the Rhine to negotiate their passage through the Frankish realm to their home in Scandinavia. These *gens sueoni*, as Louis ascertains to be their ethnicity, have a leader with the title of *chacanus* (kaghan) and are apparently unable to return to their homeland via a presumably more eastern route due to hostile tribes.¹

The passage indeed does more than merely connect them with the Mediterranean; it effectively connects these *Rhos* with a whole set of roles in the east. The official protection provided by the Byzantine Emperor and the connection to what is possibly the Khazar kaghan, as well as their knowledge of which tribes or tribal unions were to be avoided, indicate that they were, by 839, already heavily involved in regional matters. In short, they must have made their presence felt in these parts at least several years earlier.

Their connection with the Khazar kaghan, if this indeed is the case, may reflect the ties between the Byzantines and Khazars, who were on good terms in this period. Earlier in the 830s they had built the fortress at Sarkel to ward off hostile warriors in the steppes, Pechenegs and Magyars. Perhaps Byzantium had also sent some Northmen to the Khazar kaghan as further reinforcements. It was important for Byzantium to maintain good relations with the Khazars, not only to keep the steppe tribes in check, but also to maintain an alliance against the Muslim armies, who were making regular incursions into Byzantine territory in the 830s.

Very shortly after their appearance in the Annals of St Bertin, in the 840s, we find the first mention of Northmen in Arabic sources, or Rus’ as they were usually called by Middle Eastern writers, in the geographical treatise of Ibn Khurradadhbih. This earliest Arabic source on Vikings in the East seems to convey on the whole a comparable state of affairs to that of the Frankish annal, in that they are connected both with Byzantium and Khazaria, coming south via either the Don or the Dniepr.

It is not clear how the Vikings’ initial contact with Byzantium and the Islamic Caliphate came about. It is possible that the Byzantines got wind of them via the Frankish ruler, who had himself experienced that they could be bought and bribed. It is also possible that it was the result of the gradual voyages of the Scandinavians through the Baltic and onto the network of rivers leading to the Black and Caspian Seas, along the Volga, the Dniepr, or the Don as indicated by Ibn Khurradadhbih. What is clear is that the eastern Vikings maintained a more-or-less continuous presence in the region between

1. Nelson, ed. and trans., 1991, 134.

Constantinople and Khazaria, in the bodies of water connected to the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the Azov and Caspian Seas, from the mid-9th century into the 11th. To this, numerous Arabic writers of the period testify.

The following is an attempt to address some aspects of how the Muslims perceived the maritime and riverine routes of the Northmen and to examine this information with regard to medieval Arabo-Islamic geographical and cartographic tradition. It will be argued that although this material is scant on Viking ventures into the Mediterranean specifically, it presents an important view of their activities in the south and east of Europe, and that its often varied and unexpected renditions of geographical reality are certainly worthy of our attention.

Arabo-Islamic geography

First of all, it is a fortuitous coincidence that Islamic geography was coming into its own at almost exactly the time that Northmen made their presence felt in the south and east. After the Abbasids had replaced the Umayyads in 750 as rulers of the Caliphate, there was a steady increase of interest in science and scholarship, a development particularly linked with the efforts and patronage of father-and-son Caliphs Harun ar-Rashid and Ma'mun over a fifty year period from the 780s to the 830s.

The geography that developed in the Muslim world was the fruit of a mixture of the classical heritage, preserved in Byzantium and translated from Greek to Arabic, and the emerging scholarly activity in the Caliphate. Data input was furthermore acquired with postal routes, tales of travellers and merchants, embassies, espionage, etc. There were also political factors, such as the pressing need to map out and survey the vast Islamic caliphate as well as its neighbours' territories.² In the resulting treatises and maps, we can sometimes detect a certain fusion of the two main reservoirs of information: the classical one and the contemporary Islamic explorative geography.

Ibn Hawqal's map of the Caspian Sea from the 970s may serve to elucidate this somewhat. The sea is here depicted as round, and there are notably more toponyms in the south and south-west corner. Here we see placenames, and the three prominent rivers, the Volga (Itil), the Kur and the Araxes, well known in the Caliphate, which at the time extended into the Caucasus. In the northern part, however, there is less information; for instance, the Ural River (Turkic and Arabic *Yaykh*) is missing and a mountain is planted at the northern shore – probably a Ptolemaic influence, an example of supplementing less-known regions with the classical heritage. We can compare this to a map of the eastern Mediterranean from the same writer. Islam expanded east and west quite rapidly but slowly to the north. The author thus knew the eastern Mediterranean much better and the representation is very different.

These maps highlight further challenges posed by these sources in that the geographical information, expressed by both the maps and the texts, is conditioned by multiple factors, such as geopolitics, the authors' actual knowledge of routes and regions, and the traditions impinging on their work.

Like the classical geographers many centuries earlier, from whom many notions were borrowed, the Muslim geographers developed their own view of the regions outside the Caliphate. Similarly to their Greek counterparts, their descriptions are sometimes interspersed with exaggerations, stereotypes, and misnomers as well as anachronistic information. The inhabitants of these regions, with few exceptions, were above all thought to be devoid of refined culture and to represent an antithesis to civilization. They were not only geographically but also culturally distant from Islam, its cities

2. On the formative period of Islamic geography and cartography see Karamustafa 1992; Tibbets 1992a; 1992b; Taeschner 1965; Miquel 1967; Heck 2002, 94–145; Sezgin, ed., 1992.

and its traditions, and most of them were pagans as well. The passages concerning the Rus' that have come down to us are placed within texts that are created in accordance with a world view in which the central Islamic lands, specifically Mekka and Baghdad, are at the centre and *Yajuj wa Majuj* (Gog and Magog) or some other textual expression of ultimate barbarity is at the margin. The information provided by these sources on the Rus' are not a part of any ordinary or rational descriptive geography. They should rather be seen as an expression of a particular world view, of a particular political-economic situation, and of particular cultural differences.³

A common method many Muslim geographers employed to divide the known world was that of *climes* (from the Greek *klimata*), which depicted it as consisting of seven latitudinal zones extending from just north of the equator to the farthest regions to the north. The differences in environment of these zones determined through the notions of humoral medicine the different qualities and temperament of their inhabitants. In the temperate middle climes, especially the third and fourth comprising the central Muslim lands, conditions were optimal and produced a harmonious and balanced temperament. To the north and south the respective excessive cold or heat led to distemper that was proportional to their distance from the central climes. At the two extremes life was hardly possible at all, where the inhabitants were removed from norms of humanity in their ugliness and animalistic behaviour. The idea even surfaced that the flora and fauna of the north and south were white and black respectively and that in contrast to the blackness of the inhabitants of the southernmost clime their counterparts in the north showed a tendency towards albinism.⁴ Similar notions are also found in classical writers such as Herodotus who placed his own lands in an ideal spot between the extremities of Egypt in the south and Scythia to the north.⁵ The Muslim writers to some extent adopted this view from ancient authorities, but in their own age of Muslim exploration and expansion they were faced with a plethora of new and different entities that contributed to, and required, their own particular representation of peoples outside the realm of Islam.⁶

There was also potential for overlap; characteristics belonging to one clime could, given certain conditions, be applied to another. In this way the Ethiopians, otherwise firmly relegated to a near-uninhabitable zone, were held in high regard because they had a territorial state and government, and not least because they provided guards who served at the caliphal court in Baghdad. In contrast, the Turkic Khotan people were depicted as cannibals despite being organized under the auspices of a royal dynasty. Aziz Al-Azmeh infers that these exceptions to the system, as well as its blatant inherent contradictions, underline 'power relationships which underpinned ethnological types locally in Muslim domains and at large in a world organized by and for these domains'.⁷ In other words, the nature of the relationship between the entity described and the Caliphate could have a bearing on how it was perceived and represented by the geographers.

Another problem accompanying the analysis of our material is the assessment of the writers' actual geographical knowledge of the regions north of the Caliphate, where the Rus' are usually found. While the Muslim lands were quite well known, the picture gradually becomes hazier the

3. For an historical overview of the Muslim perception of 'barbarians' and the 'other' in general, see Haarmann 1988; Al-Azmeh 1992.

4. Al-Azmeh 1992, 7–8.

5. Hartog 1980, 35–36 and 237–244.

6. Not all the Muslim geographers employed the system of climes. Some adhered to the Persian *kishwar* arrangement of the known world into concentric circles, or the quadripartite division of the world. Emily Savage-Smith also points out the political incentive behind map-making to define the lands of Islam and impose order and authority over regions under Islamic administration (Savage-Smith 2003, 117). Nevertheless, the notions here outlined with regard to the system of climes permeate in general the Muslims' descriptions and view of distant peoples. For the many different approaches, cf. Miquel 1967, vol. I, 31–70.

7. Al-Azmeh 1992, 11–12.

further north we move, although still with important exceptions. The regions immediately adjacent to the Caliphate, the southern Caucasus, Armenia, and Georgia, and a narrow stretch along the western coastline of the Caspian Sea up to Bab al-Abwab (modern Derbend) were accessible and even under the Caliphate's control, such as the Emirate of Tiflis (736-1080). This is important since several Arabic sources document eastern Vikings in these parts. The busy trade route from Khurasan to Bulghar was relatively well known, as indeed is evidenced by Ibn Fadlan who provides plenty of toponyms, especially for rivers that needed to be crossed.⁸ Several Khazarian cities were also frequently documented such as Atil, Khazaran, and Khamlij, although in such cases the orthography was not always consistent. At any rate, it seems improbable that the early Muslim geographers had any clear notions of regions north of Bulghar and even the regions immediately west of the Don seem to have been little known for most of the early period, apart, that is, from the Khazar and Byzantine towns on the northern coast of the Black Sea. It is first with the appearance of Al-Istakhri's work around the mid-10th century that we come across the name *Kuyabah*, which presumably refers to Kyiv. This may have been a rendition of the Greek *Kioba*, indicating that this new information was perhaps not the result of Muslim geographical investigation but was rather borrowed from the Byzantines who by that time had already been in contact with the Kyivan Rus' as evidenced by a treaty between the two from 911.⁹ Although the provenance of such individual items may be difficult to track, the evidence of contact allowing for exchange of such information between the two is plentiful. Aside from the voluminous and dynamic exchange resulting from the Translation Movement, as well as diplomatic contacts, information may also have been obtained from prisoners and fugitives on both sides.¹⁰

Overall, however, despite a certain degree of vagueness and inaccuracy that often accompanies these geographical descriptions of the northern lands, the Muslims had a special incentive to be factual about developments in the north and especially along the northern frontier. This may be explained at least in part by their often-hostile relations with the Khazars, as well as their connections with various prominent trading companies that were, for whatever reason, important to the Muslims.

It should also be noted that geographical knowledge among the Arabo-Islamic writers did not accumulate exponentially, and steps were taken both forwards and backwards in this respect. Thus Al-Mas'udi writing in the mid-10th century accurately refuted Ibn Khurradadhbih's claim, as well as that of some travellers, that the Azov Sea (Arabic *Bahr al-Mayutis*) and the Caspian Sea (*Bahr al-Khazar*) were connected.¹¹ He furthermore provides a fairly accurate description of the route from the strait of Kerch into the Azov, up the Don and on to the Volga via portage. At the same time Al-Mas'udi erroneously reckons that the Don has its origins in a great (unnamed) lake in the north,¹² and believes the Azov Sea is greater in extent and deeper than the Black Sea (*Bahr Nitash/al-Buntus*), and he further speculates on a direct connection between the latter and the Atlantic (*Bahr Muhit*).¹³ Al-Mas'udi was able to provide an estimate of the length of the Caspian Sea that was not too far off (800 miles: modern measurement 640 miles) yet greatly exaggerates its breadth (600 miles: modern measurement 270 miles). This is curious because of the two we would expect the breadth, for example between the two important ports of Bab al-Abwab and Jurjan, to be better known than points of measurement on the distant northern coastline. Yet, even though the Caspian Sea was a major landmark, its exploration

8. See map in Frye 2005, 12.

9. Al-Istakhri, *K. Al-masalik al-mamalik*, p. 22.

10. Miquel 1967, vol. II, 383–387 and n. 1 and 2.

11. Ibn Khurradadhbih, *Kitab al-Masalik wa 'l-Mamalik*, p. 103.

12. Al-Mas'udi, *Muru'j al-Dhahab*, vol. 1, p. 261. He does not seem to be following Ptolemy here, who says that both the Volga (Gr. *Rha*) and the Don (*Tanais*) had their origins in the Hyperborean mountains in the north (Stevenson, ed. and trans., 1991, 120).

13. Al-Mas'udi, *Muru'j al-Dhahab*, vol. 1, p. 273.

developed slowly due to many factors, of which the most important was perhaps that the commercial routes on either side of the lake were well established so that maritime trade or the need for detailed knowledge of it was not necessarily required.¹⁴

It is of course impossible to map sufficiently the geographical knowledge of the Muslim writers in the 9th and 10th centuries with a few examples like these. On the whole, it seems that all kinds of information about cultural and physical geography accumulated, yet with varying consistency and coherence from one work to another, and even within one and the same work. Two important factors, however, may be discerned in the propagation of information about the north to Muslim scholars in the south: the relatively peaceful relations and the ensuing trade between the Khazars and the Caliphate from the late 8th century on the one hand, and the establishment of the lively trade on the route between the Samanids in northern Iran to the Bulgars on the Volga in the late 9th century on the other. Additionally, material was obtained from Byzantium through diplomacy and intellectual exchange, and there was an increasing need for the expanding Caliphate to know the geography of its main rival.¹⁵ In a larger timeframe we can speak of a ‘window’ of exploration more or less coeval with the emergence and formative period of Muslim geography, which opened during the relatively peaceful co-existence of the Caliphate with the Khazars in the late 8th century and closed again with ascendancy of more hostile peoples that replaced them at the end of the 10th century.¹⁶

On the whole, seas, lakes, and waterways feature prominently in this corpus as these geographical features were traditionally employed as the great dividing lines or signposts on maps, as the Nile and the Don were on medieval OT maps (originating with Isidore of Seville, dividing the known world into three regions, Europe, Africa and Asia, with the Mediterranean and the two rivers forming the T, and the surrounding ocean the O). Identifying and delineating even such an important landmark as the Mediterranean Sea on some medieval Islamic maps, however, is not necessarily a straightforward task. Thus, on Ibn Hawqal’s world map there is no visible distinction between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

Other examples of a similar ‘fluidity’ (no pun intended) in the interpretations of the major bodies of water can be seen in the *Book of Curiosities* from the 11th century, in which the Don, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean appear to form one great sound. Likewise, Al-Biruni writing in the early 11th century presents the Mediterranean and the Black Sea as one and the same entity.

Yet another complication is added with the fact that the pictorial representation often does not quite match the textual evidence, and in both there are serious issues of scale and distortion of distances as mentioned above, and conflation of geographical features (a phenomenon that lasted many centuries afterwards). This is a far too large a subject for this paper, but in brief: large regions outside the Caliphate proper were not very well understood geographically as a whole, but there were routes or ‘corridors’ into those regions, as well as cities and population centres, around which more nuanced information was gathered. The surviving maps are not accurate geographical descriptions in the modern sense, but rather schematic and even artistic representations. That is not to say that these maps did not serve their purpose: the accuracy of maps depends entirely on their intended use (a good parallel in this context are city railway maps, that distort geographical realities such as distances and landmarks). What remains, though, is that in both the visual and textual material there is a definite impulse to describe perceived routes of peoples that entered the sphere of interest of these Muslim scholars.

14. For a detailed discussion of the Caspian Sea in antiquity and medieval times see Planhol 1990, 48–61. Planhol notes the lacunae in the geographers’ knowledge of this lake as reflected by the extraordinary variety of names attributed to it, a total of thirty–seven (Planhol 1990, 52).

15. Miquel 1967, vol. II, 145.

16. On the post–Khazar situation in the region, see Golden 1992, 243–244.

Rus'/Northmen on sea/rivers in Arabic geography

Several of our medieval Arabic writers show interest in both the maritime and the riverine routes of Northmen. A number of sources from Al-Andalus document them in the western Mediterranean, most notably in connection with the Viking raid on Seville in 844 during which they camped on Isla Menor on the Guadalquivir and terrorized the area for some weeks before being chased away. They made another attempt in 859 which was quickly thwarted, as Abd ar-Rahman II had ordered fortifications to be strengthened.¹⁷ Mention should also be made of a short notice from Al-Ya'qubi writing in Cairo in 891, the earliest writer to connect Vikings in the west with those in the east:

The city of Seville, on a mighty river, the river of Cordoba <which> entered the Majus who are called Rus (Arab. *al-majus alladhina yuqal lahum ar-rus*) in the year 229 and captured, plundering, burning and slaughtering...¹⁸

Al-Ya'qubi does not state where he obtained this information but living in Cairo and writing less than fifty years after the event he would possibly have had multiple sources, written and oral, from which to choose. The reference to Rus' in connection with an attack that has been attributed to the Vikings (usually denoted as *majus*, *urduman* and variants thereof among the Muslim writers of Al-Andalus) may be seen to favour the identification of these people as Scandinavian, although we are left guessing as to Al-Ya'qubi's method of distinguishing or connecting the two since no further context or information is provided.

However, the vast majority of Arabic sources on the Vikings were penned in the Middle East. In this corpus they are mainly associated with the Caucasus and the Black Sea, the Azov and the Caspian Seas, which of course all connect with the Mediterranean – the Black Sea and the Azov directly so, and the Caspian via portage from the Don to the Volga, which has sometimes been termed the 'Khazarian Way'. They are also explicitly said to navigate the Volga, the Dniepr, and the Don.

We have already mentioned Ibn Khurradadhbih's work from the mid-9th century who placed the Rus' on the latter two riverways. From the beginning of the 10th century we have the work of Ibn Rustah who does not give a specific location for the Rus', unless his usage of the word *buhayra* is taken to refer to the Caspian Sea. Ibn Rustah reports that they conduct trade with the Volga Bulghars, thus associating them with that riverway. Ibn Fadlan met Vikings on the middle Volga in 922, where they were anchoring their ships and trading with the Volga Bulghars, leaving us with a fascinating account of his experiences with them.¹⁹ In the course of the 10th century several Arabic writers locate the Vikings in the Caspian region, and Miskawayh adds that in 943 they sailed up the Kur (now in Azerbaijan) to capture the famed city of Barda.²⁰ The 11th century *History of Shirvan and Darband* further recounts Rus' activity in this area, linking them with Shirvan, Baku (Bakuya), and the river Kur.²¹

Of the 10th century Muslim scholars, there is one writer who shows a special diligence and ambition in asserting the divisions between the various seas. Al-Mas'udi was a polymath who set the standard for Arabo-Islamic historical and geographical writing in the period, and he is especially

17. James, ed., 2009, 101. For excerpts from several Muslim and non-Muslim sources on this event, cf. Morales Romero 2004, 53–96; Price, this volume.

18. Al-Ya'qubi, *Kitab al-Buldan*, p. 304 [My translation].

19. See Montgomery, ed. and trans., 2014.

20. Ibn Miskawayh, *Kitab tajarib al-umam wa ta'aqib al-himam*. Excerpt in Birkeland 1954, 54–58.

21. Minorsky 1958, 45. The history of this text is quite complex. The extant manuscripts are quite late, yet several pieces of information indicate that it may be a faithful record to an extent. The problems are reviewed by V. Minorsky in his introduction to the work (Minorsky 1958, 1–10).

renowned for his efforts to travel extensively to verify his information. His main work, the *Muruj adh-dhahab*, ‘of the Meadows of Gold’ is, in fact, along with the famous account of Ibn Fadlan, our most valuable Arabic source on Northmen in the east.

Al-Mas‘udi has many different notices on the Rus’ since he covered many regions and topics; hence they fell under various headings in his work. In a passage on the Black Sea, Al-Mas‘udi relates that this sea belongs to the Bulgars, the Rus’, the Pechenegs and the Baskhirs.²² On the geography of the Caspian Sea and its environment, the Rus’ are said to live on its shores and to navigate it.²³ Rus’ are said to live by and have exclusive access to what appears to be the Azov Sea, although Al-Mas‘udi does not call it *bahr Mayutis*, as is usual. The Azov Sea is a gulf in the Black Sea (*khalij min bahr nitas*), into which runs the river of the Khazars (*nahr al-Khazar*), which is the Don. Al-Mas‘udi further notes that the Rus’ are mighty people who obey no king or law and that among them are merchants who trade with the Volga Bulgars. It is also related that there is a large silver mine in their region.²⁴ Further on, the Rus’ are said to consist of many different groups, one of which carries out trade with the lands of Al-Andalus.²⁵ In a passage on Al-Andalus, Al-Mas‘udi describes an attack made from boats carrying thousands of men, whom the locals called *al-majus*, and expresses his belief that these are the same people as the Rus’, possibly echoing Al-Ya‘qubi’s passage from the late 9th century.²⁶ In addition to this, there are reports of several raids in the Caspian Sea in the first half of the 10th century.

Lastly, there is one source from a slightly different vein that mentions what are probably Varangians serving in the Byzantine army in the eastern Mediterranean. The great poet al-Mutanabbi writing at the court of Saif ad-Dawla commemorated his ruler’s victory against Bardas Phocas at the battle of Hadath, one of the many attempts by the Byzantines to regain lost territory in Syria. In his poem he writes that ‘Phocas, the Domesticus of the Christians, challenged him [Sayf ad-Dawla] with about 50,000 knights and infantry men of Rum, Armenians, Rus, Slavs, Bulgars and Khazars’.²⁷ In his *Varangians of Byzantium* Blöndal surmises that Varangian units were present in other Byzantine military operations in the Mediterranean as well.²⁸

The questions remain whether and to what extent we can rely on the visual and textual material offered by the Arabic sources, whether one should take precedence over the other, or whether they can be married. The latter is unlikely since the two often depart from different aesthetic, even artistic, premises. The former is a subject of ongoing interpretation and re-interpretation. Muslim geographers in the 10th century had a rough idea of what the world known to them looked like, but there were still regions, especially to the north of the Caliphate, in Western Europe, and south of the Sahara that eluded them. Developments in the 11th and 12th centuries in connection with the Crusades and the Norman conquest of Sicily would add significantly to their knowledge of Europe, even Scandinavia, as can be seen in Idrisi’s famous *Kitab Rujar (Tabula Rogeriana)* from 1154. This would remain the most accurate world map until the appearance of European maps in the 15th century.

22. Al-Mas‘udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. I, p. 127.

23. Al-Mas‘udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. I, pp. 131–132.

24. Al-Mas‘udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. I, p. 190. This comment may possibly be inspired by the great volume of silver coins carried by the Rus’, or their display of this metal as related in Ibn Fadlan’s account.

25. Al-Mas‘udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. I, p. 191.

26. Al-Mas‘udi, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. I, p. 171.

27. Vasiliev 1950, 331.

28. Blöndal 1978, 37. It is tempting to connect this information with recent finds of two Viking age swords in Yumuktepe and in Patara. On the former see Androshchuk and Köroglu 2013, 215–240. On possibly related numismatic evidence, see Kovalev 2018, 145–196.

Conclusion

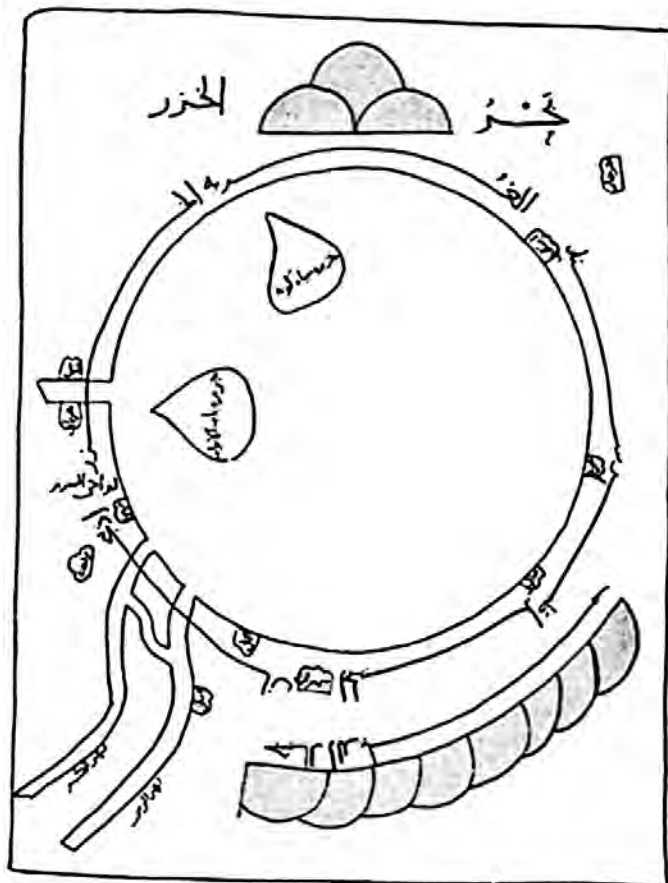
On the whole the Arabic material from the Middle East does not yield much information on Vikings or Northmen specifically in the Mediterranean Sea, but it regularly connects them with the Black Sea, the Azov, and the Caspian and of course the great riverways north of this region, especially the Volga and the Don. What is problematic here is the correlation between the visual representations handed down to us and the textual evidence, and how well we can align the individual pieces of information from different writers, which is possible obviously only through a case-by-case analysis. For instance, the maps do not place the *Rus'* ethnonym on any of the seas, whereas they are regularly associated with them in the textual evidence. That said, the Arabic corpus conveys an important view of Viking activity in the south-east of Europe and of the interconnected bodies of water from the western Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea.

The picture that emerges is one of Northmen who travel these routes as agents in trade or in military activity, as well as those who did so as contingents of the Byzantine army. Even if our sources are silent in this regard, there may have been some overlap between the different groups. We know from other parts of the Viking world that groups would form and dissolve, that sides shifted, and that their services and their loyalty could be bought with money. Be that as it may, after more than two centuries of various types of acquaintances with the Mediterranean and the connected waters, Northmen in these parts had amassed substantial knowledge of not only the routes, but also of the geography and geopolitical dynamics of the region. They employed this knowledge, with varying degrees of success, in their ventures there throughout the 9th, 10th, and into the 11th centuries; it may also have been an important reservoir of knowledge in the consolidation of the Kyivan state in the 10th and 11th centuries and its ensuing extension of territory and opposition to their neighbours.

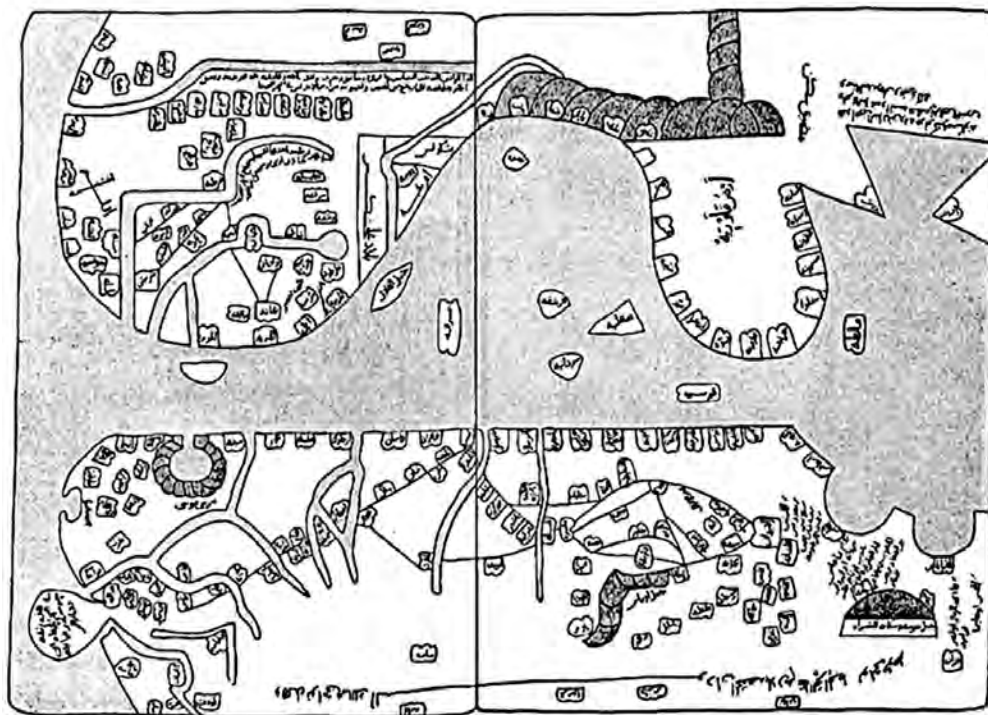
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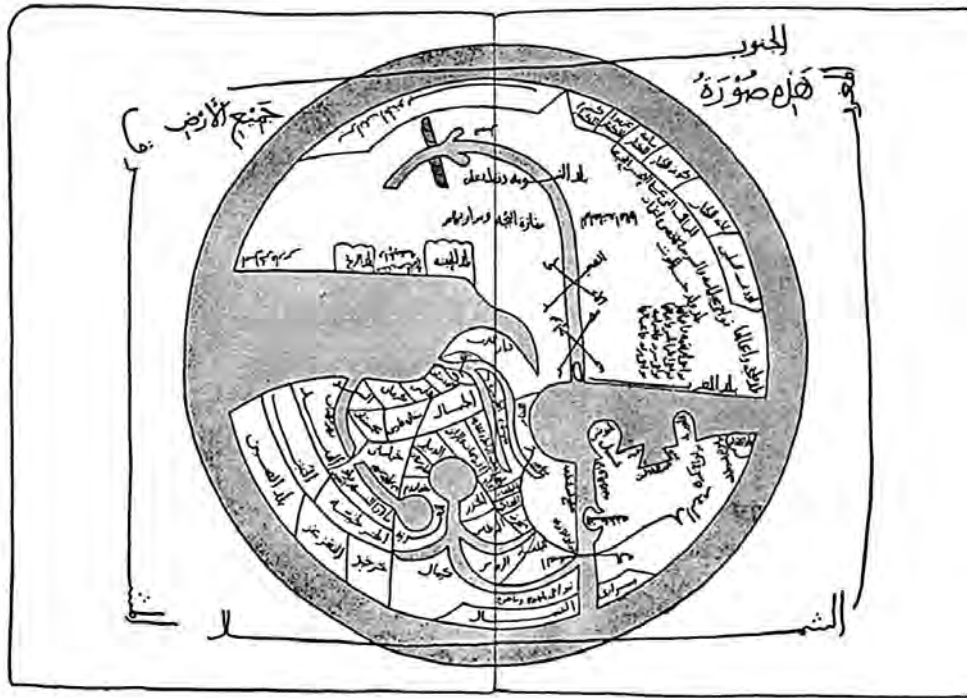
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Map 1.
CASPIAN SEA Ibn Hawqal, (1938) *Surat al-ard*,
Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum, transl.
and ed. by M. de Goeje, revised edition by J. H.
Kramers. Leiden: Brill. (p. 286)



Map 2. EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN Ibn Hawqal, (1938) *Surat al-ard*, Bibliotheca Geographorum
Arabicorum, transl. and ed. by M. de Goeje, revised edition by J. H. Kramers. Leiden: Brill. (p. 66)



Map 3. WORLD MAP Ibn Hawqal, (1383) *Surat al-ard*, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, transl. and ed. by M. de Goeje, revised edition by J. H. Kramers. Leiden: Brill. (p. 8)



Map 4. WORLD MAP Book of Curiosities (*Kitab Ghara'ib al-funan wa-mulah al-'uyun*) Bodleian Library MS. Arab. c. 90. fols. 23b and 24a

Vikings in the Spanish Mediterranean: Measuring Impact Through Local Responses

Irene García Losquiño

Many areas of research remain unapproachable because of insufficient primary sources with which to address the questions we ask. In some cases, although a historical source recounts a certain event, the current evidence is confined to that source and no further materials appear accessible via other disciplines. In either a budding or decaying field of study, the efforts to transcend the seeming lack of evidence may be limited. This has been the case for scholarly attention to the presence of Vikings in Spain and especially for research on their contact with the Spanish Mediterranean coast. Although there is documentary evidence for the latter, it is restricted to brief mentions in a few Arabic manuscripts whose accounts are mostly borrowed from each other. The specific historical interaction with places in the Spanish Mediterranean such as modern Alicante, Murcia, or Catalonia has generated some interest from Spanish researchers,¹ mostly in the field of Andalusí or local history, and has also been mentioned in international scholarship,² but much is still to be learned about the impact of Viking contact on this region.

In the exploration of new ways to develop insights on areas of Viking contact for which we have little, and apparently finite, information, the search for workable new paths for research can be daunting. Regarding Viking contact in geographical areas that have not yet been comprehensively scrutinized, it has proven fruitful for past researchers to explore the potential of toponyms, investigate metal detecting finds, compare the documentary and archaeological records, and combine other types of evidence like folklore. But what happens when there is no prospect of a fresh reading of Medieval documentary evidence, no likelihood of hitting upon relevant archaeological remains, no possibility of a toponymic presence or traces in folkloric narratives? Are there any options for revealing new aspects of Viking contact to which we could turn?

In this chapter, I explore potential ways of tackling a dearth of information in areas of Viking contact that are under-researched and (from the perspective of scholarship) unpromising. I focus specifically on Viking contact along the Spanish Mediterranean coast, particularly along the *cora*³ of Tudmir.⁴ I have chosen this geographical case study because it fulfils the criteria of being under-researched and seemingly unpromising: information in Medieval sources about Viking presence in Tudmir is very sparse. This sparsity is partially because the interaction between those peoples was restricted, occurring only within the context of the single, long campaign of 859-61, during which

1. Of particular interest is Francisco Franco Sánchez's recount of the Viking raids on the southeast coast of Iberia in the 9th century. Franco Sánchez 2018, 121-154; 1989, 375-394.

2. Christys 2015; Morales Romero 2004; Price 2008.

3. A *cora* was a type of administrative division of al-Andalus.

4. The *cora* of Tudmir was a province of al-Andalus that stretched from modern Murcia to northern Alicante and inland into Albacete. For more on the *cora* of Tudmir, see Gutiérrez Lloret, 1996.

a large Viking fleet harried the whole coast of the Iberian Peninsula and beyond, possibly reaching eastern Mediterranean regions.⁵

As a researcher accustomed to working on the Viking presence in Galicia, approaching the Spanish Levante came with a particular set of obstacles. Both previous and recent studies of Viking contact with Galicia have generally focused on documentary evidence, which, although not highly detailed, is at least sufficiently abundant.⁶ The frequency and long duration of this contact in Galicia – from the first raid in AD 844 to beyond the end of the Viking Age – enable nuanced investigations of the interchange and the varied typologies of contact that evolved. I have thus been able in the past to pursue toponymic, archaeological, and comparative lines of research to develop new insights into the Viking presence in Galicia.⁷ These interdisciplinary avenues, though ostensibly difficult or risky at first, have been productive in expanding our understanding of the kinds of interactions Vikings had in the southern diaspora. It therefore seemed reasonable, when conceiving the talk on which this chapter is based, that approaches which had worked in Galicia could be explored in other areas of Viking contact that had not yet been surveyed by disciplines other than history, and that a comparative approach would yield valuable results.

The situation with the *cora* of Tudmir, however, seems to offer fewer possibilities to the interdisciplinary researcher than that with Galicia on first sight. In order to approach the question of Viking contact with the *cora*, my methodological focus is instead on the responses to Viking presence from the local population. Attention to the perspective of the local communities and their experience of Viking violence allows us to ask new questions of familiar sources and opens avenues of research that are more accessible than those confined to a Norse focus. In order to establish how investigation into local responses may be utilised in the southern diaspora, and as a basis for comparison with Tudmir, I first analyse how the impact of violent Viking contact can be measured by analysing local responses in two other contexts in Medieval Iberia. The first is the response from the emirate and the population to the Viking attack on Seville in AD 844. The quantity and detail of documentation are significantly higher than for Tudmir, so this small case study illuminates how an attack could lead to certain kinds of responses, such as population displacement and the construction of defences. The second context to be examined under the lens of local responses is Galicia in the second half of the 10th century. This example provides another, more archaeological, view of how a region might respond to the continuous threat of Viking piracy, showing strong similarities with the previous case study. Folklore as a potential reflection of local responses in Seville and Galicia is also noted. Informed by these two comparative cases, I then consider whether these same responses can be seen after the attack of 859 on the *cora* of Tudmir. Can local responses become a baseline approach to investigate the impact of Viking presence for an area in which we have extraordinarily little evidence?

5. For an account of this campaign, see Price, this volume.

6. An especially commendable study of historical sources on Vikings in Galicia and Portugal is Pires, 2012.

7. Comparative research has enabled expanding our knowledge of, for instance, Viking mercenarism in Galicia (García Losquiño, 2022) or the potential for longer-term presence of Vikings on Galician soil (García Losquiño, 2018a).

Responses to Viking threat:***Building defences, population displacement, and folklore development.****Responses to the attack on Seville, AD 844*

The impact of a single Viking raid can be appreciated from more than the written sources, as can be seen clearly in the case of the first Viking campaign in al-Andalus in AD 844, which profoundly affected the region. Medieval texts like the *Annales Bertiniani* and the *Chronicon Albeldense* describe how a Viking fleet left Toulouse, entered the Iberian Peninsula, and raided in Asturias and Galicia.⁸ After it was repelled from Galicia, the fleet made its way around the peninsula and, raiding heavily along the way, captured the city of Seville, and they remained in control of the region for a period of over a month. This was no small fleet: the *Historia Silense* claims the army was made up of 60 ships. Different Arabic authors give a count of 80 or 54.⁹ Even if this is an exaggerated number¹⁰ or a round figure to express ‘a high quantity’,¹¹ it must have been a large army that attempted such a campaign, which accords with fleet sizes and army behaviours in other parts of the Viking world. By the time of their arrival in and conquest of Seville, this fleet had already raided several locations along the al-Andalus coast, and on their way up the river Guadalquivir towards the city, they destroyed Coria del Río, a riverine town some 15 km south of Seville. The attack on Seville itself left the city empty of inhabitants, forcing them to take refuge in the neighbouring area of Carmona.¹² The emirate expended great effort to retake the city. It was only with the help of Córdoba and the Banu Qasi, who reigned over an independent region in the northeast of the Peninsula, that Seville was recaptured,¹³ and the destabilising event left a dent in the emirate’s confidence in their defensive capacities. The city of Seville was thereafter provided with defensive walls, and the emir Abd al-Rahmān II invested in the construction of a large fleet to protect the entrance of the river Guadalquivir and the shoreline of southern al-Andalus. This, in fact, proved useful, since later Viking fleets struggled against the Andalusí armada.¹⁴

The walls and the fleet were not the only defences the emirate built following the Viking attack’s demonstration of their vulnerability. The emir Abd al-Rahmān II also reinforced coastal defences and built watchtowers and look-out fortifications. There was a period of ‘revitalisation of the *ribāt*’,¹⁵ which is a type of construction that combines defensive and religious functions. There was an investment in weaponry, including catapults and *naphtha*,¹⁶ a flammable weapon also called ‘Greek Fire’, that also caused great damage to Rus’ ships in Constantinople in AD 941.¹⁷ An arsenal was built after 844 in Carmona, the town in which the inhabitants of Seville had taken refuge during the attack.¹⁸

Hence, a single attack started a process of fortification with the aim of preventing further damage in the future. The Viking raid was not understood as an event unique to 844 but as something that would happen again and that had to be prevented. The anticipation of further attacks may have been influenced by information on Viking violence elsewhere, which would have been accessible to

8. Morales Romero 1997, 89-90; Pires 2012, 100.

9. Roldán Castro 1987, 155.

10. Authors like Ann Christys have deemed these quantities an exaggeration, attributing larger sizes of armies to the end of the Viking Age. Christys 2015, 38.

11. As has been proposed in Pires 2012, 103-104.

12. Christys 2015, 38.

13. Christys 2015, 34.

14. As recounted, for instance, by Ibn Al-Qūṭīyah. James 2009, 102.

15. Daza 2018, 55.

16. James 2009, 102.

17. Shepard 2008, 501.

18. Ramírez del Río 1999, 7.

the different regions of Iberia. Even if there were no substantial textual record of the raid of 844, the evidence of the defensive response – the response to a single raid – still allows us to comprehend the significance of the attack and its impact.

Galician defensive responses

In the same way that a study of the defensive responses to Viking presence is useful in furthering our understanding of Andalusi-Norse interactions, a similar approach can fruitfully be applied in Galicia to understand the extent to which local powers felt threatened and the population experienced a sense of danger.

Defensive structures were built around Galicia throughout the Viking Age in response to Viking attacks, but it was specifically in the second half of the 10th century that a massive set of defences was commissioned by regional aristocratic-ecclesiastical figures. The timing of these constructions correlates to an increase in the frequency of raids: attacks were happening almost yearly in some periods within the second half of the century. The escalation of the building works also coincides with dual needs: to protect the growing wealth of Santiago de Compostela, and for certain aristocratic church personalities to showcase their power amid heightened political tension. A clear example is the construction in AD 968 of the walls around Santiago, of which only a small section now remains: the arch of Mazarelos. The wall with its towers was surrounded by a moat and was commissioned by Bishop Sisnando II, who was one of the main promoters of defensive constructions during this century.¹⁹ A series of coastal fortifications was also built to protect the coastline and the entrances to inland territory via rias.²⁰ Within the small district of O Salnés alone, which stretches between the rias of Pontevedra and Arousa, a large number of fortifications built or reinforced by Bishop Sisnando II can be found: at A Lanzada, possibly built as a modification of the remains of previous defences; Cedofeita, which protected the entrance of the ria of Pontevedra; the towers of San Sadurniño and Calogo; the fortification of Lobeira;²¹ and, most famously, the towers of Oeste in Catoira, which protected the entrance of the river Ulla, the river that served as an entry point to the bishopric of Iria Flavia and Santiago de Compostela. As Baliñas Pérez suggests,²² these constructions were built as a chain of fortifications between the rias, could have communicated visually with each other, and would have alerted the inland ecclesiastical centres of Iria Flavia and Santiago of impending attacks. They would also have protected the area with small garrisons and a permanent fleet. These are just a few examples from one area of Galicia, but fortifications were built all along the coast, even some inland (like the one in Aranga), in close connection to one another.²³ Impressive fortifications such as San Xurxo (**Fig. 1**), with views to the Cape of Finisterre, speak of massive expenditure, strategic planning, and immediate need; they constituted a full political campaign for the bishops who promoted them, as well as a clear response to decades of traumatic interaction with Viking (and sometimes Andalusi) piracy.

Other types of local responses

Al-Andalus and Galicia, possibly along with most Viking contact areas, are also united by the responses of local inhabitants to their violent encounters: urban and non-urban locations emptied after being taken by Vikings. Inhabitants of Seville fled to Carmona, a nearby secure location, to escape

19. López Alsina 1988, 255.

20. Rias are water inlets in coastal regions that are created by the flooding of a river valley.

21. Baliñas Pérez 2014, 32-33.

22. Baliñas Pérez 2014, 34.

23. Alonso Romero 2018, 59.

the danger. This population movement can be seen not only in historical sources but also archaeologically; the use of the town for local protection is emphasised by later fortification of the area and the construction of an arsenal there, as mentioned above. In Galicia, similar instances of population displacement can be traced archeologically. Most interesting is the site of A Torre dos Mouros in Carnota, Galicia, a rare instance of local defensive structures constructed for the protection of fleeing population. The defensive area was built atop a mountain with commanding views over the ample bay that lies between the cape of Monte Louro and the Cape of Finisterre in western Galicia.²⁴ The proportions of the open precinct (2 ha), enclosed by a double wall and separated into two large areas, and the lack of material culture or habitation evidence point towards the use of the site as a temporary shelter for local communities against dangers coming from the sea.²⁵ The size and quality of the construction may also indicate that this community-sheltering fortified enclosure was financed and planned by local or regional powers.

In the study of Viking expansion in Iberia, whether in Galicia or al-Andalus, it can be telling to examine responses to Viking violence, but such responses go beyond the building of defences, leaving traces in other spaces like local folklore. An attack is a traumatic event for the communities that live through it, and the psychosocial effect of such violent interactions is sometimes discernible in the later narratives of those communities. An example of this can be found in an Andalusí eschatological tradition concerned with prophecies and predictions, some of which were collected by ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb in the mid-9th century:²⁶

“Calamity will come over Córdoba when it is reached by the horses of the attackers and the strong noises that come from faraway places. These will be led by the ominous young man, he with the elephant trunk, in whose vanguard will be Muslims, but in whose rearguard will be polytheists. Then, the people will take refuge in Carmona and that congregation will be cursed!”²⁷

In these lines, part of the events of 844 are recounted as the background to a future terrible event: the fall of Córdoba. So great was the impact of this campaign in the social psyche that it immediately informed not only the historiographical texts that described the event, but also permeated the production of other narratives. The traces left in local folklore could therefore potentially be evidence to incorporate in the study of regions of the Viking diaspora for which little information is available. The example above is a rare jewel, since it is contemporary with the Viking Age. It is trickier to work with traces visible only in modern folklore without earlier records but, having admitted the difficulty of these sources, they nevertheless exist and can be explored. In Galicia’s Costa da Morte children are warned to behave or else ‘Vikings will come’,²⁸ and similar references to Vikings to discourage misbehaviour also exist in Lordemanos in León,²⁹ where a Viking settlement once existed.³⁰ José Carlos Sánchez Pardo collects a couple of further instances of Galician folkloric references to Viking interaction and, while some of them signal a terror of the past, others indicate a belief in Viking assimilation or settlement in an area.³¹ While these traces in themselves are not highly informative, they can perhaps help pinpoint areas in which Viking presence was substantial or traumatic enough to leave a mark in the community.

24. Gago et al. 2013, 294.

25. Gago et al. 2013, 297.

26. Fierro Bello 1990, 84 and 90-91.

27. Spanish edition of the Arabic original in Aguadé, ed. and trans., 1991, 93. Translation into English by the author.

Regarding the translation of ‘elephant trunk’: J. Aguadé, pers. comm.

28. Esteban Petrallo and Modesto Tajés, pers. comm.

29. Pers. comm. with the oldest remaining inhabitant of Lordemanos in 2016.

30. García Losquiño 2018b, 45-49.

31. Sánchez Pardo 2010, 82.

The Viking campaign of 859-61 in the Spanish Mediterranean: The case of the cora of Tudmir

In my introduction I wondered about approaches to investigate a location with Viking contact for which there is no substantial historical documentation. Although the case studies of Galicia and Seville presented above do not have the same wealth of interdisciplinary evidence as other areas of the Viking world, they have still proven to offer possibilities for fruitful interdisciplinary research. Analysis of the impact of Viking contact in Spain's south-eastern Mediterranean coast, however, presents a different situation. As I stated before, the information available in historical documents about the raids in the *cora* of Tudmir in 859-60 is so succinct, and the possibilities for new historical documents, toponymic evidence, or Viking material culture so unlikely, that it might be feared that research on this region of Viking contact could not be developed further. If examining local responses to Viking presence proves valuable here, this would demonstrate the efficacy of this approach for regions of the Viking diaspora without other methodological possibilities. It has moreover been considered that 'the caliphate investment in coastal defences and a war fleet may have been the most noticeable consequence of the Vikings' impact in the Iberian west'³² and, while I may not fully agree with this evaluation, I do agree with terming the construction of defences a 'most noticeable' form of evidence. Will this same type of evidence serve when measuring the Norse impact in the Spanish Levante?

Historical sources record only one Viking campaign in the Spanish Mediterranean coast. As mentioned above, in the year 858 or 859, a large Viking army began a campaign along the whole coast of the Iberian Peninsula and beyond that lasted for a period of two to three years. There is confusion about the beginning date of this campaign because although the *Annales Bertiniani* date its commencement to 859,³³ there are recorded attacks in Galicia and Lisbon already in 858. Hélio Pires suggests that the latter represent a contiguous but separate operation;³⁴ other authors, such as Ann Christys and Francisco Franco Sánchez, regard them as part of a long campaign that would lead the Viking cohort far into the Mediterranean and back in 861.³⁵ A single campaign with different smaller groups undertaking diverging sub-campaigns is most likely, as Neil Price also argues in his article in this volume, since this practice is documented in the actions of other Viking armies in England and the Rus' territories. What is certain is that by 859 a large Viking army was attacking al-Andalus with as much force as they had in 844. The emir at the time, Muhammad I, must have felt grateful for his predecessor's defensive investment because although the Norse again attacked the city, they were repelled and decided to sail down the Guadalquivir towards the Straits of Gibraltar. Other coastal Andalusí locations were attacked before and after the attack on Seville, as was a location on the North African coast, the small emirate of Nekor, which the Viking army or a section of it attacked for eight days.³⁶

This Viking army's entrance into the south-eastern Iberian Mediterranean is recorded in a small amount of documentary evidence regarding the attacks on key locations: Algeciras, Orihuela, and the Balearic Islands. Of specific interest here is the attack on Orihuela, an important town in the *cora* of Tudmir. After sailing around the Cape of Gata, the Viking army veered north to follow the coast of Tudmir. They must have spent some time in the area before attempting to go inland, since 10th-century historian Ibn Hayyan mentions that they roamed the coast of Tudmir.³⁷ This raiding involved a vari-

32. Pires 2013, 169.

33. The annals recount that 'Danish pirates made a long sea-voyage, sailed through the straits between Spain and Africa and then up the Rhône. They ravaged some civitates and monasteries, and made their base on an island called the Camargue'. Nelson, ed., 1991, 90.

34. Pires 2013, 160-161.

35. Christys 2015, 47-64; Franco Sánchez 2018, 127.

36. Christys 2015, 54.

37. Franco Sánchez 1989, 382.

ety of settlements and may have included Alicante, which had by then already become a port centre of the *cora*³⁸ and could have offered resources necessary for the upkeep of the Viking fleet. This coastal raiding caused the inhabitants of the area to flee from the fleet, like those in the Guadalquivir had done. The attackers then entered the mouth of the river Segura and sailed upriver towards Orihuela, a settlement that had become part of the emirate not long before these attacks. Orihuela was sacked and the locals were forced to take refuge elsewhere. Several Arabic sources, mostly working from Ibn Hayyan's account, mention that the army attacked the fortress of Orihuela (*ḥiṣn Ūriyūla*) and burnt it down. There are no further details in the sources about this attack.³⁹

There are fewer resources and potential approaches available to develop new insights into this incident than in areas of Viking contact like Galicia because the Viking presence in the area of Orihuela was a short-term, one-off incident. The attack seems, *a priori*, to have left no visible traces in local folklore, although this is a research path that must be pursued further before asserting a complete absence of evidence. An archaeological approach would be possible if the *ḥiṣn Ūriyūla* mentioned in the historical sources were studied for confirmation of its destruction and dating. Although this archaeological approach would not do much more than confirm (or adjust) what we already know from the Medieval accounts, it would provide a better understanding of the military impact of the attack and the movements of the Viking army in the area. The fortress of Orihuela was not in the same place as the current town, which is by the river Segura, but was instead located on the Monte de San Miguel,⁴⁰ a mountain that overlooks the city and was a key vantage point for controlling the plains of the river Segura up to Murcia. The fortress would have gathered around it part of the territory's population and would have been the nucleus of Orihuela until the 9th century, when population growth caused the town to overflow to its current location.⁴¹ This fortified space must have retained some functionality after this attack, or perhaps it was partially rebuilt, since during the first half of the 10th century it was knocked down by order of the emir and later caliph, Abd al-Rahman III.⁴² The fortress was later rebuilt or reinforced, since it is described as fully developed with walls in the 12th century.⁴³ It merits stating that although it has previously been assumed that it was the fortress in Monte de San Miguel that Vikings destroyed, the word *ḥiṣn* in the Arabic sources in relation to the attack in Orihuela could also mean 'fortified city' and refer to the actual settlement of Orihuela, and it could also be in this sense that the term is used by Ibn Hayyan to refer to Abd al-Rahman III's later destruction of the *ḥiṣn* of Orihuela.⁴⁴ This actually provides a more reasonable reading of the raid of 859 since although the fortress may have been destroyed, the objective of that destruction would have been to facilitate the sacking of the city. Archaeological inquiry in this instance appears most valuable for settling this confusion, if only to certify to what degree the destruction of the fortress and Medieval settlement concurs with that mentioned in the historical sources.

The scarcity of information on this part of the 859-61 campaign and the restricted avenues for further inquiry may contribute to a perception that attacks during this portion of the voyage more minor than the efforts of the same Viking fleet elsewhere in the peninsula. Are we to assume that the paucity of comments in Medieval documents and the general lack of interdisciplinary information mean that the Viking presence in the Spanish Levante had less impact than elsewhere? Again, an analysis of

38. Rosser Limiñana, ed., 2012, 12.

39. Franco Sánchez 2018, 131-132 collects passages relating this episode from different Medieval authors, including Ibn Hayyan, Ibn Idhari and al-Nuwayri. All share the same scanty details recounted above.

40. Franco Sánchez 1991, 359.

41. Franco Sánchez 2017, 22.

42. Pavón Maldonado 1993-4, 565.

43. Diz Ardid 2017, 82.

44. Diz Ardid 2017, 81-82.

defensive developments and other local responses around Orihuela may be helpful in answering this question.

Firstly, the attack on Orihuela was highly disruptive for the local population and must have bruised the community's social psyche. Indeed, the inhabitants of Orihuela responded to this attack in the same manner as those who lived around Carnota in Galicia and in Seville in 844: the threat against their lives was such that they fled their homes and ran up the mountains to take refuge. Unlike in Galicia, we do not yet have an archaeological understanding of the location to which they may have fled. If we pay attention to the flight of Seville's inhabitants to Carmona, we can see they took refuge in the nearest defensible town inland, farther from the shores of the Guadalquivir. Carmona is 35 km on foot from Seville, so those fleeing Seville did not do so haphazardly and without preparation: this was a large population displacement that may have been planned before the arrival of the Viking fleet. The attacks by the same fleet in other parts of al-Andalus likely alerted the population of Seville to the imminent threat. There is no reason not to suspect a similar degree of information and planning in Orihuela. Although the information in the accounts of Ibn Hayyan and later authors is scant, the coast of the *cora* of Tudmir appears to have been raided for a period before the Vikings approached Orihuela through the river Segura, so we can safely assume that the threat was known to local powers and inhabitants. Despite the similarity of the response in Orihuela to those in Seville and Carnota, it is not possible to increase comprehension of the impact of the raid via folklore accounts or an archaeology of refuge; we can nevertheless draw from the comparison the likelihood that a planned, efficacious mode of retreat was undertaken by the population of Orihuela.

If in both Galicia and al-Andalus the deep impact of a single attack or a frequent Viking presence is visible in the massive investment in the construction of defences, the same may be true for the area around Orihuela. In the rest of al-Andalus, after attacks like the one in 844 or like the campaign that affected Orihuela, some sources mention the development of *ribāts* as a result of the raids.⁴⁵ An example is al-Bakrī's account of the effect of Viking presence in Asilah in the Moroccan coast, which he refers to as 'the port of the *Majūs*',⁴⁶ utilising the Arabic denominator for Vikings. The Andalusī historian claims that a *ribāṭ* was constructed there after the Viking attack in 859. There are many of these defensive structures all along al-Andalus and, although they were also built before and after the Viking contact period, some of them, like that of Asilah, can be directly connected to the aftermath of Viking campaigns.⁴⁷

In Orihuela, it would be possible to assume that a single attack was not sufficient for the investment in a *ribāṭ*, although this was the response in Asilah. There was, however, a *ribāṭ* locally, protecting the entrance of the river Segura that leads to Orihuela. This *ribāṭ* was located in Guardamar del Segura, a coastal location at the mouth of the river Segura (**Fig. 2**). In the Arabic sources the placename *Almodovar* is applied to this location, or rather to a settlement nearby;⁴⁸ the current form of the placename is late Medieval and often appears in Medieval documents as *Guardamar d'Oriola*,

45. A *ribāṭ* is a type of construction – and community, since the construction receives the name of the action of *ribāṭ* carried out by those living there – that intermixes a military and a religious role. In the Medieval Arabic world, volunteers from local communities would temporarily inhabit the *ribāṭ*, where they would devote themselves to prayer while acting at the same time as lookouts or defenders of the area the *ribāṭ* protected. Believers thus came to the community for voluntary service and became a 'citizen militia'. Franco Sánchez 2018, 138.

46. Christys 2015, 68.

47. Ann Christys (2015, 68-71) questions the usefulness of the *ribāṭ* or of watch towers as sources of information due to the difficulty of dating those constructions and to the complex functionality they had. Although that is true for many examples, an approach of individual case studies on certain *ribāṭs* supports occasional connection to Viking encounters.

48. Regarding the spatial continuity or discontinuity of Almodovar and Guardamar del Segura, see García Menarguez 1989.

meaning ‘sea-watch of Orihuela’.⁴⁹ The *ribāṭ* of Guardamar had previously been dated to the mid-10th century following the discovery of an inscription that dates the establishment of a mosque on site to AD 944. The discovery of four mosque chambers led to the proposal that it was all one larger compound with a ‘cenobitic function’: a *ribāṭ*.⁵⁰ An archaeological campaign in 1984 dated the site to that same year, but suggested an earlier habitation of the location, and dated its discontinuation to the 11th century.⁵¹ The construction of the potential *ribāṭ* was thus assumed to be one of Abd-Al Rahman III’s caliphal commissions. Subsequent excavations during the late 1980s established that the site was far more complex than initially assumed, with many more chambers, buildings and even graffiti calling the site a *ribāṭ*.⁵² Nevertheless, although the construction of the later large *ribāṭ*, with its many cells, chambers, and mosques, is mostly dated to the 10th century and is a result of caliphal investment, over a decade of archaeological research on the site has produced sufficient material evidence to confirm that the 10th-century compound was built atop an earlier *ribāṭ* that dated to the later part of the 9th century.⁵³ For instance, the 10th-century *mihrāb*⁵⁴ in one of the mosques was raised directly above a previous 9th-century *mihrāb*, an important remain of the emiral *ribāṭ*. This earlier *ribāṭ* was a compound of buildings, although the different chambers, cells, and mosques were arranged in a more dispersed fashion than in the 10th-century reconstruction.⁵⁵ These late-9th-century buildings, together with pottery finds from this same century, link the construction of this earlier *ribāṭ* to the period following the Viking attack of 859.

It is important to mention that although *ribāṭs* in coastal locations are often assigned defensive functions, Rafael Azuar suggests that the early *ribāṭ* of Guardamar could have had a role in commercial and cultural expansion.⁵⁶ Rafael Azuar links early *ribāṭs* to the development of a network of ‘sailor republics’ dedicated to expanding and establishing trade routes in the second half of the 9th century. If the *ribāṭ* was a sign of expansion, Vikings may have seen the growing economy of the area as a tempting reason for harassing Sharq al-Andalus during their stay in Carmague, southern France, where the Viking army overwintered in 859-60. Whether there is a commercial or defensive component to the Guardamar *ribāṭ*, it is certain that site takes advantage of its location: on the border between maritime and riverine routes, in this case controlling the access towards Orihuela or Murcia.⁵⁷ Even if this *ribāṭ* was not initially founded for the militarisation of the coast, the location chosen is one of a lookout, of control, and of guarding the river entry into this area of Tudmir.

Was the *ribāṭ* partially founded as a result of Viking attacks that revealed a weakness at the river mouths and a threat to this expanding economy? Or was the *ribāṭ* a symbol of a new type of trading community that enjoyed a certain independence from the emirate powers? The answer is probably a combination of both, and an early settlement in such proximity to the Viking attacks could evince the function of the *ribāṭ* as a defensive structure, but also one that benefitted from the trading expansion of the moment. The dating of the compound to the later decades of the 9th century places its foundation still within the living memory of the inhabitants of Tudmir who had been forced to flee or fight the incoming Viking raiders. Nor had the fleet been a small cohort: Ibn Idhari mentions that the Viking

49. Mas i Miralles 2002, 69-70.

50. Azuar Ruiz 1985, 130.

51. Azuar Ruiz 1985, 129.

52. Azuar Ruiz 1989, 11, 19-21.

53. Azuar Ruiz 2015, 137.

54. An architectural feature on the wall of a mosque that signals the direction to Mecca.

55. For an image of the earlier *ribāṭ*, see Azuar Ruiz 2015, 141.

56. Azuar Ruiz 2015, 143.

57. Azuar Ruiz 2004, 24.

fleet was composed of 60 ships at the beginning of the campaign,⁵⁸ while Ibn Hayyan mentions 62.⁵⁹ Even with some losses to the emiral fleets on the way, a Viking army of that size must have left an imprint on the emir and the local powers in Tudmir, much as it had done in 844.

Most importantly, this *ribāṭ* was not founded as an isolated instance in the later years of the 9th century. Other *ribāṭs* were built along the coast of the Spanish Mediterranean during this period, at the mouths of rivers protecting important harbours: the *ribāṭ* at the mouth of the river Júcar that led to Alcira, the one at the mouth of the river Turia, leading to Valencia, and finally the *ribāṭ* in San Carles de la Ràpita at the delta of the river Ebro, which led to Tortosa.⁶⁰ Even more concrete is the chronological relation of the *ribāṭ* of Almeria, south of the *cora* of Tudmir, and the Viking attacks of 859. According to Carmen Martínez Salvador, the mid-9th century beginning of constructions in Almeria coincided with the Viking campaign, as claimed by Medieval historians al-Bakrī and al-Ḥimyarī, and they could at the same time show *ribāṭ* construction as a response to the threat on the other side of the sea in Magreb.⁶¹ It is not only in the peninsular coast of Sharq al-Andalus that there was an investment in the protection of water routes. In Mallorca also the toponym Sa Ràpita indicates the existence of a Medieval *ribāṭ* in the south of the island. There is no current archaeological evidence for the *ribāṭ* in Mallorca, as is also the case for most other peninsular *ribāṭs*. Since, however, we have an origin in the 9th century for other *ribāṭs* on the coast of al-Andalus, like the ones mentioned on the Mediterranean coast or the one in Rota near the mouth of the Guadalquivir river,⁶² it would be beneficial to have further analysis to attempt a chronology of Sa Ràpita and to investigate whether the Viking attacks in 860 against Mallorca could have contributed to a need for protection or strategic control of commercial routes. The same applies to the other *ribāṭ* that once existed in Mallorca, not a coastal one but 13km northeast of Palma de Mallorca, in a location now called Marratxí.⁶³ Although Mallorca was not under Ummayyad control until 903 and it would formally have been under the control of the Byzantine Empire at the time of the 859 campaign, there was nevertheless an increased pressure and presence of the emirate in the island in the second half of the 9th century. The meagre documentary mention of the Viking attack on the Balearic Islands specifies, moreover, that the islands were ‘depopulated’, which indicates a severe raid with a potentially strong impact on the local population.

Conclusion

A focus on the local responses to single attacks or prolonged violence can show how a population was impacted by Viking contact, how the Viking threat may have been felt, and how the centralised or local powers may have been involved in the defence of these areas. The thematic lines of research adopted here can be approached from a variety of disciplines and can be combined with the historical record of Norse contact in the region to provide a more nuanced understanding of the period of interaction between the two peoples. In exploring responses to violence, the first two case studies share three similarities: the Viking threat was felt to be sufficiently disruptive and substantial to involve a large economic investment by regional political and ecclesiastical powers; there is a movement to

58. Pires 2012, 114.

59. Christys 2015, 49.

60. For a map of these *ribāṭs* see Azuar Ruiz 2004, 25. Regarding the 9th-century origins of the Ebro delta *ribāṭ*, see Bramon 2004, 119-120.

61. Martínez Salvador 2004, 50.

62. Abellán Pérez 2004, 259.

63. Bramon 2004, 118.

provide planned refuge for the local population in need of displacement; and the psychosocial effect of this violence has an impact in the development of local folklore.

The same questions and interest in the local perspectives used to examine responses to the Seville attack in 844 and the 10th century attacks in Galicia have been used to explore the impact of the Viking campaign of 859 in the *cora* of Tudmir, specifically at Orihuela. Among the three characteristics shared by the first two case studies, our last analysis allows us to suggest a participation in two of these responses. Firstly, the attacks in the *cora* of Tudmir in the mid-9th century were also severely disruptive to the local population and also involved massive displacement to safe ground. While there is no archaeological or documentary evidence for a planned temporary movement of the inhabitants of the region, we can safely assume that a place for such displacement was planned and provided, on comparative grounds and in consideration of the length of the campaign around the *cora* and the accessibility of information in al-Andalus. Secondly, a possible investment in local defences, very similar to responses in other parts of al-Andalus or in northern Africa, can be found in the building of the *ribāṭ* of Guardamar del Segura. The necessity of investing in a lookout was heightened by the fact that this area was undergoing demographic and economic expansion. Other locations attacked by Vikings in the same campaign also saw the development within the second part of the 9th century of *ribāṭs* protecting the mouths of the rivers that led to them, which supports the interpretation of the Guardamar del Segura *ribāṭ* as a possible local response to threats from the sea.

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Fig. 1. Fortification of San Xurxo, Carnota, Galicia.
Photograph by Noel Feans, under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.



Fig. 2. Ribāṭ of Guardamar del Segura with views of the sea. Source:
MAG (Museo Arqueológico de Guardamar del Segura).

Viking Art in the Church: A Scandinavian Casket in the Basilica of San Isidoro in León, Spain

Rebeca Franco Valle

Introduction

The origins and deposition of a Scandinavian-style box in the Basilica of San Isidoro of León, north-west Spain, have been a mystery for decades. This casket is a cylindrical container made of deer antler, with two gilded copper-alloy lids covering both ends of the cylinder. It is because of its decorative style that one can recognize its Viking Age Scandinavian origins. The historical events that brought it to the city of León are, however, still a mystery. Viking raids are known along the Iberian coasts from different textual sources, but there are few mentions of peaceful encounters. In this chapter, I take a biographical approach to the casket, seeking to answer questions about its context regarding both its origin and destination. With the help of placenames and textual evidence, I reinforce earlier hypotheses and link them with Scandinavians taking part in the *Reconquista* repopulation strategies and political affairs of the kingdom of León mentioned in 10th and 11th century textual sources. Was the box sent by a Danish monarch? Was there a collaboration between the Leonese monarchy and Scandinavians in the service of Knútr the Great? Furthermore, a previously unexplored 16th century inventory of the relics in the church of San Isidoro provides additional clues about the contents of the box. Could the *Beato Nicolao* relics mentioned in this inventory be the same Saint Nicholas of Myra, whose relic cult was spread by Italo-Normans to the central and western Mediterranean during 11th century? What will become clear is that this box is at the foundation of some major questions about the Viking phenomenon related to the Iberian Peninsula. To explore the biography of this box is to delve into established and non-established narratives and innovative contexts.

The Scandinavian casket in the Basilica of San Isidoro in León and its biography

The biographical approach to artefacts is a method that seeks to reveal relationships between people and objects.¹ By investigating the life history of the artefact, its likely origin in Viking Age Scandinavia, and its destination in the Iberian Peninsula, this method seeks to answer questions about the historical circumstances that brought it to León. For this, I apply datasets to the box in order to understand fundamental questions about the construction of the box, its contents, and the context of its destination.

In this sense, I take the box as the ‘visible known which ties together an invisible skein of relations’.² It is understood that an art object such as this box creates social relations by playing roles in

1. Joy 2009, 540.

2. Gell 1998, 62.

the mediation of human relationships.³ A scheme of relationships can be objectified and recognized through this box: firstly, its maker in Scandinavia, secondly, the people who owned it, along with further agents in the Iberian Peninsula. Through the analysis of artistic style, wear marks, and historical sources, I investigate how the object was created, modified, and invested with meaning by interacting with different spheres of social relationships in Scandinavia and Iberia.⁴ Thus, by unravelling the history of the object, changes in form and context elucidate the relationships between the people behind it.⁵ But before delving into the details of the artefact throughout the Middle Ages, I inspect the *status quo* of the research history of the box; the perceptions of the past are another chapter in the biography of the box that provide a background for modern research.

State of the art

It is possible to trace research on the box back to the first quarter of the 20th century, when it is featured in Pérez Llamazares' book *El Tesoro de la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro de León. Reliquias, relicarios y Joyas Artística*.⁶ The same year that Pérez Llamazares published his catalogue, Gómez-Moreno described the box as Anglo-Saxon art.⁷ Only one year later, Goldschmidt published the box in an extensive catalogue of ivories featuring the box in San Isidoro, linking it with the caskets in Bamberg and Cammin cathedrals.⁸ It was not until the 1990s, however, that the relation between Viking incursions and the box was hypothesised. The next wave of attention came from the publication by Jan Skamby Madsen in Denmark⁹ and by Eduardo Morales Romero in Spain.¹⁰ In later works, Morales Romero repeatedly drew attention in the Spanish academic sphere to Viking incursions on the Iberian coasts.

Some suggestions have made to explain the presence of this box in the Kingdom of León: it may have been brought to the church on a pilgrimage and offered as a gift or it may testify to trade links with Scandinavia of which no other evidence has yet been discovered. Another suggestion is that it may have arrived from the Isle of Man, where stonework carved in the Mammen Style is found and which is geographically much closer to the Iberian Peninsula than Scandinavia.¹¹ Else Roesdahl has ventured further interpretations about its significance in relation to the Scandinavian and European political and social context surrounding the dates of creation of the box.¹² Roesdahl considers the closest stylistic parallels decorated in Mammen Style, such as the Cammin casket (which disappeared during the Second World War), the Bamberg casket in Germany, and the Saint Stephen Sword in Prague; she points out that the objects were found outside the normal Viking spheres of trade and settlement, and in church treasuries connected with flourishing royal houses of that time. Stylistic features date them to a time after the Christianisation of Denmark, c. 965, during the reign of two powerful internationally-orientated kings: Haraldr Bluetooth (r. 958-987) and Sveinn Forkbeard (r.

3. Gell 1992, 43.

4. Gosden and Marshall 1991, 170.

5. Gosden and Marshall 1991, 176.

6. Pérez Llamazares 1925. I will come back to his book below to highlight some data relevant for the interpretation of the box.

7. Gómez-Moreno 1925, 195.

8. Goldschmidt [1926] 1975, 57.

9. Skamby Madsen 1992 in Roesdahl 2010a, 323.

10. Morales Romero 1991, 40-47.

11. Roesdahl 2010a, 358.

12. Roesdahl 1998; 2010a; 2010b.

1085-1014). In a manner similar to the box in San Isidoro, these (now) reliquaries may have arrived at their destinations as diplomatic gifts from the newly Christianised territories, which also raises the question about the motivations for choosing these particular kingdoms as recipients of gifts.¹³ Even though the box has been mentioned in subsequent scholarship, the conclusions have not gone much further.¹⁴ The involvement of the monarchy in the exchange of this artefact is in my eyes a sensible deduction, based on the context in which the box ended up in Spain – a royal collection. Therefore, the hypothesis of Roesdahl¹⁵ forms the background of the object biography presented in this chapter.

The casket: Description, style, and use wear

As we have noted, it is the decoration of the box that links it to its Scandinavian origins. Thus, the first step to reconstruct the life history of the box and to find out more details about its creation is to examine its own materiality. I therefore start by analysing the artefact's material properties and decorative style, which will tell us more details about the geographical origin and chronology of the box. The principal body of the box (33 mm x 44 mm) is cylindrical openwork made of deer antler,¹⁶ though ivory or whale bone are still mentioned in recent studies as its material.¹⁷ Both ends of the tube are covered by guilt copper-alloy openwork plates fixed by nails into the antler body. One of them plates has a hinge to allow the opening of the box (**Fig. 1**). This pearl-shaped lid also covers a protrusion that extends from the antler body. Several perforations along the rim of the lid matching those in the bone body indicate that it was once fixed by nails. Moreover, the hinge metal is a different colour than the metal covers, suggesting a probable later addition. The bottom lid is attached by four nails and is immovable. Just above the protrusion in the antler body, there is a drilled hole that interrupts abruptly the carved motifs but has no apparent function in the current state of the box. There are also small orifices along the rim of the upper part that seem to have been produced by nails. In some of the grooves of the carving there are remains of red pigment.

The three parts of the box – the cylinder and two plates – are a meticulous openwork design of Scandinavian zoomorphic style. Between the confusing labyrinth of lines, a leading animal extends its head in the elongation of the protrusion. The metal plates both lack zoomorphic motifs (**Fig. 2**). For the stylistic comparative analysis of these motifs, we will have to travel north to Scandinavia, where the Mammen and Ringerike styles developed between the last decades of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th.

Stylistic analysis of the casket

The stylistic analysis of the casket will help us delineate three fundamental aspects of its biography: an approximate chronology, a geographic origin, and a cultural origin. Besides the caskets and sword in European treasuries already mentioned – in Bamberg, Germany, and in Cammin, Poland – earlier scholars have related it to other cylinders made of antler or bone and decorated in Mammen style,

13. Roesdahl 2010b, 160.

14. Christys 2015, 7; Davies 2013; Franco Valle 2016; Fuglesang 2001, 165; Graham-Campbell 2013, 114; L'Orsa 2009, 156; Martin 2019, 6; Wicker 2019.

15. Roesdahl 1998; 2010b.

16. Morales Romero 1991, 40; Roesdahl 2010a, 354.

17. Christys 2015, 7.

such as the one found in a cave at Årnes,¹⁸ Norway.¹⁹ Similar examples known from Wolin, Poland, London, England, and Bornish in South Uist, Scotland, are interpreted as knife handles,²⁰ salt containers,²¹ or a mouthpiece for a drinking flask in the last case.²²

The main points of the stylistic analysis can be described as it follows:²³ The similarities of its style with the Årnes cylinder, both the Cammin and Bamberg caskets, as well as the sword of St. Stephen from Prague, identify the box as an example of developed Mammen style.²⁴ The Mammen Style ornamental lines represented by the elbows, panel-like broadening of the bodies, triple offshoot and leafless scroll are present in the San Isidoro box design, especially in the wings of the beast (**Fig. 3**). These motifs, however, can also occur in Ringerike style. Additional motifs of Ringerike style such as the axial double shell-spiral, and the grouping of knots at the outlines of the principal motif, like those in a stone carving at Vang, in Oppland, Norway (**Fig. 4**), also occur on the box. Axial composition provided by the two drop-shaped beasts and the shift towards a ribbon motif of the pretzel-loop clearly belongs to Ringerike style.²⁵ Since the head shapes of the smaller beasts are closer to Ringerike examples²⁶ and the motifs like the leafless scroll and triple offshoot are also frequent in Ringerike style, such as on Vang stone, I conclude that the cylindrical body is a transitional example of this later style.

If the suggested dates for the boxes of Cammin and Bamberg are accepted, the San Isidoro box should have been made after those two examples. Based on the development of the style, I would not consider it to have been made before the year 1000. Since the classic stage of Ringerike style appears fully developed in the Winchcombe Psalter²⁷ c. 1025, I would not consider it to have been made after that year.

The style in the metal plates is, however, more difficult to diagnose, but it certainly resembles developed examples of Ringerike-style plate metalwork (**Fig. 4**). It has been compared to Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon disc brooches of the tenth century, as well as the metallic parts of the Cammin and Bamberg caskets.²⁸ The Vang stone in Oppland mentioned above provides a carved stone parallel for a knot in the round plate. Additionally, metal plate openwork is frequent in Ringerike style: in York²⁹ and Winchester Cathedral in England,³⁰ Ålborg in Denmark,³¹ Hälsingland in Sweden,³² as well as the weathervanes from Källunge³³ and Heggen church (**Fig. 5**)³⁴ in Sweden and Norway respectively.

18. Norges Teknisk-Naturvitenskapelige Universitet Vitenskapsmuseet, T18308. Henceforth NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet.

19. Graham-Campbell 2013, 108; Morales Romero 2004, 116.

20. Fuglesang 1980, 127.

21. See, for example, the bone cylinders in Tesch 2007.

22. Sharples and Smith 2021, 157.

23. See the detailed stylistic analysis in Franco Valle 2016, 19-23.

24. Roesdahl 2010b, 155.

25. Fuglesang 1987, 17.

26. Fuglesang 2001, 179.

27. Cambridge University Library MS. Ff.I.23, 37v. in Fuglesang 1980, pl. 70.

28. Roesdahl 2010b, 158.

29. Fuglesang 1980, pl. 79.

30. Fuglesang 1980, pl. 30 C-D.

31. Fuglesang 1980, pl. 79.

32. Fuglesang 1980, pl. 23 A.

33. Gotlands Museums Föremålssamling, GFC4413.

34. Kulturhistorisk museum, C23602.

Modifications to the box. What was it for?

The wear marks on the box can help identify certain stages of modification that it underwent. For example, some of the nail perforations in the bone of the cylinder do not correspond with the current metal plate lids. The holes perforating the now-hinged lid might indicate that it was intended to be immovable, fixed with nails, when first set. The different material of the hinge might confirm that it was added later. The bone-material cylinders mentioned earlier – at Årnes,³⁵ Wolin, London and Bornish in South Uist – should give us more clues about the original shape of the box. But unlike San Isidoro's box, none of these cylinders have metal lids, nor an openwork style, nor such elaborate decoration. These features make the San Isidoro box a unique artefact as far as we know.

These physical marks suggest that there were three different stages of modification in the box and the lids: first the bone cylinder was nailed to something that went through it, as the nail perforations along the border of the bone cylinder might indicate. It is difficult to say with certainty what kind of object it was, but the perforations hint that it might have been attached to something like the shaft of a staff going through it. Similar perforations can be observed on the Årnes bone cylinder,³⁶ interpreted as a knife handle or part of a knife sheath,³⁷ and the cylinder from Bornish,³⁸ and a staff made in Mammen style is known from Lund.³⁹ A second modification to the box would have added the metal lids, both nailed to the edges of the cylinder at different points than the former perforations. The third modification would have detached the pear-shaped lid and added a hinge to it, leaving empty holes in the rim of both the metal plate and the cylinder.

The function of the box as a reliquary seems to convince most scholars, discarding other suggestions such as a pyxis for the holy host, an idol, a game piece or a perfume container. As we shall see, perhaps this last option – a perfume container – might not exclude its use as a relic container. In any case, most scholars agree on the possibility that its contents – whatever they were – were closed inside, but intended to be seen (or smelled) through the openwork.⁴⁰ Moreover, I agree with Roesdahl that the good conservation of the artefact indicates that the box must have arrived in Spain shortly after it was made, and that it was not in circulation for long before it was deposited in the treasury.⁴¹ Thus, I am going to focus my historical analysis on the immediate decades after the creation of the box, examining the secure stylistic bracket of circa 40 years at the beginning of the 11th century.⁴²

Toponymic and textual evidence: The kingdom and the Vikings.

Perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the Scandinavian box is that there is not much direct or indirect evidence connecting Scandinavia with the circumstances that brought it to Spain in the dates close to its creation. Several literary sources report people from the north of Europe roaming the coasts of the Iberian Peninsula during 11th century and in the centuries prior. However, these usually tell us about quick and violent encounters, during which trade or peaceful exchange could not have happened.

35. NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet, T18308.

36. NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet, Inv. N. T18308

37. Fuglesang 1980, 127.

38. Sharples and Smith 2021, 157.

39. Riksantikvarieämbetet, KM 59126.

40. Goldschmidt [1926] 1975, 57; Gómez-Moreno 1925, 195; Roesdahl 1998, 216.

41. Roesdahl 1998, 216.

42. For complete iconographic analysis in relation with Viking Age imagery and Old Norse poetry, see Franco Valle and Neiß 2021, and Franco Valle 2022.

Some textual notices might hint at longer sojourns, with the Vikings staying in the area for some period over the winter. In the following paragraphs, I explore some of the longer and possibly peaceful encounters, which delineate an historical context for the presence of the box in León.

Viking raids are recorded along the Iberian coasts from the 9th century to the second half of the 11th century. Textual references become more abundant in the 10th century, with incursions apparently increasing in virulence and strength. Christian Iberian sources use several names for the northern invaders: *Normanni*, *gens Normannorum*, *Nordomannorum*, *Lordomanni*, *Loclimanos*, or *Lordomannorum*, for example⁴³. These sources have been the object of several studies and revisions, showing that they are not unproblematic.⁴⁴ Thus, for example, in addition to the conscious or unconscious biases in the sources added by copyists, the stories and texts preserved are substantially more recent than the information reported. One must also be aware of the intentionality with which these sources were originally written, especially regarding some of the chronicles, which were grounded in political motivation.

Such is the case for the *Chronica Silense*,⁴⁵ which was written as a chronicle of the life of King-emperor Alfonso VI, son of King Fernando I and Sancha. The importance of this account lies in its description of the longest and most virulent attack in the North-west of Spain, which has been presented as an attempted Viking conquest by modern scholars.⁴⁶ The main text of the *Silense* includes a fragment of the 11th-century *Chronicon Sampiri* that mentions a three-year incursion affecting the borders of the Kingdom of León:

‘In the second year of his reign (Ramiro III, 968) one hundred ships of Vikings (Normani) with their king Gundered penetrated the cities of Galicia and with much slaughter in the lands of Santiago, whose bishop Sisnando perished by the sword. They sacked all Galicia as far as the *Pirineos montes Ezebrarii*. In the third year of their settlement, God, from whom nothing is hidden, brought down his vengeance upon them; for just as they had carried the Christians away captive and put many to the sword, so many ills fell upon them, until they were forced to go out from Galicia. Count Guillelmus Sánchez in the name of the Lord, and with the aid of the Apostle Santiago whose lands they had devastated, went out with a great army and with divine aid killed the pagans, including their king, and burned their ships.’⁴⁷

Pirineos montes Ezebrarii has been identified as the current Montes do Cebreiro, which is the geographic border between Galicia and el Bierzo. This region in the western mountains of León is far inland and not accessible by boat.⁴⁸ The most remarkable details about this three-year campaign are its long duration and how deep inland they roamed.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the moralizing tone of the chronicler and political character of the chronicle raise doubts about the credibility of the information. Between the lines of the narration it is possible to distinguish the recurrent rhetorical topic of *discordia fratrum* – divine punishment of the kingdom triggered by a dispute within the ruling class;⁵⁰ it is suspicious

43. Christys 2015, 16.

44. Almazán 1986; Christys 2015; Dozy 1987; Morales Romero 2004.

45. It has been discussed that this Chronicle is wrongly named after its supposed writing place, the monastery Santo Domingo of Silos in Burgos. It is likely, however, that this Chronicle was composed in the San Isidoro Monastery in León. Due to the longstanding use of the name *Silense*, I continue using it to avoid confusion. See further discussion in Isla Frez 2012.

46. Almazán 1986, 100.

47. *Historia Silense* (i.e., *Chronica Silense*) in Christys 2015, 83.

48. Christys 2015, 16. See also the detailed toponymic discussion in García Losquiño 2018, 43–44.

49. Christys 2015, 83; Morales Romero 2004, 97.

50. This is also a central theme in classic historiography such as in Salustio and Charlemagne’s biographers, to whom the *Silense* is highly indebted. The *Discordia* can generate an attack of the Barbarians when kindred royal aristocrats fight among themselves. This is also the case during the reign of Ramiro III that culminates in devastation by the *Normani* and Almanzor. See more in Isla Frez 2013, 686–678.

that the attack of the Viking Gundered that desolates Galicia up to its eastern border with the kingdom of León happens at a time of stark discord between the Bishop of Santiago de Compostela, who had great power in Galicia, and the kingdom of León. What makes the episode of the attack of Gundered even more suspicious is the similarity of his name to that of the 5th century Vandal king Gundericus,⁵¹ who also caused havoc in the same area and was defeated in a similar manner in *Montes Nervasos* by the Visigoths.⁵² Moreover, the kings of León portrayed themselves as heirs of the Visigoth kings, defeaters of the Vandals and Suebi in Galicia. In addition, the *Silense* employs texts of classic tradition to enhance its rhetoric with historical analogies, all of which make the details of this narration less reliable. In any case, it should not be completely ruled out that a powerful Viking incursion occurred in the 10th century, since apparently a violent attack ended the life of the bishop Sisnando of Santiago de Compostela. But from the corrupted source of the *Chronicon Sampiri*, preserved in the moralizing narrative of the *Silense*, it is hard to draw solid conclusions about how long these attacks lasted or how far inland they penetrated.

Nonetheless, other sources might indicate that the relations between Vikings and Iberians involved more than just violence. In the following paragraphs, I highlight the arguably non-violent encounters concerning the kingdom of León and its areas of influence, which provides additional background to understand the presence of the Scandinavian casket in the capital of an inland kingdom, like León, and in a royal estate, like the church of San Isidoro.

In contrast to the former, long testimony, a short note in *Annales Complutenses* says that ‘Sub era MVIII venerunt Lordomani ad Campos’⁵³ (In *Era* 1008–970 AD –the *Lordomanos* arrived at Campos’).⁵⁴ It is likely that ‘Campos’ in this text refers to Campos Góticos, a region circa 50 km south of the city of León.⁵⁵ Noteworthy in this frugal statement is the proximity of this place to the capital and the lack of mention of the violent encounters that are frequently highlighted in other notices. Another testimony dated to August 1028 tells us about an incident that happened at an undetermined time some years before. On this occasion, a nobleman called Felix had to flee from the wrath of the king – probably Alfonso V – for an unknown motive, by aid of boats from the *Lodmanos*. Even though this charter or the action narrated in it might not be genuine, it indicates that the writer believed that such a collaboration was possible.⁵⁶

We turn now to a delicate moment for the kingdom of León, not long after the former episode. After the death of King Alfonso V, his son Vermudo III (r. 1028-1037) inherited the throne while still a minor.⁵⁷ King Sancho III of the neighbouring kingdom of Navarre (r. 1004-1035)⁵⁸ saw this as an opportunity to take over the kingdom of León, since it was the *imperiale culmine* (the seat of the emperor).⁵⁹ A long letter, dated to 1032 and attributed to King Vermudo III, narrates a curious episode that happened in Galicia at an undetermined point during this conflict: a count called Rodrigo Romáriz had to be helped by a group of *Normani* to end an uprising of a Basque contingent that had previously taken the Castle of Lapio in the province of Lugo (Galicia). Even though it is not completely clear which side the Northmen were favouring, this notice provides us with an additional hint that a group of *Normani*

51. I would like to thank Simon Malmberg for pointing out to me the similarity of the passage about Gundered to that concerning Gundericus narrated by Hydatius.

52. Rodríguez López 1906, 257.

53. Dozy 1987, 47.

54. See also Flórez 1767, 382; Morales Romero 2004, 97; Christys 2015, 89.

55. Morales Romero 2004, 97; García Losquiño 2018, 44-45.

56. Christys 2015, 96.

57. Morales Romero 2004, 208.

58. King Alfonso had a second wife named Urraca, sister of the King of Navarre. Once Vermudo reached the age of majority, he married the daughter of the King of Navarre, Jimena.

59. Sánchez Candeira 1951, 17.

were participating in the affairs of the kingdom, not simply as sea marauders.⁶⁰ Previous hypotheses have tentatively related this passage to the story of a character that appears in *Knýtlinga Saga* as part of the army of Knútr the Great. According to the saga, Úlfr ‘a count of Denmark and great warrior...’⁶¹ achieved his nickname *the Galician* for being the conqueror of this territory. However as noted by Ann Christys, there is no more than a coincidence in chronology to connect these two sources.⁶²

Besides this letter, there are also three placenames that may be taken as a complementary allusion to the possible long-term presence of the Vikings in the area. The first is a charter from 992 AD mentioning a ‘city of *Lodimanos*’ in Galicia, close to the Ulla river mouth.⁶³ The second is a village called Lordemanos, in the province of León, in the region of Campos. Lastly, there is a place called Lordemañ in Coimbra, Portugal. Attesting the existence of a place called ‘*Lordomanos*’ as early as the 11th century is the mention of a property boundary in a charter of the Cathedral of León.⁶⁴ Vicente Almazán suggested that the origin of these two last examples could have been the outcome of the participation of the Vikings in the political affairs of the kingdom, which is also consistent with the kingdom’s borderland repopulation policies during the 10th and 11th centuries of the *Reconquista*. This is also documented for other groups of people participating in alliances at different points of the *Reconquista*, like those coming from Navarre, Galicia, and beyond the Pyrenees.⁶⁵

León and the treasury of San Isidoro

The next step in the biography of the artefact is an analysis of the place where the box has been preserved for centuries, which is not a passive agent in history; there is a reason why the box ended up in this place among all the cities and churches in Spain. The Iberian Peninsula during the 10th and 11th centuries was characterized by a division into several distinct cultural and administrative areas, which can be roughly distinguished as the Umayyad Caliphate of al-Andalus in the south (929-1031 AD), and the mosaic of Christian territories in the north. The non-uniform process of military expansion and restoration of the ecclesiastic order towards the south, with the northern kingdoms as agents, had been developing since the 8th century. This long process, which lasted about 700 years, was named *Reconquista* by modern historians.⁶⁶ By the beginning of the 11th century, León was the capital of one of the most influential kingdoms of Iberian Peninsula. The city itself was a cultural centre and crossroad: 11th century charters reflect the existence of a weekly market in the city, in which local and imported products from distant lands were exchanged. Furthermore, the pilgrimage road to Santiago de Compostela goes through the city. Accounts as early as the 9th and 10th centuries tell us about pilgrims arriving from the entirety of Christendom, including Europe north of the Pyrenees, North Africa, Nubia, Byzantium, and as far east as Ethiopia.⁶⁷

60. Morales Romero 2004, 208.

61. ‘Faðir hans hét Úlfr. Hann var jarl í Danmörk. Hann var hermaðr mikill. Hann fór í vestrvíking ok van Galizuland ok eyddi ok gerði þar mikinn hernað. Því var hann kallaðr Gallizu-Úlfr’. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1982, 221.

62. Christys 2015, 98.

63. Christys 2015, 81; Morales Romero 2004, 87.

64. León Cathedral document collection in Christys 2015, 16. Irene García Losquiño has compiled three instances in documents mentioning the placename Lordemanos in 1067, 1117 and 1206. The foundations of the sanctuary near the current village of Lordemanos date to the 10th century, demonstrating that the place was not depopulated by this time. See García Losquiño 2018, 45.

65. Almazán 1986, 211.

66. Ríos Saloma 2008, 210.

67. The names of clerics coming from Byzantium to Oviedo c. 1012 are also recorded: *Andreas episcopus de Grecia. Gregorius discipulus illius. Pable clerici*. In Carrero Santamaría 2002, 73-74; Martínez Peñín 2008, 80.

The church of San Isidoro had been one of the important cores of the city since the middle of the 10th century. The current building stands over several reconstructions carried out from the Middle Ages to modern times. The foundation of the building, however, is attributed to King Sancho I (r. 935-966) who built a monastery in honour of the child martyr Saint Pelayo.⁶⁸ After the destructive raids of al-Mansur, Kings Vermudo II and Alfonso V (r. 999-1028) began a reconstruction program; they also initiated the tradition of its use as a royal crypt – in the Pantheon of San Isidoro – and linked it with the Spanish imperial ideal.⁶⁹ Those responsible for the dedication to Saint Isidore of Seville were King Fernando I (r. 1037-1065) and his wife Sancha (d. 1067) who commanded a new rededication of the church to host the body of the Visigoth saint in 1063.⁷⁰ Besides the Scandinavian casket, there are several other artefacts of diverse cultural origins in the treasury of the church, with a chronology roughly bracketing between the 10th and 16th centuries. It has been suggested that many of these richly made, exotic caskets, textiles and church artefacts arrived through diplomatic channels as gifts to the kings of León and were later deposited in the church treasury.⁷¹ The individual circumstances for the arrival of some of these artefacts are as enigmatic as those for the deposition of the Scandinavian box. Nonetheless, it is possible to observe a common denominator between these other artefacts and the Scandinavian box: royal gift exchanges arriving in León as a cultural centre and seat of the kings.

Were relics of Saint Nicholas in the box?

Previously unexplored data – the book published in 1925 by Pérez Llamazares – opens a new chapter in the biography of the box. The chapter of his book dedicated to describing the relics, reliquaries, and other objects preserved in San Isidoro includes the transcription of a 1553 inventory of the relics in the church altars. The information contained in this inventory is important not only because it predates the destruction caused during the 18th century war with France, but also because of its level of detail. Among the many relics enumerated in the chapel of Santo Martino, inside the church of San Isidoro, was a ‘little box made of bone, carved, with a lid of brass and a label that says “*Reliquie de sepulcro de beato Nicolao*”’.⁷² This is not only the sole description that matches the Scandinavian box, but also none of the other current reliquaries in the collection of the church fits this description. Even if it might still be questioned whether this is the same box as the Scandinavian one, this document points out that most of the small boxes of diverse origins preserved today in the church Museum were used as reliquaries.⁷³

At this junction I provide some historical background: by the end 11th century, Italo-Normans took the bodily remains of Saint Nicholas from Myra to Bari through the Mediterranean after the former city fell under the control of the Turks.⁷⁴ This *translatio* –the bodily removal of the relics of Saint Nicholas to Italy – was not the beginning of the popularity of the cult of Saint Nicholas in the west, however, but rather the result of it. The pilgrimage to Byzantium and traffic in relics during the previous centuries was connected to the increasing of the popularity of the saint. The sepulchre of

68. Flórez 1784, 20.

69. Sánchez Candeira 1951, 66; Coffins 1995, 241.

70. Flórez 1786, 278.

71. Franco Mata 1991; Martin 2019.

72. Pérez Llamazares 1925, 102.

73. Ambrosio de Morales’s inventory with descriptions published in 1565 is currently the most used by scholars. The description by Juan Villafañe cited in Pérez Llamazares (1925) is not published. Ambrosio de Morales includes only the important pieces; Villafañe’s is much more detailed.

74. Jones 1978, 66-73; Delaney 1982, 426.

Saint Nicholas was frequently visited, and the perfume-relic *myrrh*, an aromatic and, believed by the church, miraculous liquid exuding from the sepulchre, was known in the west. The Ottonian realm was one of the first transalpine states to take up the Saint Nicholas cult.⁷⁵ The growing popularity of this saint in the northern regions seems to have been spread through royal dynastic contacts.⁷⁶ Before the year 1000, several buildings dedicated to Saint Nicholas in what is now Germany can be counted, like the chapel constructed by Otto III in Aachen.⁷⁷ In addition to the multiple phials of myrrh circulating through Europe, bodily relics of the saint can be counted, such as a finger bone used to dedicate a chapel in Worms in 1058.⁷⁸ His veneration was also established in England, arriving through Lotharingia, before the Norman Conquest.⁷⁹ Besides this, churches dedicated to Saint Nicholas soon appear in Aarhus (c. 1070 or 1080), Visby, Sigtuna, and Cammin during the 12th century.⁸⁰

Did the label '*Reliquie de Sepulcro beato Nicolao*' refer to the sepulchre in Myra or the shrine in Bari, Italy? Was the casket also brought along with the relics? Although the exudations from the sepulchre are more commonly known as a liquid substance, solid myrrh is also known for its exuding properties.⁸¹ I thus suggest that myrrh could have been the contents of the box.

Based on the modifications shown by the lids of the box, I suggest two hypotheses: the relics *de Sepulcro de Beato Nicolao* in the inventory of 1553, possibly inside the Scandinavian box, would have come along with the casket in the 11th century, *sepulcro* referring to the original sepulchre in Myra. The hinge would have been added in a later stage to allow access to the relic. The second hypothesis assumes that the relics mentioned were set inside when the box was already in León. The nails that had shut the lid were then taken off, and the hinge was added to access the newly placed relics.

How did the box arrive in León? A game of emperors

The role of the city of León as capital of the kingdom and as seat for the kings who had claimed the title of Emperor of Spain since the 10th century⁸² highlights the symbolic importance of the city and the collection in San Isidoro of León. The transfer of relics from the territories under Muslim control, of which Saint Pelayo and Saint Isidore of Seville are examples, is a fundamental gesture in royal legitimization and cultural assertion of the northern kingdoms, as well as in staking an imperial claim.⁸³ For Fernando I and Sancha, the new dedication to San Isidoro and the reconstruction program in the church had additional legitimization connotations after a fratricidal war – the same war that had involved the *Normani* in the letter dated to 1032. Although the donations made by the royal couple were a milestone for the collection, they were not the beginning of it. The pieces in the San Isidoro treasury arrived from different parts of Europe at different times through the donations of earlier and later monarchs. For many of them, gift exchange was a fundamental part of the 'unwritten diplomatic code in high-status expressions of goodwill'.⁸⁴

75. Jones 1978, 94

76. Garipzanov 2010, 240.

77. Jones 1978, 109.

78. Jones 1978, 73.

79. Jones 1978, 144.

80. Garipzanov 2010, 235-239.

81. Saint Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies* explains this and other properties of myrrh. Barney et al. 2006, 115, 323-348.

82. Sánchez Candeira 1951, 17-19.

83. See more about strategic collection in Martin 2019.

84. Shalem 2005, 101.

The stylistic development of Ringerike style in the box is also significant. As the style of the box at San Isidoro indicates, it was made some years later than its counterparts in Northern Europe. Moreover, the development of the Ringerike style overlaps with the reign of Knútr the Great in England (r. 1016-1037). The previously-discussed examples of the Winchcombe Psalter and other objects in Winchester and London are also likely to have been made during this period.⁸⁵ Knútr was especially focused on international politics, extending beyond the north of Europe. He is known to have visited Rome and to have sent out costly gifts to foreign churches⁸⁶ For example, he also sent a beautifully illustrated psalter and a sacramentary to Cologne, and a book written with golden letters and other gifts to Duke William the Great of Aquitaine, who had friends in the Leonese court. It is also curious that the reaction of the bishop Fulbert of Chartres after receiving gifts from Knútr was:

‘When we saw the gift that you sent us, we were amazed at your knowledge as well as your faith ... since you, whom we had heard to be a pagan prince, we now know to be not only a Christian, but also a most generous donor to God’s churches and servants’.⁸⁷

Knútr’s international politics were certainly successful: he had a daughter with Emma of Normandy, named Gunnhilda (or Kunigunde), who married the Holy Roman Emperor Henry III. This adds another layer of complexity: the casket at Bamberg is traditionally known as *Kunigunde’s casket*, thought to have been donated by the daughter of Knútr. However, Horn Fuglesang has pointed out that dating the Bamberg casket based on the assumption it belonged to the daughter of King Knútr (d. 1038) is weak.⁸⁸ There were, in fact, two empresses named Kunigunde – the wife of Emperor Henry II was also called Kunigunde⁸⁹ – in a very short period compatible with the dotation to Bamberg, which further complicates the matter.

Artistic influences, particularly from the sphere of Aachen and the Holy Roman Empire at the beginning of the 11th century, can also be detected in the artistic productions of León.⁹⁰ Such is the case of the embossed silver casket made expressly to contain the human remains of Saint Isidore after they were transferred from Sevilla.⁹¹ Artistic currents arriving from c. 1020, originating from the *Scriptoria* in the English Channel area, can also be tangentially recognised in the decorations of the ivory crucifix donated by Sancha and Fernando I to the church of San Isidoro.⁹² In addition to artistic influences, the Leonese court had friends in common with the northern kings in Francia, Normandy, and Germany. The arrangement of the betrothal of Alfonso VI with Agatha, daughter of William the Conqueror,⁹³ his later marriages with Agnes of Aquitaine and Constance of Bourgogne – or, much later, that of Kristin, daughter of Hákon Hákonsson, with the brother of Alfonso X in the 13th century – show that these contacts were more than anecdotic.⁹⁴

85. A stone slab decorated from Saint Paul’s Cathedral in London and a copper-alloy plate from Winchester Cathedral, are both examples of Ringerike style in England that have been dated to this period. See more in Fuglesang 1980, 77-81, 170, 189.

86. Lawson 2004, 110.

87. Lawson 2004, 146.

88. Fuglesang 1980, 17.

89. Lawson 2004, 128.

90. Williams 1995, 237.

91. Gallego García 2010, 237.

92. Álvarez da Silva 2014, 116-121; Gallego García 2010; Park 1973, 77-91.

93. Martialay Sacristán and Suárez Bilbao 2011, 163.

94. Gordo Molina 2007.

Concluding remarks

It is not possible to argue definitively to explain the presence of the box in Spain from the sources discussed: the *Knýtinga Saga* that names Úlfr the Galician, a man in the service of Knútr; the *Normani* who participated in political conflict; or the place-names in the region close to León. When considering the connections between Scandinavia, the Iberian Peninsula, and the Mediterranean at large to mainland Europe during this period, however, the box emerges as the nexus conjoining a more complex and tangible narrative. By narrowing down the biography of the box, a link emerges that connects information that is otherwise unconnected, in turn helping us broaden the horizon for Scandinavian engagement with the Iberian Peninsula in the Viking Age.

From the artefact style, an approximate date *post quem* for the arrival of the box in Spain and a geographical area of origin can both be inferred. Moreover, the social context of artistic parallels to the Scandinavian box grants us unique perspectives regarding the socio-political situation in the Early Medieval period. For example, its relation to the stylistically parallel artefacts at Cammin, Bamberg, and Prague, suggests the possibility that, although each is as unique as the casket at San Isidoro, they were all connected with the contacts initiated by Danish royalty at the end of the 10th century or beginning of the 11th.⁹⁵ It also is likely that these pieces were made at different moments for different purposes. The possibility that this box contained relics of Saint Nicholas of Myra – during a time when the Mediterranean transfer of relics by Italo-Normans was imminent – can also be regarded as a contributing factor in the possible shared connectivity. Perhaps the box represented a distillation of the agency of this Saint, whose popularity was quickly rising in both the north and the south, utilizing the sacred power of the church as a communicative agent.

Could the casket thus have been one of the ‘cultural vehicles used as an agent in the unwritten diplomatic code of high-status expressions of goodwill’⁹⁶ in the same way that other exotic caskets of the treasury in San Isidoro church are known to have been used? The set of events developing in the kingdom of León certainly are not in contradiction with this hypothesis, and I argue that it is in this light that the presence of the Scandinavian box in León is best explained. The narrative that emerges by analysing the biography of the casket shows us not only Vikings marauding the Iberian coasts, but also Scandinavians willing to participate in the affairs of the kingdom of León. Perhaps the surprise of the abbot of Chartres concerning Knútr’s piety has aged well and is equally ours. The San Isidoro casket might still be the tangible knot that ‘ties together an invisible myriad of relations’ transcending cultural, geographical and stereotypical boundaries from the Late Viking Age and the modern day alike. It is through the dissolution of romanticised adversarial paradigms, whenever they were conceived, that it is possible to explore new fruitful avenues of research which may generate more nuanced and de-romanticised images of the past.

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95. Roesdahl 2010a, 358.

96. Shalem 2005, 101.

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Fig. 1. Scandinavian Box in San Isidoro, León, Spain (Museo San Isidoro de León, Inventory Number: IIC-3-089-002-0009).
Photo: Therese Martin, © Museo San Isidoro de León.



Fig. 2. View of the metal covers of the Scandinavian casket (Museo San Isidoro de León, Inventory Number: IIC-3-089-002-0009). Photo: Therese Martin, © Museo San Isidoro de León.

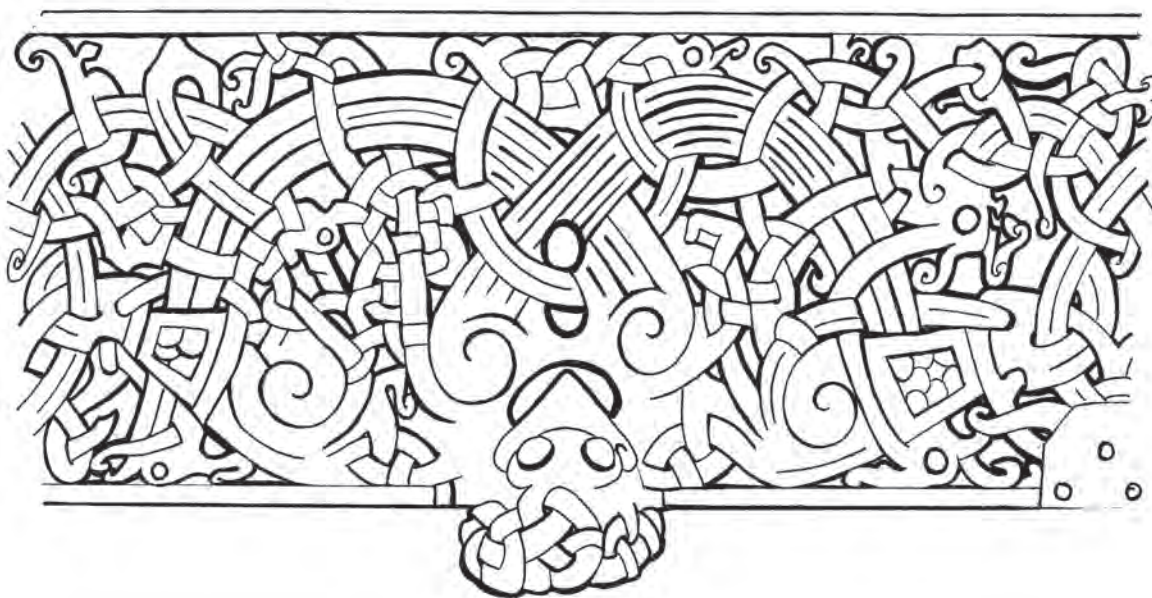


Fig. 3. Extended design in the bone cylinder of the Scandinavian box of San Isidoro in León.
Design: Rebeca Franco Valle.



Fig. 4. Vang Stone N 84, Oppland, Norway (Riksantikvaren, ID Number 31725-1).
Photo: Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, Riksantikvaren. CC BY-SA 4.0.



Fig. 5. Heggen vane. (Kulturhistorisk Museum in Oslo, Inventory Number: C23602).
Photo: Pia Edqvist, Kulturhistorisk Museum in Oslo. License CC BY-SA 4.0.

Óláfr Haraldsson's Abandoned Journey into the Mediterranean

Bjørn Bandlien

In the early 11th century, two Norwegians from the Ringerike district in south-eastern Norway set out for the Mediterranean. After the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030, Haraldr Sigurðsson followed the well-trodden path along the Russian rivers first to Kyiv and then to Byzantium. As is discussed elsewhere in this volume, his service in the Varangian guard in the Eastern Mediterranean in the late 1030s and early 1040s is well documented.¹ He later returned to Norway, and in 1046 was made king and was later known as Haraldr Hardruler: Haraldr Sigurðsson harðráði.

According to the 13th-century kings' sagas, Haraldr's elder half-brother, Óláfr Haraldsson, had previously also ventured on a journey towards the Mediterranean. Óláfr was supposed to have led a fleet approaching from the west, heading for the Strait of Gibraltar. Just as he was about to enter the Mediterranean Sea, however, Óláfr abandoned his plans to pursue his journey further, and turned back north. In *Fagrskinna*, written c. 1220, the purpose of Óláfr's journey is not given, but the passage refers to bad wind and a revelation that made him abandon his venture:

From there he went all the way south to Karlsáróss and raided there on both sides of the river. Then he wanted to go out to the Straits of Gibraltar and waited for a long time but did not get a fair wind, and received there a revelation that God did not wish him to go further south, but that he should rather go north to Norway, his ancestral land, and it said that he was to be king there for ever.²

Heimskringla, written around a decade later, expands the episode and give more details:

After that King Óláfr led his force westward to Karlsár and laid waste there, holding a battle there. And while King Óláfr was lying in Karlsár and waiting for a fair wind and planning to sail out to Nǫrvasund [Strait of Gibraltar] and from there out to Jerusalem, then he dreamed a remarkable dream, that there came to him a remarkable and handsome and yet terrifying man and spoke to him, telling him to abandon that plan, of going to distant lands. 'Go back to your ancestral lands, for you will be king over Norway for ever.' He understood this dream to mean that he and his kinsmen would be king over the land for a long time.³

Here, the goal is said to be the Holy Land, and the vision is specified to be a dream-man commanding Óláfr to return to Norway. This is clearly foreshadowing his later role as a patron saint of the Norwegian kings, projecting the royal dynasty as part of a divine plan. The idea of traveling to Jerusalem might be suspected to be a later tradition attached to St Óláfr, written at a time of pilgrimage and

1. See Jackson, this volume; Rózycki, this volume.

2. Bjarni Einarsson, ed., 1985, chapter 27. Translation from Finlay, trans., 2004, 135–136. The journey to Spain is also mentioned in passing in a short Latin text written in Norway c. 1170: Ekrem and Mortensen, eds., 2003, 100.

3. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1945, vol. 2, "Ólafs saga Helga", chapter 18. Translation from Finlay and Faulkes, trans., 2014, vol. 2, "Óláfr Haraldsson (The Saint)", 15.

crusade when the Norwegian saintly king was not only a protector of his descendants but also of the Holy Land and crusaders from the north.⁴

In early historiography, few scholars questioned Óláfr Haraldsson's presence in the Iberian area. Both *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* cite skaldic poetry composed by the court poets of Óláfr, Sigvatr Þórðarson and Óttarr the Black, as sources for the journey. Following this, recorded attacks in Iberian sources by Northmen in Galicia, especially the sack of Tui, have been associated with Óláfr Haraldsson's journey.⁵

The chronology and itinerary of Óláfr Haraldsson in his early career must be based largely on skaldic poetry, with its difficult placenames and lack of contextualization, along with scattered notes in insular and continental sources. The additional notes in the prose of the sagas must be treated with caution, as they are also interpretations of the skaldic poetry and later narrative sources. The most important source is the Icelander Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Víkingarvísur*. Sigvatr was the most important court skald during Óláfr Haraldsson's reign after his return to Norway in 1015 until his death in 1030. He had not travelled with Óláfr himself, but his father had been part of the fleet. The problem has been to correlate the Old Norse place names in their poems with a modern map. *Víkingarvísur* enumerates Óláfr's battles, from the Baltic Sea, Sweden, Frisia, England, Normandy and Bretagne, Iberia(?), and Aquitaine. The tenth battle (stanza 10) is placed at Hól and Hringsfjörðr, conventionally interpreted as Dol and the nearby coastline on the border between the duchies Normandy and Bretagne. The next stanza deals with the eleventh battle at Gríslupollar before the town Viljálmsbœ, interpreted as the vicinity of Castropol in Asturias. The twelfth battle is at Fetlafjörðr, which has been associated with Latin Flavium Brigantium, now Betanzos close to La Coruña, in Galicia. In stanza 13 the next battle takes place at Seljupollar and Gunnvaldsborg; the first name has been interpreted as a Norse version of Latin Cilenorum aqua, later La Guardia, near the river Miño that leads up to Tui. In any reconstruction of the travel, this fits with the sagas' narrative, where the passage of the vision at Gibraltar is inserted. The next stanza refers to yet another raid, this time at a town called Varrandi in the land of Poitou, upstream on the river Leiru (Loire). Then, in the fifteenth and final stanza, the poet is suddenly back in Norway for the encounter with Earl Hákon Eiríkrsson.⁶

In a recent revisiting of the sources, Helio Pires has raised timely and considerable doubts about much of this scholarship and points out the lack of hard, contemporary evidence that proves Óláfr Haraldsson travelled further south than the Pyrenees. In the chronology of the sources, the arrival of Óláfr in Normandy was probably early in 1012 and the baptism (or confirmation) at Rouen in late 1013 or early 1014. His journey to the south, however far he went, must then have started late in 1012, returning sometime in autumn 1013. His name is not recorded in the Iberian chronicles and annals, and story of him heading for the Strait of Gibraltar and Jerusalem must be seen in light of later hagiographic narratives. The place names in *Víkingarvísur* should thus rather be seen in connection to Aquitaine and the area surrounding the mouth of the river Loire.⁷ This does not, of course, mean that there were no Viking raids at the time. Pires notes that several of the attacks peaked in the 840s and in the 960s. Ann Christys included charters that allude to attacks in the late 10th and early 11th centuries.⁸

In this paper, the problem of Óláfr Haraldsson's presence and planned journey into the Mediterranean will be approached from another angle. It is likely that Óláfr was a mercenary in the service

4. On St Óláfr as a crusader saint from the mid-12th century, see Weber 1997.

5. On early discussions of these placenames, and of Óláfr's itinerary in Normandy, France, and Iberia, see for example Fabricius 1897, 75–160; Johnsen 1916; as well as commentaries in editions and translations of *Heimskringla*.

6. The most recent edition and translation of the poem, with useful notes and references to earlier scholarship, is Jesch, ed., 2012. See also (in addition to the literature listed in the previous note): Fell 1981; Jesch 2001, 83–84; 2004.

7. Pires 2013; 2015.

8. Pires 2013, 162–167; Christys 2015, esp. 80–96. See also the useful discussion in Price 2008.

of the Norman Duke Richard II (r. 996–1026). William of Jumièges wrote in his chronicle in c. 1070 that the duke called for assistance from Óláfr and a certain Lacman in his feud with Count Odo of Chartres. They captured Dol, and later Óláfr is said to have been baptised in the cathedral of Rouen by Archbishop Robert, brother of Duke Richard II.⁹ Although this has frequently been pointed out by scholars, its importance and impact on the activities of Óláfr before he became king of Norway have never been fully explored. In what follows, I suggest that Óláfr was not necessarily journeying south to Iberia on his own initiative, but rather as part of his service to Duke Richard II and in the context of Norman campaigns into the Mediterranean.

Norman perception and reception of Óláfr Haraldsson in 1012–14

At the time of Óláfr Haraldsson's arrival, probably in 1012, Normandy was ruled by Duke Richard II (d. 1026). He was only the fourth ruler since the Duchy had been established a century ago, when Rollo was granted the land from King Charles the Simple of West Francia. Rollo was baptised and married Gisla, daughter of King Charles. Rollo was followed by his son William Longsword in c. 928, and after he was killed in 943 Duke Richard I ruled for over a half century, until his death in 996. During this century, the Norman dukes had become increasingly French-speaking elite, involved in the political rivalry and culture of northern France.

However, there was clearly a living memory of the ruling dynasty's Scandinavian origins in the early 11th century. The main chronicler at the time, Dudo of St. Quentin, emphasised in his history of the Norman dukes the origins of Rollo as a *Daci/Dani* and his career as the leader of the fleet and army of men from the north. Northmen, or *Normanni*, would in Latin chronicles and hagiography be a negative term, inspiring fear and signalling outsiders and often pagans who instigated chaos and suffering. The Scandinavian origins of Normans distinguished their identity in comparison to their neighbouring rulers and the French kings. To some extent, Normandy can be seen as part of the 'Viking diaspora', cultivating the Scandinavian heritage, and being involved in trading to the north and in the Danish conquest of England during the times of Sveinn Forkbeard and Knútr the Great.¹⁰ Other scholars have emphasised the linguistic and literary relations between Scandinavia and Normandy. Elisabeth van Houts has argued that Norman chroniclers, especially Dudo and William of Jumièges, used Scandinavians as sources.¹¹ Even in the Latin literature, especially the satirical poems that were written in Rouen at the time, similarities have been seen with Scandinavian skaldic poetry and narratives.¹² Resemblances between Norman chronicles and saga literature may, however, be reversed; the chronicle of William of Jumièges was clearly known in the learned milieu associated with the Nidaros cathedral in the later part of the 12th century, and may have influenced the sagas rather than the other way around.¹³

Judith Jesch is hence hesitant to term Normandy a part of the Viking diaspora in the early 11th century, although she points out that the region was closely involved in the maritime culture and the networks of that diaspora.¹⁴ Katherine Cross has argued that the use of the Scandinavian past to shape

9. Van Houts, ed. and trans., 1995, 24–27.

10. Abrams 2012, 27–28.

11. Van Houts 1983.

12. See for instance the introductory notes in Ziolkowski, ed., 1989, 42–43.

13. The use of William's chronicle was, however, rather muddled; see Kraggerud, ed. and trans., 2018, chapter 13, with comments 221–223; Mortensen 2000. During his stay in Nidaros in 1219–20, Snorri might have become acquainted, at least indirectly, with William's work. Dudo's work seems to have been known to Saxo, writing in Lund c. 1200.

14. Jesch 2015, 27–28.

Norman identity must be seen in its regional context. The Norman elite were assimilated to French culture shortly after the settlement, but at the same time they did not want to identify themselves as 'French'. Their Viking ancestry distinguished them from the French, legitimised their independence and emphasised their role as fierce and intimidating warriors and allies. As baptised Northmanni, however, they still had a crucial role in defending and extending Christianity in a time of fear and turmoil. Nevertheless, the Scandinavian heritage was linked to the ancestry and myths of origins, rather than close relations in the early 11th century.¹⁵

During the campaigns of the Danish kings Sveinn Forkbeard and his son Knútr, however, beginning shortly after the St. Brice's Day massacre of the Danes in 1002, and the marriage of Emma, sister of Duke Richard II, to Æthelred II of England the same year, the Normans were forced to face opponents of the same stock as themselves. The most intriguing source of how Óláfr may have been perceived from a Norman viewpoint is Dudo of Saint-Quentin's chronicle. Dudo was not a Norman, but from Picardy. He had been sent by Count Albert I of Vermandois to Duke Richard I of Normandy in 987 to make him negotiate in Albert's conflict with Hugh Capet, who had recently been crowned king of the French in Noyon just south of Saint-Quentin. Probably educated at the cathedral school in Liège, and possibly also at Reims, he was part of the new generation of scholars who studied much more closely the classical writers in the original, both for style and not least for stories and virtues that would work as examples for their audience. Dudo returned to Normandy several times, and shortly before or after Richard I's death in 996 started working on his history of the Normans. He probably continued to work on this history until he withdrew to Saint-Quentin for the last time in 1015. As a friend of the duke, probably with connections to his court and the nascent cathedral school in Rouen, he would have met Scandinavians – indeed he presents Rouen as 'a meeting place of the Belgian, the Celt, and Angle'.¹⁶

In his first book, Dudo presents two models of Danes. On the one hand, there is Hasting who laid waste to most of Francia and trampled down holy places, roaring as 'the wolf round the folds of the sheep'.¹⁷ Rollo is all but an inversion of Hasting, fighting with honour and keeping his word. He is led by a dream to go first to England, but refuses King Æthelstan's offer to be baptised there because he knows his destiny lies on the other side of the channel. His entry into Rouen has been compared to Hasting's conquest of Luna in Italy – the latter mistakes the city for Rome and deceives the people by feigning a desire to be baptised, but in contrast the townsmen of Rouen open their gate for Rollo who eventually accepts baptism and vows to protect the land. Hasting dies in treachery finding the false Rome, but Rouen is transformed into a new Rome when Rollo accepts his divine call. In Dudo's narrative, Rollo's travels and establishment of Christian rule in Normandy allude partly to the Normans as a new Israel, but also to Constantine the Great as a Christian emperor and to Vergil's Aeneas who founded Rome after many years of travels and tribulations.¹⁸ Unlike the French kings and Ottonian emperors, however, there is little emphasis on Charlemagne as a model.

The different depictions of Hasting and Rollo imply that there was a division between the good (Christianized) and the bad (pagan) Vikings. For Dudo, and presumably his audience among the Norman ruling elite, the Normans as converted and fierce Danes are essential for defending the Norman – and Frankish – realm from the pagan raiders coming from the same stock, some of whom had settled

15. Cross 2018, esp. 209–213.

16. Christensen, trans., 1998, 100.

17. Christensen, trans., 1998, 17.

18. On Rollo modelled on Aeneas, see Searle 1984; Bouet 1990; Albu 2001, 13–20. On Rouen as a new Rome, see Shopkow 1997, 69–71. On the allusions to Constantine the Great, see Pohl 2012. On Dudo's theology of the formation of the Normans, see Sønnesyn 2015.

elsewhere in Normandy. In these encounters between Normans and Vikings, language skills are depicted as essential for communicating and negotiating with their enemies. This is evident in the case of Riulf, who is alluded to as a pagan and who goads other chieftains of the Northmen in a rebellion against Duke William Longsword. After the battle, he talks to Saxon troops in the Danish tongue and secures peace not only for Normandy but also for France.¹⁹

Dudo emphasised that some eloquence in the Danish tongue is essential for convincing the pagan Northmen to stop raiding. He had William Longsword send his young son, the future Duke Richard I from Rouen – where the ‘Roman tongue’ (French) was preferred – to Bayeux, in order to ‘benefit of the Dacian talkativeness, and learn it thoroughly by heart, so that in the future he should be able to express himself more fluently to the Dacian-born’.²⁰ This passage should not be taken at face value as a source of the knowledge of Old Norse in Normandy in general, but is an indication that Dudo, when writing the chronicle, regarded the ability to communicate with Northmen as important. Indeed, Dudo explicitly states that his skills in the Danish tongue were crucial in his relations and negotiations with the rather independent Norsemen of the Cotentin Peninsula. Duke Richard I’s language skills are soon put to test, according to Dudo’s chronicle. Already in his youth, he had to be assisted by the Danish king Haraldr against the schemes of King Louis IV of France (r. 936–54).²¹ In his later struggles against King Lothair of France (r. 954–86) and Count Theobald I of Blois (d. 975) during the 960s, he is said to have sent messengers to the nation of the Danes for assistance.²² They came as a horde, and for several years raided territories in France, while Normandy itself was in peace. Count Theobald had to repent and beg for peace, and Richard I talked to the pagan visitors in their own tongue, negotiating the terms of how the wars should end. After long discussions, the Danes were divided in two groups: those who accepted baptism and grants of land in Normandy, and those who refused to be converted. The latter group was sent away with rich supplies for raiding elsewhere (see further discussion below).

This long and twisted episode in Dudo’s chronicle is rounded off by Duke Richard I’s marriage to Gunnr, a woman ‘sprung from the most famous stock of Dacian nobles’. With this union, the duke strengthened his ties to the chieftains in this unruly, and, according to Dudo, partly pagan region. Gunnr (Gunnor), mother of Richard II, Archbishop Robert, and Queen Emma of Normandy, was still alive when Dudo wrote his chronicle, and might have been among those in Rouen well versed in Old Norse when Óláfr Haraldsson stayed in Normandy.²³ Gunnr is associated with other literary works, especially the satirical poem *Moriuht* by Warner of Rouen, also written around the time that Óláfr Haraldsson stayed in Normandy. This poem tells the story of an unfortunate Irishman who is captured by Vikings. He appears to be transformed into a donkey and used as a sex slave by his captors, but later he seeks the help of Gunnr, depicted as a widow and the head of the realm of Normandy (*caput regni*), to help him find his wife and daughter who were still in captivity. In the satirical tone of the poem, Gunnr agrees to help him if he offers a (sexual) favour in return, but Gunnr’s association as an intermediary between Vikings or pagan Northmen and the Normans, in this case involving manumission of slaves and captives, seems genuine.²⁴

Indeed, the episode of the invited and fierce Northmen fighting against the neighbours of the Normans, echoes the strategy of Duke Richard II when he brought in fierce Viking chieftains, Óláfr

19. Christensen, trans., 64–68 (chapters 43–46) and 73–74 (chapters 53–54).

20. Christensen, trans., 97 (chapter 68).

21. Christensen, trans., 114–119 (chapters 84–88). This cannot be King Harold Bluetooth, but more probably a chief from the Bayeux district or the Cotentin; see the comments in Christensen, trans., 214, n. 358.

22. Christensen, trans., 150–163 (chapters 114–124).

23. Christensen, trans., 163–164 (chapter 125). See Van Houts 1999.

24. McDonough, ed. and trans.; Van Houts (1999), 18–20.

Haraldrsson and Lacman, and had them fight against the Bretons. This parallel between the present and the past is strengthened by the fact that the account of the invited Vikings in the 960s is the only episode in which Dudo states that there are Norwegians among the visiting armies.²⁵ In the chronicle of William of Jumièges, Óláfr undergoes a conversion and is transformed by the help of the ducal family into the image of ‘the good Viking’ that Dudo had shaped in Normandy. Duke Richard II had invited and supplied him; the duke’s mother, Gunnr, may have convinced him; and the duke’s brother, Archbishop Robert of Rouen, baptised him;²⁶ meanwhile the duke’s sister Emma had fled from England to Normandy in 1013 with the children she had with King Æthelred II of England, which may have influenced Óláfr’s activities in and ultimate abandonment of English politics.

Normandy, Iberia, and the Mediterranean

The parallels between the Danes and Norwegians invited by Duke Richard I in the 960s, as told by Dudo of Saint-Quentin in his chronicle, and Óláfr Haraldrsson’s service to Duke Richard II in 1012–14 can be taken one step further; this brings us to the Viking raids in the Iberian Peninsula.

When they received the invitation of Duke Richard I to be baptised and allowed to settle in Normandy, those Danes who wanted to remain pagan sought other terms:

If Richard, the duke of great power, will grant us very generous supplies for our journey, and have us guided to where we will be able to survive, and conquer a kingdom, we will spare the kingdom of Francia as you have requested. If he does otherwise, we have invaded Francia before, and we will visit it more harshly, crushed as it is by battles, burning, and rapine.²⁷

The duke is quick to accept these terms:

‘To these men I will grant provisions for the sea-voyage, with ships laden with meal and bacon’ (...) And those who desired to wander in the ways of paganism, he had them guided to Spain by guides from Coutances. And in the course of that voyage they capture eighteen cities, and won for themselves what they found in them. Raiding here and there, they attacked Spain, and began afflicting it severely with burning and plundering.²⁸

The year is not specified in which this fleet set out from Normandy to Spain. Neither do we get any more precise geographical leads, nor who the opponents and victims were during these raids. They are dismissed as either ‘exasperated rustics’, those of ‘dusky skin’ or ‘Ethiopians;’ the latter indicates Berbers who fought for the Moors. This would indicate that Dudo at least perceived them as Muslims, and that the raid took place in al-Andalus, but at the same time this is clearly only part of the army – the rustics could be Christians as well, and the fact that Dudo did not specify the religion of the locals suggests as much.

Since the dating of the raid is not certain, Dudo’s account has been associated with the several of the many Viking attacks in the late 960s and early 970s. In June 966, it was reported to Caliph al-Hakam II (r. 961–76) that a fleet of 28 ships had been seen off Alcaçer do Sal, south of Lisbon. A large battle on land outside Lisbon was indecisive, but after a sea battle at the mouth of the river Silves the

25. Christensen, trans., 156. He used the term *Northwegigenae*.

26. This is presented as a baptism in William of Jumièges, which fits into the pattern of Rollo and the Vikings fighting for Duke Richard I in the 960s. However, it is more likely that Óláfr already was baptised in Norway, and that he underwent confirmation in Rouen in 1013/14; see Kraggerud 2012.

27. Christensen, trans., 161.

28. Christensen, trans., 162. Coutances is on the western shore of Cotennes, a region Dudo several times suggested was settled by pagan Vikings.

Vikings were killed or fled. In 968 a fleet of 100 ships arrived in Arousa in Galicia and defeated a local army led by Bishop Sisnando II of Iria. In 971–2 there were again Northmen in Galicia and Algarve, opposed by both Christians and Muslims.²⁹ If the number of ships and the extensive plundering in Dudo's account is emphasized, the attack in 968 may seem most likely, but if the opponents included Moors and Berbers, the attacks in 966 or 971–2 suit the description.

The background for the Viking attacks on Spain that Dudo presented are the important point for the purposes of this study. For the Normans, it is mostly to divert the Danes from raiding France, and for the Danes the most important motivation is to seek a rich realm for booty, and perhaps conquest and settlement. In the contemporary reports of Viking attacks in the period 965–972, there are few indications of any serious progress in establishing a rulership in Galicia, although that might have been their original intention.³⁰ In the early years of the 11th century, however, this was about to change.

There are a number of records indicating that Normans entered the Mediterranean by the Strait of Gibraltar from the late 990s onwards. These travels had several purposes: pilgrimage, mercenary, and eventually conquest – which are often hard to distinguish from one another. According to Amatus of Montecassino, Norman pilgrims went to Jerusalem in 999. On their way back, the local lords recruited them to assist Salerno in their fight against the Saracens.³¹ Some of the pilgrims were prominent, such as Count Fulk Nerra of Anjou (d. 1040) who went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem three or four times. By the time Óláfr Haraldsson visited Normandy, Fulk Nerra had already been to Jerusalem twice.³² Another site increasingly visited by Norman pilgrims was Monte Gargano in Apulia, the most prominent site in the Latin west dedicated to the Archangel Michael. The most famous group of Norman pilgrims who visited Monte Gargano arrived in 1017. They met the Lombard Melus of Bari, who recruited them to join him in his rebellion against the Byzantines in Apulia. According to the usually well-informed chronicler Raoul Glaber, writing *c.* 1040, the Pope had been involved in these plans, and recruited a Norman, who had fallen foul of Duke Richard II, for military assistance. That Norman and his men had success and they were followed by many other men from Normandy, accompanied by their families. They did not go by sea, however, but crossed the Alps on their way to Italy.³³

Duke Richard II himself showed a deep affection for the Holy Land. One of the issues that was raising awareness of Jerusalem during the time Óláfr stayed in Normandy was the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre ordered by Caliph al-Hakim in September 1009. The depiction in the French chroniclers Adémar of Chabannes (d. 1034) and Raoul Glaber (d. 1047) shows that this was relatively well known, at least in Burgundy and France, and both interpreted the event as an apocalyptic sign. Adémar and Raoul explained that the destruction was caused by al-Hakim's wish to end the flow of pilgrims from Latin Europe, and associated al-Hakim with the traits of the Antichrist.³⁴ It was probably this destruction that caused Duke Richard II to send money to the Holy Land and to the monastery at Mount Sinai, including one hundred pounds of gold for the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre. He also initiated a long-term relation with the Mount Sinai monastery, and Richard II even received monks who also came from this monastery to Normandy.³⁵

Both the pilgrimage to Monte Gargano and the interpretation of the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre were heavily influenced by apocalyptic expectations. An influential text at the turn of the

29. Almazán 2004, 44–47; Morales Romero 2004b, 69–75; Christys 2015, 84–89.

30. Price 2008, 468.

31. Dunbar, trans., 2004, 16–21; France 1991; Loud 2000, 60–66.

32. Bachrach 1987. Fulk Nerra's mother was Adela of Vermandois, sister of Luitgarde who was married to William Longsword.

33. France, ed. and transl., 1989, 96–101.

34. Callahan 2008.

35. France, ed. and transl., 1989, 1.21.

millennium was the Tiburtine Sibyl, according to which the king of the Romans will convert many Jews and pagans, slay those who refuse, vanquish Gog and Magog, and hand over the Christian kingdom to God in Jerusalem. The Tiburtine Sibyl had a particular appeal for the circle of Otto III (996–1002), who himself had visited Monte Gargano during Lent in 999. The Italian redaction of the Tiburtine Sibyl was written around 1000 at the abbey of Fruttuaria, north of Turin. This abbey was founded by William of Volpiano in 1000 or 1001. William was shortly after invited by Duke Richard II to reform the abbeys in Normandy, among them the important houses of Fécamp and Mont-Saint-Michel. Indeed, one of the earliest preserved manuscripts containing the Sibyl was written at Fécamp in the second half of the 11th century, along with a tract on the Antichrist and Raoul Glaber's biography of William of Volpiano.³⁶

It is thus reasonable to assume that other eschatological and liturgical texts dealing with the end of time would have been well known in Normandy in 1012–14.³⁷ Óláfr's journey to Iberia was perhaps part of this new interest in visiting and supporting the Holy Land among the Normans – related to that of other Normans who travelled into the Mediterranean – and was perhaps part of his service of Duke Richard II of Normandy. The pope and Melus of Bari must have known about the Normans as possible military resources even before they invited them to participate in the struggles in Apulia in 1017. Commanding a fleet, Óláfr would be a valuable asset for a sea route into the Mediterranean. Alternatively, if we assume that Dudo drew a parallel between the Northmen going to Spain in the 960s on the instigation of Richard I and Óláfr Haraldsson, he would have been joined by Normans from Coutances. In 1013, the most prominent man living in this district was Tancred of Hauteville, then in his thirties. Even though such a link is stretching the evidence, it is not unlikely that Óláfr and Tancred, the father of, among others, Robert Guiscard of Apulia and Roger of Sicily, had met. Dudo's mention of guides from the Cotentin Peninsula for the Northmen the 960s indicates that up to 1015 when he wrote his chronicle, he knew that they had good knowledge of Spain.

The chronology of Óláfr's journeys indicates that he most likely travelled to Iberia in 1013. Although his journey had previously been associated with the killing of the powerful Don Mendo Gonçalves, count of Portugal and guardian of the young King Alfonso V of León, in 1008, this is now regarded as unsubstantiated by the sources.³⁸ A more likely connection is the large raids reported in 1015–16, when Vikings stayed the winter somewhere between Duoro and Ave, and in 1016 attacked a castle in the province of Braga. This fleet may be linked to later reports concerning the capture of the bishop of Tui, along with other inhabitants, by Vikings around this time.³⁹ Charter evidence confirms this, and documents that a certain Amarelo Mestaliz paid for her daughters to be set free in 1015, and a few years later a man south of Porto bought freedom for himself and his daughter from a Viking ship.⁴⁰ Assuming he made his journey in 1013 and not 1014 or later, however, the chronology makes it doubtful that Óláfr Haraldsson was involved in this specific attack, although these other expeditions offer a context of a multitude of fleets coming from the north during this period. If his goal was to enter the Mediterranean with Norman pilgrims and/or warriors, it is more likely that he made occasional raids when in need of supplies rather than full-scale attacks on a region; this practice was known during the crusading voyages of Sigurðr the Crusader and Rognvaldr Kali in the 12th century.

36. Roach 2015. The difference between the Ottonian and Norman perception of eschatology seems to be related to the myths of origin; while Otto III regarded Charlemagne as a key figure in the legend of the Last Emperor as well as his ancestor, Richard II emphasised the role of St. Michael.

37. Possible eschatological influences on Óláfr Haraldsson's rule are discussed in more detail in Bandlien 2021.

38. For example, in Almazán 2004, but see now Pires 2013, 165; Christys 2015, 97.

39. Price 2008, 467. Rui Pinto de Azevedo pointed out that the evidence for a link between the Vikings over-wintering 1015–16 and the sack of Tui in 1014 is disputable (Pinto de Azevedo 1974).

40. Christys 2015, 96.

The timing, however, was horrible. Since 1009 al-Andalus had been in a state of chaos with internal rivalry and fighting. In 1013, Berber forces began a large attack and conquered Córdoba during the summer, massacring the inhabitants.⁴¹ This extremely dangerous situation in south-western Spain would be a likely explanation for Óláfr's return to Normandy, although the dream directing him to seek the kingdom of Norway was more apposite in a medieval setting.

Ringerike and León as nodes in the European web in the early 11th century

Óláfr's journey to Spain seems at first glance not to have made much impact on late Viking-Age politics and culture until the sagas were written in late the 12th and early 13th centuries. When the skald Óttarr the Black composed a poem hailing Óláfr Haraldsson in the mid-1020s, he seems to have omitted the Iberian adventures although he mentioned Óláfr raiding in Poitou.⁴²

A possible trace of Óláfr's Andalusian adventure is a collection of 24 Umayyad silver coins found on Heligholmen, an island off the southern tip of Gotland.⁴³ These coins were issued by the Caliphs of Córdoba, dating from the late 8th century to early 11th century. Thirteen of the coins are from the reign of Hisham II (976–1013), whose rule was dominated by his mayor of the palace, al-Mansur (d. 1002). The latest coin, dated AH 403 (1012/13), was issued by Suleyman, the Berber leader who sacked Córdoba in May 1013 and probably killed Hisham II during the massacres. Since AH 403 ended mid-July 1013 AD, this coin must have been struck almost immediately after Suleyman was proclaimed caliph. Although certainty cannot be established, the easiest explanation would be that this collection of silver dirhems, which is unique in a Scandinavian context, is related to someone who had been in Óláfr's fleet during these years.

Óláfr may also have inspired the likes of the Norman Roger of Tosny and Galizia-Úlfr. Óláfr had probably met the former during his stay in Rouen. He went to Barcelona c. 1023 to assist Countess Ermessenda against the Muslims.⁴⁴ Galizia-Úlfr may have met Óláfr in England, and is said to have married the daughter of Hákon Eiríkrsson, Earl of Lade. Hákon was the first of the rulers of Norway that Óláfr encountered – and exiled – when he returned to Norway in 1015; Hákon later became one of Knútr's earls in England. Galizia-Úlfr's raiding in Galicia is conventionally dated to 1028.

There are also some indirect – and admittedly inconclusive – indications for cultural relations, or at least a material and visual common ground between Spain and Norway. These are related to the development of artwork in the late Viking Age: the Mammen and Ringerike styles. The Scandinavians had interacted with and adapted continental and Mediterranean motives in art since the Roman era, although they manipulated motifs and styles to conform to a local agenda and pagan identity.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the Mammen and Ringerike styles are more often related to Christian rulership and symbolism; Christ on the cross on the larger Jelling stone, raised by Haraldr Bluetooth c. 965, is an obvious example. The 'large beast' on the other side of the stone could seem a less Christian symbol, although the context would influence its interpretation. One element, also found, for example, in the bird on the Mammen axe (from what appears to be a burial of a follower of Haraldr Bluetooth c. 970/71), is an often-neglected element in the visual representations in late Viking-Age art: joint spirals. This element is found in Spain as well as in the home ground of Óláfr Haraldsson in Ringerike.

41. Fletcher 2001, 79–80.

42. Townend, ed., 2012, 739, stanza 12.

43. Jonsson and Östergren 1983; they suggested that Andalucian traders might have brought the coins to Heligholmen, which I find unlikely at that period.

44. Villegas-Aristizábal 2008.

45. Wicker 2003.

In León, there is a small but unique cylinder box made of antler carved in Mammen style in the Cathedral of San Isidore.⁴⁶ It was presumably used as a small reliquary in the Middle Ages, although it is now empty. Signe Horn Fuglesang has dated the box to the late phase of the Mammen style, with traits that were to be developed in the Ringerike style from c. 1000 onwards – therefore shortly before or after the death of Haraldr Bluetooth c. 986.⁴⁷ The main motif is a bird that is spread around the whole cylinder, with the beaked head protruding from the top and with clearly visible joint spirals.⁴⁸ It was most probably made in Denmark, and how and when the box came to Galicia remains uncertain. Else Roesdahl suggests that it might have been a gift from a pilgrim to Santiago de Compostela sometime during the 11th century, perhaps to initiate diplomatic relations with the King of León on behalf of the Danish king.⁴⁹

In Spain, we find joint spirals in the illuminations of a manuscript from the latter half of the 10th century, the so-called Urgell Beatus. This was one of a large group of richly illuminated manuscripts of a commentary on the Apocalypse originally written in the 8th century. Among its 79 miniatures, horses and beasts are depicted with joint spirals, as well as the seven-headed dragon fighting Archangel Michael. Although it has been in Urgell in Catalonia since the early 12th century, the provenance of its production is unknown. The relations amongst monasteries in northern Spain were fluid at the time, however, and manuscripts are known to have been used as gifts outside their regions of production.⁵⁰ From the format, colour, and iconography, the Urgell Beatus has been suggested to have been made in the Kingdom of León, about the time the León box was made. Strikingly, in the two other Beatus manuscripts made in the kingdom of León, both predating the Urgell Beatus, the spirals are not found in the joints of animals, but on the wings of angels, seraphs, and the eagle symbolizing St. John.⁵¹

To suggest any direct influence from the Urgell Beatus on Mammen style or vice versa would go too far. Beasts or birds of prey, combined with the scrolls, vegetal motifs, and spirals, are often found in Ottonian art, however, and there were many paths from German courts and monasteries to Spain in the later 10th century.⁵² Indeed, both the Mammen and Ringerike styles – especially the latter – have been associated with the imperial centres of architecture and scriptoria in northern Germany, such as

46. See Franco Valle, this volume.

47. Fuglesang 1996, 87–89. James Graham-Campbell suggests that the Mammen style quickly went out of fashion after the death of Haraldr Bluetooth and the end of Jelling as a central place (Graham-Campbell 2013, 115).

48. The spread-eagled and snake-entwined bird can best be seen on an extended drawing in, for example, Graham-Campbell 2013, 114 (ill. 128).

49. Roesdahl 2010a. See also Morales Romero 2004b and Roesdahl 2010b on other Mammen-style objects that were probably offered as prominent gifts. One obvious occasion on which the box could have been offered as a royal gift was via the (admittedly short-lived) diplomatic network between Alfonso V (r. 999–1028), Duke William the Great of Aquitaine (d. 1030), and Cnut the Great (r. 1016–35); see Bolton 2017, 164–167.

50. Walker 2017.

51. Williams 1998, 17–20. In one of the sketches of a miniature not painted in the front of the book, there is a full-page illustration of a bird fighting a snake or dragon. Here only the motif, not the style, is similar to the León box.

52. John of Gorze was sent as an envoy by Otto I to Córdoba in 953, stayed there for several years, and brought back to the German court Recemundus, later Mozarabic bishop of Elvira. Recemundus later went to Italy and became a friend of Liudprand of Cremona, who visited Byzantium and Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. The brothers Count Ermengol I of Urgell (d. 1010) and Count Ramon Borrell of Barcelona ruled Catalonia in the end of the 10th century, and the latter visited Rome twice in 998 and 1001, meeting not only the pope but also Emperor Otto III and his court around the time the latter went to Monte Gargano barefoot. His father, Count Borrell II of Barcelona (d. 993), had been a pilgrim to Aurillac in 967, and was a host to Gerbert of Aurillac during his studies in Catalonia, later schoolmaster in Reims and elected pope as Sylvester II; see Zimmermann 1999, 446; Zuccato 2005, 748. It has been suggested that Dudo of Saint-Quentin studied under Gerbert of Aurillac in Reims in the 970s, but he was more likely a pupil in Liège. Dudo may have known Gerbert indirectly, however. In the opening letter of his chronicle, Dudo addressed Bishop Adalbero of Laon, who was the nephew of Bishop Adalbero of Reims and had studied under Gerbert; see Shopkow 1989.

Bamberg, Hildesheim, and Reichenau. Signe Fuglesang has argued that although the Ringerike style is found outside Scandinavia, the inspiration and connotations seem closer to Ottonian illuminations, especially those produced at Hildesheim in late 10th century.⁵³ The eagle was also important for the Ottonians, not only as a symbol of St. John, but also an imperial sign and emblem of power and war. For instance, it is said in a late 10th-century chronicle that Charlemagne had affixed a bronze eagle as in flight on top of his palace in Aachen. It apparently had originally been pointed eastwards, but the Ottonians directed it westwards against the French. During an attack against Otto II, this was again turned eastwards. The theological meaning was most likely taken from the Bible: the prophet Isaiah said that those who humbly sought consolation with God should rise like an eagle on its wings against enemies.⁵⁴ Such religious legitimization of imperial authority made a deep impact on the kingship of León by the mid-11th century.⁵⁵

The site that would become the Cathedral of San Isidore in León in 1063, had, however, already gained a certain reputation in Europe by the end of the 10th century, mainly because of the relics of St. Pelagius. Pelagius was martyred in Córdoba in 925/6 as a young boy, after having voluntarily taken the place of his uncle, a bishop of León, as a hostage. He is said to have been killed because he refused the amorous advances of the emir Abd al-Rahman III. Some decades later, King Sancho I of León (r. 956–8/960–6) was dethroned and sent into exile. He sought military assistance from the same al-Rahamn, who now was caliph of Cordoba. With the help of a Moorish army, he once again became king of León, and founded a monastery for St. Pelagius and a church dedicated to John the Evangelist. After negotiations with al-Hakam, who succeeded his father as caliph in 961, relics of Pelagius were sent from Córdoba in 967 to Elvira, sister of Sancho I (who had died the previous year) and abbess of San Salvador in León.⁵⁶ Thus, this saint who died as a hostage with the Moorish ‘pagans’, was translated just as Vikings raided and sought hostages along the coast. If indeed the Mammen-styled box in León was a gift and was used as a reliquary beside the Andalusian casket made for the relics St. Pelagius, it would have communicated much of the same message of peaceful diplomatic relations between outbursts of enmity and war.⁵⁷

Around the time of the translation of St. Pelagius, in the 960s, unnamed Spanish envoys told the story of the martyred boy at the Ottonian court. Hrotsvit (d. 973), a nun at the imperial Gandersheim Abbey in northern Germany led by Abbess Gerberga (d. 1001) who was a niece of Otto I and cousin of Otto II, composed a legend in verse based on this story.⁵⁸ This poem has been regarded as crucial in shaping the image of the Saracens as pagan worshippers of idols inhabited by demons. Such representations would later influence not only the early crusaders, but also the perception of pagan peoples in the neighbourhood of Germany.⁵⁹ The presentation of the pagan al-Rahman III as led by demonic lust for boys, was important in shaping the idea of same-sex desire as not only ‘unclean’ and ‘illicit’, but

53. Fuglesang 1980. Patterns similar to the Ringerike style are found on the tomb of Hugh of Troarn, an otherwise unknown soldier in the service of Duke Richard II (actually, he terms himself ‘miles Ricardi regis’, possible evidence that the duke aspired for a royal title), and on the capitals of Bernay in Normandy. It also seems to have influenced illumination in Kyiv Rus’; see Baylé 1991, 80–81, 293, 310; Gertsman 2000.

54. Lake, ed. and trans., 2011 vol. II, 116 (III.71).

55. Walker 2020.

56. Andalusian heart-shaped boxes contained the relics, and were set in a casket with images carved in ivory, clad in silken lining on the lid; see Williams and Walker 1993. The casket may have been made shortly after the re-translation of the relics to León in 1053, after having been kept in Oviedo for half a century. The small boxes and silk may have been from the first translation in 967; see Rosser-Owen 2015, 50–55.

57. A related example is the pyxis with a chalice and paten given to Don Mendo Gonçalves and his wife Toda in 1004–08; see Prado-Vilar 1997, 33–34.

58. Translated in Wilson, trans., 1998, 29–40.

59. Tolan 2002, 106–108.

as ‘Sodomitic vices’, a grievous sin linked to the combination of extreme luxury, lust, and idolatry.⁶⁰

Pelagius, however, resisting the advances of the pagan caliph and the threat of being raped, escapes the dangers of effeminacy and vice by becoming a martyr. Hrotsvit confers this pious control to the whole Leonese kingdom, heroically fighting the pagan advances against Christians (Sancho I’s alliance with al-Rahman III is, of course, not mentioned in her poem). Pelagius, whose bodily beauty was potentially effeminate, is by his resistance transformed into a warrior, a *miles*, of God. Hrotsvit’s poem may reflect the anxiety among Christians about becoming hostages to pagans, and indeed Gandersheim Abbey had itself been threatened by Vikings in the late 9th century, and most acutely by Magyars in Hrotsvit’s own times.⁶¹

The contrast of Hrotsvit’s Pelagius and Warner of Rouen’s Moriut is striking. For Pelagius, chaste resistance to the lustful pagan transformed the boy into a manly soldier of Christ crowned by martyrdom, while for Moriut the sexually promiscuous but Christian Duchess restores the sexually exploited and beastly protagonist to manhood by freeing his wife and daughter. One senses that the latter’s experience of being a captive, although deeply satirical, was more relatable to the many hostages held by Vikings and Muslims (and certainly no less the other way around), but both narratives move within a related frame of captivity, slavery, manumission, and complex encounters of Christian and pagan, ‘us’ and ‘other’. The Mammen-styled León box, used as a reliquary side by side with the one made in Córdoba for St. Pelagius is a reminder of these complexities.

Óláfr Haraldsson seems actively to have used a related imagery himself after his return to Norway in 1015. During Óláfr’s reign, the Ringerike style is found most frequently on runic stones north of Lake Tyrifjorden, in the region surrounding where he grew up and to which he returned to consolidate power in 1016. The Ringerike style was, as stated above, a development of the Jelling and Mammen styles with its early versions of the joint spirals, but it was also more heavily influenced by illuminations containing ornaments and tendrils especially in Ottonian manuscripts. Although the preserved runic stones were raised some distance from the royal manor in Ringerike, the red sandstone used for them was from a quarry on Ulvøya, an island in Tyrifjorden just an arrow-shot from the manor at Stein. It is thus reasonable to assume that the carvings – and perhaps runes – were made at a workshop close to Óláfr’s manor, but the memorial stones were raised to friends and allies who wanted to associate with the new regime. Of these runic stones, the one raised at Alstad at Toten (close to Lake Mjøsa) shared imagery that would have been familiar to a Leonese regent: on the upper part is a large bird, arguably an imperial eagle or at least a bird of prey, like on the León box, as well as riders that could be interpreted as either a hunting scene, or as the riders of the apocalypse like in the Urgell Beatus.⁶²

Conclusion

Did Óláfr Haraldsson go to Iberia, headed for the Mediterranean? The geographical indications in Sigvatr’s *Víkingavísur* are too vague, the saga narratives are too late, and the contemporary Iberian sources are too silent to determine this beyond doubt. Óláfr certainly served Duke Richard II of Normandy, however, and Dudo of Saint-Quentin demonstrates how such a Viking leader would be perceived in relation to Norman identity in early 11th century. Strikingly, Dudo’s depiction of the

60. Jordan 1997, 10–28.

61. Stevenson 2012, 48–50.

62. The bird on the Alstad-stone, along with the imagery on the contemporary Heggen ‘weather vane’ (just west of the Tyrifjorden) and the coinage of Óláfr (especially those found in a treasure at the church ruin at Stein), is discussed more fully in Bandlien 2018.

Vikings who refused to convert and instead went to Spain in the 960s is more or less a blueprint for the situation of Óláfr in 1013.

On the other hand, Normans went on pilgrimages as well as partaking in military ventures in the Mediterranean from the late 990s. Rather than being an unwilling convert, like the Vikings in the 960s, Óláfr may have intended to follow in the wake of his Norman associates. If he arrived at the Iberian coastlines, this went unnoticed by Iberian chroniclers; it might have been overshadowed by the larger fleets arriving from the north in the years before and after 1013, and not least by the ongoing fighting in al-Andalus for the rulership of Córdoba – a war in which the Christian kingdoms in northern Iberia were also involved. This very turbulent situation in 1013 would explain, in a more immediate way than the religious prophecy in the dream inserted in the sagas (that has peculiar similarities to how, according to Dudo, Rollo dreamt that he would settle in and rule over Normandy), why Óláfr had to abandon his plan to enter the Mediterranean.

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EASTERN CONNECTIONS

Rune-Carvers and the Mediterranean

Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt

Introduction

This paper considers the relationships between rune-carvers and the Mediterranean. The objectives are to investigate what runes can tell us about the Vikings' relationships with the Mediterranean, and moreover to consider whether rune-carvers were active participants in Viking expeditions, and what their duties in the warrior-bands would have been. A number of runic inscriptions in Scandinavia mention places like Greece (Byzantium), Jerusalem, and Langbarðaland (Italy); most of them are 11th century AD runestones (**Fig. 1**). These runestones mostly contain short formulaic memorial inscriptions; but together the runestone inscriptions mention a range of destinations and activities, perhaps because foreign travel was an important matter that could enhance the status of the family. The function of the runestones in the homelands, and the skilled and sometimes even professional carvers, as well as the archaeological context of runestones and other runic artefacts shed light on the few runic inscriptions found in the Mediterranean region. In addition to the runestones that mention places in the Mediterranean, or travels abroad in more general terms, runic objects have been found in martial contexts, such as in the garrison of Birka. Altogether, this raises the question of whether rune-carvers participated actively in expeditions to the Mediterranean, and whether they had any particular duties in that context.

Far-travelled rune-carvers

Viking-Age runestone-carvers have long captured the attention of scholars regarding their role, status, education, and function in society. Space is limited on the stone surface, and it takes an effort to produce a carving, but some features of the inscription were clearly considered compulsory – i.e., the relationships between the deceased and the family members. When space and resources allowed, there may be a Christian prayer and additional information, such as noteworthy achievements (like travels abroad), and occasionally the carver's signature. We know *c.* 170 carvers by name¹, and judging by details in ornamentation and runes, there were many more. It is evident that the carvers had different degrees of skill and that some carvers were true artists and could be quite famous. Some expert carvers, like Æpir, Fótr, and Ásmundr, have even been regarded as professional carvers due to the large number of stones signed by or attributed to them. The carvers' command of the runic writing system varies as well: some knew only the basics while others could challenge the reader by using secret runes. Analyses of the carving technique by 3D-scanning and multivariate statistics reveal that these

1. Källström 2007, 210.

rune-carvers often had helping hands or apprentices.² Furthermore, since the runic inscriptions are the first written texts produced in Scandinavia, the rune-carvers were early carriers of literacy. Most runestones were clearly Christian monuments, and a large proportion of the Late-Viking runestones have explicit Christian features like a cross or a prayer, or both.³ When we discuss the rune-carvers' identity and competence, we seek to come closer to who they were, where they achieved their learning, and in what contexts we find them. It seems that runestone-carvers are in possession of a special competence, combining a handicraft with literacy, and the more skilled they are, the more widespread their products are. As knowledgeable people, they may have been brought along to the legal assemblies ('things') and on other travels, and they might have acted as representatives of their households.⁴

Crucially, not only do the carvers mention remote places; some of them have themselves travelled far and wide. Úlfr in Borresta was a carver connected to a family, presumed to be wealthy, in a certain area to the north of Stockholm. He carved several stones, inherited a farm and had been travelling, before he died and his sons raised a stone in his memory.⁵ In this runic inscription, we learn that Úlfr had been several times to England: 'And Ulfr has taken three payments in England. That was the first that Tosti paid. Then Þorketill paid. Then Knútr paid'.⁶ The last payment has been identified with the *giald* (loot, debt, treasure) by Canute (Knútr) the Great in 1018.⁷

In another case, the ornament style reveals the carver to have been a traveller. The runestone in Simris in Scania⁸ features a clearly Middle-Swedish ornament style in a geographical setting that is otherwise Danish. The style has been classified as Pr4 according to the stylistic-chronological system by Anne-Sofie Gräslund,⁹ a late style that is rare in Denmark and southern Sweden apart from the Baltic islands Öland and Gotland. It has been suggested that the carver is Þorgautr, Fóts arfi,¹⁰ who is a well-known carver and son of another even better-known carver, Fot. Whatever the identity of the carver, this person evidently brought his art from Uppland to Scania, in those days a trip from Svithioð to Denmark of c. 600 km one way as the bird flies – not far by the standards of Viking travel, but definitely outside this carver's ordinary range. In addition, the inscription explicitly states that the stone was raised to Hrafn, *svein Gunnu[lf]s á Svíþjóðu*, 'Gunnulfr's lad in Sweden'.

Another Scandinavian rune-carver on the road carved a runestone (or more precisely, an early Christian burial monument) on Berezanj, an island in the Black Sea at the mouth of the Dnipro.¹¹ Berezanj is mentioned in Byzantine sources as a stop for rest and ship repair on the river routes to the south.¹² The stone has such close parallels in Häggesled in the Swedish region Västergötland that the man Grane mentioned in the inscription in Berezanj may even have come from the same family.¹³

2. Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002, 51, 65-66, 73.

3. Gräslund 1987, 258.

4. Kitzler Åhfeldt 2016, 176-177.

5. Källström 2007, 263.

6. U 344; English translation from SRD: <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forsk/samnord.htm>. Accessed 1 February 2020.

7. Källström 2007, 69.

8. DR 344.

9. Gräslund 2006.

10. Stille 2022, 101.

11. Arne 1907, 204; 1914, 44-46; SRD, UA Fv1914; 47.

12. Rózycki 2014, 134.

13. Svärdström 1958, 39; Kitzler Åhfeldt 2011, 149-150; Ljung 2015, 159.

Runic inscriptions in the Mediterranean

In some instances it is plausible to argue that the rune-carvers took part in campaigns and were members of warrior groups, as witnessed by well-travelled rune-carvers who visited Piraeus, Hagia Sofia, and Berezanj.¹⁴ In Hagia Sofia, several short runic inscriptions have been discovered, although some of them may need further investigation.¹⁵ The Hagia Sofia inscriptions may be understood as doodles, since they are shallowly incised and mainly consist of names. It has been suggested Varangian guards carved them while attending mass with the imperial family.¹⁶

I would previously have discounted the runestone in Berezanj in the Black Sea on the grounds that it was not relevant to a Mediterranean context, but according to Þórir Jónsson Hraundal, the Black Sea region was considered as a part of the Mediterranean in contemporary cartography;¹⁷ we may therefore need to reconsider.

The paramount example of runic inscriptions in the Mediterranean is the marble lion from Piraeus, now in Venice, with three independent Late-Viking-Age runic inscriptions (**Fig. 2**).¹⁸ Thorgunn Snædal has recently, with great difficulty, made several painstaking on-site examinations of the carvings, and for all relevant details I refer to her reports.¹⁹ With her new reading and interpretation, Snædal has shown that several more-or-less skilful carvers were members of the Varangian troops, at least one of whom was a skilled artist either from Uppland or from Gotland.²⁰ Snædal adds, however, that although the carvers are most probably Swedish, some characteristics indicate the presence of Norwegians; i.e., the group was of mixed Scandinavian origin.²¹

There are three separate runic inscriptions on the lion. The one presumed to be the oldest, dating to the 1020s–1030s AD, was carved by a warrior band in memory of a member of the troop who died before he could take his share of the loot.²² It is explicitly mentioned that Svear are responsible for the inscription on the lion, which implies a group from the Mälaren region. It is noteworthy that this inscription, like the rune stone made in memory of Úlfr mentioned above and several others, is concerned with ‘*giald*’ (loot, debt, treasure):

hiaggu(?) þæir helfnings/helmings mænn(?)...en ī hafn þessi þæir mænn(?) hiaggu(?) rūnar at Hau[r]sa bōnda...
[rē]ðu(?) Svīar þetta ā leiun/lei(o)nu (alt: rēðu Svīar þetta leionu).
F[iall]/ffurs](?) āðr giald vann gærva.

They cut (the runes), the men of the host ... but in this harbour those men cut runes after Haursi, the farmer...

Swedish men applied this on the lion.

(He) fell/perished before he could receive ‘geld’.²³

14. This topic is developed further in Kitzler Åhfeldt 2022.

15. Svärdström 1970; Larsson 1983, 1989; Fischer 1999; Knirk 1999.

16. Larsson 1983, 13–14.

17. Hraundal, this volume.

18. Snædal 2014; SRD, By NT1984; 32.

19. Snædal 2014; 2016.

20. Snædal 2014, 35–40; 2016, 189, 192.

21. Snædal 2014, 14, 20, 25, 34–35.

22. Snædal 2014, 2016, 194.

23. Snædal 2016, 194.

The second inscription, 11th or possibly early 12th century, reads *drængiar/drængir rist(u) rûnir/rûnir*, ‘Young men/warriors cut the runes’.²⁴ According to Snædal, this inscription was inscribed with an inferior technique and has no connection to the other carvings.²⁵

The third and probably, but not certainly, most recent inscription, dating to 1070–1100 AD, reads *Āsmundr risti (rûn)ar þessar þair Āskæll/Āskæll (?) ... Þōrlæifr... ok...*, ‘Āsmundr carved these runes, they, Eskil (?)...Þorleifr and...’.²⁶ This inscription appears with a characteristic ornament style found in late 11th century Sweden – specifically in Uppland and Gotland – and Āsmundr was a very skilled carver.²⁷ As a particularly good parallel for the ornamentation, Snædal mentions a large boulder with runic ornament and inscriptions at Kyrkstigen in Ed in Uppland, which also happens to be concerned with Greece. There are two carvings on this boulder, reading:

A: Ragnvaldr had the runes carved in memory of Fastvé, his mother, Ónæmr’s daughter, (who) died in Eið. May God help her spirit.

B: Ragnvaldr had the runes carved; (he) was in Greece, was commander of the retinue.²⁸

There are several characteristic features here. Firstly, the carver has placed the inscriptions on a large boulder, a permanent landscape feature that cannot be moved (**Fig. 3**). This means that the provenience of the inscription is certain; it was made in that place. Ragnvaldr *had the runes carved*; the use of an auxiliary verb in the formulation implies that he asked someone else to make the inscription, which may have involved one of the so-called professional carvers. The carving was made in remembrance of his mother and there is a prayer for her. Finally, there is an important note about Ragnvaldr himself: he was in Greece, i.e., Byzantium, and he was a commander.

Let us dismiss decisively the notion that the runic carvings on the Piraeus lion are a kind of scribbling or doodling. Experiments show that similar runic ornament and inscriptions may take weeks to produce. The grooves cannot be cut to the full depth at once; they must be cut in several stages in which the first thin and narrow grooves, following a sketch drawing, are successively deepened and widened. The amount of work is proportionate to the total length of carved ornament lines and the number of runes.²⁹ The carvings on the Piraeus lion could not have been produced during a short moment when guards were looking away; people in command must have sanctioned this inscription. Any warriors with rudimentary runic knowledge may have been able to write their names in Hagia Sofia, but the inscriptions on the Piraeus Lion are far beyond that, especially the runic ornament on the lion’s right side. This rune carving is at the same level as the expert carvings in Middle Sweden, often signed by or attributed to renowned carvers and their apprentices. If the same carvings had been found in Scandinavia, they would have been regarded as high-status inscriptions.

Another factor for understanding the Piraeus lion is that runic memorials in Scandinavia have often been interpreted in terms of landowning, wealth, and sometimes of political influence. The runestones function mainly as memorials, but since family relationships are carefully charted, it has been argued that an unintentional side effect is that they reflect the hereditary system.³⁰ The runestones are closely connected to landholding, which may also be the reason why we rarely find runestones outside their homelands. Most runestones are concerned with family relations, but there are some inscriptions

24. Snædal 2016, 202.

25. Snædal 2014, 24.

26. Snædal 2016, 205.

27. Snædal 2014, 34-35.

28. U 112, English translation in SRD.

29. Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002, Paper I, 90.

30. Sawyer 1988; 1992, 10.

on which relations go beyond the family. Some of these can be interpreted as relating to brothers in arms.³¹

To be meaningful and make sense, runestones as monuments require more stable conditions than an army on the move can offer. Consequently, the Piraeus Lion would be a marker of some degree of permanence on the site, and of friendly relationships to the lords of the area. Snædal's dating of the separate inscriptions indicate a century of Scandinavian presence, repeatedly returning to the lion. In a way, it was 'their' lion.

The Mediterranean in the homelands

To understand the rune-carvers' functions in the Mediterranean expeditions, we can study the function of runic inscriptions in the Viking homelands. Inscriptions may have had multiple functions, but there is no doubt that the main aim is to create a durable and visible memorial:

ÞólfR(?)/Þøfr(?) ok Þorfastr þæiR letu ræisa stæin at Þorbiorn, faður sinn goðan. Her mun standa stæinn næR brautu ok Gillaug reð gærva mæрки at boa[nda] sinn.

ÞólfR(?)/Þøfr(?) and Þorfastr, they had the stone raised in memory of Þorbjörn, their good father. Here will the stone stand near the path. And Gillaug arranged the making of the landmark in memory of her husbandman.³²

The traveller-stones (Swedish *utlandsfararstenar*) constitute a minority of the runestones, but have become a sub-topic in runic research. A large number of rune stones tell stories of travel abroad, mentioning a range of destinations: for example England, Saxland, Estonia, Finland, Garðariki, Heðeby, Holmgård, Jutland, Serkland (the Middle East), Tavastland, possibly Choresm – and more.³³ An additional number mention only the general direction East (*c.* 57 inscriptions) or West (*c.* 30 inscriptions); a few mention both or overlap with a more specific destination. Exact numbers are difficult to state because the preservation of inscriptions varies. The traveller-stones have been studied regarding the destinations, titles, and roles of the travellers, and how the stones relate to settlements and graves such as large mounds and ship-settings. It has been argued that there is a correlation between traveller-stones and large settlements.³⁴ The traveller-stones seem to occur at settlements with high status, belonging to families or 'clans' with a tradition of foreign travels and martial activities. The clans in these large settlements had the resources necessary to afford a ship.³⁵ Furthermore, Marco Bianchi identifies deviancy in the writing system as a marker of 'high-ambition' stones and further proposes that a direct relation exists between deviant writing systems and foreign travels. There are therefore probably even more runestones that can be associated with foreign travels. Proficiency in runes correlates with social status and travels.³⁶

The most distinguished category of traveller-stones is the group of Ingvarr-stones, so called after the leader who has been identified with Ingvarr the Far-Traveller in the Icelandic saga *Yngvars saga víðförla*.³⁷ The saga describes an unlucky expedition to the Caspian Sea, where most participants

31. Jesch 2001, 187-188, 232-235.

32. U 838, English translation in SRD.

33. Jansson 1987, 38-90; Larsson 1990, 100, 106, 121.

34. Larsson 1990, 129, 133.

35. Larsson 1990, 129, 133.

36. Bianchi 2010:160-161, 163; see also Källström 2016, 176.

37. Larsson 1983; Pálsson and Edwards 1989; Strid 1997.

died of disease. The Ingvarr-stones presently include *c.* 27 runestones related to this disastrous event, with a main distribution in Central Sweden except a single stone in the northern region Medelpad.³⁸ The inscriptions are also interesting because they sometimes relate to the organization of Ingvarr's expedition.³⁹

Greece

The runic inscriptions explicitly related to the Mediterranean are those mentioning Greece, Jerusalem, and Langbarðaland (**Fig. 1**). Greece and Jerusalem even appear in the same inscription.⁴⁰ Several runic inscriptions mentioning the East as a general direction likely concern the Mediterranean as well, since 'East' occurs in combination with Greece, Jerusalem, and Langbarðaland, but other destinations are also included.⁴¹ In runestone inscriptions, 'Greece' may refer to Byzantium more broadly. Approximately thirty runestones mention Greece (including some uncertain cases); their chronology and geographical distribution has recently been studied in detail by Magnus Källström.⁴² The stones' dating spans the 11th century into the early 12th century, in correspondence with the inscriptions on the Piraeus lion. These runestones have been understood to refer to Scandinavian persons, either in service of the Byzantine emperor or participating in the attacks on Byzantium from Kyiv in the 11th century.⁴³ It can be assumed that most of the stones were raised in memory of men who died on the journey, but a few of the inscriptions may concern men who returned safely.⁴⁴ In those examples, the destination of Greece appears in a context of gaining wealth:

Guðrún raised the stone in memory of Heðinn; (he) was Sveinn's nephew. He was in Greece, took his share of gold. May Christ help Christians' spirits.⁴⁵

Kárr had this stone raised in memory of Haursi(?), his father; and Kabbi(?)/Kampi(?)/ Kappi(?)/Gapi(?) in memory of his kinsman-by-marriage. (He) travelled competently; earned wealth abroad in Greece for his heir.⁴⁶ (**Fig. 4**).

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is mentioned in six runic inscriptions, of which two are on runestones. The first one mentions the man Eysteinn who visited Jerusalem and later died in Greece:

Ástríðr lét reisa steina þessa at Eystein, bónda sinn, er sótti Jórsalir ok endaðist upp í Grikkjum.

Ástríðr had these stones raised in memory of Eysteinn, her husbandman, who went out to Jerusalem and met his end up in Greece.⁴⁷

Eystein was a member of the large and wealthy Jarlabanki family, which we can follow through runic inscriptions for several generations. The verb *sótti* in the inscription (infinitive *søkia*) can be trans-

38. Åhlén 2006, 286; Larsson 1990, 107; Jesch 2001, 102-103.

39. Jesch 2001, 181, 185, 187, 202.

40. U 136.

41. Larsson 1990, 121.

42. Källström 2016, 176-185.

43. Larsson 1990, 115; Snædal 2014, 35.

44. Larsson 1990, 115; Snædal 2014, 23; 2016, 197; Källström 2016, 173.

45. Sö 165, English translation in SRD.

46. U 792, English translation in SRD.

47. U 136, English translation by the author, based on SRD and Jansson 1987, 72.

lated both as ‘visited’ and ‘attacked’, so we do not know exactly what he did in Jerusalem.⁴⁸ Elias Wessén’s and Jansson’s interpretation of the inscription is that Eystein went to Jerusalem, which is perhaps the most likely alternative.⁴⁹ Graves and a cenotaph (an empty mound) have been found in direct connection to the stone and it has been suggested that the cenotaph belongs to Eystein, who never returned, and that his widow Ástríðr lies in the grave.⁵⁰

The other inscription mentions the woman Ingirún (?) who wanted to travel to Jerusalem (**Fig. 5**). This carving is now lost, but it is known from a drawing by one of the early antiquarians, Márten Aschaneus (1575–1641):

Ingirún(?), Hårdar dóttir, lét rista rúnar at sik sjalfa. Hon vill austr fara ok út til Jórsala. Fótr(?) risti rúnar.

Ingerun, Hård’s daughter, had the runes cut in memory of herself. She means to go east and out to Jerusalem. Fot cut the runes.⁵¹

The word choice in the runic inscription implies not only that she wished to do so, but that she definitely intended to make the journey. In earlier research, it has been assumed that Ingirún wanted to go on a pilgrimage.⁵² However, we know as little about her intentions as about Eyvind above. We may be led to believe that Eyvind attacked Jerusalem while Ingirún had a pious motive for travel, but the inscriptions are not sufficient evidence for either of these interpretations. Ingirún’s statement, however, might set her apart as a well-situated woman with independence and wealth. Eystein’s stone has an ornament style classified as Pr2, *c.* 1020–1050 according to Anne-Sofie Gräslund’s stylistic-chronological system, while Ingirún’s stone is Pr3 in style, *c.* 1050–1080.⁵³

Two runic inscriptions that mention Jerusalem are incised into the inner wall of the Neolithic mound Maeshowe on Orkney. These inscriptions were probably incised in 1125–1175.⁵⁴ One inscription says that ‘Jerusalem men (crusaders) broke this mound’.⁵⁵ The word *iorsalamenn* in the inscription can refer to individuals or participants of any gender, not only men.⁵⁶ A narrower dating to 1151–1153 has been suggested, relying heavily on the identification of these Jerusalem-travellers with the Earl Ragnvaldr’s crusaders in the Orkneyinga saga, but this cannot be assumed.⁵⁷ The other inscription was carved by Hlíf, the only known woman carver in the Orcadian corpus,⁵⁸ and indeed in the entire Western diaspora, as Andrea Freund noted in her dissertation on runic writing in Orkney.⁵⁹ Hlíf is not ‘just anyone’. She counts herself among the ‘Jerusalem travellers’ and she is the earl’s housekeeper (*matselja*).⁶⁰ Freund argues that this inscription shows the highest degree of runic literacy among all inscriptions in Maeshowe.⁶¹

48. Peterson 2006.

49. UR 6:I, 202; Jansson 1987, 72.

50. Andersson 1999, 30–34.

51. U 605†, English translation by Peter Foote from Jansson 1987, 72.

52. UR 3:I, 10.

53. Gräslund 2006.

54. Barnes 1994, 39–43.

55. Or Barnes 14.

56. Freund 2020, 181; *ONP*.

57. Barnes 1994, 40; Freund 2020, 171–172.

58. Or Barnes 24.

59. Freund 2020, 181.

60. Barnes 1994, 189; Freund 2020, 181.

61. Freund 2020, 184.

On a whetstone from Gotland, an inscription mentions two names followed by four remote destinations: ‘Ormika, Ulfvatr(?), Greece, Jerusalem, Iceland, Serkland’⁶² (**Fig. 6**). The meaning of the inscription remains unclear: whether Ormika and Ulfvatr visited all these places or whether they, or the carver, had simply heard of them.⁶³ In any case, Jerusalem is part of the carver’s perception of a foreign world. Remarkably, on this same object, there is a mould for casting a particular type of mount, used to adorn a belt in a Gotlandic version of eastern Baltic dress.⁶⁴

Finally, Jerusalem is included in a runic inscription in Latin on a wooden stick from Trondheim in Norway from c. 1225–1275⁶⁵ – but by that date we are well beyond the Viking Age.

Langbarðaland

Four runestones mention Langbarðaland, meaning Italy. These inscriptions might be connected to the Byzantine warfare against the Arabs and the Normans in southern Italy, in which Varangians participated.⁶⁶ While Langbarðaland could be reached from the west, two of the inscriptions state that the deceased was on the eastern road:

Inga raised this stone in memory of Óleifr, her ... He ploughed his stern to the east, and met his end in the land of the Lombards⁶⁷

and

... raised his. He met his end on the eastern route abroad in Lombardy(?).⁶⁸

The translation of Langbarðaland to Lombardy is misleading here, since Longobardia was the Greek name for southern Italy.⁶⁹ The remaining two stones are raised in different locations but probably refer to the same man, Holmi who died in Langbarðaland and had a stone raised by his mother.⁷⁰

Runes in martial contexts

Runes on Viking-Age weapons are generally rare. There are about 20 Viking-Age runic inscriptions on weapons, but several of these are on Neolithic axes and should probably be regarded as magical artifacts rather than as weapons.⁷¹ Only a single Viking-Age spearhead with a runic inscription is known: a spearhead from Svenskens on Gotland, inlaid with silver and dated to 950–970 AD.⁷²

Runic proficiency may still have been a part of warrior identity, as a status marker and an intellectual capacity.⁷³ There are several instances in which runic inscriptions appear in martial contexts, on a variety of objects. As an example of runes found in explicitly martial contexts, we might mention the diverse artefacts with runes found in the garrison of Birka,⁷⁴ which was attacked and incinerated in the

62. G 216.

63. Källström 2016, 169.

64. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2009, 188–189.

65. Knirk 1998, 489, 505; SRD, N A188.

66. Snædal 2014, 36–37; 2016, 209.

67. Sö 65, English translation in SRD.

68. Sö Fv1954;22, English translation in SRD.

69. Snædal 2014, 36.

70. U 133 and U 141.

71. Düwel 1981, 131, 2001; Grünzweig 2004, 157–158.

72. Androshchuk and Källström 2020, 436.

73. Gustavson 2009.

74. Nordén, 1937, 178–179; Gustavson 2001, 35, 37 fig. 1; 2009, 122.

970s AD and subsequently abandoned.⁷⁵ The finds in Birka's garrison show that warriors used runes on a variety of small objects, not limited to a certain category but appearing on amulets, personal equipment (combs) and short messages for show-off or play.⁷⁶ In the Birka context, the warriors have been seen as 'early adaptors', who adopted new inventions such as writing and used them for purposes relevant to themselves.⁷⁷ As seen on the Piraeus lion, the taking of *giald* was one of these highly relevant practices. In later periods, runic amulets have been found in medieval fortifications. On the Baltic island Öland, medieval runic plates in lead (i.e. amulets) have been found in fortifications such as Eketorp, Gråborg, and Borgholm.⁷⁸

Runic proficiency is of course not limited to warriors and martial contexts – far from it. Nevertheless, runic proficiency seems to be one of the skills appreciated in that cultural environment. In the Viking period, that skill was, however, seldom applied to weapons, unlike the situation in the Roman period when runic inscriptions were applied to lances and spearheads more frequently. In the Viking Age, the memorial function of runic inscriptions is much more evident.

Rune-carvers abroad: keeping up morale

The reputation of each dead man

When we consider what the runic inscriptions may tell us about travels abroad, one thing we need to remember is the paramount importance of memory and reputation in Viking society, as expressed in Havamál, stanza 77:

Cattle die, kinsmen die,
the self must also die;
I know one thing that never dies;
the reputation of each dead man.⁷⁹

Viking preoccupation with remembrance and reputation, as reflected in poetry and on runestones, is a much-discussed topic.⁸⁰ It has been said that it was the very purpose of Viking life, and that the cause and place of death was a significant part of posthumous renown.⁸¹ Travels abroad were worth mentioning even in shorthand 'obituaries', and judging by expressions on runestones 'it was more honourable and admirable to die abroad, or in general to have been abroad'.⁸² Most runestones do not reveal anything about the manner of death, but when causes are given – such as treachery, being killed, or having fallen in battle – the inscription usually refers to death abroad or on an expedition.⁸³ Only matters of great weight are mentioned in the inscriptions, so from the mentions of Greece, Jerusalem, and Langbarðaland we understand that travelling to these destinations was an achievement.

Another relevant factor is the overlap between rune-carvers and *skalds* (loosely translatable as bards), as attested, for example, by the stanza in *dróttkvætt* on the late 10th century Karlevi stone⁸⁴ on

75. Holmquist Olausson, 2001, 13; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006, 51-58, 64, 69; Holmquist 2016.

76. Kitzler Åhfeldt 2022, 222.

77. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2010, 176.

78. Gustavson 2007, 204-205; Pereswetoff-Morath 2019, 239; Erlandsson 2015, 70, fig.7.

79. *The Poetic Edda*, in trans. by Carolyne Larrington 1999, 24.

80. E.g., Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, 187-188, 338; Jesch 2001, 216; Price, 2002, 391; Thedéen 2009, 61.

81. Thedéen 2009, 61.

82. Thedéen 2009, 68.

83. Jesch 2001, 57-58, 254-255.

84. Ö1 1.

the Baltic island Öland.⁸⁵ Some rune-carvers call themselves skalds, such as Þorbjörn Skald and Grim Skald. Skald and smith (*smiðr*) are the only professions that can be related to the rune-carvers.⁸⁶ From Norway, we know of another Þorbjörn Skald,⁸⁷ in Stangeland.⁸⁸ In this inscription, it is mentioned that the commemorated person ‘fell’, which probably meant that he was on a military campaign to Denmark.⁸⁹

Judith Jesch suggests that the function of the skalds was not only to create court poetry but to act as keepers of memory, and that the tasks of the poets and the rune-carvers are related in this practice.⁹⁰ Many of the skalds were well-travelled and the poet had a certain importance as witness at battles – ‘to bear witness’ – especially in the late 10th–11th centuries AD, like, for example, the skald Halldór Snorrason who was an eyewitness and brought news back to Iceland.⁹¹ Jesch further proposes that the function of the rune-carver was not limited to making records in runes, but similar to that of a skald as a keeper of memory in a more general sense. Thus, the runic ‘skalds’ and the skaldic poets alike had a documentary role, not necessarily that of creating aesthetic texts.⁹² Jesch therefore suggests that the term ‘skald’ when applied to a rune-carver (as Þorbjörn Skald) refers neither to a poetic role nor to an aesthetical one, but to the act of noting down important information.⁹³ By studying the names and relationships in the inscriptions together with the geographic distribution, Magnus Källström has reached the conclusion that Þorbjörn Skald was connected to certain high-ranking families that were concerned with transfers of property and travels to the East. What is interesting here, is his argument that Þorbjörn Skald was a member of a magnate’s retinue and that his task was to fix the memory of the deceased of this family.⁹⁴

Keeping up morale

It is worth remembering that an army needs not only fighters but also a diverse set of specialists for practical tasks and moral support. These include various crafters for repairing equipment (e.g., boat builders and textile experts for mending sails), along with interpreters and diplomats, field surgeons in (early) modern armies, and priests in Medieval as well as modern armies. In a Viking context, Neil Price has suggested that there might have been ritual specialists supporting the fight, e.g., ‘gandr-warrior’ and sorcerers, and perhaps vǫlur, seiðkonur and seiðmenn, casting spells and counter-spells.⁹⁵ Jesch argues that the skald, too, had a function for the warrior group, in preparing the warriors for the gory mess of the battlefield by rephrasing it to the ‘feeding of eagles’ and by indoctrinating in the young warriors that fleeing was not an option.⁹⁶ There are other functions than the actual fighting needed for encouragement, like taking care of memory and making sure that the fallen were not forgotten. The latter would be an important function for the motivation of an army on the move, far from home. The memorial function of runestones is evident, but the rune-carvers’ general competence in this area might well have found use in contexts where the raising of memorials was not feasible.

85. Jesch 2015, 174.

86. Källström 2007, 239.

87. N 239.

88. Spurkland 2005, 94.

89. Spurkland 2005, 94.

90. Jesch 2005.

91. Jesch 2015, 175-176.

92. Jesch 2001; 2005, 99.

93. Jesch 2005, 99-100.

94. Källström 1999, 134.

95. Price 2002, 124, 393.

96. Jesch 2009, 75-76; 2010, 172.

I suggest that we can place the rune-carvers in the Mediterranean in the context of the range of specialists needed in a campaign. Since this implies a personal presence, it is interesting to note that a couple of runestones mention that the rune-carvers were part of a *lið*.⁹⁷ The meaning of *lið* in the runic inscriptions seems mainly to indicate a following of warriors, a retinue, although it can also imply a civil company, people belonging to the household (Swedish ‘husfolk’) or a rune-carver’s helpers.⁹⁸

The passage in *Havamál* quoted above is concerned with having a *good* reputation, but I think there was an urgent need for the warrior abroad simply to be remembered at all. Here I think that the rune-carvers or poets, as keepers of memory, had a role in the campaigning troupe similar to that of physicians and priests in armies of later times: to ensure that no one fallen would be left behind. Just as an army needs a system for taking care of the wounded, the Viking army would need their poets. As a warrior, I might be reassured to know that someone would at least notice that I was gone. Someone would take the message home and tales would be told about our deeds. A warrior might think that even though a runestone could not be raised abroad, where they owned no land and had no relatives, there might be a stone at home when the message finally reached the family – which was clearly the case for the traveller stones. In Piraeus, there was a rare opportunity to carve a memorial inscription on a permanent monument on the site.

Conclusions

This article has considered how proficient rune-carvers took part in campaigns in the Mediterranean. Although weapons inscribed with runes are rare, and runestones in the Mediterranean are even rarer, runic knowledge and rune-carvers had a role to play. They could help hearten the warrior band by ensuring that no one’s death would be forgotten. Memory could be saved from oblivion by the rune-carvers’ presence. Thus, they had an important function to fulfil for the Viking warriors to keep up morale in a stressful situation. A warrior abroad should not die un-remembered; the rune-carvers and/or skalds would ensure that. While the rune-carver’s task at home was essential for memory and reputation, they may have an additional social function in the warrior-bands by inspiring courage. In a future study, it would be interesting to analyse the carving technique of the Piraeus Lion by 3D-scanning and multivariate statistics. Recent studies have shown that there are regional differences in carving techniques,⁹⁹ so these analyses may answer the question: from which part of Sweden did the Piraeus-carvers come?

In recent years, it has become more evident how well-organized the Viking army was, including many skills and talents. Part of their success may have been that Viking leaders recognized the need for the spiritual inspiration that poets could provide, in order to bolster courage. Although runic inscriptions in the Mediterranean are scarce, they have a range in applications, including doodling in Hagia Sofia and memorial inscriptions on a runestone in Berezanj and on a marble lion in Piraeus, implying that competent carvers not only commemorated travellers on runestones in the homelands, but also followed the whole way to the Mediterranean. The inscriptions testify to the presence of both more- and less-skilled rune-carvers, some of them possibly poets who could help the (other) warriors raise courage. They may have been warriors themselves. When their stay on a site became more permanent, they applied the same type of memorial inscriptions as in the homelands, making the place their own.

97. U 479; U 1161.

98. Jesch 2001, 187-188; Källström 2007, 237-238.

99. Kitzler Åhfeldt 2019.

Abbreviations

- DR+ nr = runic inscription in Jacobsen, L. and E. Moltke (1941–42) *Danmarks runeindskrifter*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard.
- G + nr = runic inscription published in Jansson, S. B. F., E. Wessén, and E. Svärdström (1961–81) *Gotlands runinskrifter* 1–2. Sveriges runinskrifter 11–12. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell international. – Numbers over 222 are published in *Gotlands runinskrifter* 3, preliminary manuscript by H. Gustavson and Th. Snædal available on the website of Swedish National Heritage Board. Accessed 15 October 2020. <https://www.raa.se/kulturarv/runor-och-runstenar/digitala-sveriges-runinskrifter>.
- ONP. Dictionary of Old Norse Prose. maðr, mann sb. m. (ONP) (ku.dk). University of Copenhagen. Accessed 31 March 2021. <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php>.
- Or Barnes + number = Barnes, M. P. (1994) *The runic inscriptions of Maeshowe, Orkney*. Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk.
- SRD = “Samnordisk runtextdatabas 3.0”. Uppsala Runforum, Uppsala universitet. Accessed 1 February 2020. <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>.
- SRI = *Sveriges runinskrifter* (1900-.) Various authors; published by Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien. 14 vols. to date. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell international.
- Sö + number = runic inscription published in Brate, E. and E. Wessén (1924–36) *Södermanlands runinskrifter*, Sveriges runinskrifter 3. Almqvist & Wiksell international, Stockholm.
- Sö Fv1954;22 = Jansson, S. B. F. (1954) “Uppländska, småländska och sörmländska runstensfynd”. *Fornvännen* 1954: 22.
- U + number = runic inscription published in Wessén, E. and Jansson, S. B. F. 1940–58. *Upplands runinskrifter* 1–4, Sveriges runinskrifter 6–9. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell international.
- UR + number = Wessén, E. and S. B. F. Jansson. (1940–1958) *Upplands runinskrifter*. Stockholm. SRI 6-9.
- Öl + number = runic inscription published in Söderberg, S. and E. Brate (1911–18). *Ölands runinskrifter*. Sveriges runinskrifter 1. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell international.

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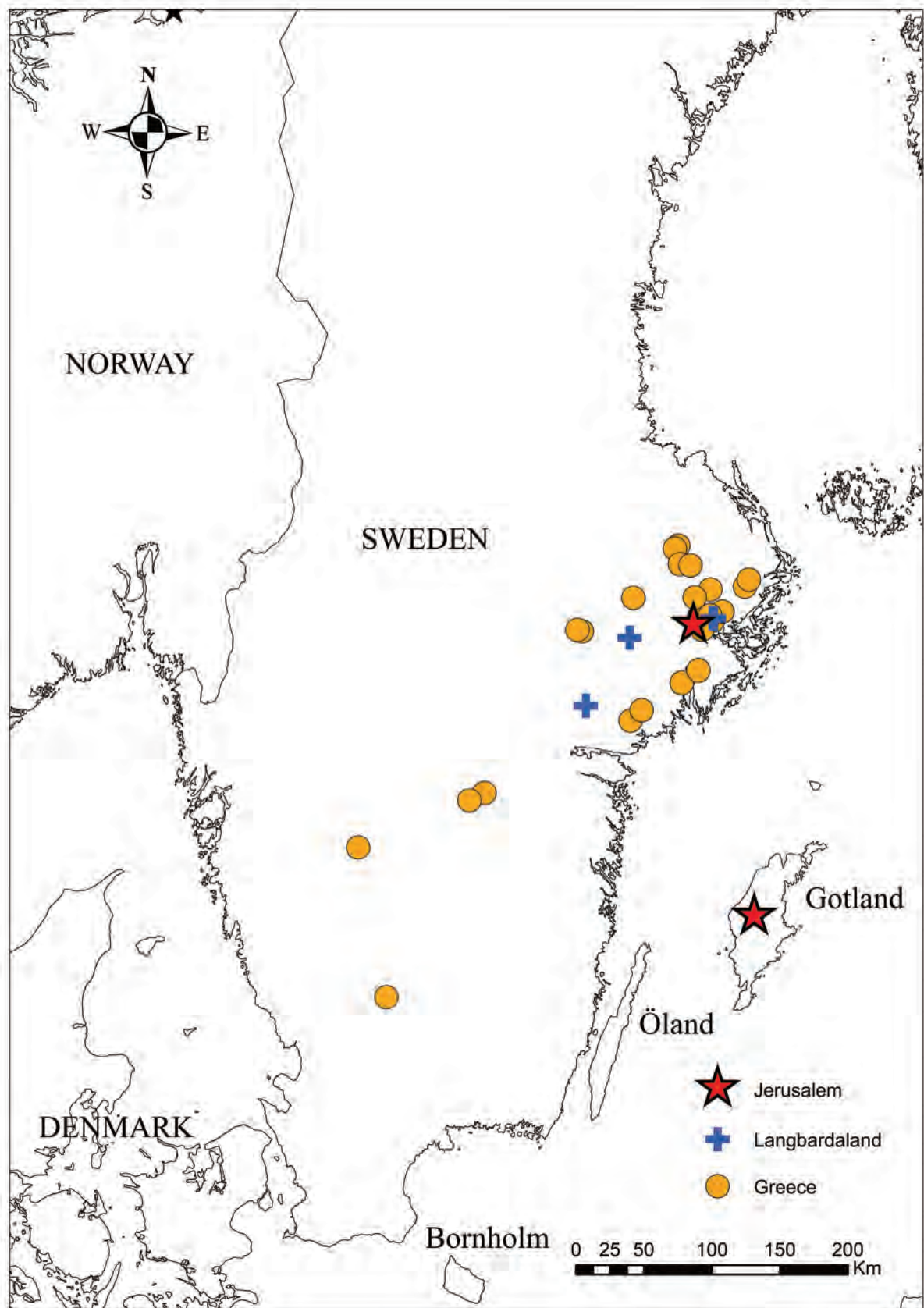


Fig. 1. Viking-Age runic inscriptions in Sweden mentioning Greece, Jerusalem and Langbarðaland. Map: Laila Kitzler Ähfeltdt, Swedish National Heritage Board. CC-BY.



Fig. 2.
The Piraeus Lion. Photo: Swedish National Heritage Board. CC-BY.



Fig. 3. Runic boulder in Ed parish, Uppland (U 112).
Photo: Bengt A. Lundberg. Swedish National Heritage Board. CC-BY.



Fig. 4. Runestone in Ulunda, Tillinge parish (U 792). Kárr had this stone raised in memory of Haursi(?), his father; and Kabbi(?)/Kampi(?)/Kappi(?)/Gapi(?) in memory of his kinsman-by-marriage. (He) travelled competently; earned wealth abroad in Greece for his heir. Photo: Swedish National Heritage Board. CC-BY.

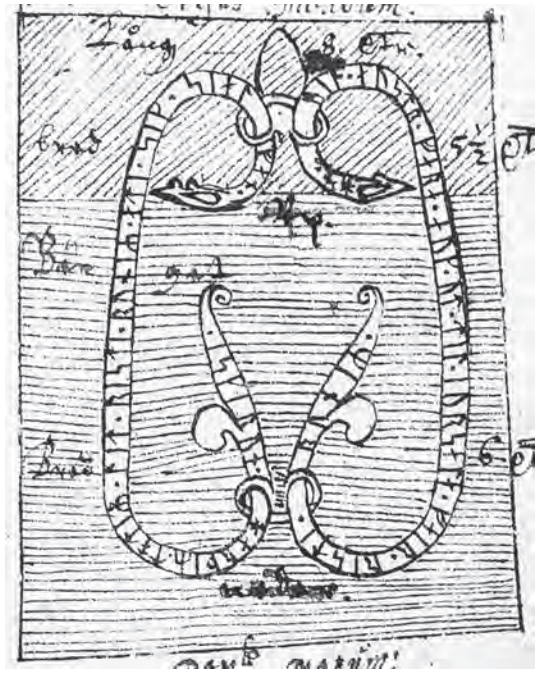


Fig. 5. Runestone in Stäket, Stockholms-Näs parish, Uppland, now lost (U 605†). Runic inscription c. 1050-1080 AD about the woman Ingirún, who intended to go to Jerusalem. Drawing by Mårten Aschaneus (1575-1641). Photo: Swedish National Heritage Board. CC-BY.

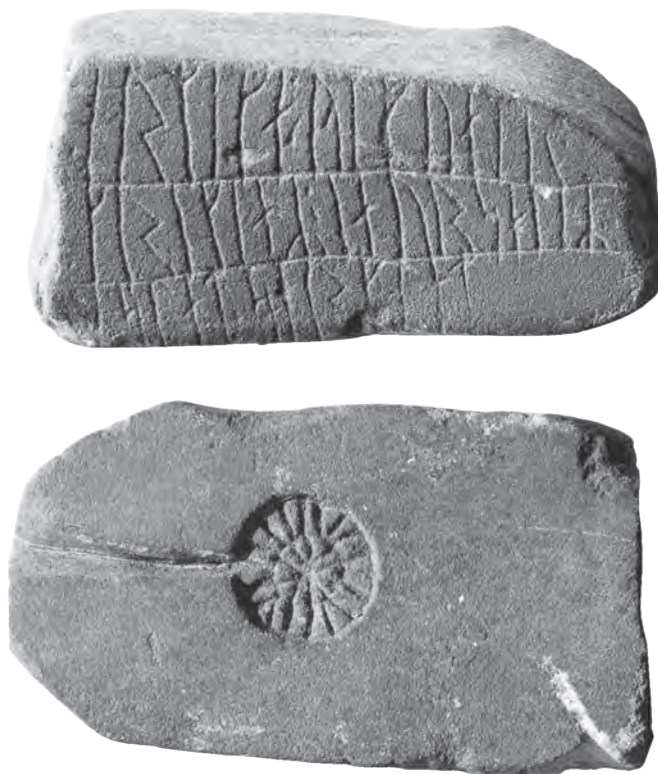


Fig. 6.

Whetstone from Timans, Roma parish, Gotland (G 216), c. 1050-1100 AD. A) Inscription: Ormika, Ulfhvatr(?), Greece, Jerusalem, Iceland, Serkland. Photo: Unknown, 1940. B) Backside with mould. Photo: G. Svahnström 1940. Swedish National Heritage Board. CC-BY.

Southern Tales on Northern Shores: The Varangian Legacy in the Sagas

Rue Taylor

Recent scholarship has increasingly pushed for transnational perspectives and the concept of fluid cultural hybridity developing among Norse travellers who had prolonged contact with the eastern and Mediterranean regions.¹ Of these Scandinavians, the mercenaries of the Varangian Guard in particular spent many years living abroad, witnessing and absorbing the Byzantine culture that flourished under the Macedonian dynasty. A natural starting point in considering a potential Byzanto-Norse hybrid culture of the Guard is the degree to which these Scandinavians assimilated in Byzantium, and in what aspects – what qualities were most compelling or convenient for them to adapt, versus the characteristics of their native Norse culture that they did not relinquish?

Given the source material, these questions are almost certainly unanswerable. We have very little contemporary Scandinavian evidence of the Guard, and the contemporary foreign sources are not detailed enough to determine the boundaries of developing identity among these Norsemen. What we do have, however, are the later narratives of the Varangians. Although these, too, are dogged with limitations, not the least because they are highly fictionalized, there is still much to be gleaned from these passages, which are capable of speaking less to the *history* and more to the *legacy* of the Varangian Guard. Taken altogether, we are left with the following narrative: Scandinavian warriors travelled south to the Byzantine Empire. During their stay over the course of several years, they naturally acquired certain aspects of Byzantine life and society. The precise definition of this hybrid culture cannot be determined. Upon the end of their service, however, many Varangians returned home to Scandinavia, bringing with them those elements of Byzantium that had become part of their identities. Over the course of several generations, their legacies were passed down and retold, expanded and adapted to make sense in an evolving Scandinavian setting, but still retaining elements of their exotic point of origin. Eventually these narratives, now incorporated into the native poetic and saga traditions, were written down.

In measuring this impact of Varangian culture within the sagas, one may observe two branches of their legacy, in line with the general phenomenon of adaptation. The first branch deals with the historically attested Varangian, in which Norse authors, constructing a story of a real person, attempt to reconcile and explain foreign narratives brought back by their subject. These stories originated in unfamiliar territory and require some tweaking in order to make sense to a Scandinavian audience; but they are grounded in a degree of Medieval historicity, with poetic and oral sources cited to validate the narrative's accuracy. The second branch is the fictional Varangian, in which the traveller and his exceptional identity are now so familiar to the Norse world that he no longer requires roots in reality,

1. See for example Thorir Hraundal 2014; Androshchuk 2014; Androshchuk, Shepard, and White 2016; Sverrir Jakobsson 2020.

becoming instead a recognizable literary trope. In quantifying the Varangian presence in the saga corpus through this model, one may begin to identify foreign elements brought back by the Guard that were either understood, or adjusted to be understood, by the Scandinavians to the point that they could create and deploy these figures without explanation to audiences who knew them on sight.

This contribution addresses both these categories via case study, beginning with that most famous of Varangians, Haraldr Sigurðarson. The climax of his early years in the Mediterranean comes with the blinding of the Byzantine emperor, an act that Byzantine eyewitnesses describe as a consequence of moral and political undoing, and which Norse poets and prose authors attribute to a personal act by Haraldr himself. As a result, this event provides a constant, an historical fact of mutilation whose context and explanation shift during its transmission north, demonstrating how a Varangian story originating in Byzantium may become an integrated part of the Norse corpus. The second half of this text will look to the fictional Varangians of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, Eyvindr Bjarnarson and Þorkell Þjóstarsson, and how they are constructed to play a role in an otherwise local saga that only an experienced *Austrvegr* traveller can fill.

The Varangian abroad

On the day after Easter in the year 1042, the Byzantine emperor Michael V Kalaphates was blinded in the streets of Constantinople. This brutal maiming, committed against the backdrop of a city-wide uprising, marked the end of a disastrous four-month reign, and added yet another emperor to the growing list of short-lived rulers to take the throne during the 11th century. In distant Scandinavia, however, his downfall was immortalized as a key event in the Varangian career of King Haraldr Sigurðarson of Norway. The accounts of Haraldr's time in Byzantium are exceedingly useful for their details, both fact and fiction, concerning the Norse experience in the Mediterranean. Most importantly for the present study, they provide a compelling glimpse into how one story – a mere blip on history's radar – can take on many forms during the course of geographical and temporal transmission from 11th century Constantinople to 13th century Iceland.

Although Michael V's rule is often skimmed over by both Medieval and modern historians, two notable Middle Byzantine writers lived through and recorded his reign as eyewitnesses. These sources do not reference Haraldr or the Varangians directly in their narratives of Michael, but they offer a window into events that Haraldr may have witnessed, and provide a Byzantine perspective on the events of April 21, 1042. Michael Psellos' *Chronographia* and Michael Attaleiates' *History* both seek to explain why Michael V was blinded, and how this violent act was the inevitable result of a demonstrably weak and unstable reign. These sources are at times contradictory and governed by authorial intent; although both Psellos and Attaleiates claim to have been eyewitnesses to the blinding, for instance, they disagree on the method by which Michael loses his sight. Nonetheless, they concur on the major factors at play, and, keeping their descriptions of the act itself to a minimum, delve instead into what made Michael a bad ruler and how his core nature ultimately set him up for failure.

According to Psellos, Michael V's major flaw is his inconsistency of character. He describes the emperor as 'ever changing in life, and his many appearances and their swift changes were the defining features of his soul'.² This manifests as a lack of self-control – he was 'a slave to his anger, changeable, stirred to hatred and wrath by any chance happening' – and unpredictability – 'he had an extraordinary flair for concealing "the fire beneath the ashes"', that is, he hid an evil disposition under

2. Ὁ γὰρ ἀνὴρ οὗτος χρῆμά τι ποικίλον ἐγγέγονει τῷ βίῳ, καὶ ἦν αὐτῷ χαρακτήρ τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ πολύμορφον καὶ πολύστροφον. Psellos, *Χρονογραφία*, 5.9; Psellos 2004, 252; translation from Lauritzen 2013, 40.

a kindly exterior'.³ This discrepancy between inner and outer person is most prominently displayed in Michael's dealings with his family. According to the *Chronographia*, the emperor, fuelled by jealousy of his relatives' success, not only cared nothing for their wellbeing, but preferred instead to give power to, as Psellos puts it, 'quite insignificant' people.⁴ Psellos is joined in this commentary by Attaleiates, but while Psellos appears more interested in the emperor's duplicity of character, Attaleiates focuses on the repercussions of such actions: 'In this way he destroyed his family, which intelligent men saw as mindless zeal, for it deprived him of the crucial support of his relatives'.⁵

The implication of relatives as support is critical to both narratives. Michael desires the support of his constituents, who have no entrenched loyalty to him, over that of his own family, his natural allies. Moreover, Psellos states that Michael not only rids himself of relatives, but also the surrounding aristocracy: 'he would then have the support of the many [the people] rather than the few [the nobility]'.⁶ This unconventional reliance on the populace is a flaw credited in both accounts as the ultimate cause of the emperor's downfall: he misjudges his own popularity with his people, and pays the heaviest price when they see through his deceptions and revolt. Thus, despite their different angles – Psellos highlighting the young ruler's inconsistent character, Attaleiates looking to the reaction of the city itself – both writers focus on the process rather than the result (the blinding), and produce compatible snapshots of the measure of rulership in the Middle Byzantine period.

As the narrative of Michael's blinding moves to Scandinavia, it undergoes a marked shift in format and focus. The earliest extant Norse source on Michael's blinding is arguably the poetry said to have been composed in Haraldr's court. Because poetry played a key role in crafting and preserving the legacies of their subjects, it is no surprise that Haraldr, as both a king and a man fascinated with his own legacy, was a great patron of skalds. Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's *Sexstefja* is a prime example, charting Haraldr's life story from his youthful participation in the battle of Stiklastaðir in 1030 to his death at the battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066.⁷ As with other poems in this vein, *Sexstefja* tells the king's story through a catalogue of individual deeds and events, focusing on dramatic martial conflicts between its hero and a series of villains. The memorial function of the poem eschews cohesive storytelling for a record of the high points in Haraldr's life.

One such moment is the blinding of the Byzantine emperor, which comprise stanzas 7-8:

7. Stólpengils lét stinga
—styrjöld vas þá byrjuð—
eyðir augu bæði
út heiðingja sútar.
Lagði allvaldr Egða
austr á bragning hraustan

3. ὀργῆς τε γὰρ ἤττων ἦν καὶ ἄνθρωπος εὐμετάβολος, καὶ τὸ τυχὸν πρᾶγμα εἰς μῖσος αὐτὸν καὶ ὀργὴν ἀνερρίπιζεν. Psellos, *Χρονογραφία*, 5.9; Psellos 2004, 254; Psellus 1966, 126. δεινὸς δὲ εἴπερ τις ἀνθρώπων πῦρ μὲν ὑπὸ σποδιᾷ κρύψαι, γνώμην φημί πονηρὰν ὑπ' εὐνοίας προσχήματι, ἄτοπὰ τε ἐνθυμηθῆναι τε καὶ βουλευέσασθαι, ἀγνωμονέστατός τε πρὸς εὐπρέτας καὶ μηδενὶ χάριν εἰδώς, μήτε φιλίας μήτε τῆς περὶ ἐκεῖνον ἐπιμελείας καὶ θεραπείας. Psellos, *Χρονογραφία*, 4.28; Psellos 2004, 202; Psellus 1966, 103.

4. κοινωνεῖν δὲ αὐτῷ τοῦ κράτους μικρὸν μὲν ἢ μῆδὲνα τῶν ἀπάντων ἐβούλετο. Psellos, *Χρονογραφία*, 5.9; Psellus 1966, 126; Psellos 2004, 252. Included among these 'insignificants' may be Michael's unit of Scythian eunuch mercenaries, who appear to have replaced the Varangian Guard as imperial bodyguards during his reign; see Sigfús Blöndal 1978, 77.

5. καὶ τὸ γένος αὐτοῦ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον καταστρέψας, ἄφρονα ζῆλον προσφέρειν τοῖς συνετοῖς ἔδοξεν, ἐπιλωμένον ἑαυτὸν τοσαύτης βοήθειας ἀπεργασάμενος. Attaleiates, *Ἱστορία* 4.3; Attaleiates 2012, 18-19.

6. ἵνα τοῖς πολλοῖς μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς ὀλίγοις δορυφοροῖτο. Psellos, *Χρονογραφία*, 5.15; Psellos 2004, 264; Psellus 1966, 131.

7. I am grateful to Kate Heslop for discussion on this topic.

gráligt mark, en Girkja
götu illa för stillir.

The destroyer of the care [GLADDENER] of the wolf [lit. heath-goer] [WARRIOR] had both eyes of the emperor stabbed out; war was under way then. The overlord of the Egðir [NORWEGIAN KING = Haraldr] placed a hostile mark on the daring prince in the east, and the ruler of the Greeks [= Michael] travelled a dire road.

8. Ok hertoga hneykir
herfingnum lét stinga
—leyfð berk hans—ór hofði
haugs skundaði augu.

And the confounder of war-leaders [RULER] had the eyes stabbed out of the head of the war-captured impeller of the mound [GENEROUS RULER]; I proffer a eulogy of him [Haraldr].⁸

Following the form of encomiastic court poetry, the context that was so significant to the Byzantine authors is omitted in favour of the act itself, which is recast as a showdown between two rivals of equal standing in both politics and warfare. While the Byzantine Empire far outranked Norway in terms of political power, Haraldr's capabilities as an outstanding warrior were not bluster, and stanza 7 reinforces these strengths – Michael is a *stólþengill*, which Roberta Frank has interpreted as reverence for the Byzantine throne, and Haraldr receives a classic warrior kenning of wolf-feeder, variations of which appear elsewhere in the poem.⁹ At the same time, the verse also boosts the weakness of both parties, as Michael V is granted the warrior description *hraustr*, while Haraldr's future role as *allvaldr Egða* emphasizes his position as a ruler of people. The line *styrjöld vas þá byrjuð* brings home this idea of evenly matched opponents by suggesting a war brought about by the maiming – a metaphorical consequence, as there is no further mention of this conflict in either poetry or prose.

Stanza 8 continues this trajectory by casting Michael as a ruler more in line with the Norse tradition than his native one. This half-stanza is preserved in a section of *Skáldskaparmál* on poetic words for men, under the term *hertogi*: 'A jarl can be called a *hertogi*, and a *konungr* can also be referred to thus, since he leads his army to battle'.¹⁰ *Sexstefja* 8 is the proffered example of the term's poetic usage, in which Haraldr is referred to as *hneykir hertoga*, 'confounder of war-leaders', a kenning that applies the word in question to his enemies rather than himself. Considering his later reign, the use of *hertogi* is well-applied according to its *Edda* definition – Haraldr's chief rivals are a *jarl*, Einarr þambarskelfir, and a *konungr*, Sveinn Úlfsson. In this context, Michael V is the first ruler to fall before Haraldr, marking the shift in the Norwegian prince's narrative from defeat followed by exile to victory followed by homecoming, while simultaneously prefacing the struggles awaiting him in the coming years.¹¹ The final kenning employed for Michael, *skundaðr haugs*, is a curiosity that has spawned debate over the implications of *haugr* in this context. Diana Whaley has argued that *skundaðr* must relate to *skyndir*, which is found in kennings relating to treasure – in this case, the *haugr* may refer

8. Edition and translation from Whaley, ed., 2009, 118-120.

9. Frank 1978, 134.

10. Hertogi heitir jarl ok er konungr svá kallaðr ok fyrir því er hann leiðir her til orrostu. Faulkes, ed., 1998, 99; translation following Faulkes, trans., 1995, 145.

11. The *Edda* lists *keisari* as 'it fyrsta ok it æzta heiti manns' (the first and highest term for man) above *konungr*; however, while this word is used for Byzantine emperors in prose, it appears only six times in the skaldic corpus, and never for a Byzantine. These stanzas are Sigv *Knútdr* 10^f, Mark *Eirdr* 24ⁱⁱ, Kálf *Kátr* 5^{vii} & 22^{vii}, Anon *Heil* 26^{vii}, and Anon *Mey* 23^{vii}. Faulkes, trans., 1995, 145; Faulkes, ed., 1998, 99.

to burial mounds containing great wealth.¹² This reading ties in neatly with the popular view of Byzantium as a trove of riches, and has led to the interpretation of ‘generous ruler’ for this kenning, an image revived in the very next stanza as Haraldr’s ship, upon departure from Garðar, *gekk með gollu miklu* ‘advanced with much gold’.¹³

Upon its incorporation into the prose narratives of Haraldr’s life, the story of the blinding evolves once more. While the purpose of *Sexstefja* and its fellows is to capture the highlights of Haraldr’s life in list-like form, the prose is driven by narrative, and requires that these individual events connect and build upon one another in story form. In this context, Haraldr’s Varangian years take on a dual purpose. The first is to preface his coming rule by exploring the early stages of his character, and how he came to be the king that we will see in later chapters. The second is to entertain, as he is clearly a subject of fascination to the Medieval authors and their audiences, and the interest in his more exotic exploits sometimes outweighs their usefulness in crafting his character.

As a result, the blinding cannot sit unexplained in the story, but it also cannot be clarified via Byzantine rationale, because the politics of 11th century Byzantium were not well-known among the later Scandinavian authors, nor would this foreign context have translated well to their audiences.¹⁴ The task, therefore, is to provide a framework by which the act makes sense from a Norse perspective, the result of which Sigfús Blöndal has called a ‘rather silly romantic fable’, a clearly fictional addition about a love triangle gone wrong that nevertheless pulls this foreign incident further from its distant roots and towards an integrated part of the Norse narrative tradition.

The first step in unpacking this story begins with the blinding itself. This type of mutilation is quite rare in the Scandinavian sources, but, when it does occur, it is often accompanied by castration. This combination can be found, for example, in the life of Magnús Sigurðsson, later the Blind, who, following capture by Haraldr Gilli, was ‘handed to the king’s thralls, and they maimed him, gouging out his eyes and cutting off one leg, and finally he was castrated’.¹⁵ Órækja Snorrason is taken by Sturla Sigvatsson onto a glacier in *Sturlunga saga*, whereupon Sturla puts out Órækja’s eyes with a knife, partially castrates him, and leaves him in a cave.¹⁶ Egill Skallagrímson repays the farmer Ármóðr for lying about whether or not he has beer by gouging out one eye and cutting off his beard in a lighter but still pointed form of emasculation. Although Michael V is not castrated in any physical way, either in the skaldic stanzas or the prosimetrum, Haraldr blinds him in the imperial bedroom, a significant departure from the Byzantine tradition of public mutilation, but far more meaningful when put into dialogue with these other Scandinavian sources.

The importance of this setting at the story’s climax is emphasized by the romance that has led us there. Empress Zoe is attracted to Haraldr, who is himself more intrigued by her relative María. Zoe’s

12. Whaley, ed., 2009, 120.

13. Another possibility is the idea of mound-sitting as a practice for kings in the Germanic tradition. Whaley, ed., 2009, 121.

14. There is ample evidence that Byzantine politics were not closely followed in Medieval Scandinavia. A prominent example, put forth by Sverrir Jakobsson, is the lack of Norse familiarity with one of the biggest conflicts in Byzantine history, that of the East-West schism between the Orthodox and Roman Churches (see Sverrir Jakobsson 2008). A small example, relevant to the current topic, is the misnaming of Michael V as Constantine in the prose variants of Haraldr’s life. It has been suggested that this misnomer comes from the fact that Michael was blinded alongside his uncle Constantine, and the two names have been confused. However, the name is more probably that of Michael’s successor, Constantine IX Monomachus, as it is far likelier that Norse authors nearly two centuries later mixed up two of the many 11th century emperors than remembered the name of the uncle of such a minor ruler.

15. *seldr í hendr konungs þrælum, en þeir veittu honum meizlur, stungu út augu hans ok hjoggu af annan fót, en síðast var hann geldr.* Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 1951, 287. The *Morkinskinna* version of this episode states that Magnús lost both legs.

16. Although Órækja later reappears apparently cured, he and his wife part ways, dealing a blow to his virility and sexual prowess even as his body is physically restored. Adams 2013, 208.

jealousy leads her to provoke the emperor into arresting Haraldr under supposedly false charges, after which he escapes from prison with the help of St Óláfr. From there, he gathers his warriors and blinds the emperor. Zoe's attraction to, and rejection by, Haraldr prepares the Norse audience for just what kind of tale this is – a love story gone wrong. Whether or not Haraldr's arrest was a matter of historical fact, the cause of his incarceration is implied, in the Norse variants of the story, to be an act of revenge by Zoe through her proxy Michael. However, the nature of this revenge, on account of a failed romance, is gendered in and of itself: Haraldr is denied María, the woman he purportedly loves, on account of another woman, Zoe, who uses her male co-ruler to throw him in jail and shames the Norwegian prince in the process. In a literary corpus rife with tales of vengeance and feud, retaliation is expected, even necessary, and in this case the retaliatory act matches the original offenses: denial of romantic liaison and humiliation at the hands of a woman.¹⁷

It is clear to the modern eye that this narrative must be a later invention, and the Byzantine sources support this reading – despite their inconsistencies, they provide a more accurate political and cultural backdrop, and preserve enough genealogy to reveal that María is entirely fictional. However, one other form of evidence is invoked across sources, especially in *Morkinskinna*: that of oral tradition. Following the young prince's initial flight east after Stiklastaðir, the author notes: 'from here, the story of Haraldr's journey is what Haraldr himself narrated, and those men who followed him'.¹⁸ This assertion is revived throughout his Mediterranean career, reflecting Haraldr's fascination with crafting his own legacy and tapping into the side of the kings' sagas that Alison Finlay has characterized as 'an exercise in propaganda'.¹⁹ However, Ármann Jakobsson has pointed out that the author of *Morkinskinna* appears to hedge his bets when unsure of the accuracy of a particular narrative, often by referring to generic oral sources rather than a specific person.²⁰ Taking such language into consideration, the author's two sources for Zoe's lust for Haraldr are somewhat suspicious – 'people say the queen herself wanted him', and later, 'people who have been in Miklagarðr within memory of the Varangians say that Zoe herself wanted him'.²¹ Although the story is ultimately included in the larger narrative, its attribution to these unnamed *menn* instead of Haraldr himself plays a dual role in both confirming and casting doubt on the narrative's historicity. This cautious approach represents a key turning point in the development of the Varangian legend. Although within the kings' sagas these stories still require a foothold, however tenuous, in history, fiction is increasingly more reliable in offering meaning to evolving audiences than the original facts. In this light, the introduction of the fictional Varangian into the saga tradition is a natural next step.

17. While Haraldr himself would realistically have had nothing to do with the empress, Psellos notes in his *Chronographia* that, despite a vast age difference and Zoe's legal duty as Michael's adopted mother, the two co-rulers were briefly lovers, a relationship the young emperor later regretted: 'the very thought of it made him feel like biting off his own tongue and spitting it away in disgust' (Psellus 1966, 132). It is possible that the Varangians, an integral part of palace life, had picked up on this fleeting relationship, or at least assumed that emperor and empress were somehow involved because they shared power. Zoe's known lascivious nature may also have contributed to this interpretation.

18. heðan frá er sú frásögn um farar Haralds er hann, Haraldr, sagði sjálf, ok þeir menn er honum fylgðu. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður I. Guðjónsson, eds., 2001, 84.

19. Finlay 2015, 92.

20. Ármann Jakobsson 2014, 298.

21. menn mæla þat at hon sjálf, dróttningin, vildi hafa hann...þat segja menn, þeir er verit hafa í Miklagarði, at Væringja minni svá frásagnar at Zóe sjálf vildi hafa hann. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður I. Guðjónsson, eds., 2001, 106, 109.

The Varangian at home

Haraldr Sigurðarson's adventures expose some ways in which the Varangian legacy developed and grew in its transmission from Byzantium to Scandinavia. But the reverence for these outstanding warriors continued to keep their legend alive throughout the Middle Ages, resulting in the creation of a new 'generation' of *Væringjar* to carry the baton. These are the literary Varangians, possessing little to no historical verification, and although it is difficult to parse them in light of the integration of eastern narratives into the Scandinavian corpus, they can offer insight into which aspects of the Varangian Guard seem to have remained in the zeitgeist of the North centuries later. Varangians in this category generally fall into a series of literary tropes: voyagers to Byzantium are often fleeing a feud or pursuing one; gaining an honour boost; on a pilgrimage; or given a noble and convenient removal from a saga.

A notable example of multiple Varangian motifs at play can be found in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, which features not one, but two Eastern travellers – Eyvindr Bjarnarson and Þorkell Þjóstars-son. Eyvindr and Þorkell are typically read as thoroughly fictional, and while both characters are recognizably Norse at their core, aspects of their actions and their presence on the page work to set them outside the Icelandic norm. Eyvindr diverges from the rest of the saga's cast due to his exotic wealth, martial prowess, and exalted status, while Þorkell stands out through the nature of his rhetoric and advice. However, the root of these differences, and the defining quality that sets them apart from the rest of the characters, is that they have spent time in Byzantium.²² When these two men are approached as fictional characters, the question arises: why did the saga writer choose to attach an outside culture to these figures, and what in the saga requires this culture to be Byzantine?

Eyvindr Bjarnarson is the more straightforward of the two characters, and his eastern travels are introduced at the saga's start, though he does not physically take the stage until much later.²³ As in other Varangian narratives, Eyvindr is presented as a model of success, arriving home in style with his colourful clothes, exquisite shields, and loyal retinue. He is a fine example of Viking-Age success and personifies the raw concept behind the eastern voyages: the greater the risk, the greater the rewards. Nonetheless, *Hrafnkels saga*, with its farmers' quarrel narrative, lacks a central heroic figure. Instead, this role is given to Eyvindr, a minor character in the grand scheme of things, who promptly dies within two pages of his formal arrival on set. Such a reversal of fortune is appropriate within the context of *Hrafnkels saga*: this is a narrative with no space or purpose for a larger-than-life hero. Indeed, the saga defies black-and-white categorization in every respect, and Eyvindr is simply out of place within such grey territory – thus his one-dimensional characterization suggests that he is not so much a character as a prop.

In this light, the saga's garnishing of Eyvindr's character with time spent in Byzantium takes on a more nuanced purpose. At the time of his entrance, the saga has reached a narrative point that requires Hrafnkell to take some sort of action in order to rebalance the scales, and Sámr's noble brother is an ideal solution. The fact that Eyvindr is wealthy, honourable, and good with a sword could be enough to make him a worthy sacrifice; but, read alongside other depictions of Varangian heroes across the Norse corpus, the addition of *Austrvegr* to Eyvindr's resumé raises his status exponentially. The subsequent attention given to his outsized portrayal effectively communicates the degree to which Hrafn-

22. To further emphasize this pedigree, each man has a brother who has remained home in Iceland, setting up a neat symmetry that highlights their otherness.

23. Although the focus of my research, both here and elsewhere, is primarily the mercenaries of the Varangian Guard, I include Eyvindr, a merchant, to consider the differences between him and Þorkell, and because the appearance of multiple characters in a single saga who have spent time in Constantinople is particularly noteworthy.

kell has been affected by Sámr's lawsuit and ensuing actions, including, presumably, his torture at the hands of the Þjóstarssons. Accordingly, this literary trope of the legendary Varangian is used to clarify cause and effect within the saga, and the lack of explanation as to its purpose in the text seems to indicate that it was a familiar tactic.

The inclusion of a stereotype like Eyvindr makes the figure of Þorkell Þjóstarsson stand out all the more. The two characters share a similar provenance to a point, in their time spent in Byzantium and the quality of the items they wear and bear. However, Þorkell, unlike Eyvindr, survives his return to Iceland, introducing further complexity in his role within the saga. The two qualities most relevant in analysing Þorkell's character are his motive and his purpose in being included in the narrative. His motive is not explicitly stated and must be extrapolated from his actions. But his actions cannot be viewed in the isolation of the saga or even Iceland itself – rather, if one takes a wider look at the eastern experience, more might be deduced about his character and the saga writer's purpose in depicting him just so. Thus, for a quick snapshot, consider this:

A man grows up in the small, insular society of Iceland. He travels abroad and heads east. The voyage down the river systems is dangerous, full of rapids and hostile peoples, and not everyone in his company survives. Then he arrives in Constantinople. It is almost certainly the largest and wealthiest city he has ever seen. He swears loyalty to the emperor and witnesses the pomp and circumstance of the Byzantine court. He may convert to a new form of Christianity, and he almost certainly learns some Greek. He deploys to *more* foreign lands and fights against *more* esoteric cultures. He makes a lot of money. He fights a lot of battles. He witnesses many deaths. And, over the course of several years, he adapts to his surroundings and becomes, to some degree, Byzantine.

Then he comes home.

What then? One might here consider Achilles and the fateful choice of a short, glorious life versus a long one in obscurity, or, within the Norse corpus, Egill Skallagrímsson and the torment of his post-warrior years. Þorkell Þjóstarsson is at a similar turning point in his own journey. He has, for all intents and purposes, lived a magnificent life for six years, and the glossy sheen applied to those who travel the Eastern Road in the wider Norse corpus attests to the reverence held for the homecoming travellers. When Þorkell arrived home, he likely faced something similar to the welcome expected for Eyvindr – the celebration of a returning hero.

And afterwards? After living in one of the major centres of the world, and being part of something far greater than himself, he is now back in small, insular Iceland. Þorkell is a changed man in an unchanged country. He has a goðorð that his brother has been keeping for him, but Þorgeirr, who has remained in Iceland, knows the people and the politics far better than he does. Þorkell allows his brother to keep the goðorð. So, what else is a returning Varangian meant to do? Perhaps he rides the coat tails of his adventures for a while. But after a certain point, everyone has seen his new clothes and weapons, everyone has heard his stories, and everyone has spent their admiration and returned to normal life, and come to see him, two years on, as quotidian once more.

It is at this point in Þorkell's return that we encounter him in *Hrafnkels saga*, by his own admission to Þorgeirr – 'I am undecided on what to do with myself at this time. And you know, kinsman, that I have involved myself in few things since I returned to Iceland'.²⁴ He has not successfully reintegrated into society, no longer able to rely on his travels for authority and prestige, and no longer impressing anyone with his entourage and his fancy clothes. Then a poor farmer asks him for help against a professed neighbourhood bully, and he sees an opportunity to become relevant again. The conflict between Sámr and Hrafnkell seems to strike a chord with him – the powerful oppressing the weak. 'Perhaps I

24. ek óráðinn, hvat er ek vil af mér gera at bragði. En þú veizt, frændi, at ek hefí til fás hlutazk, síðan ek kom til Íslands. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., 1950, 115.

would think twice about quarrelling with Hrafnkell if I were a chieftain,' Porkell tells his brother, 'but I do not think so, because I prefer to challenge someone who has overcome everyone else'.²⁵ This kind of language has a heroic, martial ring to it, and echoes the typical depiction of the Varangian hero, in line with Haraldr and even Eyvindr, who insists on riding to his death because to flee would be ignoble.

But there is no battle for Þorkell – instead, his ensuing involvement in the dispute reveals how far his mentality has drifted from his Icelandic roots. Although he professes to understand why his brother Þorgeirr does not want to take Sámur and Þorbjörn's case, Þorkell misses the forest for the trees. He now possesses a different moral compass and a different sense of justice from both his goði brother and the farmers of the East Fjords, and this is a perspective that is so counter to the native attitude that it can only be exercised by someone with one step outside the Icelandic milieu. Even the fact that Þorkell is allowed to act on this different system of thought requires a suspension of belief in terms of real-world politics and law.²⁶ Although Þorgeirr recognizes that his brother is attempting to manipulate him (and tells him as much), he agrees to follow Þorkell's urging to help Sámur and Þorbjörn. This decision is against his better judgment – there are valid reasons why the goðar refuse to back Hrafnkell's opposition – but he indulges his brother nonetheless. Why? It's possible that he recognizes his brother's struggle to reintegrate into Icelandic society and wishes to help his attempt to make himself relevant again. Or perhaps he just wants Þorkell off his back for a while. Whatever his reason, Þorgeirr chooses his outsider brother's ill-conceived plan over his own political judgment and makes good on his aid, creating an untenable situation that must be corrected by the saga's conclusion. Thus Þorkell operates as a foil against which is highlighted the system guiding the actions of everyone else: Þorgeirr, Hrafnkell, and, ultimately, Sámur, who makes the decision, counter to the brothers' advice, to offer his adversary the choice of life.

Þorkell appears once more at the end of the saga, when Sámur returns to the brothers again asking for help. This time, Þorgeirr retakes the lead, speaking for them both in refusing aid. Þorkell's attempt to make Sámur into something greater has failed, as well it should have – Þorkell is not acting in Sámur's best interest, but his own, while Sámur has allowed himself to be directed by someone else against his better judgment, just as when his uncle convinced him to prosecute Hrafnkell in the first place. Notably, the previously outspoken Þorkell does not speak at all during this final scene, or for the rest of the saga, having seemingly relinquished, like his goðorð, all control of the situation to Þorgeirr at last. Even more interesting, however, is the trajectory of Þorkell's life since we last encountered him – upon Sámur's arrival, we learn that 'Þorkell had recently arrived from a journey. He had been abroad for four years'.²⁷ The erstwhile Varangian, unable to find his place in Iceland after his experience in the Mediterranean, ultimately continues to seek his fortune, and his life, elsewhere. Much like Eyvindr, though far less violently, there can be no homecoming for Þorkell the *man* – however, Þorkell the *literary device* has played his role effectively and achieved his end.

Although Þorkell and Eyvindr are almost certainly fictional, their inclusion within a narrative like *Hrafnkels saga* may speak to a wider, more realistic trend among former Varangians. As mentioned above, there is no room here for the construct of the Varangians of legends: they are too large and too idealistic for the saga, and the fate of its own Varangians speaks clearly to this. Eyvindr is the closest thing to a hero the saga has, and he is killed off almost instantly. Þorkell may be a hero in another setting – an eastern one – but back in Iceland, his talents and perspectives are out of place and not suited to local politics.

25. Þat má vera, at svá fœri mér at, ef ek væra hqfðingi, at mér þœtti illt at deila við Hrafnkel, en eigi sýnisk mér svá, fyrir því at mér þœtti við þann bezt at eiga, er allir hrekjask fyrir áðr. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., 1950, 114.

26. Miller 2017, 111.

27. Þá var Þorkell nýkominn út ór för. Hann hafði verit utan fjóra vetr. Jón Jóhannesson, ed., 1950, 280.

Yet this act of pushing beyond the common motif of the Varangian homecoming hints at a grain of truth around which Þorkell's character is built. The element of trauma is implicit in his story: a soldier fighting in distant wars returns home and, unable to leave the battlefield behind, loses his way. This has been the story of veterans for millennia, and still rings true today. Trauma is an unavoidable ingredient of the human condition, especially in violent professions, and the seamless nature with which the saga constructs and deploys the character of Þorkell may imply a familiarity, among author and audience, with this type of limbo. Whether deliberate or incidental, *Hrafnkels saga* presents an unusually complete image of these legendary warriors – the triumph of the victorious Varangian returning home in style, and the tragedy of the aimless Varangian, no longer in sync with his homeland, but tied to it nonetheless.

Concluding thoughts

The narratives of Þorkell, Eyvindr, and Haraldr each contribute a thread to the tapestry of the Varangian legacy. Þorkell represents the retired warrior, and the challenge of finding the next chapter after the dust of a glorious career has settled. Eyvindr's small role represents the classic Varangian homecoming, an effective snapshot of local reaction to larger-than-life accomplishment. Haraldr's youth provides a window into the Mediterranean activities of the Guard, and how these stories, part foreign and part native by the time they reach the manuscripts, capture the thrill of distant adventures while building the image of a young prince on the road to greatness. Together, they tell one version of the Varangian experience, a narrative pieced together from fragments scattered across the Norse corpus. But although Haraldr's early years are the nexus of Varangian studies, he is unique in this trio in that his full life is preserved. His homecoming, true to form, is executed with immense style, a lavish arrival that throws Eyvindr in the shade and draws upon Haraldr's penchant for disguise to heighten the drama of his triumphant return. The bulk of his sagas subsequently deals with his 'retirement,' but unlike Þorkell, Haraldr has a clear purpose in life as king of Norway. Nevertheless, he too is restless, and while the precise nature in which his Varangian career may have impacted his reign is unclear, it is perhaps fitting that despite his grip on the Norwegian throne, he never stops reaching for the next great accomplishment – a trait that eventually leads to his death in yet another foreign country.

Ultimately, the presence of the Varangian Guard in the Norse literary tradition is a dilution of historical Varangian identity – but it is still distinctly Varangian, because these figures, no matter how realistic, no matter how fictional, remain highly visible on the page. Their legacy during the Middle Ages is maintained and magnified over the years, keeping them alive even as the warriors themselves have begun to pass into the mists of history. But beyond their achievements, it is also their distinctive non-Norse actions and attributes that take centre stage – a vestige, I would argue, of their own semi-Norse, semi-Byzantine existence that, coming full circle, has now become an integrated part of their homeland.

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Retracing the Vikings in the East – a Review of Scandinavian-Islamic Interfaces

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Why Scandinavian – Islamic Interfaces?

When Scandinavians ventured into the Mediterranean in the 9th century CE, they encountered a world that had been a part of the Islamic cultural and religious sphere for two hundred years. Although different in a political-dynastic sense, al-Andalus, the Maghreb, and Ifriqiya shared a vast network of cultural contacts. From the mid-9th century, Arab sources mention ‘*Majus*’ attacking al-Andalus and Morocco, and the Varangian guard fighting on Crete, in Apulia, and on Sicily.¹ The southern experiences in the Mediterranean had a definitely martial character. The most common contacts from a Swedish perspective, however, were to the East. In the same era, millions of Islamic coins flowed into Scandinavia from North Africa, the Caliphate, and the Samanid dominion in Central Asia. Their origins differed, and the temporality of the silver stream makes it possible to outline changing interfaces between the actors. Besides artefacts, Arabic written sources have contributed greatly to our understanding of the Scandinavians involved.²

This contribution addresses two questions: how are Scandinavian contacts with Islamic regions presented and used in contemporary discourse, and what is the archaeological evidence for these contacts? I present a critical review, by highlighting historical conditions in the region between Eastern Middle Sweden and the Caspian Sea. In this vast area, people who were engaged in the transfer of commodities relied on well-tried routes and routines in a ‘down-the-line’ system, engaging several of these groups.³

Two sources have been used as evidence for extensive trade with the Caliphate, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the Viking Age. With ibn Khordadbeh’s account in the early 9th century about the Rus’ travelling to Baghdad, we are given a starting point. The second source is the runic stone from Västmanland (Vs 1) mentioning the man Slagvi who fell in ‘...*karusm*...’ in c. 1010-1020 CE. These two written sources can be challenged as evidence of direct and continuous trade with the Caliphate and Central Asian dynasties. By examining the chronology and character of ‘Oriental’ artefacts found in Sweden and the historical contexts for the actors, another development is suggested.

Staraja Ladoga was the first emporium established at the gateway to the resources. Several other important nodes in the network can be found among Finnic groups. The Baltic-Finnic Ves’ held a vital position furthest to the west between the lakes Ladoga, Onega and Beloye. On the Volga with adjacent rivers, Meryans, Muromians, and Mordvinians participated in the fur trade. Moving further south-east, interaction was maintained with Slavic, Magyar, Turkic, and Iranian speaking groups.

1. Christys 2015.

2. Jonsson Hraundal 2013.

3. Sindbaek 2005, 261-273.

Most important were the dominions on the steppes and along the wide rivers.⁴ The Khazars came into power after the decline of the Western Turkic khaganate in mid-7th century. Their interactions with Byzantium promoted urbanism and fortification building. Since their strongholds in Crimea presented an interface with the rich dominion, they became important political and economic partners, even after their conversion to Judaism in the 9th century. In the late 800s, the Magyars cut off parts of their territories in the west. Their most important urban centres in Sarkel and Itil became conduits for commodities brought from Central Asia and Iran, and for forest riches from the north. The relation between the Saltovo Mayaki culture and the Khazars can be expressed as a cultural tradition merging into a multi-ethnic polity. While the Saltovo Mayaki culture was present in the Crimea, north of the Caucasus, and in the Volga estuary, it extended further than the Khazar dominion.⁵

The Volga Bulgars came from a similar cultural background. They were tributaries to the Khazars but became a territorial entity in the late 9th century on the Middle Volga. After accepting Islam in the first half of the 10th century, trade with Central Asia boomed. Their core was Turkic, but Volga Finnic, Magyar, Slavic, and Ural groups mixed in the settlements. Their largest towns were Bolghar, Biljar, and Suvar.

Both Khazars and Volga Bulgars followed nomadism as a normative way of life. Elite groups still went on seasonal relocations to the steppes, living in traditional yurts. Nevertheless, their economies were based on agriculture, cattle, and fishing. Around Itil, there were rich fields and gardens, vineyards, and grazing lands, watered by canals from the Volga. They accumulated wealth as intermediaries in the trade between Central Asia and northern Eurasia, using their wealth to maintain cavalry forces. Both dominions were severely hampered by Rus' expansion in the late 10th century. However, Volga Bulgaria survived as a bridge between Khwarezm, Khorasan, and the North until the Mongol invasion in 1236.

Islamic interfaces presented in exhibitions

For this short discussion, four exhibitions and published media have been chosen to demonstrate how connections between Sweden and the East are presented to the public.

In 1985, an exhibition was launched by the Museum of National Antiquities, the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities, and the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm. Its rationale was expressed as "...an interest in Islamic culture...".⁶ Another argument for the exhibition was the growing number of Muslims in Sweden. In the preface it says that "It is important that their self-esteem should be reinforced in their new country and that they should not lose their national identity".⁷

In the year 2002 *Sverige och den islamiska världen: ett svenskt kulturarv* was published by a group of scholars emphasizing Islamic relations with Sweden. In the preface, the Foreign Minister Anna Lindh presented the intention of the book as an ongoing dialogue with the Islamic world and Sweden's Muslim citizens.⁸ The aim of the exhibition and book was to '...arouse interest and questions about our relationship with Islam and Muslims in the World today, but also to Islam in Sweden'.⁹ The title was chosen to provoke questions about the respective definitions of a Swedish and an Islamic cultural heritage.¹⁰

4. Golden 1992; Golden *et al.* 2007; Kovalev 2011; forthcoming b; Noonan 2007.

5. Pletneva 1967, 187, fig. 50, with distribution of Saltovo Mayaki culture in relation to the Khazars.

6. Isaksson 1985, 4.

7. Isaksson 1985, 5.

8. Ådahl *et al.* 2002, 8.

9. Ådahl 2002, 3.

10. Ådahl 2002, 10.

In 2003, a similar contribution was made at the regional museum of Västergötland.¹¹ In the book *Vi har ju mötts förr* the intention was to present

...meetings between Christians and Muslims. There are many examples from our history where meeting the Orient has enriched the Swedish cultural heritage. They are easy to forget and overlook when threats and frightening world events are clouding the view.¹²

Another example can be seen in the 2017 exhibition *Viking couture* at Enköping museum. In the exhibition, a design on a Viking-Age textile strip from Birka was interpreted as a woven pattern, supposedly reading *Allah* or *Ali*. Following a press release to that effect sent out by the scholar responsible, but without any publication supporting the assertion, the story was swiftly picked up by media around the world, since it was said to express Muslim faith among Scandinavian Vikings. The scholar in question argued:

Presumably, Viking Age burial customs were influenced by Islam and the idea of an eternal life in Paradise after death.¹³

Today, when we talk a lot about integration, this is a fantastic occasion to use the Viking as an example of earlier cultural exchange and that it is not something new happening today.¹⁴

The interpretation has been thoroughly deconstructed, not least with the argument that the specific ‘kufic’ style did not come into use until after the 15th century.¹⁵

A similar situation occurred concerning the well-known ring from Birka with an inserted glass stone, engraved with an ‘Arabic’ text. It gained attention when the inserted supposed amethyst was shown to be made of glass. The scholars emphasized that:

The importance of the studied Birka ring is that it most eloquently corroborates ancient tales about direct contacts between Viking Age Scandinavia and the Islamic world. Such contacts must have facilitated exchange of goods, culture, ideas, and news much more efficiently than indirect trade involving several merchants in-between.¹⁶

CNN ended the article with a comment on Swedish foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia.

All examples are obviously coloured by contemporary politics. In the prefaces’ official proclamations, the exhibitions’ political ambition is often praised. There is a general tendency to stress benign and strong connections between Sweden and Islamic regions. The reasons for creating an exhibition in 1985 are, however, more neutral than those in the 2002, 2003 and 2017 exhibitions. In the latter, the past has become a hostage of the present. Another observation is that the policies in the prefaces tend to merge with the scholarly texts over time. Obviously, a more markedly contemporary perspective on relations with Islam dominates when archaeology meets the public in exhibitions and the media.

Direct Islamic trade has been stressed by other scholars. A connection has been made between objects and cultural transmission, with the bold assumption that ‘...We know that Arab traders had visited Scandinavia; they may even have settled in Birka for some time’.¹⁷ It is suggested that Islam competed for Scandinavian souls with Christianity as an adversary, delaying the conversion process. In another publication, Samanid Central Asia is pointed out as the ‘actually probable’ origin of the

11. Hjärpe, ed., 2003.

12. Hjärpe, ed., 2003, back cover.

13. <https://www.uu.se/en/news/article/?id=9390&typ=artikel>. Accessed July 14, 2021

14. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/upsala/vikingar-bar-arabiska-tecken>. Accessed July 21, 2022

15. Mulder 2017.

16. <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/19/europe/sweden-viking-arabic-ring/index.html>. Accessed July 21, 2022.

17. Mikkelsen 1997, 49.

‘Oriental’ objects. The author states that ‘...In the light of the accounts of Rus’ given in the Arabic sources, the core area of contacts and interactions was the Caspian Sea region and the area south of the Aral Sea’.¹⁸

What is the material and textual basis for these interpretations of such contacts, and when did they take place? Is the assertion reliable that there were ‘...close and vigorous links and a great deal of trade between Sweden and the Arab World...’ without intermediaries?¹⁹ Given the growing use of Viking-Age archaeology to criticize national chauvinism and address problems in contemporary society, it is essential to investigate the sources and contexts of the past, and refresh our memory about the knowledge gained through previous research, retracing the Vikings in the East. There are several publications on Eastern trade that contain detailed information about the economy and political development in Central Asia, Khazaria, Volga Bulgaria, and further west, presenting another picture.²⁰

Traces of the go-betweens – ‘Oriental’ objects in Sweden

In the extensive literature on Scandinavian presence in the East, there is little doubt that Scandinavians acted as merchants.²¹ ‘Oriental’ imports in Sweden are presented in several publications.²² Beside the Islamic dirhams emerging from the soil every year, artefacts from these regions are rare. In this study, jewellery, vessels, and coins are chosen as examples. Some new discoveries can refine the general picture of their provenance and chronology.

Metal jewellery

A ring from Birka (grave 515) is famous for the ‘Arabic’ text on the glass stone. It has been seen as important because of ‘...its connection to the Islamic world’ and has been argued to have been a direct import due to the minimal wear on the object.²³ That analysis, however, lacks textual and contextual discussion about the setting in which such rings were used in the East. Four other rings of similar Saltovo Mayaki type and one stray cornelian setting stone from a possible sixth ring have been found in Birka. Of these six rings, two are dated to the middle of the 9th and one to the 10th century. Similar Khazar silver rings are found along the Volga route, in Timerevo (dated to c. 900), in Sarskoe Gorodishche by Lake Nero, in the Georgii settlement on the Veriazha, in Ryurikovo Gorodishche, and in Staraja Ladoga, where several items have been found.²⁴ It is thus more plausible that all three rings found on Birka come from Khazaria where such objects appear in graves.²⁵

Pieces of silver vessels reused as bullion and pendants have been found in Birka and its hinterland. A bell-shaped capsule, probably deriving from Volga Bulgaria, was found in a 9th-century female grave.²⁶ Most common, however, are the ‘Oriental’ belts.²⁷ They occur in female graves as

18. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2020, 59.

19. Isaksson 1985, 5.

20. Jonsson Hraundal 2013; 2014; Kovalev 2000-2001; 2005; forthcoming b; Noonan 2007.

21. Androshchuk 2013; Callmer 1981, 2000; Duczko 2004; Franklin and Shepard 1996; Jansson 1987; Martin 1986; Noonan 1994.

22. Arne 1914; Callmer 1989; Duczko 1998; Jansson 1987; 1988.

23. Wärmländer *et al.* 2015, 135.

24. Fekner and Nedoshivina in Duczko 1998, 111, fig. 8; Franklin and Shepard 1996, 33-34.; Leontev 2017, 177, fig. 5: 6.

25. Callmer 1989, 32; Jansson 1987, 578; Pletneva 1967, 141, fig. 36; 1989, 116, fig. 61.

26. Jansson 1988, 579.

27. Jansson 1987; 1988, 607-613; Hedenstierna-Jonson and Holmquist 2006.

pendants for necklaces, dated to the second half of the 9th century, in most cases at the very end of it.²⁸ Only a few complete belts are represented. They have parallels in both the Khazar and Volga Bulgar worlds. From the end of the 9th to the late 10th century, the tradition was widely distributed, used as belts proper, among the nomadic groups and also the Magyars now emerging between Khazaria and Rus'. The majority of those from Birka were, however, made in the Volga Bulgarian tradition, like the belt mounts found in Gnezdovo.²⁹ In the settlements on the Dniepr and Desna rivers they were commonly used. The ornaments show restricted dispersal in the Novgorod region, where only participants of the *druzina* adorned themselves in this steppe-nomadic fashion.³⁰

The nomadic belt tradition has its strongest presence in Sweden during the 11th and 12th centuries. One imported mould made of a white mineral was found in Sigtuna, used to produce belt tips (**Fig. 1**).

The artisan worked in a small house dated to *c.* 1075-1100. Belt fittings had then long since been abandoned in large parts of Kyivan Rus'.³¹ The political changes when the Khazar empire fell in the late 10th century, the coming of the Kipchak Turks who did not use ornamented belts, and the reorientation towards Byzantium, made them socially redundant. In the Novgorod region, however, the tradition was still alive. The mould found in Sigtuna is of 11th-century 'Novgorodian type', styled with a triangular cut in its upper part, and a pointed lower part, decorated with a plant pattern.

Vessels

Vessels in ceramics, glass and metals are some of the most frequent imports. The oldest glass cup was found in a male grave in Birka.³² It is dated to the late 9th century and is one of few items from the Caliphate proper. Fragments from another cup of similar date were found at Barkarby, Uppland.³³

The 'Oriental' incense burner from Åbyn, Hamrånge, Gästrikland is one of seven known copper and bronze vessels.³⁴ It is suggested that the burner was produced in Khorasan in the 10th century.³⁵ The oldest jug is from Åland, containing coins with *tpq* 890 CE. Three copper jugs are dated to the 10th century (Aska; Klinta; and Tuna in Hjälsa) and one used as hoard container has a *tpq* 991 CE (Föhlagen).³⁶ A fragmented bronze vessel has been recovered in Fånö, Uppland. It is preliminarily dated to the 10th century.³⁷ A copper jug filled with coins and objects dated to *tpq* 985 found in Tatarskij Tolkish, in Volga Bulgaria, is similar in style to those from Aska and Klinta, demonstrating a connection to that region.³⁸

Pottery vessels in the urban deposits and burials at Birka show a distinct Eastern origin from around 900 CE.³⁹ The number of south-east European and Middle Eastern ceramics is, however, small, only 1.5% of the imports. Those identified are attributed to Byzantium, Khazaria, and Volga

28. Callmer 1989, 33.

29. Hedenstierna-Jonson and Holmquist 2006, 34; Murasheva 2000, 92; Pushkina 2007, 185.

30. Mikhailov 2007, 206.

31. Mikhailov 2007, 205.

32. Callmer 1989, 32; Jansson 1987, 623.

33. Jansson 1985, 189.

34. Jansson 1988, 621.

35. Ådahl 2002, 87.

36. Jansson 1985, 188-189; 1988, 646.

37. Jansson 1985, 189.

38. Darkevich 2009, Table 45, 7; Pachomov 1938, 71-72.

39. Bäck 2016.

Bulgaria, mostly functioning as storage jars. A thrown jug with a handle has been found in the burials at Ormknös on Björkö (**Fig. 2**).⁴⁰ Combs and a fragment of a dirham dated to *c.* 811/812 suggest a date in the mid- or late 9th century CE.

The slender jug has a close resemblance to ‘Tamatarcha’ jug types found in Crimea, Cherson, Sarkel, Tamatarcha, and Kertch, belonging to the Khazar dominion.⁴¹ Besides Birka, they have been found in Beloozero, in the Gnezdovo settlement, in Gorodisjtje Titjicha on the Don, Zjivotinnoe Gorodisjtje close to Voronezh, and at a stronghold in Timofeevka in the Tula region. These one-handled jugs were first made in the 8th century, becoming quite common in the 9th, replacing amphoras as containers.⁴² It is suggested that they were made on the Taman’ peninsula, situated between the Black Sea and Sea of Azov.

A Volga Bulgarian pot was found in an alley by a jetty in Birka, dated to the mid-10th century.⁴³ In Russia, similar pots have been recovered in more than 30 places along the route from Volga Bulgaria: in Suzdal’, Vladimir, Rostov, Lake Beloye, and Novgorod.⁴⁴

Sherds of compact spherico-conical transport vessels for valuable liquids signal a contact with Khazar and Volga Bulgar trade. Produced in Central Asia (Samarqand, Marw, and Khwarezm), they were containers for mercury and precious liquids used in larger parts of the Afro-Asian world.⁴⁵ Thousands of sherds are known from the Khazar lower Volga region, from Volga Bulgaria, and from Novgorod.

Coins

Among the first imported ‘Oriental’ objects were coins, glass and cornelian beads, and seal stones.⁴⁶ This influx from the end of the 8th century emanated from Scandinavians tapping into existing trade networks. Ummayyad and Abbasid cornelian and millefiori beads left a trail from Caucasia, among the Meryans, Muromians, and Mordvinians, to the Åland islands and Eastern Middle Sweden.⁴⁷ During the late 8th and early 9th centuries, dirhams were brought from the lands between Donets, Don and lower Volga following several different trajectories to the North.

In the course of the 9th century, a growing number of dirhams were brought into the Baltic. The bulk of them are concentrated toward the very end of the century or around 900.⁴⁸ A unique Abbasid gold dinar, found in a possible hoard and used as a pendant, was struck in 872 under the reign of al-Mu‘tamid ‘ala’llah and is an unusual exponent of this period of exchange (Estuna, Uppland, SHM 18273).

Since the strongest argument for direct trade with the Caliphate derives from artefact assemblages from Birka, it is fruitful to observe numismatic patterns there. The earliest coins found in the Black Earth and the graves are dated to the end of the 8th century, evincing a fast response to the nascent trade between Khazaria and the Caliphate from approximately 775 to 800 CE.⁴⁹ Few dirhams were imported before 890; they became numerous during the 10th century. Coins struck in the 8th and 9th centuries were deposited in graves much later, in the 10th century. Thus, most of the dirhams were im-

40. Arrhenius *et al.* 1978, 51.

41. Koval 2010, 173, fig. 63, 4-6 and 174; Pletneva 1967, 130-133.

42. Noonan 2007, 243.

43. Ambrosiani and Gustin 2015, 231.

44. Koval 2006, 187.

45. Koval 2006, 187; 2010, 174; Kovalev, forthcoming b, 46-47.

46. Callmer 1989, 32.

47. Callmer 1989, 23.

48. Callmer 1989, 25.

49. Gustin 2004, 98; Noonan 2007, 234.

ported in the latest phase of Birka's existence, when Samanid coins constituted the bulk of imported dirhams into Sweden, together with other 'Oriental' objects.

Birka's dirhams correspond with our general knowledge about the origins and intensity in the import of minted silver.⁵⁰ In the Baltic, 16% of the total number of dirhams were imported in the 8th and 9th centuries, whereas 84% were brought in during the 10th and early 11th centuries. Seen through the import of dirhams, the Volga Bulgar trade was four times greater than that with the Khazars.

Directions for the exchange can be observed in the composition of dirham imitations in Birka.⁵¹ Khazar imitations circulate only in the 9th century, with a cessation in the main flow by 875-880. An important hoard found in Birka containing Volga Bulgar imitations highlights the final phase of the dirham import. Several dirhams were found together with a Volga Bulgar jug, about two hundred cornelian and rock crystal beads, 'Oriental' buttons, and belt mounts. The assemblage indicates that Volga Bulgaria was the primary intermediary for trade with the Caliphate in the mid-10th century. It corresponds well with what has been interpreted as direct transfer of Volga Bulgarian dirhams to the Baltic.⁵² Avoiding the tithes imposed upon merchants by the emerging Kyivan Rus', the Volga Rus' travelled a northern route from the Upper Volga, over the Sheksna river, through Ves' regions by Lake Beloe, the Badozhshk portage, Lake Onega, the Svir' River, Lake Ladoga, the Neva River, to Staraja Ladoga and on to Eastern Middle Sweden. This trail can be tracked in the distribution of clay paws and Thor's hammer rings with origins in Lake Mälaren Valley and the Åland islands.⁵³ The hoard in Birka has been attributed to a local merchant travelling directly from there to Volga Bulgaria and back. However, in the hoard the dirhams span the period from 920 to 946, indicating that they could have been accumulated in the East. The artefacts could thus be seen as transported by the Rus' settlers on the Upper Volga acting as intermediaries in the 950s to 970s, in accordance with the numismatic evidence.⁵⁴ The Volga Rus' were probably continuing their close cooperation with the Volga Bulgars after the reduction of Islamic silver from the Samanids.

In Sigtuna, we can study the last deposited dirhams.⁵⁵ Two of the nine coins are from 9th-century Abbasid mints and five are issued by Samanid rulers in the beginning of the 10th century. All are found in contexts from the 11th century or later. Four were used as pendants, taken out of circulation. The collection is typical for the end of the silver flow, drying up around 1000 CE.

The observations above suggest a temporal and qualitative dynamism regarding the origin and chronology of the 'Oriental' artefacts. From the late 8th to the mid-9th century, they mostly consisted of dirhams and beads. With the establishment of Sarkel on the Don in 840-841, the Khazars strengthened their position with Byzantine support and offers of protection.⁵⁶ Twenty-four hillforts dated from the 8th to the 10th centuries followed the northern Donets and were staffed by Iranian-speaking, mounted Alans. From the second half of the 9th century, a variety of objects were in use. Saltovo Mayaki finger rings, glass drinking vessels from the Caliphate, and belt mounts used as jewellery are all indicative of growing exchange. Several of these things correspond with categories found in the Saltovo Mayaki culture as well as further north among the Eastern Finns.⁵⁷

Reaching the Donets, Don, and lower Volga river system in the 9th century, Rus' merchants visited Khazar trading centres. Northern slave and fur merchants connected with luxury commodities

50. Noonan 2007, 234.

51. Ambrosiani and Gustin 2015.

52. Kovalev 2011.

53. Jansson 1987, 782; Callmer 1994.

54. Kovalev 2011, 97.

55. Roslund 2015.

56. Kovalev 2005, 81.

57. Callmer 1989, 34.

and silver dirhams from Iran and Central Asia, generating large revenues for the *Khagan* ruler and the Bek, the military leader.⁵⁸ The Rus' were primarily a source of income as tax-paying traders bringing furs, slaves, and other commodities. They also held positions as mercenaries. Living in centres like Itil on the Volga estuary, they intermingled with all other religious and cultural groups within the dominion. The Rus' met Muslim merchants and thousands of mercenaries from Khwarezm. These hired soldiers made it possible for the Khazars to keep their power.

The Caucasus connection came to an end around 900 CE, when Pecheneg nomads disrupted the logistics.⁵⁹ Only Sarkel continued in use. The silver stream took another direction along the Silk Road, east of the Caspian Sea to Volga Bulgar. As with the dirhams from Samanid Central Asia, a greater quantity and more varied set of commodities were brought to the North during the 10th century.

Creating territorial power – influences from Khazars and Volga Bulgars

Focussing on the question of Islamic impact on Scandinavian Viking-Age societies, we must ask where and how Rus' met followers of the Faith. There were Muslim populations living in the Khazar dominion, and some segments of the Volga Bulgars were converted in the first half of the 10th century. In both regions, there were abundant possibilities for interaction. Turkic nomadic influences were, however, more important for Rus' identity, especially among the Dniepr Rus'.

The Khazars ruled a multi-ethnic society.⁶⁰ Turks of different faiths, pagan Finnic groups, Magyars, Pechenegs, Alans, and Muslims from Khwarezm and Iran were among some 25 to 28 distinct peoples. Their neighbours paid tribute under the threat of mercenary soldiers, until the Magyars, Volga Bulgars and lastly the Kyivan Rus' opposed oppression.

To create unity and a sense of community among these groups, symbols were used. On one type of dirham issued 837/838, a *tamga* (stamp, seal) is seen, in one part of the coin reserved for early Abbasid governors.⁶¹ A similar series of *tamga*-decorated dirhams were struck in the 10th century. The trident shaped *tamga* 'was somehow connected to Turkic political heritage, probably to the Khazar ruling house at the time the coins were issued'.⁶² It has also been seen as a bird of prey, but there are equally strong arguments for a connection to the Khazar dirham issues, signifying political-religious leadership.⁶³

The *tamga* of the ruling Khazar elite could be the inspiration of the Rurikid dynastic emblem. First seen as graffiti on late 9th century dirhams, it is displayed on seals during the reign of Sviatoslav I Igorevich (945- 972). Bidents or tridents were still in use in the 11th century under his son Vladimir the Great (958-1015) and survived to the Mongol invasion 1230/1240.⁶⁴ Rurikid signs are found on an amphora and a cooking pot base in Sigtuna dated to the early 11th and early 12th centuries respectively, illustrating their common use and geographic dispersal (**Fig. 3**).

Connected to the Khazar elite is also the *Khagan* institution. The Rus' are mentioned among the followers of a Byzantine visit to Emperor Louis the Pious in 839, when they presented themselves as subjects of a *Khagan*. According to ibn-Rustah, the term was still in use among the Rus' in the beginning of the 10th century. We can follow it within the Rurikid dynasty to the mid-11th century. The first

58. Noonan 2007, 209.

59. Kovalev 2005, 104.

60. Noonan 2001, 76-85.

61. Kovalev 2005, 227.

62. Kovalev 2005: 230.

63. Duczko 2004, 228; Franklin and Shepard 1996, 120.

64. Moltjanov 2017, 453.

native Rus' metropolitan of Kyiv, Ilarion, was installed by Grand Prince Iaroslav the Wise. In praise of him, Ilarion called the prince *Khagan*. A graffito in the St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv confirms a late use.⁶⁵

Kyiv became the centre for territorial claims on both the North and South in the 10th century.⁶⁶ An affiliation to nomadic lifestyles became part of Rus' identity. In the settlements on the Desna, such as Chernigov and Shestovitsa, the material culture indicates contacts with the Khazar sphere.⁶⁷ Sviatoslav Igorevich was described as more nomad than Rus'. Probably born in Rjurikovo Gorodishche, he was the first ruler of Kyiv to bear a Slavic name. He presented a nomad lifestyle, with partly shaved head, a sidelock and golden earring like the Turkic, Bulgar, and Magyar nobility of the time.⁶⁸ We can also discern this affiliation in weapons with a nomadic origin found in Scandinavia.⁶⁹

Arabic sources confirm the close relation between Rus' and Khazars.⁷⁰ From the mid-9th to 11th centuries, a distinct transfer in presentations can be seen. Al-Masudi states in his account from the mid-10th century that Rus' lived in Itil. Rus' are classified as 'brothers' of the Khazars, and 'Turks', by Al-Idrisi, Al-Qaswini and ibn-Khaldun in the 12th and 13th centuries. Such intertwining of identities may have been suggested to Arabic scholars by a close political and cultural relationship.

Other, more belligerent, interactions occurred. From c. 864 to 1041, several attacks on settlements by the Caspian Sea were launched from Khazar territory on the lower Volga. In 912, Muslim mercenaries revolted and fought the Rus' after re-entering the realm. Those who survived were killed by Volga Bulgars further north. All similar events seem to have ended in the destruction or expulsion of the Rus'.

The Rus' pillage in the Caspian Sea can be seen as a proof of the weakened power of the "...Khazars". After the attack on Itil in 965 by Sviatoslav Igorevich, and the destruction in 985 of Bulgar, the Rus' could move with fewer constraints into the Caspian Sea. This was, however, short lived. Seen in the imports of northern Iranian dirhams, it can be suggested that the Rus' power only held sway between the 960s and 980s.⁷¹ After that, the Volga Bulgars re-entered the trade network.

The Volga Bulgars took advantage of the shift in trade from the end of the 9th century. Even if we find an overlap of 50 years when Khazar and Volga Bulgar trade ran parallel, the latter eventually won the day. From c. 900, the Samanid dirhams testify indisputably in favour of the Volga Bulgars successively taking over the whole territory. They established sedentary urban nodes from the beginning of the 10th century, opposing taxation from the Khazars by connecting to the Samanids and choosing Islam, at least among the elite. In 920, Ibn Fadlan was sent by the Caliph al-Muqtadir as ambassador and teacher of Islam. In his description, it is obvious that the Islamization process took some time. He was critical of the Volga Bulgars, with their wooden mosques and inability to read the Quran. The elite in urban centres such as Biljar had followed Islam since the very beginning of the 10th century, and they fully adopted the faith in its second half.⁷² However, in the rural areas pagan customs still prevailed until the year 1000.

The Rus' and Scandinavians who visited Khazar and Volga Bulgar trading centres naturally met followers of Islam, as merchants and mercenaries. However, these transactions took place north of

65. Franklin and Shepard 1996, 241; Noonan 2001, 87.

66. Franklin and Shepard 1996, 112.

67. Duczko 2004, 256.

68. Franklin & Shepard 1996: 143.

69. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2017; Jansson 1988, 614-621.

70. Jonsson Hraundal 2014, 72-73.

71. Kovalev, forthcoming a.

72. Chalikova 1986, 137-152.

the Caucasus, as indicated by Arab chroniclers.⁷³ Among the elite of the Khazars, Judaism became the chosen religion in the 9th century, even if the Khwaresmian military guard was Muslim. It is also important to realize that the Volga Bulgar elite did not accept Islam until the beginning of the 10th century, in response to Khazar pressure and close trade connections with the Samanids. Islam does not seem to have influenced Rus' identity, whereas there are several indications that Turkic nomadic insignia, weapons and even the name of the ruler were brought in from the Khazars. The Rus' actors coming to Volga Bulgaria could also be of the Upper Volga group, with connections to Eastern Middle Sweden.⁷⁴ Beginning already in the late Vendel period, Merya settlements in the Jaroslavl' region became important for Scandinavians. Sarskii fort became a fortified place, with open settlements surrounding it from the second half of the 9th century. In Michailovskoe, Petrovskoe, and Timerevo there was a distinct Scandinavian presence. Settlements in the Suzdal' area have given similar archaeological evidence to a broad participation in trade, but without a specific *emporium*.⁷⁵ Dirhams and other imports are dispersed in the settlements, indicating a different social control over exchange than in south-western Rus'.

There was still a dirham import between the Caucasus and Volga Bulgar trails, due to the constant demand for silver and possible sources for it. A set of dirhams from northern Iran and Khwaresm filtered into the Volga-Oka system after the destruction of Khazaria by the Rus' in 965, with their temporary presence on the lower Volga until c. 980.⁷⁶ After that decade, Volga Bulgaria gained access to the Caspian Sea. In 1006, they signed a mutual treaty of peace and trade with Vladimir the Great. Trade trajectories took a northerly route in the 11th century, as Rostov and Suzdal' became advanced positions for the Rus', still focused on Volga Bulgaria until the Mongol invasion.⁷⁷ It is thus possible that Islamic artefacts were still coming into Sweden in the 11th and 12th centuries through the Volga Bulgar-Suzdal'-Novgorod network.

Post- Viking-Age Islamic interfaces

To interpret the Islamic contacts, a contrast must be drawn with subsequent centuries. Were they gone with the diminishing flow of dirhams?

During the 11th century, glass beads of Iranian origin and glass cups possibly from the same region entered Sweden. Millefiori glass beads found in deposits dated to the beginning of that century are found in Sigtuna, with an origin in Nishapur (**Fig. 4**).⁷⁸

They came to Scandinavia by the way of the Caucasus, Don, Volga Bulgaria, along a trail north of the Volga, over the lands of the Mordvinians and Muromians, the Ves' at Lake Beloye, Novgorod, Finland and into Scandinavia. A substantial number of these beads are found on Gotland. A yellow glass knob found in Sigtuna is a fragment from a possible Islamic glass vessel, with a date and origin similar to those of the millefiori beads.⁷⁹ Such cups, used for date or almond wine, were produced in Nishapur and Palestine.

73. Jonsson Hraundal 2013, 186.

74. Callmer 1994; 2000: 45.

75. Makarov 2021.

76. Kovalev, forthcoming a, 16.

77. Kovalev, forthcoming b, 52.

78. Callmer, forthcoming.

79. Henricson 2006, 42.

A glazed cup was found in a grave in Hemse, Gotland, dated to the 11th century.⁸⁰ Arne reported a similar cup from the Vladimir district in Russia.⁸¹ Others are found in the Lake Beloye region among the Ves', one in a grave with a German coin with *tpq* 1057.⁸² In Sigtuna, Islamic vessels from Syria and Iran have been recovered from deposits dated to the late 11th to early 12th centuries.⁸³ A group of vessels with a three-layer glaze in green, yellow and brown/black may have an Iranian origin (**Fig. 5**).

There seems to have been an influx of cut-up silver vessels in the late 11th century, like those used earlier as pendants in Birka. Pieces from four vessels are known on Gotland from the late 11th century: Lilla Vaståde (Hablingbo parish), Sibbenarve (Öja parish), Sigsarve (Hejde parish), and Botvalde/Botarve (Väte parish).⁸⁴ They constitute an interesting interface with markets where Islamic riches flowed.

Some 20 post-Viking-Age Kufic gold coins have been found in north-western Europe. In the Dune treasure (Dalhem parish, SHM 6849), four Islamic gold coins were deposited, together with a gilt silver cup of Iranian origin. Two of the dinars were struck in Almeria in 1124-25 and 1125-26, under the reign of Ali ben-Yusuf. Another dinar was made in Sebta (Ceuta) in Morocco under the reign of Abd-al-Mum'in (1130-63). The fourth was struck in 1147-48 in Murcia for Abd-Allah ibn-Ajad. Together with the dinars proper was a gold coin struck under king Alfonso VIII of Castile (1158-1214) with Arabic letters. In the same hoard are also found three pendants in gilt silver, imitating Islamic dinars with pseudo-kufic letters. The dinars and imitations were used as pendants. In the Ahlesminde hoard from Bornholm, two gold dinars, one from Cairo and the other from al Mahdiya (Tunisia), were found that had been issued by the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir (1036-94), with a *tpq* 1070.⁸⁵ Gold from the trade routes between Morocco and Sub-Saharan regions arrived as coins in Scandinavia.

Arabic letters and style became part of the cultural dialogue with Islam in the Middle Ages. The Broddetorp altar piece from Västergötland is dated to the second half of the 12th century.⁸⁶ This *antemensale* in metal and wood is purely Christian in iconography and context. However, in one of the decorative separations a 'Kufesque' text can be seen, saying: 'in the name of God, the most Gracious, the most Merciful'. It is not unusual to find Arabic writing in Christian contexts. Pentz refers to a tradition in Byzantine 11th-century churches, in which kufic-inspired patterns were used as decoration. The reasons behind the tradition might be found in the perception of other objects in Christian contexts. Fatimid luxury items in precious metals, glass and rock crystal found their way into cathedral treasuries in Europe, seen as proof of an origin in the Holy Land.⁸⁷ In this light, objects from Islamic lands were not interpreted as Muslim, but were incorporated into Scandinavian Christian culture based on local interpretations.

It is obvious that objects from the Islamic world continued to filter into the Western network after the political-economic change at the end of the 10th century. Sigtuna has produced a series of artefacts, and Gotland seems to be another node for influx. Accumulation of Islamic artefacts must be seen in a wider perspective, with an access to the Mediterranean for Scandinavian pilgrims. However, the millefiori beads and vessels could be commodities coming through Suzdal' and Novgorod on the still-active Volga route.

80. Jansson 1985, 189.

81. Arne 1938, 109, fig 2.

82. Makarov 1990, 203, table XVIII, no. 14.

83. Roslund 2011.

84. Jansson 1985, 190; 1988, 626-627.

85. Ingvardson 2020, 43.

86. Pentz 2007.

87. Shalem 1996.

Islamic- Scandinavian interfaces: an evaluation

What can be concluded from this inquiry? Distance did not stop Scandinavians from venturing afar. The questions are whether they had direct contacts with the Caliphate and Khwarezm, and if Islam had an impact on Viking-Age communities. These questions are essential because of the use of history in contemporary exhibitions and archaeology.

Summarizing the analysis of ‘Oriental’ objects found in Scandinavia as of the 1980s, Ingmar Jansson pointed at an origin across a wide area.⁸⁸ The Caliphate, regions north of the Caucasus and Volga Bulgaria were presented as possible centres of production as well as nodes of a network. In 1997, Władysław Duczko found different results.⁸⁹ His interpretation still holds when the discoveries of the last decades are included, and I agree strongly with his conclusions: the main goal for Scandinavian trips to the East was silver; with the exception of the very early phase, the interaction was with Khazars and Volga Bulgars, and the objects were obtained in Rus’ lands, not in the Caliphate; there are no indications of any impact on Scandinavian culture from Islamic regions; a better understanding can be reached by studies of excavations in the region dominated by Volga Bulgars, Khazars, Rus’, and the nomadic cultures of the steppes.⁹⁰ It is obvious that scholars conducting research in recent years seem to make their interpretations without recollecting the conclusions of earlier research. By using singular classes of objects, they lose important evidence for their origins and historical contexts.

Journeys during the 9th century seem to have been longer than those from around 900. In the first period, between *c.* 800 and 850, access to the Caspian Sea was possible due to political factors. The Khazars let merchants pass into Islamic territories. There are reasons to believe that until the end of the 9th century, the bulk of traders made their exchange in Khazar territory and were prevented from going further. When the Volga Bulgars offered new possibilities because of the Samanid dirham influx from *c.* 900, a Northern route was preferred. Trade was conducted with visiting Muslim merchants with the Volga Bulgars as middlemen. The Scandinavians were not permitted further south in the network.

Since ibn Khordadbeh’s 9th-century notation is the only source for direct trade by the Rus’ with Baghdad, it is worth noting that all other written descriptions of Scandinavian action in the Caspian Sea are violent in character. Around 950, the tendency to travel shorter distances was strengthened by the territorialization of Rus’ between Kyiv and Novgorod, leading to a strong Byzantine affiliation along the Volchov-Dnepr route. In the north-east, the Volga Bulgarian exchange under the dominion of Upper Volga Rus’ chose another solution to avoid control. The Islamic riches may have come through this network to Birka. From the middle of the 10th century the silver stream declined, leading to an end of imports in Eastern Middle Sweden in the first decades of the 11th century. This tendency is attested by the change in the dirham circulation in Birka and Sigtuna.⁹¹ Residual Volga Rus’ connections can be the reason for the Iranian 11th-century millifiori glass beads, glass cups and assumed glazed pottery coming to Sigtuna.

One inscription often discussed in studies of travels to the East is the stone in Stora Rytterne, Västmanland (Vs 1) dated to 1010-40.⁹² The word ‘*karusm*’ has been interpreted as Khwarezm, situated in the Amu Darja estuary by the Aral Sea. There are however doubts from a local and a trans-regional perspective. Firstly, other parts of the runic inscription show misspellings, leading to another

88. Jansson 1988, 566.

89. Duczko 1998.

90. Duczko 1998, 114.

91. Gustin 2004; Roslund 2015.

92. Arne 1947; Jansson 1964: 6; Gustafsson 2002; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2020, 55.

interpretation; ‘*austr i Karum*’ could instead be the commonly used ‘*austr i Gardum*’, i.e. the Rus’ lands. Secondly, the Samanid silver flow had long since diminished, and the routes had become shorter. Scandinavian trade across the territory between Volga Bulgaria, over the Ust-Iurt plateau to the Aral Sea, is less probable due to the drop of dirham silver content to 20%-40%, creating only regional value.⁹³ There are no Arabic sources mentioning Scandinavian merchants engaged directly with the Near East after 900 CE, and in the mid-10th century not south of Volga Bulgaria.⁹⁴ One vital question that must be asked concerning a claim of direct trade, is what kind of coins would be present in Västmanland. In the beginning of the 11th century, dirhams from the Ghaznavid or Karakhanid dynasties should be included in the hoards. It is thus less likely that the word ‘*austr i Karum*’ refers to Khwarezm. In my opinion, a trade expedition to Khwarezm in the early 11th century, south of the Aral Sea, does not fit the historical context, as Arne had already pointed out.⁹⁵

An important issue for interpreting the ‘Oriental’ objects concerns theories of culture transfer. There is a lack of analyses of how Scandinavians might have accepted parts of the Islamic world view. When transfer of ideas and material expressions of them occur, there are some requirements that are essential. A positive inclination towards the ‘sender’ is one basis, as well as intensity, frequency and variation.⁹⁶ Hybrid forms or a style fusing two or more cultural expressions can be the result. If imports are used as luxury commodities or re-shaped into symbols understandable for the local community, it is difficult to argue for close cultural interaction. The Islamic objects arriving in Eastern Middle Sweden seem to have been used as exotic utensils, or were reshaped, like the belt ornaments, which changed from the male to the female sphere as pendants. This is a treatment in function and thought similar to that of the Islamic artefacts and ‘kufic’ signs used on Viking Age weights and in Christian churches (**Fig. 6**).

Assumptions of close interaction between Scandinavians and Muslims are comparable to the narrative about ‘*Convivencia*’ and harmonic coexistence in al-Andalus, which is now contested among scholars. Interpretations of how power relations were experienced by minorities, whether Muslims, Jews or Christians, are very much dependent on what kind of sources are used and what generalisations are made. Research focused on literature and art are much more inclined towards ‘*Convivencia*’ than that using historical and legal written sources. Use within a majority community of a minority’s cultural traits should not be seen as social acceptance.⁹⁷ Studies of intercultural relations in Medieval Spain suffer from two misinterpretations, which are shared in Islamic-Scandinavian studies. Firstly, ethnic conflict and cultural diffusion are seen as mutually exclusive phenomena. The second fault is equating acculturation (a cultural process) with assimilation (a social process), and assuming that the lessening of cultural distance must result in a similar proximity in social relations.

Comparable discourses presenting a simplified picture of the Scandinavian Viking-Age society as multicultural, or even inhabited by “Muslim Vikings”, are always enthusiastically disseminated by the media without including critical voices. Unfortunately, contemporary need to stress close interaction between Scandinavian and Islamic actors in the Viking Age is distorting a factual view of historical and cultural events with more closely related regions and peoples.

What can we learn from the suggested historical interpretation? Firstly, there is a need for a shift in perspective from a search for direct contacts with Islamic regions and its impact on Scandinavia in the Viking Age, towards interaction with Turkic, Iranian, Finnic and Slavic groups north of the

93. Kovalev, forthcoming a, 27.

94. Kovalev, forthcoming a, 39; Martin 1986, p. 36-37.

95. Arne 1947: 291.

96. Roslund 2007, 128-139.

97. Glick 1979.

Caucasus, at the Black Sea, and within the vast river systems flowing into the Volga. Since the 1980s, advances have been made both in Islamic archaeology and art as well as among scholars in Russia and Central Asia studying the Middle Ages. We may ask what was happening in Tabaristan, Khorasan and Khwarezm that coincided with the flow of goods. New theoretical approaches on culture transfer and hybridisation processes can provide a better understanding of the presence of 'Oriental' objects in the trajectories of the East.

A second task is to stress the fact that Turkic peoples are downplayed or forgotten in the narrative, groups that are actually the most likely mediators of the commodities.⁹⁸ In the Arabic sources the Rus' are portrayed as small, itinerant groups, as raiders, traders, and mercenaries.⁹⁹ They are embedded in much larger political entities, such as the Khazars and Volga Bulgars, embracing populations of Finnic, Iranian and Central Asian origin. With this background, a shift towards these cultures and their interaction with the Rus' would be fruitful for our understanding of trade networks leading to Scandinavia. Not least, the mirroring of symbols of power between Khazars and Rus' princes in the 10th century, when a territorial entity emerged that would become Kyivan Rus', is of importance. However, Arabic sources make a distinction between several groups, creating a more dynamic picture than the one given by Byzantine and 'Kyivan' perspectives.¹⁰⁰ Comprehensive surveys on Rus' in the East are focused on the Scandinavian Ladoga-Ilmen- and Western Dwina-Dnepr groups, probably because of their part in the establishment of Kyivan Rus' and because of dependency on Byzantine and Latin sources.¹⁰¹ The dominion of the Volga Rus' has gained less attention. Many of the Eastern objects are found in burial mounds in the Jaroslavl'-Vladimir region in Russia.¹⁰² It would be interesting to study the impact of Volga Finnic-Scandinavian culture on the Upper Volga, the slavization of the region, and the slow fading of close contacts with Åland and Central Middle Sweden. Focused studies of their material culture would be an opening to better understanding of Viking Age Jaroslavl' and Medieval Suzdal', in the region that would become the state of Moscovy.¹⁰³

A third track to investigate is the corpus of late Viking-Age and Medieval objects from Islamic regions imported to Scandinavia through the 11th and 12th centuries. Glazed vessels, semi-precious stone and glass beads, singular Islamic gold coins from the Mediterranean, as well as cut pieces of silver objects, bear witness to a continuity in Islamic interfaces. This window in time could have been a sign of a continuity in the Novgorod-Suzdal'-Volga Bulgaria trade, but could also illuminate pilgrims from Scandinavia travelling to the Mediterranean. These three tasks should not fade into the background when archaeological knowledge is transferred into the museum exhibitions and catalogues.

Islamic objects were imported into Sweden in the past. However, the influx is dispersed over a long period of time and they were handled by intermediaries, thus giving little evidence of direct interfaces and possibilities for influences from Islam. I agree with Jan Peder Lamm; 'The finds suggest that the contacts with the Islamic World mainly were indirect, and mainly as a result from an in-flow of minted and un-minted silver'.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, it is essential that we find a way of solving contemporary political contradictions without violating the past. Those ar-Rus' caravan travellers identified by ibn Khordadbeh in the first half of the 9th century as '...a kind of the Saqaliba...', may not have come directly from Scandinavia, but may have been Rus' from the Upper Volga settlements, together with Volga Finnic Meryans. Such interfaces demand theoretical considerations about cultural identities

98. Jonsson Hraundal 2014, 77.

99. Jonsson Hraundal 2014, 71.

100. Callmer 1994, 32; Jonsson Hraundal 2013, 166.

101. See, for example, Androshchuk 2013; Duczko 2004.

102. Jansson 1987, 581, 583, 624, 618.

103. Callmer 1994, 40.

104. Lamm 2003, 65.

and hybridisation, which are likely to prove far more interesting than a supposed direct trade with the Caliphate.

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Fig. 1. Mould for an 'Oriental belt' tip of 'Novgorodian type', Sigtuna ca 1075-1100 CE. Photo by Mats Roslund.



Fig. 2. Slender thrown jug of 'Tamatarcha' type from Khazar territory north of the Black Sea, found in the Ormknös burial ground, Birka (SHM 31359: 14, grave 1a). Arrhenius et al. 1978, 15. Analogies from Koval 2010, 173, Fig. 63, 4-6.



Fig. 3. Rurikid emblems incised on the shoulder of a Byzantine amphora (c. 1040-1055 CE) and on the base of a cooking pot from Sigtuna (early 12th century CE). There is no certain correlation with tamgas of specific Rurikid princes. Photos by Mats Roslund.



Fig. 4. Millefiori glass beads from the block Professorn 1, Sigtuna. The long faceted bead (left) is from deposits dated to 1015-1030 CE; the octagonal one (right) is dated to 1040-1055 CE. Photos by Mats Roslund.

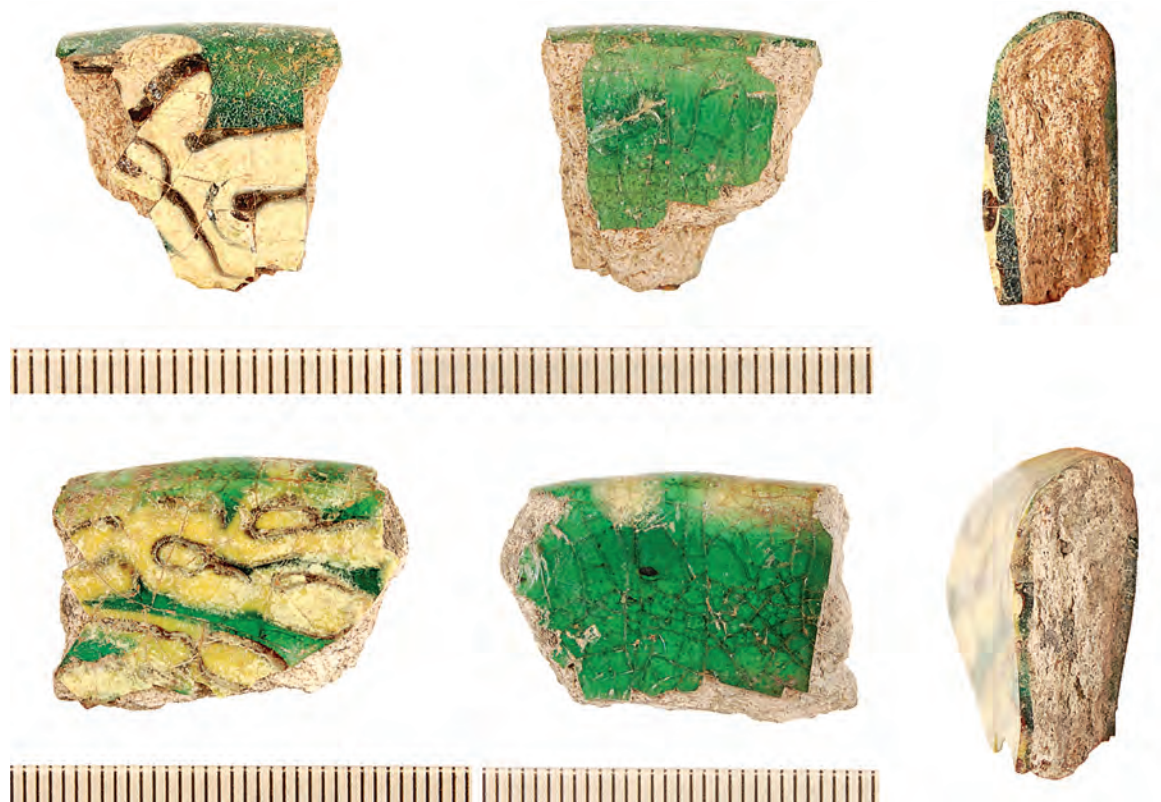


Fig. 5. Glazed bowls in green, yellow, and brown/black. Found in deposits from the late 11th- early 12th century. Possible Iranian origin. Photo by Mats Roslund.



Fig 6. Spherical Viking Age weight with “kufic” letters. Uppåkra, Sweden. Finds no 219 and finds no 3554. Photos by Paul Eklöf Pettersson/ The Key to Uppåkra Project.

Rus', Khazaria, and the Byzantine Commonwealth: The Beginning of Interrelations

Vladimir Ja. Petrukhin

The Rus' (*Rhos*) were mentioned for the first time in the Carolingian *Annales Bertiniani* in 839 when they appeared with the Byzantine embassy sent by emperor Theophilos to Louis the Pious' residence in Ingelheim on the Rhine. The embassy was accompanied by a group of people who called themselves *Rhos* and had been sent by their ruler to Constantinople 'for the sake of friendship' but could not return to their land along the same road because it was blocked by fierce barbarians. Theophilos asked Louis to let them travel through the Empire of the Franks, but Louis wanted to investigate their origin. These people admitted that they were 'from the tribe of *Sueones* (Swedes)'. The Franks tried to oppose the onslaught of the Vikings and Louis suspected that the aliens were not 'friends' but spies: he ordered them arrested. These *Rhos* people claimed that their ruler was called *chacanus*, and this declaration gave birth to the traditional discussion in Russian historiography: whether these 'Russians' obeyed the Khazarian khagan/chagan or had their own ruler in their mysterious pre-Riurikid 'Russian khaganate'.¹

In recent historiography, despite the apparent 'normanist' nature of the *Annales Bertiniani* (suggesting a Scandinavian origin for the initial *Rus'*), the 'antinormanist' idea of the first diplomatic initiative and the original Russian State has been dominant, with a native Russian ruler who claimed a Khazarian title *khagan*.² Slavonic Kyiv was traditionally supposed to have been the capital of this state; in subsequent developments of this argument, taking into account the absence of any evidence of Kyiv before the second half of the 9th century, the capital of the 'Russian (*Rhos*) Khaganate' was placed at the Novgorod *Gorodische* (Hillfort)³ or in Ladoga where Scandinavian (Viking) antiquities are dated as early as the 8th century. Ladoga seems to be preferable in interpretations that attempt to synchronize the archaeological data with the embassy of 839,⁴ but the borders of this 'Russian Khaganate' remain unclear and its supposed 'capital', Ladoga, was a small settlement even in the first half of the 9th century.

At the same time (around 840) the Khazarian khagan and his commander-in-chief, *bag*, sent an embassy to Theophilos asking to build a brick fortress in Sarkel on the Don/Tanais river, according to Constantine Porphyrogenitus.⁵ It was supposed in the early 20th century that the *Rhos* of *Annales Ber-*

1. This khaganate, according to these constructions, might have been founded in the 830s, before the invitation of prince Riurik and the Varangians-Normans to Novgorod (in 862, according to the *Primary Russian Chronicle*). Stepan Gedeonov insisted in 1876 on the Russian (Slavonic) origin of the khagan mentioned in *Annales Bertiniani* (Waitz, ed. 1883): cf. the apologetic publication of his book by modern Russian antinormanists; Gedeonov 2004.

2. See the historiography of the question in Golden 1982; Stepanov 2005.

3. Zuckerman 2000, 106-120.

4. Cf. Franklin and Shepard 1996, 29-31; Shepard 1998, 174, and skeptical analysis of historical interpretation of the early Ladoga remains: Nosov 2018, 58-61.

5. Litavrin and Novoseltsev, eds., 1991, 42.

tiniani could be part of this Khazarian embassy.⁶ It is remarkable that the building of a fortress in the steppe (the Don basin), far from Byzantium itself, was worthy of mention in the history of the Empire.

In 1998, a book was published (containing Jonathan Shepard's paper, which I discuss later) with a notable title: *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?*⁷ I would like to suggest the following answer to this question: it was alive for the Khazars and for the initial Rus'. A miniature from Skylitzes' *Chronicle* from the 11th century illustrates Theophilos flanked by two Varangians with spears. We have no evidence of the Varangian guard before the early 11th century but contacts of the Byzantines with Scandinavians are evident beginning with 839.⁸

The Don was the main trade route for Khazaria, as well as for the Russians (*Rhos*, *Old Rus'*) of Scandinavian (Swedish) origin: coins from the Near East reached Eastern and Northern Europe from the beginning of the 9th century. One of the early hoards (around 800) was found in the so-called Right-Bank (Tsymlyansk) Fortress (*Gorodische*). Sarkel was situated on the opposite left bank of the Don. A Khazarian imitation of a dirham and a coin with Scandinavian graffiti characterize the cultural contacts of the owner of the hoard.⁹

Both left- and right-bank fortresses controlled the transitional steppe route from the Volga to the Don River and via the Don to the West. Both fortresses have been partly investigated: Sarkel was excavated by Mikhail Artamonov in the middle of the 20th century, and its remains were rediscovered by the underwater Tsymlyansk expedition on the bottom of Tsymlyansk Reservoir in the summer of 2019.¹⁰ The Right-Bank (Tsymlyansk) Fortress (**Fig. 1**) seems to be a predecessor of Sarkel and has been excavated by Svetlana Pletneva (1958-1959) and by Valerij Flyorov (since 1987); remains of the walls are falling down into Tsymlyansk Reservoir (**Fig. 2**). The protection of these ruins has been carried out by Flyorov and my enthusiastic students from the National Research University 'Higher School of Economics,' Moscow (2018-2020).

Tiles of Byzantine type have been found in excavations of the Right-Bank Fortress and other Khazarian sites.¹¹ It is significant that the material from the Right-Bank (Tsymlyansk) hillfort includes shingles, since tiles and shingles (**Fig. 3**), as well as stone blocks – the main building material for the walls and towers of the Right-Bank Tsymlyansk Fortress (**Fig. 2**) – indicate Byzantine building traditions. The impact of this Byzantine construction technique (tiles and shingles) can be found not only in the Right-Bank Fortress but also in the Khazarian Semikarakory hillfort in the lower Don basin and other nearby Khazarian sites.¹²

Flyorov has suggested that the evidence of Byzantine architectural traditions from different Khazarian sites in the Don basin (including Bashanta sites in Kalmykia) could be interpreted as indicating closer connections and a number of diplomatic and building missions from Byzantium.¹³ Strengthening of the 'domen' of the Khazarian Khagan (according to Pletneva) by the Greeks could be connected with the complication of Khazar-Hungarian relations on the steppe: apparently, the Hungarians were threatening international waterways on their way to the Crimea and Central Europe, which formed the Crimean and Danubian frontier of Byzantium;¹⁴ the Hungarians were mentioned as 'a fierce people who had taken over their return route' by the *Rhos* ambassadors in Ingelheim.¹⁵

6. Cf. Dvornik 1949 with previous historiography; recently, Shepard 1998.

7. Brubaker, ed., 1998.

8. Cf. Franklin and Shepard 1996, 30.

9. Melnikova 2001, 120; the hoard is still unpublished.

10. Tkachenko *et al.* 2020.

11. Moisieiev 2017; 2020.

12. Flyorov 2014, 109-111.

13. Flyorov 2017.

14. Shepard 1998, 172-174.

15. Cf. Golden 1982, 96-97.

The initial Slavonic name *Rus'* (*Annales Bertiniani* followed the Greek vocalization *Rhos*¹⁶) reflected the Scandinavian name *rōþer* that meant a 'retinue of rowers'.¹⁷ It was not a tribal but a river/'route' name: these *Rus'* people could not be called *Vikings*, as in the Baltic, because they could not use their long ships on the Eastern European rivers; they had to use light paddle boats (*monoxyles*).¹⁸ On the Rhine, at the court of Louis the Pious, they used this 'route' name, which led to the suspicions of the Emperor who realized that they were not an unknown 'people' but a band of the Normans/Vikings.

In 1995 Jonathan Shepard published Byzantine finds from Northern Europe that could be connected with the 839 embassy of the *Rhos*:¹⁹ coins of Theophilos and a Byzantine seal from the same time found at the most prominent sites of the Viking Age – Heðeby, Birka and the early Novgorod hillfort (Gorodische).²⁰ I would add the most plentiful find (11 coins of Theophilos)²¹ originating from Gnëzdovo near Smolensk (the Upper Dnieper), nine of which were used as pendants (**Fig. 4**). Since the cultural layers from 830s are not known in these Russian sites, however, these objects cannot be directly connected with the activity of the people from the time of Theophilos' embassy, although they could demonstrate traces of Byzantine diplomatic activity in this period.²²

Archaeology, however, demonstrates the diversity of the cultural contacts in the Baltic: in Ladoga, the Baltic 'gate' of *Rus'*, and in other trading settlements in Eastern Europe, finds from the Middle Swedish region of Birka are the most numerous, but 'imports' of Danish, or Danish-Frisian, origin are also known. The Byzantine seal from Heðeby mentioned by Shepard has a special interest for our theme: this seal of *patrikios* Theodosios, dating back to the period from 820 to 860, testifies to the activity of Byzantine diplomacy in the Baltic Sea region at the time when Byzantium was fighting against the Arabs in the Western Mediterranean.²³ Another seal (*domestikos* Leon, mid-9th century) was found in the Gorodische of Novgorod and could be connected with early Byzantine activity in *Rus'/Russia*.²⁴ Shepard also recalls in that connection the Viking attack against the Muslims in Seville in 844: it is remarkable that the Arabian author *al-Ya'kuby* used the Eastern European river name *ar-Rus* for the raiders who attacked Seville from the river.²⁵

A special problem concerning the diplomatic activities of Byzantium and the policy of fortification of Khazarian strongholds is connected with the wars against the Caliphate; conflicts between the Khazars and the Arabs in the Caucasus were constant. A stone fortress of Khumara is the most magnificent Khazarian stronghold in the central region of the Northern Caucasus (Karachay-Cherkessia: see map, (**Fig. 5**); its fortification system could be connected with Byzantine traditions, but the results of recent excavations are still unpublished.²⁶

The ambassadors of the 'people of *Rhos*' could be members of the Byzantine diplomatic mission, as has been supposed, and the Byzantine seal from Heðeby could point to their route towards the Baltic – from Ingelheim to Heðeby. Another seal of Theodosius has recently been found in the contem-

16. Cf. Shepard 1995, 43.

17. De Administrando Imperio: Litavrin and Novoseltsev, eds., 297-298.

18. Litavrin and Novoseltsev, eds., 1991, 9.

19. Shepard 1995.

20. Four 'souvenir' coins (with uncertain stratigraphic date): Nosov 2017, 24.

21. Shevtsov 2017; 2018.

22. Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson noted in the discussion during the international conference on which this volume is based (*Vikings in the Mediterranean*, 27-30 Nov. 2019) that the Theophilos coin from Birka also originates from a 10th-century grave. On the previous discussion, see Shepard 1995, 50, n. 26.

23. Shepard 1995, 55.

24. Bulgakova 2010.

25. See Kalinina 2001.

26. Flyorov 2011, 120-123.

porary layer of the town of Ribe – the Viking port located on the border of Denmark and Friesland.²⁷ Last but not least, the famous Spillings hoard from Gotland contains numerous dirhams, a few Khazarian imitations of dirhams, Heðeby coins, and a silver coin of Theophilos.²⁸ These numismatic and sphragistic finds reinforce the hypothesis of Byzantine diplomatic activity in the Baltic Sea, just as Byzantine fortresses in the Don basin reinforce Dmitri Obolensky's hypothesis that the Byzantine commonwealth²⁹ from the 7th century initially included Khazaria and later, from the 9th century, early Rus'.³⁰ In any case, the Vikings and the Khazars found themselves in the sphere of interest of the 'Byzantine commonwealth' in the 930s-940s, and the facilitator in the pursuit of these transcontinental interests was the initial Scandinavian *Rus'* (*Rhos*).

27. Feveile 2010, 9.

28. Ostergren et al. 2009, 28.

29. Obolensky 1971.

30. On Khazaria, see Zuckerman 2006, 218; on Rus, see Shepard 1995; 1998, 173.

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Fig. 1. Right-Bank Tsymlyansk Fortress. Reconstruction by O. Fedorov (after Flyorov 2011, cover).



Fig. 2a and b.
Stone blocks from the ruined wall of the Right-Bank Tsymlyansk Fortress (photos by V. Flyorov)



Fig. 3. Tiles from the Right-Bank Tsymlyansk Fortress (after Kalinina, Flyorov, Petrukhin 2014, photo 3).



Fig. 4. Coins of Theophilus from Gnëzdovo (after Shevtsov 2018, fig. 3).

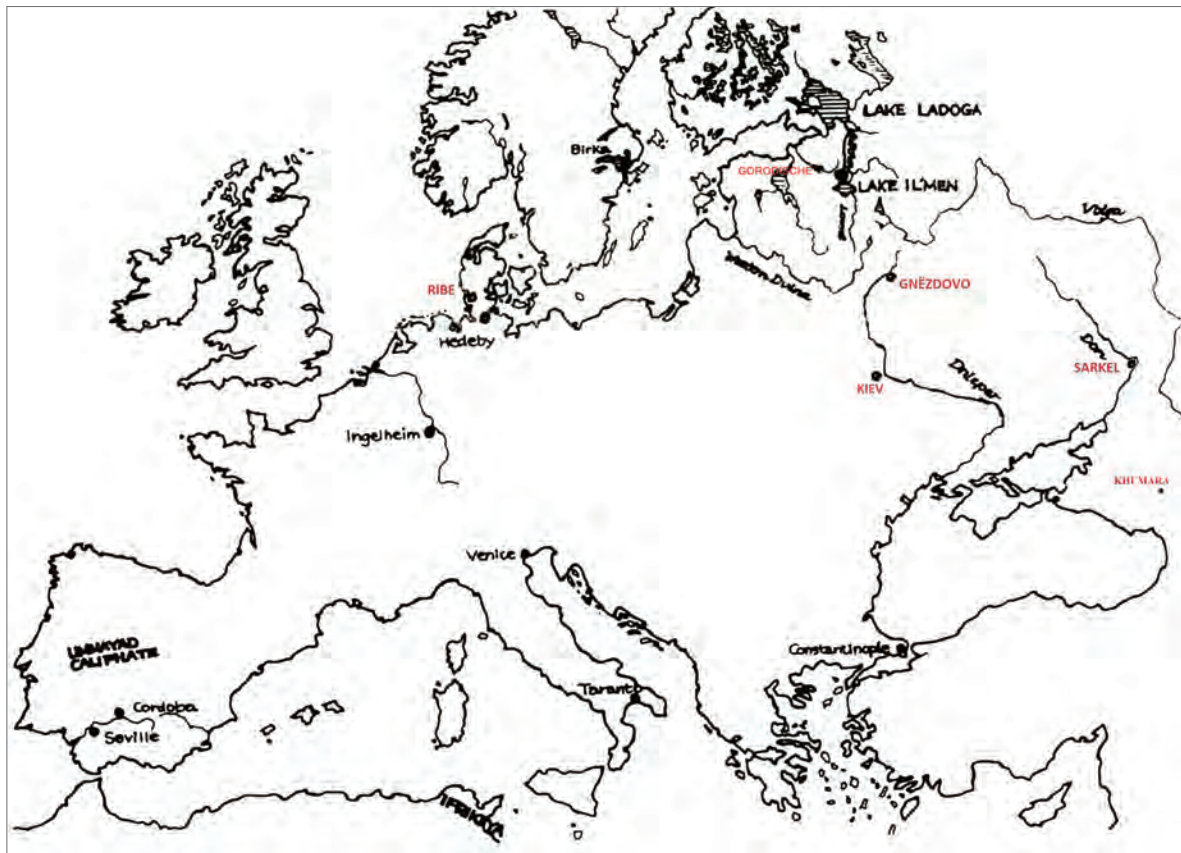


Fig. 5. Map of early medieval Europe, showing the location of sites mentioned in the text.

On Gold Acquired by Haraldr Sigurðarson During his Byzantine Service

Tatjana N. Jackson

In 1046, the Norwegian king Magnús the Good, the son of St. Óláfr, shared Norway with Haraldr Sigurðarson, his fourth cousin on the male line and his father's half-brother, who had returned to Norway after ten years of absence. The division of power is evidenced, for example, by the skald Þjóðólfr Arnórsson in his *Sexstefja* 10 composed c. 1066:

Vatn lézt, vísi, slitna,
víðkunnr, of skor þunnri,
(dýr klufu flóð) þars fóruð
(flaust) í Danmørk austan.
Bauð hq̄lf við sik síðan
sonr Ôleifs þér (hôla
frændr, hykk, at þar fyndisk
fegnir) lq̄nd ok þegna.

'You caused the water to be parted, wide-famed leader, around the thin planking, as you travelled from the east into Denmark; the splendid ships clove the flood. Then {Óláfr's son} [= Magnús] offered you half the lands and retainers with himself; I think that the kinsmen met there most joyfully'.¹

The circumstances of Haraldr's sojourn abroad (*útanlendis*) are well known from the great compendia of the Kings' sagas composed before 1235 (*Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla*). Having fled from the Battle of Stiklastaðir in 1030, Haraldr healed his wounds in Sweden during the first year, then spent several years in Old Rus', then about ten years in the service of the Byzantine emperor,² then returned to Rus', married Elizabeth, the daughter of Yaroslav the Wise, and, through Sweden, returned in 1046 – according to the Icelandic annals – to Norway.³

Shortly after these events, in the 1070s, Haraldr's stay in Constantinople is mentioned by the German chronicler Adam of Bremen, who resorted to the services of Danish informants and claims to have gained a lot of information from the Danish king Svend Estridsen (Sveinn Úlfsson of the sagas, 1047-1076), who was rather unfriendly towards Haraldr.⁴ Adam reports that this brother of Olaf the Saint had enriched himself in the service of the Byzantine emperor:

1. Whaley 2009, 122.

2. Haraldr's service in Byzantium was dated to 1034-1043 already by Gustav Storm (Storm 1884, 383-384); this date has since been accepted by many scholars. The new convincing dating of his arrival to Constantinople (1033) is suggested by Łukasz Różycki (Różycki, this volume).

3. See Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1951, 68-209; Storm, ed. 1888, 108.

4. According to Jakub Morawiec, Svend should be treated not as a source of Adam's information but as a rhetorical figure necessary for Adam to achieve his goals (Morawiec 2022). On Svend Estridsen, see Hybel 2016.

Haroldus quidam, frater Olaph, regis et martyris, vivente adhuc germano patriam egressus Constantino-polim exul abiit. Ubi miles imperatoris effectus multa prelia contra Sarracenos in mari et Scitas in terra gessit, fortitudine clarus et divitiis auctus vehementer.

‘A certain Harold, the brother of Olaf, king and martyr, left his fatherland while his brother still lived and went as an exile to Constantinople. Becoming there the emperor’s knight, he fought many battles with the Saracens by sea and with the Scythians by land, and he was distinguished for his bravery and much exalted for his riches’.⁵

Adam’s story of how Haraldr fell in the Battle of Stamford Bridge (1066) is supplemented by a *scholion* that contains a very important detail for us (to which we will return): namely, it mentions a *bar of gold* that Haraldr had brought from Greece:

Haroldus iste rex Nordmannorum CCC naves habuit magnas, quae omnes ibi remanserunt. Insuper *massa auri*, quam Haroldus a Grecia duxit, ad Bastardum tali fortuna pervenit. Erat autem pondus auri, quod vix bissemi iuvenes cervice levarent’.

‘this Norman King Harold had CCC large ships, which all were left there. Moreover, a *bar of gold* brought by Harold from Greece came into the hands of [William] the Bastard. This gold weighed so much that it could hardly be lifted on the shoulders of twelve young men’.⁶

I would like to emphasize that in describing Haraldr’s wealth the sagas speak mostly about *gold*, which they, no doubt, borrow from the skalds, contemporaries of King Haraldr. This should not necessarily mean that Haraldr’s wealth consisted mostly of gold: in the eyes of Icelandic skalds gold was primarily not a personification of wealth, but a materialization of power and luck (Old Norse *heill*) inherent to their owners⁷ (in our case, to Haraldr).

Bǫlverkr Arnórsson, in his *Drápa* about Haraldr harðráði composed before 1066 states (str. 7) that Haraldr provided Magnús with *gold*, while the latter gave him ‘the green ground’, which might imply half of Norway:

Heimil varð, es heyrðak,
hoddstríðir, þér síðan
græn, en gull bautt hōnum,
grund, es Magnús funduð.
Endisk ykkar frænda
allfriðliga á miðli
sætt, en síðan vætti
Sveinn rómǫldu einnar.

‘{Hoard-enemy} [GENEROUS MAN], the green ground was later granted to you, as I heard, when you met Magnús and *gave him gold*. The accord was kept most peacefully between you two kinsmen, but from then on Sveinn could only expect war’.⁸

Þjóðólfr Arnórsson in *Sexstefja* (c. 1066), in describing (str. 9) Haraldr’s ship on the way from Rus’ back to Norway, mentions that it was loaded with *gold*:

5. Schmeidler 1917, 153-154, III.13; translation: Reuter, ed. 2002, 124.

6. Schmeidler 1917, 196, Schol. 83; translation: Reuter, ed. 2002, 159.

7. Gurevich 2003, 131.

8. Gade, ed. 2009a, 292.

Reist eikikjölur austan
 orðigt vatn ór Garðum;
 Svíar tæðu þér síðan,
 snjallr landreki, allir.
 Gekk með golli miklu
 – glygg fell ótt of tyggja –
 höll á hléborð sollin
 Haralds skeið und vef breiðum.

‘The oaken keel clove the mounting water from the east out of Garðar; all the Swedes supported you after that, valiant land-ruler. Haraldr’s waterlogged warship advanced *with much gold*, listing to the leeward under her broad sail; a raging storm fell upon the prince’.⁹

Stúfr inn blindi Þórðarson kattar in *Stúfsdrápa* (c. 1067) speaks (str. 4) of Haraldr’s marriage and mentions the fact that he received a lot of *gold*, a situation that becomes clear only through the saga text that quotes this strophe. This is his marriage to the daughter of Yaroslav the Wise and his gold that he had sent to Yaroslav from Byzantium for safekeeping (see in more detail below):

Mægð gat orðlingr eiga
 ógnar mildr, þás vildi;
 gulls tók gauta spjalli
 gnótt ok bragnings dóttur.

‘The battle-generous monarch got the marriage he desired; {the confidant of the people} [KING] *took plenty of gold* and the ruler’s daughter’.¹⁰

The 11th-century skald Valgarðr á Velli not only mentions in his poem about Haraldr harðráði *gold* brought from *Garðar* (Old Rus’) but describes his ship decorated with *gold* (strs. 5, 10, 11):

Skauzt und farm inn frízta
 – frami veitisk þér – beiti;
 farðir goll ór Garðum
 grunlaust, Haraldr, austan.
 Stýrðir hvatt í hørðu,
 hugdyggr jofurr, glyggvi,
 – sátt, þás sædrif létti,
 Sigtún – en skip hniðu.

‘You pushed a ship under the most splendid cargo; success is granted you; Haraldr, without a doubt you brought *gold* west from *Garðar*. Loyal-minded prince, you steered vigorously in the hard storm, and the ships pitched; you sighted Sigtuna when the sea-spray eased’.

Inn vas í, sem brynni,
 iðglíkt séa miðjan,
 eldr, þars yðrum helduð,
 orms munn, skipum sunnan.
 Skeið bar skolpt inn rauða;
 skein af golli hreinu;
 dreki fór dagleið mikla;
 dúfu braut und húfi.

9. Whaley, ed. 2009, 121-122 (with my emendation in translation: *Garðar* instead of *Russia*).

10. Gade, ed. 2009b, 354.

‘Looking into the middle of the dragon-ship’s mouth, it was just as if fire was burning where you steered your ships from the south. The warship carried its red skull; it *glowed from the pure gold*; the dragon-ship sailed a long day’s journey; the wave broke beneath the hull’.

Lauðr vas lagt í beðja;
lék sollit haf gollu,
enn herskipum hrannir
høfuð ógurlið þógu.
Ræðr, en ræsir æðri
rístr aldri sæ kaldan,
– sveit tér sínum dróttni
snjóll – Nóregi öllum.

‘Foam was folded into layers; the swollen sea *played with gold*, and waves washed the terrifying heads of the warships. You rule all Norway, and a nobler regent will never carve the cold sea; the valiant company support their lord’.¹¹

Skaldic stanzas unequivocally indicate that the gold that Haraldr brought to Norway he exported from Old Rus’. Nothing, however, proves that Haraldr had enriched himself during his stay in Rus’. Rather, the skalds perceived Rus’ as an intermediate station on the way of Haraldr (or his gold) from Byzantium to Scandinavia.¹²

Indeed, in all great compendia of the Kings’ sagas it is said that Haraldr, having left Constantinople, ‘fór til Hólmgarðs á fund Jarisleifs konungs ok fekk þar góðar viðtøkur, tók þá til sín gullit mikla, er hann hafði áðr sent fyrir sér útan ór Miklagarði’ (‘went to Hólmgarðr to see King Jarisleifr and was well received there, and took charge of much gold he had previously sent back from Miklagarðr for himself’).¹³ *Morkinskinna* describes where Haraldr (who called himself Norðbrikt while in the emperor’s service) got his gold and how he sent it to Yaroslav the Wise:

Norðbrikt dvalðisk marga vetr í Affríka ok fekk þar *mikit gull* ok marga dýrgripi, en fé þat allt sem hann fekk, ok eigi þurfti hann at hafa til liðskostar, sendi hann með trúnaðarmönnum sínum norðr í Hólmgarð í vald ok gæzlu Jarisleifs konungs. Ok drósk þar svá mikit ógrynni fjár saman at eigi mátti mörkum telja, sem líkligt má þykkja, er hann herjaði þann hlut heimsins er nær var *auðgastr at gulli* ok dýrgripum.

‘Norðbrikt spent many years in Africa and acquired *much gold* and many treasures. All the money that he did not need for the provisioning of his military expenditures he sent with his confidential messengers north to Hólmgarðr for safekeeping with King Yaroslav. Such a huge amount of money was collected that it could not be weighed. That was not unlikely since he was raiding that part of the world that had virtually *the greatest store of gold* and treasures’.¹⁴

Traditionally, sending money to Yaroslav was perceived and discussed in the light of Haraldr’s matchmaking and Yaroslav’s initial refusal on the grounds that he could not give his daughter to the

11. Gade, ed. 2009c, 304-305, 308-309, 309-310.

12. Not only skaldic verses, but also runic inscriptions indicate that in the Scandinavian consciousness Byzantium was associated with gold. Thus two inscriptions from Södermanland (Sö 163 and Sö 165) commemorate men who travelled to Byzantium and ‘divided gold’ (i: krikium: uli: sifiti), the latter being understood by Kristel Zilmer as ‘the dividing of payment’ (Zilmer 2005, 185; see also 154, 167), which might indicate that payment was thought to be made in gold. On Sö 163, see Lindqvist, this volume.

13. Bjarni Einarsson, ed. 1985, 237; translation: Finlay, trans. 2004, 191.

14. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 94; translation: Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 136 (with my emendation in translation: *Hólmgarðr* instead of *Kiev*); cp. Bjarni Einarsson, ed. 1985, 237; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1951, 76.

one who was not rich enough. These activities of Haraldr, however, had a different, much deeper, purport. According to Galina Glazyrina, an explanation might be found through the analysis of the early Norwegian legislation, namely clause 47 of the Norwegian *Gulatingsslov*, put in writing in the second half of the 12th century but based on earlier norms, that formulates the rules of inheritance after a person had left the country.¹⁵ This man could appoint in public a person to manage his property for three years, after which time the successors came into the possession of this property. But if a man was planning to go to Byzantium, his belongings came into the hands of his successors at once. Under such circumstances, Haraldr had no reason to send the wealth obtained in the Byzantine emperor's service to his homeland. On the other hand, historical logic points to the obvious impossibility of keeping great wealth – probably not quite belonging to him – in Byzantium. The sagas have it that 'hann hefði gull þat er átti Grikkjakonungr' ('he kept the gold that belonged to the Byzantine Emperor').¹⁶ All this leads us to believe that Haraldr's transfer of gold to Yaroslav was factual, preserved by tradition.

Snorri Sturluson in *Heimskringla* gives one more explanation of the origin of Haraldr's wealth. He says that when Haraldr had returned from Byzantium to Rus' he was welcomed by Yaroslav the Wise.

Dvalðisk hann þar um vetrinn, tók þá í sína varðveizlu gull þat allt, er hann hafði áðr sent þannug útan af Miklagarði, ok margs konar dýrgripi. Var þat svá mikit fé, at engi maðr norðr í lönð hafði sét slíkt í eins manns eigu. Haraldr hafði þrim sinnum komit í pólútasvarf, meðan hann var í Miklagarði. Þat eru þar lög, at hvert sinn, er Grikkjakonungr deyr, þá skulu Væringjar hafa pólútasvarf. Þeir skulu þá ganga um allar pólútir konungs, þar sem fêhirzlur hans eru, ok skal hverr þá eignask at frjálusu, er hönðum kómr á.

'He stayed there for the winter taking now into his own keeping *all the gold* that he had previously sent there from out in Miklagarðr, and many kinds of valuable objects. It was so much wealth that no one in northern countries had seen so much in the possession of one man. Haraldr had three times been involved in palace plundering while he was in Miklagarðr. It is the law there that every time a king of the Greeks dies, then the Væringjar shall hold a palace plundering. They shall then go through all the king's palaces where his treasures are, and everyone shall then be free to keep whatever he gets his hands on'.¹⁷

Snorri, as we see, understands the first part of the word *pólútasvarf* as a Latin *palatia*, 'emperor's palace', and says that Haraldr, whilst serving in Miklagarðr, three times participated in passing, in accordance with the law (which hardly ever existed), through the recently-deceased emperor's palace, indulging in unlimited plunder.¹⁸ V. G. Vasil'yevskiy believed that after the blinding of Michael Calaphates, in which Haraldr was likely to have participated, he could have been amidst the outraged crowd that stormed the palace and could at that moment have taken part in what the sagas call *pólútasvarf* and fill his hands with Byzantine gold.¹⁹ A. I. Lyashchenko pointed that robberies were possible with palace revolutions so frequent in Byzantium. And in fact, Haraldr had experienced three shifts of rulers in Constantinople: Roman III (1034), Michael IV (1041) and Michael V (1042).²⁰ Sigfús Blöndal thought that 'it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the Varangians who were on guard duty when the emperor died were allowed to take certain precious objects as mementos'.²¹ Not all scholars

15. Glazyrina 1991, 124.

16. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 109; translation: Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 145.

17. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1951, 89-90; translation: Finlay and Faulkes, trans. 2015, 53.

18. For the treatment of the term *pólútasvarf* by scholars, see Jackson 2012, 481-483; Jackson and Podossinov 2015; Jackson 2019, 163-164.

19. Vasil'yevskiy 1908, 283.

20. Lyashchenko 1922, 127, n. 2.

21. Sigfús Blöndal 1978, 80.

have accepted Snorri's interpretation of *pólútasvarf*²², but they have agreed that Haraldr had had chances for the appropriation of public funds and personal enrichment during his Byzantine service.

The great compendia of the Kings' sagas draw a colourful picture of how, in exchange for half a Norwegian state, Haraldr gave Magnús half of his countless wealth. And it was *gold* that Haraldr gave to King Magnús. Viðar Pálsson notes that 'Magnús's surrender of power and the establishment of double-kingship took place in a highly ritualized manner that involved feasting and gift giving'.²³ We shall now examine the way it is described in the earliest of the three compendia, in *Morkinskinna* ch. 16, since *Fagrskinna* reproduces the scenes of interest to us almost verbatim from *Morkinskinna*, and Snorri Sturluson in *Heimskringla*, on the contrary, abbreviates the text, omitting remarkable details. *Morkinskinna* relates that Haraldr returned from Byzantium and met Magnús the Good, and asked him to share power between the two; that Magnús said in response that he would listen to the advice of his men; that Einarr Þambarskelmir pronounced that while Haraldr had been away they recaptured the country from Knútr and his sons and that they were used to serve one king and would serve only Magnús, as long as he lived and ruled the country. Unhappy with this state of affairs, Haraldr made an alliance with Sveinn Úlfsson grounded not only on their mutual claims to Norway and Denmark subject to Magnús but also on family ties that had been established through the marriage of Haraldr and Elizabeth Yaroslavna.²⁴

After a series of joint raids in Zealand and Funen, Haraldr and Sveinn parted. According to *Morkinskinna*, Haraldr received a secret letter from Magnús with a proposal to resume negotiations, cunningly broke his alliance with Sveinn, and sailed from Denmark to Norway. He went to his ancestral estates in Upplönd and unsuccessfully tried to make people call him *king*. Still, there turned up a man who did it, and the saga has preserved his name. Again, among those gifts that the king gave him in gratitude for the royal title, there were objects made of *gold*:

Þar var til einn maðr af buöndum er þat gærði, en þat var Þórir á Steig er síðan var mikill höfðingi, en þá var Þórir fimmtán vetra gamall er hann gaf Haraldí konungs nafn. En Haraldr gaf honum þá mósurbolla ok var gyrðr með silfri ok yfir kilpr gylldr af silfri. Bollinn sjálfr var ok fullr af brenndu silfri. Hann gaf honum ok *tvá gullhringa*, ok stóðu báðir saman mörk, ok skikkju sína; þat var brúnn purpuri.

'...and that was Þórir at Steig, who later became a great chieftain. Þórir was fifteen years old when he gave Haraldr the royal title. Haraldr presented him with a maple bowl girded about in silver and with a handle of gilded silver. The bowl itself was filled with pure silver. He also gave him *two gold rings*, worth a mark taken together, and his cloak. The cloak was dark purple'.²⁵

On the advice of their friends and advisers, Haraldr and Magnús concluded a truce and met to reach an agreement. A splendid feast was arranged. King Magnús was the host, and he entertained Haraldr with sixty of his men for three days. By the end of the first day Magnús had presented all Haraldr's men with swords, shields, other weapons, clothing, etc. The more noble a person was, the more valuable was the gift. After that, Magnús handed Haraldr two reed springs, saying: 'Haraldr frændi, hvárn reyrtin vili'ér [þiggja at] oss at gjöf?' ('Kinsman, which reed do you wish as a gift from me?')²⁶ Having chosen one of them, Haraldr received with it 'hálf Nóregs[konungs] veldi með öllum skatti ok skuld ok allri eign' ('half of the realm of Norway with all the taxes and dues and all

22. See Jackson 2019, 242-245.

23. Viðar Pálsson 2010, 97.

24. Jackson 2001.

25. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 125; translation: Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 154.

26. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 126; translation: Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 154.

properties’).²⁷ So, the division of Norway is presented in *Morkinskinna* as a gift at a feast. Gifts were etiquette elements of a feast, which, in the words of Aron Gurevich, was the most important institution of social communication.²⁸ A host was to make gifts to all his guests (and especially the noble ones) present at the celebration. But in our case, this is not a sign of hospitality, since Magnús’ gift to Haraldr differs strikingly from the gifts made by him to the rest of his guests. His gift – which remained at this point in the story without a reciprocal gift – was in fact an expectation of a return-gift. This might be argued, firstly, because, according to observations of Marcel Mauss, archaic societies possess a specific feature: the ‘voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous,’ but ‘in fact obligatory and interested,’ nature of transactions that almost always put on the form ‘of the gift generously offered,’ even when this gesture is nothing but a formality and when there is an economic interest behind it.²⁹ Secondly, the scene in which Magnús and his men are watching Haraldr’s ship shining with gold (this is the first, *in absentia*, meeting of the future co-rulers),³⁰ makes it clear to the reader that Magnús is aware of Haraldr’s riches and most likely counts on gold as a reciprocal gift.

And indeed, three days later, Haraldr’s return feast followed. His guests were Magnús and sixty of his men, each of whom received valuable gifts from Haraldr. When everyone except Magnús had received a gift, Haraldr ordered that the treasures be brought into the hall and the large and numerous chests be opened. He addressed Magnús with the following words:

Þér veittuð oss fyrra dags ríki mikit er þér höfðuð áðr unknit með sœmð af óvinum yðrum ok várum ok tókuð oss til samlags við yðr, ok var þat vel gort, enda höfðuð ér mikit til. Nú er hér í annan stað at sjá. Vér höfum verit útanlendis ok þó í nokkurum mannhættum áðr en vér hafim þessu *gulli* saman komit. Ok skulu vér nú skipta þessu í tvá staði ǫllu, ok skulu þér nú, frændi, eignask *hálf gullit* við oss, ár er þér vilduð at vér ættim hálfít landit með yðr.

‘The other day you conferred a great realm on me, which you had won from your enemies and mine with great honor. You took me as a coregent, and that was a generous gesture even though you had more than enough at your disposal. Now we must look at the other side. I have been abroad and in some peril in the process of accumulating this *gold*. I will now divide the whole amount into two halves, and you, kinsman, will take possession of *half my gold*, since you wished me to have half your land’.³¹

Having said this, Haraldr divided the treasure between them. So, at the second feast, the return gift was presented. This had to have led to strengthening friendly relations. The saga immediately makes it clear, however, that all this did not lead to great friendship and love between the two rulers. The saga tells that there was brought in *eitt gullstraup* ‘a goblet of gold’, as big as a man’s head. Haraldr then asked Magnús: ‘Frændi, hvar er nú þat *gull* er þú reiðir nú hér í gegn þessum knapphöfða?’ (‘Kinsman, where is the gold with which you could compensate this vessel?’). Magnús said that all the gold and silver had been used up in numerous military operations, and the only gold left was a ring on his arm. Haraldr answered by saying the following words with obvious mockery: ‘Þetta er lítit gull, frændi, ... þess konungs er á tvau konungríki ok meiri ván at sumir men ífisk í hvárt þér eiguð

27. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 126; translation: Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 154.

28. Gurevich 2003, 132.

29. Mauss 1966, 1.

30. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 80: ‘Þat sama haust er Magnús konungr lá skipum sínum við Skáney sá þeir einn dag at skip sigldi austan fyrir land. Þat var *allt gulli búit* fyrir ofan sjó ok váru á drekahöfuð fõgr.’ Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 129: ‘In the autumn when King Magnús was in Skáney with his ships, they observed one day how a ship sailed from the east along the coast. It was *all ornamented in gold* above the water line and carried splendid dragon heads fore and aft.’

31. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 127; translation: Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 155.

þenna hringinn eða eigi'. ('That does not amount to much *gold* for a man with two kingdoms, and some people will question whether you are even the owner of this ring'). But when Magnús claimed that the ring was his rightful property, since it was given to him, when they last parted, by his father Óláfr the Saint, Haraldr again could not hold back his emotions and commented on it in a far from friendly manner: 'Satt segið ér, herra. Óláfr konungr hefir yðr gefit hringinn, en þenna sama hring tók hann af feðr mínum fyr ekki mikla sök, ok eigi var þá gott smákonungum í landinu er faðir þinn var sem ríkastr'. ('That is the truth, lord. King Óláfr did give you the ring, but he took the same ring from my father for little cause. It was no pleasure to be a petty king in the country when your father was at the height of his power').³² Viðar Pálsson emphasizes that 'the underlying discontent between the two parties remains visible through the symbolic meaning of the objects exchanged'.³³ That is where their conversation ended. Further on in the saga, we read more than once about the clashes between the two kings and how difficult it was for them to stay restrained.

The whole story ends with a reference to the source of information, one of the six oral informants named in *Morkinskinna*: 'Með þessum hætti segir Þorgils, vitr maðr, ok kvað sér segja Goðríði, dóttur Guthorms Steigar-Þórissonar, ok hann lézk sjá mǫsurbollan ok mǫttulinn er Haraldr konungr gaf Þóri ok var þá skorinn í altaraklæði.' ('This is the way it was told by Þorgils, a prudent man, and he said that he had been told the story by Guðríðr, the daughter of Guthormr, the son of Steigar-Þórir. He said that he had seen the maple bowl and the cloak that King Haraldr had given Þórir. The latter had by then been cut into an altar cloth').³⁴ All this happened in 1046. Steigar-Þórir (hanged by king Magnús the Bare-Foot in 1094) – the first to recognize Haraldr as a king – could have been a witness to the events described. He could have told this to his son Guthormr, a father-in-law of the Norwegian king Eysteinn Magnússon (1103-1122). Guthormr could have told this to his daughter Guðríðr, who could have lived until the second half of the 12th century and could have told this story to a certain Icelander Þorgils Snorrason, known to *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, who died in 1201.³⁵

How can one evaluate the material discussed above? The fact that the wealth of Haraldr after his return from Byzantium is described by the Icelandic skalds, the king's contemporaries, and is mentioned by Adam of Bremen leads us to accept this information as reliable and think that Haraldr had in fact enriched himself *útanlendis*. The presence in the sagas of certain markers of oral tradition, and in particular references to those people who were living at the same time as Haraldr and those who could pass the stories from generation to generation, indicates that this saga had been transmitted orally and preserved in people's memory for about two centuries before it was put on parchment. King Haraldr himself is not the last among its oral informants: there are four references to him in *Morkinskinna* as a source of information. One might be sure that, if not to Iceland, but to the Scandinavian North the saga of his travels beyond the seas was brought by the king himself. The traditions about Haraldr seem to have blossomed more richly than about other rulers, and we may suspect that Haraldr had had a hand in this. He could have been the main patron of his own legend and could have supplied the narrative with information.³⁶ Some details might have been distorted in the process of oral transmission, but others appear to be reliable. Thus, for instance, the saga story about the transfer of Haraldr's wealth for safekeeping to Yaroslav the Wise deserves attention. On the contrary, following Gustav Storm one might doubt the saga story that Haraldr was seized by Empress Zóe and Emperor Monomachos

32. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 127-128; translation: Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 155.

33. Viðar Pálsson 2010, 99.

34. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 128; translation: Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 155-156.

35. See Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 59-60.

36. See my paper: Jackson 2018.

and brought to a dungeon, ‘ok var sú sök in fyrsta gefin honum at hann hefði gull þat er átti Grikkjakonungr’ (‘the first charge against him was that he kept the gold that belonged to the Byzantine Emperor’),³⁷ on the grounds that Kekaumenos, a contemporary of the events, does not say a word about it. According to him, μετὰ δὲ τὴν τελευτὴν τοῦ κυρ Μιχαὴλ καὶ τοῦ ἀνεψιοῦ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀποβασιλέως ἠθέλησεν ἐπὶ τοῦ Μονομάχου αἰτησάμενος ὑποχωρῆσαι εἰς τὴν χώραν αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐ συνεχωρήθη, ἀλλὰ γέγονεν αὐτῷ στενὴ ἢ ἔξοδος (‘after the death of the lord Michael and his nephew the ex-emperor [Michael the Caulker], Haraldr wished to return to his homeland and made this entreaty before Monomachos. He was not allowed but, in fact, his way out narrowed. Nonetheless, he secretly escaped’).³⁸ As for the *gold*, about which both the skalds and the saga authors speak, it might be a combination of two interconnected ideas: on the one hand, the image of Byzantium entrenched in the minds of contemporaries and descendants, from which Haraldr had returned, as an empire of wealth, power, and, above all, gold; on the other hand, the medieval Scandinavians’ notions of gold as a symbol of success, power, and well-being, as a materialization of ‘luck’ of the one who possessed it. As a result, Haraldr has remained in the memory of the next generations as a ruler ‘svá *auðigr at gulli*, at engi maðr vissi dæmi til’ (‘so *wealthy in gold* that people knew of no precedent’).³⁹

37. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, eds. 2011, 109; translation: Andersson and Gade, trans. 2000, 145.

38. Litavrin 1972, 282, 284; translation: North 1998/9, 7, §81.

39. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1951, 95; translation: Finlay and Faulkes, trans. 2015, 56.

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Another Comment on the Date of Haraldr Harðráði's Arrival at Byzantium

Łukasz Różycki

There is no need to introduce Haraldr Harðráði (Haraldr Sigurdsson), probably the most famous mercenary at the service of the rulers of Constantinople¹ and later a king of Norway whose actions greatly affected the Medieval universe.² Although many facts about Haraldr's life are well known, there are still some gaps, especially pertaining to his early years. The goal of this article is to analyse Russian, Scandinavian, Polish and especially Byzantine sources³ in order to establish as precise a date as possible for Haraldr Harðráði's arrival in Constantinople and the beginning of his service as a Byzantine mercenary.⁴

Haraldr was son of Sigurðr Syr, a Christian ruler of Ringerike, and his wife Ásta Gudbrandsdatter;⁵ Óleifr II Haraldsson, a king of Norway, was his older half-brother. Óleifr played a part in Haraldr's departure from Scandinavia and his military exile. In 1030 Óleifr, on his way from Novgorod fought the Battle of Stiklestad in which he faced a much larger force of troops of the local warlords. If he had won the battle decisively, he could have hoped to regain the Norwegian throne, especially since the mighty Knútr⁶ was engaged on other fronts and could not directly support the pagan earls.⁷ According to *Fagrskinna* and *Snorrina*,⁸ although Haraldr was only a teenager – probably at the tender age of 15 – he had managed to accumulate 600 soldiers and had hastily joined his brother on his way to attempt to resume the throne.⁹ The defeat in the Battle of Stiklestad had far-reaching consequences. In Scandinavia, only one strong ruler, Knútr the Great, was left and the supporters of king

1. On the importance of the northern mercenaries on the Empire's service, see Blöndal 1978, 15-32; Shepard 1973a, 53-92; 1993, 275-305; Somerville and McDonald 2014, 282-286; Theotokis 2012, 125-156. The Varangians seem to have been better suited to the Byzantine system of combat and tactics than the Franks, most likely because Varangian units had already operated in the Byzantine army in the 10th century.

2. On the significance of the Battle of Stamford Bridge, see the classic work by Elliot (1810) or the more recent one by DeVries (1999, 262-300).

3. During the time in question, Byzantine historiography was undergoing profound changes although its roots still went back to the classical Greek and Latin historiography. See Hunger 1978, 243-504; Kazhdan 2006, 7-42, 133-184, 273-294; Krumbacher 1891, 33-154; Ljubarskij 1992, 177-186. On the context of the changes, see especially Markopoulos 2006, 696-715; Alexander 1940, 194-209.

4. The text's title is a direct reference to an excellent article written by Jonathan Shepard (1973b, 145-150). Haraldr's stay at the court of Jaroslav the Wise has been very well presented by Lubik (2020, 6-20).

5. Ásta came from Vestfold; her first husband was Haraldr Grenske with whom she had a son, the future king Óláfr II. From her marriage with Sigurðr Syr she had Haraldr. It is possible that Ásta was baptised during the reign of Óláfr Tryggvason, during her stay at Sigurð's court.

6. For further information on Knútr and his empire, see Bolton 2009; Lund 2008.

7. Óláfr was unpopular due to his policy of centralisation and Christianisation. See Wilson 1971, 69-89.

8. For further information on the author and his work, see Beck *et al.*, eds., 2013; Ciklamini 1978, 15-33.

9. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 1.

Óleifr II of Norway (killed in the battle and later canonised¹⁰) had to look for refuge outside Knútr's area of influence.¹¹ Haraldr was lucky to have survived the massacre. According to the sagas, he took part in the battle side by side with his brother, never abandoning him and receiving a serious wound; allegedly, he was saved from the battlefield by Rǫngvaldr Brúsason.¹²

When Haraldr's wounds healed, he is said to have gone to Sweden to meet some of his brother's allies including earl Rǫngvaldr Brúsason. Young Haraldr acquired some ships and sailed to Kyiv to serve Iaroslav the Wise¹³ who welcomed him warmly and who is said to have appointed Haraldr commander of a part of the army and to have treated him like a son.¹⁴ As reported by *Fagrskinna*¹⁵ and *Morkinskinna*,¹⁶ Haraldr either assumed command of the Russian warriors or, according to the latter, of the country's entire defence forces. In fact, he is likely to have commanded a part of the Varangian contingent together with the more experienced Eilífr Rǫgnvaldsson who was probably Haraldr's military mentor.¹⁷ Interestingly, the Kyiv ruler's policy was partly oriented towards supporting expatriated kings and offering them his daughters in marriage. The court in Kyiv hosted Andrew I of Hungary, Edward the Exile (Edward Ætheling who married Agatha) and Haraldr III. Moreover, Anne of Kyiv married Philip I, king of France. This is evidence of a wise and well-planned dynastic policy, although we should note that Iaroslav was initially reluctant to marry his daughter to Haraldr, believing the man to be too poor a suitor. But young Haraldr was determined and during his service in Byzantium prudently sent spoils of war¹⁸ for storage in Kyiv. Eventually, in 1044, he finally married his patron's daughter, Elizaveta of Kyiv.

With a group of his soldiers, Haraldr stayed at the local court for several years, fighting with Slavs and taking part in an expedition in 1031 against Mieszko II¹⁹ during which, according to Snorri, he showed no mercy to the Poles.²⁰ It is hard to establish unambiguously the role played by the young exile at Iaroslav's court, although his late brother's reputation and family ties must have proved helpful.²¹ The ruler of Kyiv probably did not relinquish control over his army as the sagas suggest²² but Haraldr certainly played an important role in Iaroslav's force, even if it was purely symbolic. In particular, the Varangian squad was of great importance during the conflict with Mstislav and the subsequent fights with the Pechenegs²³ when the Varangians were at the centre of the Russian formation.²⁴ Therefore, for Haraldr, Kyiv was a good place to master the art of war.

Military fame must have been an attractive prospect to Haraldr, because soon after the conflict with Mstislav, he set sail for Constantinople along with 500 soldiers. Haraldr came from a royal fam-

10. Antonsson 2003, 143–160; Jackson 2010, 147–167.

11. *Fagrskinna*, 51.227; *Morkinskinna*, 9.57–58. Some of the escapees found refuge in Sweden – for example Rǫngvaldr Brúsason.

12. *Fagrskinna* 51.227; Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 1.

13. *Fagrskinna*, 51.227; *Morkinskinna*, 9.58; Lubik 2020, 6–20.

14. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 2.

15. *Fagrskinna*, 51.227.

16. *Morkinskinna*, 9.58.

17. See especially Lubik 2020, 15–17.

18. On the subject of Haraldr's spoils and the myths surrounding them, see Jackson, this volume.

19. Polish sources practically ignored Iaroslav's war with Mieszko II because of the greater problems faced by the ruler of the young country in the west and south. See *Galli Anonymi Cronica et Gesta ducum sive principum polonorum*, 1.17.

20. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 2; *Morkinskinna*, 9.58; *Fagrskinna* 51.227.

21. *Morkinskinna*, 9.58.

22. *Morkinskinna*, 9.58.

23. According to Kelly DeVries, however, Haraldr had an opportunity to fight with nomads in skirmishes while in Russian service; DeVries 1999, 25.

24. Rus' Primary Chronicle = RPC, 57, 58.

ily, and he was brave, young, and unafraid of fighting, as he had proved in Iaroslav's service; soldiers would undoubtedly have flocked to his banner. The young commander and his people travelled the traditional trade route 'from the Varangians to the Greeks' running through the Dnieper and along the western coast of the Black Sea.²⁵ It must have been hard to leave Iaroslav's court, but after the expedition against Poland, the ruler of Kyiv was not interested in subsequent military operations.²⁶ The winter expeditions for tribute to the lands of the subjugated Slavs were not satisfactory for Haraldr, since no significant spoils or military glory could be won there. The fact that the young soldier wanted to marry Elizaveta of Kyiv, to which Iaroslav had not yet agreed, could also have been important. In the end, Iaroslav expected his daughter's prospective husband to be a man of position and wealth.²⁷

Haraldr and his 500 soldiers²⁸ are said to have departed for the Empire and, according to *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, and Snorri's compilation, on his arrival the mercenary leader paid homage to Zoe Porphyrogenita and her husband Michael IV the Paphlagonian (who co-ruled with the empress in 1034-41). This is thought to have taken place at the beginning of Michael's rule in 1034;²⁹ a majority of scholars accept this date³⁰ based on the account of the author of *Fagrskinna*, which has been further corroborated by Jonathan Shepard's analysis.³¹ From then on, young Haraldr's career took off rapidly. During his service in Byzantium, he was ordered to join the troops headed by George Maniakes, one of the most prominent commanders of the time.³² Under his command, Haraldr fought in the East against pirates and the Arabs; he was also stationed in the Armenia and fought in Maniakes' Sicilian campaign.³³ While 1034 is generally assumed to be the year of Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople, Byzantine sources provide a slightly different picture, which requires some verification. The remainder of this article will address this issue.

In his excellent piece, Jonathan Shepard focused mainly on Snorri's work, which is mostly a compilation of earlier sagas.³⁴ The author stipulated clearly that in the spring after the Battle of Stiklestad,

25. On the traditional trade route from Rus' to the Empire, see Duczko 2004, 155-187, 248-253; Różycki 2014, 122-135.

26. RPC, 58-59. This does not indicate that Iaroslav's troops were not involved militarily. The Russian troops had to be on guard against the Pechenegs who ultimately attacked Kyiv in 1036, and against the rebellious Slavic subjects. The fights did not bring much military glory or spoils; rather it was difficult and dangerous routine service. Iaroslav took steps against his neighbours around 1038, after defeating the Pechenegs and taking care of the inner affairs of the duchy. Haraldr could not wait that long for expeditions that would bring him fame and riches, so he had to seek service abroad.

27. *Morkinskinna*, 9. 58-59. Attention should be drawn to the position of gold accumulated in the emperor's service or during the southern expeditions as presented in both sagas and Russian chronicles. Uspenskij 2016, 337-344.

28. It is obviously difficult to determine if Haraldr really had such a large unit at his personal disposal when he left Kyiv, so we should approach this piece of information with due caution. Snorri's narrative is somewhat confirmed by Kekaumenos, who mentions that 500 warriors were under the command of Haraldr before his mission to Sicily, but it is possible that these were men assigned to Haraldr for the duration of the campaign in the East. I return to this problem below.

29. Skylitzes, 39.

30. Ciggaar 1980, 385-401; Shepard 1973b, 145-150.

31. The year 1033 was suggested by Jonathan Shepard (1973b, 145-150), who claims that Haraldr spent three years in Kyivan Rus' and went to Constantinople in 1034. Shepard's hypothesis is based on interpreting the word *pólútasvarf* as 'polyudie', which in the 9th century probably meant an expedition to bring back Slavic slaves (or tribute). This opinion is based on several assumptions, however. Firstly, it is not certain whether the interpretation of the word is correct. Secondly, even if the word referred to 'polyudie' and Haraldr participated in this event three times, it does not mean that it was an annual occurrence. It is equally possible that all expeditions to Slavic lands were referred to by that word. Shepard (1973b, 145-150) also lists all previous suggestions for dating Haraldr's arrival. More recently, K. Ciggaar stated evasively that Haraldr reached Constantinople around 1034. This work is worth closer consideration because the author very convincingly describes Haraldr's expedition under Byzantine banners against the Pechenegs; see Ciggaar 1980, 385. One also needs to bear in mind that not all scholars accept the year of 1034; for example Adolf Stender-Petersen (1940, 19) suggested 1033.

32. This larger-than-life commander was described by Biały 2016, 171-185. See also Jacob 2007, 163-176.

33. There is no evidence that Haraldr was a commander of the Varangian Guard. Biały 2016, 177.

34. Glauser 1998, 34-44; Haraldsdóttir 1998, 97-109.

Haraldr set off for the court of Iaroslav the Wise. This, therefore, must have been around 1031. In Kyiv, Haraldr is said to have participated three times in *pólútasvarf*,³⁵ interpreted by Jonathan Shepard as the familiar Byzantine polyudie (τὰ πολύδια),³⁶ a term appearing in *De administrando Imperio*,³⁷ which referred to an annual winter expedition by the Rus' to Slavic territories with the goal of gathering a tribute.³⁸ Following this analysis, Shepard put forward a hypothesis that Haraldr spent three years in Kyivan Rus and arrived in Constantinople in 1034. Although this interpretation of the word *pólútasvarf* is extremely interesting and tempting, one needs to bear in mind that it has been a subject of a heated scholarly discussion and has been disputed by some academics including Tatjana Jackson.³⁹ She explained the term *pólútasvarf* differently – as a combination of *palatia* and *svarf*, which dramatically changes the context of the sentence.⁴⁰ It is also possible that the word *pólútasvarf* had referred to the definition attested from *De administrando Imperio* but that its meaning changed over a hundred years. There is nothing in Snorri's work that would imply that *pólútasvarf* referred to an annual event. Moreover, the content of *De administrando Imperio* by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus does not suggest this, either.⁴¹ The 10th century Byzantine text contains only information about the regular nature of these tribute-related expeditions to the Slavic territory.⁴² It is quite likely that every year troops were sent out to areas inhabited by various tribes in order to collect a tribute; consequently, there must have been many expeditions of this type every year. It is hard to imagine that tributes from all the settlements and subjugated lands could be collected during a single big expedition; the troops would have had to return to Kyiv laden with goods and slaves. It seems much more likely that small units were sent out to collect a tribute from one tribe or from a single location. If Shepard interpreted the term correctly, Haraldr could thus have participated in three *pólútasvarf* even in one year. There are too many points of uncertainty to establish how many years Haraldr spent at Iaroslav the Wise's court solely on the basis of the interpretation of the term *pólútasvarf*.

If the date of Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople cannot be determined based on his service to Iaroslav the Wise, it is only natural to resort again to the sagas and examine the rulers of the Empire at the time of Haraldr's arrival. *Morkinskinna* contains information that at that time Byzantium was ruled over by Michael IV the Paphlagonian and his wife Zoe.⁴³ According to the saga's author, Haraldr kept his royal origin secret from the imperial couple; in these circumstances it is very doubtful that an anonymous mercenary would have been granted an audience at the imperial court immediately after his arrival in Constantinople. Snorri mentioned that at the time in question, Constantinople was ruled by the empress Zoe and her husband Michael IV the Paphlagonian.⁴⁴ This is important because the empress Zoe had had her former husband Romanos III Argyros murdered on 11 April 1034.⁴⁵ Therefore, Haraldr's visit in Constantinople must have taken place after that date, after Michael IV the Paphlagonian had taken possession of the throne.⁴⁶ The next sequence of events seems clear: Haraldr fought with pirates and later with the Arabs on the mainland, and then set off for Sicily with Maniakes. While this interpretation of the sequence of events seems tempting, the Byzantine sources contradict

35. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 16.

36. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* = DAI 9.107.

37. See Jenkins (2012), 1-8. For further information on the work, see the classic book by Bury (1906, 517-578).

38. Stender-Petersen 1940, 1-9; Jenkins (2012), 59-60, with a subsequent list of literature on the subject.

39. See also the interpretation of the term *pólútasvarf* by Tatjana N. Jackson, this volume.

40. Jackson 2015, 79-81.

41. Jenkins 2012, 59-60.

42. DAI, 9.107.

43. *Morkinskinna*, 9.59.

44. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 3.

45. Skylitzes, 389-392.

46. Skylitzes, 392.

it. Notably, Snorri tends to be unreliable when it comes to the chronology of the rulers in Constantinople, to which he did not pay much attention. For example, he confused emperor Michael V Kalaphates with emperor Constantine IX Monomachos;⁴⁷ Snorri therefore confused the ruler allegedly blinded by Haraldr! Snorri's narration about Haraldr's romantic involvement often defies facts; his intention was to show the saga's protagonist in the best possible light.⁴⁸ While the sagas contain much extremely interesting information, they should not be used as the major source for determining the date of Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople, especially in preference to Byzantine sources.

There are two important sources from the imperial circle during the period in question; one of them is the *Strategikon* of Kekaumenos.⁴⁹ The author knew Haraldr personally and they served in the army together. The other source is John Skylitzes' work⁵⁰ which is an excellent example of the ancient traditions in the Byzantine Empire.⁵¹ The chronicle is precise, chronologically ordered and based on a large number of sources.⁵² Therefore, the Byzantine sources are more credible and chronologically closer to Haraldr's time than the Scandinavian sources⁵³ that have been used for dating the first years of Haraldr's military voyages.

Kekaumenos and Haraldr Harðráði

Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople is usually viewed with reference to the *Strategikon* of Kekaumenos and his account of Haraldr paying tribute to Michael the Paphlagonian.⁵⁴ It is interpreted as confirming the sagas and thus ending discussion about the chronology of the events, but some doubts have arisen. Haraldr's tribute to Michael the Paphlagonian mentioned by Kekaumenos did not take place during his first visit in Constantinople; further in his anecdote, Kekaumenos provided a chronological description of the events in Sicily. Kekaumenos described the events in the following way:

ἤγαγε δὲ καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ λαόν, ἄνδρας γενναίους πεντακοσίους καὶ εἰσῆλθε, καὶ ἐδέξατο αὐτὸν ὁ βασιλεὺς ὡς ἐνεδέχετο, καὶ ἀπέστειλεν αὐτὸν μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ εἰς Σικελίαν ἐκεῖ γὰρ ἦν ὁ ῥωμαϊκὸς στρατός, πολεμῶν τὴν νῆσον.⁵⁵

He also brought with himself a retinue (λαόν), five hundred men *noble by birth* (γενναῖος) and entered [the city of Constantinople] and was granted audience by the emperor; he was then sent with his men,⁵⁶ to Sicily, where the Roman army was attacking the island.⁵⁷

An analysis of this excerpt brings a number of frequently disregarded elements to our attention.⁵⁸

47. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 13. He subsequently confused Constantine with Michael V Kalaphates; Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 14.

48. Ciklamini 1978, 135.

49. We do not know who Kekaumenos was. In the early 20th century, there were attempts to associate the author of the *Strategikon* with Catacalon Cecaumenus. See Buckler, 1936, 9–10, 15–20; 1938, 139–141. For more on the family, see Savvides 1986, 23, 25–26.

50. For more on the author, see Seibt 1976, 81–85.

51. Seibt 1976, 81–85.

52. For an example, see Shepard 1975–6, 269–311. Shepard 1992, 171–181 has more on Skylitzes' sources.

53. NB: we believe what the authors of the sagas say about the rulers of Constantinople at the time when Haraldr was a mercenary (which was, in fact, of no consequence) but not about the emperor whom Haraldr blinded, if it happened at all.

54. Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 51.

55. Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 97. 7–10. From editio princeps: Wassiliesky and Jernstedt eds. 1896.

56. The author also emphasizes the military character of Haraldr's followers, by using the noun λαόν; in the translation, however, this repetition is unnecessary.

57. This translation from Greek is mine. I chose a more literal and precise translation, at the cost of its stylistic qualities.

58. See also an excellent Spanish translation of the piece: J. S. Codoñer, ed. and trans. 2000, 15.8.5. Similarly pre-

The soldiers who came with Haraldr to Constantinople were not bloodthirsty barbarians, as implied in the translation by Charlotte Roueché (literally: *five hundred valiant men*), but rather noble (γενναῖος) mercenaries answering directly to Haraldr and kept in imperial service.⁵⁹ Kekaumenos writes about them in positive terms. The use of the word λαόν, which in my opinion in this case indicates the warriors' direct fealty to Haraldr, may mean that the unit mentioned by Kekaumenos comprised mostly soldiers who either travelled with Haraldr to the Empire, or were assigned to his command during the campaign in the East. Consequently, it would indicate that this was a small mercenary detachment, which would place Haraldr as a mid-ranking commander within the imperial *tagmata*.⁶⁰ Even Snorri noted that during his service in the East under the command of Maniakes, Haraldr made a name for himself as a mercenary.⁶¹ Haraldr probably paid tribute to Michael the Paphlagonian as a commander of these troops while relocating from the East to Sicily. It was therefore not a welcoming audience, but rather a meeting with a promising young commander, who has already been in imperial service for a while, before dispatching him to conquer Sicily. A military audience of this sort was a regular occurrence. Haraldr could have been admitted before the emperor along with a number of other commanders, who served under Maniakes and were being sent on a new campaign. Audiences like these were intended to ensure the soldiers' loyalty to the emperor and to emphasize the ruler's role in the campaign.⁶² After a warm welcome by emperor Michael the Paphlagonian (interestingly, Kekaumenos does not mention the empress Zoe, who at that time had been removed from power by her husband), Haraldr took his unit to Sicily, where fighting had already begun. One fact is important and needs to be emphasized – Kekaumenos clearly indicates the order of these events, meaning that Haraldr first saw the emperor, and only afterwards was dispatched (ἀποστέλλω) with his men to Sicily.

If that is the case, then Kekaumenos did not describe Haraldr's first visit to Constantinople but rather the second one, preceding the relocation to Sicily. Haraldr's stay in the Byzantine capital following Maniakes' eastern campaign is also confirmed by the author of *Morkinskinna* who devoted some time to describing the events accompanying Haraldr's visit in the Byzantine capital.⁶³

Kekaumenos was a representative of the military aristocracy and knew Haraldr, his brother in arms.⁶⁴ Therefore, it comes as a surprise that this well-informed author would mislead his readers, especially in the part of the text dedicated to the advice for the emperor. An attempt to confront and combine Snorri's and Kekaumenos' narrations has resulted in the latter being considered less credible in matters of chronology by scholars like Jackson.⁶⁵ However, if we assume that Kekaumenos started his description of Haraldr's service from the moment they could have met, disregarding his service in

cise is the German translation by Beck (trans. 1964), 246. And, with slight changes, also the Russian version by Litavrin (1972), 5. 81.

59. Even if they were Haraldr's soldiers, it is hard to agree that a force of 500 soldiers who were to accompany Haraldr to Constantinople was significant or that the very command thereof would ensure his entrance to the emperor's palace. In the first half of the 11th century, the Byzantine Empire had a robust regular army (*tagmata*) and numerous *thémata* whose number, according to some estimates, could even have amounted to 80,000 soldiers. According to Treadgold (1995, 162), the total forces could have amounted to 280,000. In comparison with these numbers, 500 soldiers are unimpressive. Notably, Haraldr did not disclose his origin, as he wanted to remain anonymous.

60. This is further supported by the fact that following the campaigns in Sicily and Bulgaria, Haraldr was granted the title of *σπαθαροκανδιδάτορ* (*spatharocandidatus*), which was equal to the military title of *τοποτηρητής* (*topoteretes*), i.e. a mid-ranking commander.

61. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 4-5.

62. This was not out of the ordinary. Compare, e.g., how the emperors acted towards military commanders during campaigns in the 10th century: *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (C) 443-459.

63. *Morkinskinna*, 134-135.

64. Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 51.

65. Jackson 2015, 74.

the East under the command of Maniakes, the resulting chronological description of the events is accurate and bereft of serious errors:⁶⁶ Kekaumenos wrote that right after paying homage to the emperor, Haraldr was sent to Sicily with his soldiers and, later on, he fought in Bulgaria.⁶⁷

Kekaumenos met Haraldr during Maniakes' Sicilian campaign and so the description of Haraldr's story does not start with his arrival in Constantinople from Iaroslav's court but rather with his journey to the front in Sicily. It was a time when Haraldr had made a name for himself in the army commanded by Maniakes. His troops, relocated to Sicily from the East, had to return via Constantinople. An invading army needed supplies, machines of war and reinforcements. The expedition was so important that it is unlikely Maniakes would neglect to meet with the emperor in the Byzantine capital beforehand.⁶⁸ The emperor may also have met Haraldr, who enjoyed some military glory⁶⁹ and who, according to Snorri, commanded the European mercenaries as part of an imperial *tagmata*.⁷⁰ This procedure would be in accordance with the habits observed in the Byzantine capital. Following Haraldr's visit in the emperor's palace, Kekaumenos started a chronological description of the subsequent events in the mercenary's career. We can therefore assume that Kekaumenos did not write about the beginning of Haraldr's service but rather focused on its second part when Haraldr already enjoyed some respect. The imperial audience mentioned by the Byzantine writer could not have been granted during Haraldr's first visit in Constantinople but only after he had secured his position, before Maniakes' expedition to Sicily. By that time Haraldr must have enjoyed some military fame so the emperor could have wanted to give him an audience. This is the event referred to by Kekaumenos, who emphasised that the emperor received Haraldr personally for his war merits. Kekaumenos' narration is therefore useless for determining the date of Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople.

John Skylitzes and Haraldr Harðráði

We have concluded that Kekaumenos' narration is useless for the purposes of this text, since it starts with preparations for Maniakes' trip to Sicily in Constantinople. Are there any chronological indications in the other Byzantine source, John Skylitzes' chronicle? The chronicler did not mention Haraldr but he described in detail Giorgios Maniakes' career. He was not only one of the most distinguished commanders of his generation but also a future contender for the emperor's throne.⁷¹ Quite importantly, Skylitzes chose Maniakes to be one of the main protagonists of his chronicle. We can therefore compare the information from the sagas, oftentimes simplified and idealised,⁷² with the very precise Byzantine account written by Skylitzes.⁷³

Romanos III Argyros, the predecessor of Michael IV the Paphlagonian, is said to have died on 11

66. This is a description of the sequence of events in chronological order; there is no need to look for gaps in Kekaumenos' narration. Poppe 1971, 22.

67. Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, 51.

68. About the emperor rewarding the army and therefore controlling it, see, for example *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (B) 92-100.

69. Morkinskinna, 134-135.

70. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 4.

71. Shepard not only established the potential list of sources used by Skylitzes; he also identified some errors in the chronology which resulted from compiling these sources. In this case, a source is of great interest that was referred to by Shepard as 'B', which was probably a pamphlet in honour of the distinguished commander. See Shepard 1977-1979, 145-159. On the other great hero of Skylitzes' chronicle – i.e., Catacalon Cecaumenus – see Shepard 1992, 171-181.

72. Ciklamini 1978, 133-137.

73. This does not mean, however, that Skylitzes did not make mistakes. A case in point are his genealogical supplements which are evidence of diligence but are not free from error. See Polemis 1965, 74-75.

April 1034. According to Snorri, Haraldr made an appearance before empress Zoe and her husband Michael IV the Paphlagonian. This information, however, can be contested. Snorri might not have known who was the emperor at the time of Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople; this would not have been the first situation in which the chronicler had problems with the chronology of the Empire's rulers. It is quite possible that Snorri confused the audiences and that when he mentioned Michael and Zoe, he meant the audience granted by the imperial couple to Haraldr before the Sicilian campaign, which is also mentioned by Kekaumenos (who disregarded empress Zoe). It is equally possible that Snorri wanted to add splendour to his hero and that the audience following Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople never actually took place.⁷⁴

Next, Snorri noted that at the beginning of his service (in the autumn), Haraldr fought against pirates on Greek islands under the command of Georgios Maniakes.⁷⁵ In this situation, the commander is of extreme importance to subsequent narration. The Rus' probably arrived in Constantinople by sea in the summer or the early autumn when the level of the Dnieper was high enough to manoeuvre the Dnieper Rapids and ensure a relatively safe journey. In this case, the first campaign could have been launched only a few months after Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople.⁷⁶ The Byzantine sources do not mention any naval manoeuvres in 1033,⁷⁷ which is not surprising if these were some minor actions aimed against Arab pirates. Under the year of 1034 (6543), however, Skylitzes wrote that the emperor dismissed *strategos* Maniakes of Edessa, Haraldr's commander, and replaced him with Leon Lependrenos.⁷⁸ At the request of the emperor's brother, John the Orphanotrophos, Maniakes was relocated to Vaspurakan in western Armenia where he replaced *patrikos* Constantin Kabasilas. Maniakes stayed in Armenia until the operation in Italy commenced in 1037;⁷⁹ his stay in the East was therefore relatively short. Snorri wrote that Haraldr served in the fleet under the command of Maniakes and fought against pirates⁸⁰ on the Greek isles; this obviously could not have taken place during Maniakes' stay in Armenia where a conflict could have occurred between the two commanders as described by Snorri.⁸¹ If Haraldr stayed under the command of Maniakes, he could not have taken part in an operation against the Arab pirates in 1035 near the Cyclades, especially since the professional *thémata* fleet (the Kibyrrhaiōtai) repelled the threat.⁸² One could assume that the author of the saga made a mistake but the remark about the pirates is straightforward as is the description of Haraldr's conflict with Maniakes. This only corroborates the theory that the mercenary must have been a part of the *strategos*' main force.

On the other hand, if Haraldr had started his service earlier, in 1033, Snorri's narration is aligned with Skylitzes's work; then Maniakes, the *dux* of Edessa, could have seconded soldiers to fight against pirates. Moreover, the fight could have taken place during Haraldr's journey with his people to join

74. The imperial couple ruling one of the world's most powerful countries did not have to receive every mercenary commander personally, even of such noble origin; furthermore, Haraldr is said to have concealed his bloodline.

75. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 3.

76. Another important aspect is the transport to the location of war operations. If Haraldr fought for the emperor as early as in the autumn, we must not assume that he served in a remote corner of the Empire. In the summer and early autumn, transport to the vicinity of Edessa did not pose particular problems. Shepard (1973b, 149-150) suggested that Haraldr could also have been part of John the Orphanotrophos' operation in 1034 but the authors of the sagas clearly emphasised that Maniakes was the commander.

77. Haraldr probably did not take part in the operations against Egypt in 1033. Pryor and Jeffreys (2006), 77.

78. Skylitzes, 397.

79. This information is confirmed by Skylitzes, whose work is chronologically precise for Armenia (especially until the 1040s but also for Maniakes' life). See additionally Shepard 1975-6, 276-279.

80. The fights in the Aegean Sea with the buccaneers from Crete in the 9th and 10th centuries are examples of these fights against pirates. For further information, see Christides 1981, 77-111.

81. Magnusson and Palsson, trans., 2005, 4.

82. Pryor and Jeffreys (2006), 88.

Maniakes and serve him. The pirates from the Cyclades were defeated as late as in May 1035;⁸³ therefore until 1035 the Arab pirates were continuously active and Haraldr would have had numerous opportunities to fight against them. In this case, instead of looking for big battles we can be content with the fact that Haraldr took part in pacification operations along the coast or even en route by sea from Constantinople to Maniakes' force (formally as a soldier under the command of Maniakes). In addition, the earlier date provides an opportunity for Haraldr to visit the Holy Land while still under the command of Maniakes, before the latter was transferred to Armenia. We know that following the conquest of Edessa, Maniakes' troops were involved in pacification activities in the vicinity of the conquered and pillaged city:⁸⁴ the authors of the sagas must have presented it as campaigns against the Saracen in Africa.

On the other hand, if we shift the date of Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople to the year of 1034, then Skylitzes' narration would contradict the sagas. Maniakes, transferred to Armenia, could not have sent Haraldr to fight against pirates and even if he did, Haraldr did not stay with his commander, so that he would not have had an opportunity to engage in a conflict with him, widely recounted by the sources, including Snorri. Haraldr would not have had an opportunity to visit the Holy Land;⁸⁵ if the date is shifted to 1033, this would be quite plausible, for example during the army's winter hiatuses when military manoeuvres were put on hold.

There is only one possibility left: Haraldr started his service under the command of Maniakes during the latter's stay in Edessa – i.e., before September 1034. If Haraldr arrived in the summer and started his service in the autumn, it could not have taken place in the year when Maniakes was relocated. It must have happened a year earlier (1033). Haraldr's first war expedition was under that extraordinary commander so it probably took place in the autumn of 1033 and the spring of 1034.⁸⁶ At that time, Haraldr could have taken part in an operation against pirates, fought against the Saracen,⁸⁷ or even visited the Holy Land.

In this scenario, following Maniakes' military career, we should shift Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople to 1033. Another argument in favour of this theory may be the peace of Rus'. Following an expedition to Poland in 1031,⁸⁸ Iaroslav the Wise was involved with internal affairs, so his army was fairly idle except for pacification actions that did not bring great glory or the much-coveted spoils. If Haraldr intended to accumulate the property he needed to seize his brother's throne and marry Iaroslav's daughter,⁸⁹ he had to be more proactive. A two-year break in serious military expeditions seems long enough for Haraldr to have decided to take his chances in the Eastern Roman Empire.

Conclusions

A scholar working with a source always needs to exercise caution and a certain amount of healthy scepticism. In this case, a comparative analysis of the sources puts us in a rather favourable position:

83. Skylitzes, 398.

84. Dostourian 1993, 1.58; Biały 2016, 175; Ripper 2009, 299–303.

85. He might have visited as a pilgrim, during a break in the military activities in the East. We also cannot rule out the possibility that the lands surrounding Edessa, where Maniakes's troops were fighting initially, were deemed to be close enough to Jerusalem by the saga-writers to be considered part of the Holy Land.

86. In 1034 mainly Pisa's fleet was involved in fights against pirates; it attacked Bona under control of the Zirid dynasty, but the events took place far from Edessa. According to John Pryor and Elizabeth Jeffreys (2006, 90), they resulted in Sharaf al-Dawla's expedition in the Ionian Sea but it is dated back to 1047.

87. In my opinion, however, the fights against the Saracen took place during Maniakes' stay in Armenia.

88. RPC, 58.

89. Morkinskinna, 9. 58-59.

we have at our disposal Medieval sagas and works of Byzantine historians – sources, therefore, representing two different cultures and historiographical traditions. While the sagas offer a less complicated solution to the problem of the date of Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople, an in-depth analysis suggests that the answer is not as clear-cut. If we follow for the sagas exclusively, we need to agree on 1034: i.e., the beginning of the reign of Michael IV. Other information from the sagas, however, does not align with our general knowledge of the course of Maniakes' service. Haraldr could not have served in the Byzantine fleet under the command of Maniakes in the autumn of 1034 because the latter had been relocated to Armenia. Furthermore, the authors of the sagas emphasized that Haraldr's initial career revolved around Maniakes. This leads to a conclusion that Maniakes was transferred to Armenia with his troops including Haraldr and other mercenaries. The work of Skylitzes allows us to cross-reference the conflicts in which Haraldr was allegedly involved, which were described in the sagas, with the exact dates provided by the Byzantine historian.

Therefore, if we consider the Byzantine chronicle a precise and accurate account of the events, Haraldr's arrival in Constantinople should be dated one year earlier to allow an opportunity for him to participate in a sea expedition under the command of Maniakes against the pirates⁹⁰ and in military actions against the Arabs near Edessa, before the Armenian campaign. A year later (1034) Maniakes' troops had already made their way to Vaspurakan, fighting against the Arabs on the mainland. For Haraldr to have been able to participate in the sea manoeuvres, he must have started his service under Maniakes in 1033 when the commander was stationed in Edessa. This is the best solution, bearing in mind the fact that the Byzantine sources are more credible than the sagas.⁹¹ It is equally possible that the Armenian campaigns under the command of Maniakes were described in the sagas as Haraldr's fights against the Arabs in Africa. This would be a solution to one of the chronological puzzles in Haraldr's life. The issue of his arrival in Constantinople remains open although 1033 is the only date that offers reconciliation between the sagas and the Byzantine chronicles.

Abbreviations

DAI = Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*

RPC = Rus' Primary Chronicle

90. However, this does not exclude the three expeditions under the Russian rule for a Slavic tribute. As Shepard noted (1973b, 149), Haraldr's expeditions were described during his second stay in Kyiv. It is therefore perfectly logical that the first time Haraldr participated in two expeditions and during his second stay at Iaroslav's court in one expedition. This version is offered by the authors of the sagas.

91. This is especially true of Snorri's narration, as Marlene Ciklamini (1978, 135) and others have pointed out.

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MEDITERRANEAN REFLECTIONS

In Quest of Glory: Gendered Expectations and Narratives of Past Behaviour

Marianne Moen

Introduction

Whilst the Viking expansion zones to the East and West are both well-documented and extensively studied,¹ links with Southern Europe and the Mediterranean remain relatively obscure. By all accounts not a destination for regular raids or settlements, there is nevertheless material indicating sporadic contact.² This paper seeks to contextualise the presence of Viking groups in the Mediterranean with better-known expansion areas in order to facilitate a discussion of gendered identities. The overall aim is to contribute to a renewed interest in the gendered bias apparent in the persistent archaeological reticence of acknowledging women as active social agents,³ tied in with a critique of politically charged knowledge production.⁴

Thus the paper offers a reflection on the perceived configurations of travelling groups in light of feminist critiques of culturally engrained assumptions of binary gendered differences. The reigning practice is to consider raiding groups as homogenous, consisting primarily of young men.⁵ This, however, is arguably a manifestation of the archaeological tendency to project a simplified binary gender ideology onto the distant human past, the Viking Age included.⁶ By doing so, we cloud a complex reality in which gendered experiences and opportunities varied according to a number of factors. Moreover, we perpetuate a dangerous cultural norm by glossing the past in our own image. Positioning gender as binary not only neglects substantial amounts of material, it also disregards the complexity of social identity and cultural experience, which are made up of a multitude of different strands of overlapping and intersecting identities to form complex dynamics both individually and at group level.⁷ Furthermore, archaeological narratives of mobility on a wider scale retain a strong tendency to

1. Aannestad, H. L., Pedersen, U., Moen, M., Naumann, E. & Berg, H. (eds.) 2020. *Vikings Across Boundaries: Viking-Age Transformations Volume II*, London: Routledge.

2. Price, N. 2008. The Vikings in Spain, North Africa and the Mediterranean *In*: Price, N. & Brink, S. (eds.) *The Viking World*. London: Routledge, Christys, A. 2015. *Vikings in the south: voyages to Iberia and the Mediterranean*, London, Bloomsbury Academic.

3. As discussed with regards to mobility in Frieman *et al.* 2019.

4. Moen 2019b.

5. Raffield, B. 2016. Bands of brothers: a re-appraisal of the Viking Great Army and its implications for the Scandinavian colonization of England. *Early Medieval Europe*, 24, 308-337..

6. As critiqued in Moen 2019a with regard to the Viking Age; cf. Ghisleni *et al.* 2016; Bickle 2019; Dempsey 2019.

7. Danielsson, I.-M. B. 2007. *Masking moments: the transitions of bodies and beings in late Iron Age Scandinavia*. 40 PhD, Stockholms universitet, Arwill-Nordbladh, E. 2012. Ability and Disability. On Bodily Variations and Bodily Possibilities in Viking Age Myth and Image. *In*: Danielsson, I.-M. B. & Thedeén, S. (eds.) *To Tender Gender: The Past and Future of Gender Research in Archaeology*. Stockholm: Stockholm University, Danielsson, I.-M. B. & Thedeén, S. 2012. Gender Questions. *In*: Danielsson, I.-M. B. & Thedeén, S. (eds.) *To Tender Gender: the pasts and futures of gender*

present different motivations and causal factors depending on the gender of the individuals involved: male travel is cast in the light of exploration and gain, whilst female travel is often cast in the light of travelling because of men, with little or no agency accorded to the women involved.⁸ Arguably, this is attributable to modern gendered ideals rather than to an inherent gendered difference in behaviour and desires, and it is in this context necessary to recognise the promotion of gender as binary as rooted in traditions of modern western knowledge production,⁹ and indeed politically charged ideology.

Mediterranean journeys

The source material for Viking presence in the Mediterranean has been explored elsewhere,¹⁰ and will be further detailed by other contributors to this volume. Moreover, this article is more concerned with how we bring the present into the past when it comes to how we perceive gender as a behavioural determinant. Hence, the briefest of sketches to set the background is sufficient in terms of the material. With the best-attested Mediterranean incursion being the ambitious raid of 859-861,¹¹ it is clear we are looking primarily towards raiding groups and combative fleets. Best documented by the Arab historian Ibn Hayyān,¹² it also crops up in other sources, including the Irish chronicler Duaid Mac-Fuirbis who records how it brought a great host of Moors in captivity to Ireland,¹³ with presumably far-flung consequences. The cultural ramifications of enforced mobility would have been considerable for all parties involved, probably fostering long-lived and profound after-effects on the deprived communities, those who eventually received the captives, and those who transported them, not to mention the captives themselves. There are other mentions of slaving and acts of ransom from this raid, such as when the fleet attacked a town on the Moroccan coast and captured two royal women, who were subsequently ransomed.¹⁴ These two examples are particularly interesting for a feminist deconstruction of traditional narratives, in that they specifically refer to the relocation of a large group of apparently male slaves (the host of Moors, described as the ‘blue men of Ireland’¹⁵) and the ransoming of female captives respectively. This goes against stereotype, in which there has been a tradition of focusing on the trade and exploitation of primarily female slaves, with suggestions they were a prime motivator for many raids.¹⁶ Current knowledge structures arguably promote interpretations of enforced mobility in a much higher degree when the subjects are female rather than male, leading to the potential neglect of other dynamics.

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8. Frieman *et al.* 2019.

9. Connell, R. 1987. *Gender and power: society, the person and sexual politics*, Cambridge, Polity Press, Haraway, D. [1988] 2013. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. In: Mccann, C. R. & Kim, S.-K. (eds.) *Feminist Theory Reader: local and global perspectives*. New York: Routledge..

10. Price 2008; Christys 2015.

11. Christys 2015, 47-64.

12. Christys 2015, 48.

13. Price 2008, 466.

14. Price 2008, 466; Christys 2015, 54.

15. Price 2008, 466.

16. Barrett 2008; Raffield *et al.* 2016; 2017

Regardless of the potential spoils in terms of slaves and other goods, however, the fleet met with military resistance of a magnitude that may have acted as a deterrent for future expeditions,¹⁷ especially of a similar scale, though other mentions of presumably smaller endeavours crop up in subsequent years.¹⁸ It is not the clarification of when and where that is in focus here, however; it is a deliberation of *who*. How we envisage the social configuration of such groups forms a fundamental stepping-stone for how we envisage the social dynamics of Viking-Age society.

Travelling women in archaeological knowledge production

Viking-Age scholarship has a long tradition of associating women with hearth and home, and men with exploits outside the home.¹⁹ This perceived divide has become so entrenched as to be ubiquitous, and yet it is by no means difficult to challenge.²⁰ As I have demonstrated elsewhere, it is arguably more embedded in the academic discourse than it is universally manifested in the material,²¹ meaning a review is overdue. Travelling ranks amongst the pursuits often reserved for men in this model, especially when done for financial gain, discovery, and other forms of intrepid ventures.²² This is not restricted to Viking-Age studies but permeates archaeological interpretations, with travelling as a manifestation of active agency rarely envisaged for women.²³ Instead, female mobility is often explained in terms of exogamous marriages, with women ‘being sent’ in marriage²⁴ or otherwise exchanged.²⁵ Such narratives play into the culturally dominant view of women as passive, in which active agency is exchanged for interpretations wherein things *happen to* women, rather than things happening as a result of their actions, as has been widely discussed within feminist scholarship.²⁶ Thus, much has been made of a (contested) study which suggested that Iceland was populated in the main by Norwegian men and Irish women,²⁷ often proposed as slaves. Conversely, male enforced mobility cannot be said to have occasioned the same degree of academic interest, as, for example, in the above-mentioned influx of slaves to Ireland. Thus, this discussion enters a long-standing tradition of querying the interpretative frameworks and knowledge structures that allow the perpetuation of these stereotypes against mounting scrutiny.

Much Viking-Age scholarship has promoted a trope according to which women only travelled when part of a settlement mission,²⁸ fitting with a wider tendency to place women’s agency, actions, and motivations within the family sphere. This manifests on various societal levels, from explanations of imports in female graves in Norway as gifts from male travellers,²⁹ to the explanation of the presence of typical female Scandinavian jewellery in Eastern European Viking-Age burials as presents from Scandinavian men to their local wives or girlfriends.³⁰ Conversely, when imports are found in

17. Price 2008, 468.

18. Christys 2015, 95.

19. Arwill-Nordbladh 1998; Dommasnes [1991] 1998; Pedersen 2014; Moen 2019a.

20. E.g., Dommasnes [1991] 1998, 339; Clover 1993; Price 2002, 111; Moen 2019a.

21. Moen 2019a.

22. E.g., Solberg 2003; Barrett 2008; Sigurðsson 2008; 2010; Raffield *et al.* 2016.

23. See Frieman *et al.* 2019 for a discussion.

24. Skre 2007, 467; Frei *et al.* 2017.

25. Raffield 2016; Raffield *et al.* 2017.

26. Connell 1987; Pyburn 2004; Wylie 2007, 2012.

27. See Helgason *et al.* 2000 for the original study and, e.g., Krewińska *et al.* 2015 for an alternative view.

28. As, for example, in Jesch 1991; Jochens 2002; Barrett 2008.

29. As assumed in Barrett 2010, 293; as discussed in Aannestad 2015; and as assumed in Jesch 2015.

30. Stalsberg 2001.

male graves, they are interpreted as signs of networks, trade, or travel, whilst typical male Scandinavian objects found in Eastern Europe are used to argue for a Scandinavian presence there.³¹ This tendency to interpret things differently according to the gender of the persons they are associated with is arguably caused by the preconceptions of the archaeologists who interpret them, rather than any inherent qualities in the objects themselves.³² An imported brooch remains the same regardless of the perceived gender of the person with whom it is buried, but modern eyes instantly perceive a difference based on that gender. Though gendered differences in interpretations can of course be justifiable if supported by strong corroborating archaeological material, this is often not the case. We remain therefore in a situation in which interpretations that promote active narratives for men and passive ones for women are still the preferred option, even in cases in which the material remains give little support to such biases.³³

The belief that women only travelled when they were fulfilling a perceived natural role of bringing the family, and thus figuratively the hearth, with them can be challenged on a number of levels. The family sagas give us travelling women in many guises, featuring prominently in *Grœnlendinga Saga*³⁴ and *Eyrbyggja Saga*.³⁵ The famous Auðr the Deepminded also travelled extensively, making active choices to do so.³⁶ Stray mentions of travelling women occur often enough to give the impression that it was well within the remits of normal behaviour for women of higher social classes to initiate and engage in travel for their own business or pleasure.³⁷

Furthermore, archaeological material shows the participation of women at various stages of the Viking expansion period.³⁸ In the British Isles, Jane Kershaw's work has demonstrated the presence of Scandinavian women in the first waves of travellers,³⁹ whilst isotope analysis from burials from the East of England has indicated the same.⁴⁰ Moreover, the skeletal material from the mass burial at the winter camp of the Great Heathen Army at Repton, though not exhaustively examined, shows around 20% female remains.⁴¹ Studies of mtDNA⁴² furthermore show considerable female Scandinavian ancestry in several parts of the Viking World, including Orkney and Iceland.⁴³ In the context of journeys south, the Swedish rune-stone raised by a woman named Ingerun on the occasion of her setting out on a pilgrimage is also relevant,⁴⁴ as her route is likely to have taken her through the Mediterranean.⁴⁵

Women taking part in the wider Viking phenomenon are, in other words, no longer in question. In what capacity these women joined raids and migrations remains open for debate, however, and we will move on to consider women travelling in a more warlike context, to explore the link with the Mediterranean in greater detail.

31. Stalsberg 2001; Hillerdal 2009a, 2009b.

32. As discussed in Hedenstierna-Jonson forthcoming.

33. See e.g., Conkey and Spector 1984; Wylie 2007 for critiques of this bias.

34. Jørgensen and Hagland, eds. 2004 ("Soga om Grœnlendinga"), 291-302.

35. Jørgensen and Hagland, eds. 2004 ("Sagaen om Øyrbyggene"), 117-198.

36. Amongst others Larsen 1989; Jørgensen and Hagland, eds. 2004 ("Soga om Eirik Raude"), 303-320.

37. Various examples in Larsen 1989; the story of Ásgjerd who had travelled to Iceland and gained land there in *Njáls saga*; and mention of a lady traveller in Jørgensen and Hagland, eds. 2004 ("Tåtten om Einar Skulason"), 323-324.

38. Stalsberg 2001; Duczko 2004: 9; Hillerdal 2009b; Kershaw 2020; Nordstein 2020.

39. Kershaw 2013.

40. McLeod 2011.

41. Pers. communication Cat Jarman; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 74.

42. Passed down through the maternal line only.

43. Goodacre *et al.* 2005.

44. Sawyer 2000, 122; see also Kitzler Åhfeldt, this volume.

45. Davidson 1976, 248.

Gender dynamics and travelling groups

In the *Annals of Inisfallen* for the year 905, we find the following enigmatic entry, interpreted as a reference to a Viking host raiding in the Northern Mediterranean:⁴⁶

Barbarians came across the Tyrrhenian Sea and across every sea besides from the east of the world, and they arrived in Italy and Rome on steeds, and clad in leather garments and **accompanied by close-cropped women**.⁴⁷

This brief sentence gives an opening to speculate whether women participated in journeys to the Mediterranean whose foremost purpose was to raid, and to discuss gendered identities in raiding groups. The social significance of this thereby also provides a further point to consider women as part of war bands in light of politicised knowledge production, which continues to colour ideas of gendered behavioural restrictions as outlined above. Moreover, the sentence makes it clear that these women were unusual: their appearance, specifically their hair, was worthy of note. In order to do full justice to the reference, a brief consideration of how appearances can play into or against cultural expectations both past and present will be included as well.

Women in a warlike context

In line with culturally engrained beliefs of gender-appropriate behaviour, there is an academic reticence against considering women warriors as anything other than wishful thinking.⁴⁸ And yet, archaeological material testifies to the occasional association of women with weapons. The most famous such case is currently the chamber grave Bj.581 from Birka, containing the body of a woman in a wealthy weapons grave.⁴⁹ Other examples include Aunvollen in Norway, which includes a sword,⁵⁰ along with a number of female-gendered graves in Norway containing axes and occasionally arrowheads or shields.⁵¹ The female burial with a battle axe at Bogøvej, Langeland in Denmark⁵² is also well known, and a few cases are even known from the British Isles, such as the spear found with a female burial in York⁵³ and the oft-cited woman with a sword from mound 50 at Heath Wood.⁵⁴ These are only a few selected examples, to demonstrate that the association between women and weapons, though certainly not common, is supported in mortuary material.

Though more indirect than weapon burials, the above-mentioned female remains from Repton also deserve consideration.⁵⁵ Though we do not know in what capacity these women were there, this is in a sense irrelevant to the larger question of their involvement with warfare. Even if we consider them in more traditional roles, as ‘camp followers’ or ‘wives’ rather than warriors, such traditional roles would have required the assertion and manifestation of social agency, and their presence would have influenced the collective identity of the group of which they were a part.

46. Price 2019, 275.

47. Mac Airt 1951 .

48. As seen in Jesch 2015; Androshchuk 2017; Williams 2017; discussed in Price et al. 2019; Hedenstierna-Jonson forthcoming.

49. Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017.

50. Stenvik 1981.

51. Gardela 2013; 2018; Lund and Moen 2019; Moen 2019a.

52. Pedersen 2010, 49.

53. Redmond 2007, 95.

54. McLeod 2011; 2019.

55. Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001.

Written sources also give reason to question the idea of homogenous male identities as self-evident in travelling parties. Looking East, we find John Skylitzes' oft-cited description of women warriors amongst the Rus' forces during the siege of Dorolston in Bulgaria, AD 971.⁵⁶ In the aftermath of one of the fiercest battles of the siege, the winning Byzantine forces, going out to loot the fallen, discovered women dressed as men who had died in battle.⁵⁷ The Scandinavian identity of the Rus', though a contentious subject, is sufficiently well established for this source to be used here.⁵⁸

To the West, meanwhile, we find perhaps the most famous of women Viking warriors in text in the form of the Red Girl of the 12th century Irish chronicle *Cordagh Ghaedhel re Gallaiigh*. This account of a Viking attack on Dublin in the 9th century so names one of the fleet commanders on account of her red hair,⁵⁹ suggesting the possibility of high-ranking female military commanders. On a similar note, the *Annals of Ulster* twice refer to female war commanders: once in 881 and again in 1098.⁶⁰

Also relevant here is Abbo's eye-witness account from a siege of Paris in 885. Whilst the source does not describe whether or not these women fought themselves, the description of Danish women amongst the Viking army places them in a context of war and violence,⁶¹ and most certainly as part of a group travelling with the purpose of achieving gain through violent ends. They thus ought to be considered a part of the social fabric of the group to which they belonged.

Heroic sagas and Eddic poetry further provide numerous examples of raiding shield maidens, such as the indomitable Hervor of *Hervarar Saga ok Heiðreks*,⁶² or the woman in *Star Oddi's dream* who would not settle for less than captaining her own raiding fleet.⁶³ In other words, although we have little to suggest that women habitually took part in raiding parties we have plenty to indicate that they could and that it was not unheard of or outside the remits of known behaviour.

Hair and social symbolism

Connected to the wider subject of the influence of gendered expectations on knowledge production and resulting representations of the past, it is also relevant to include a discussion of the descriptive part of the passage from the *Annals of Inisfallen*.

The source tells us that the short hair of these women was worthy of note in that it was commented on at all, but further than that we do not know in what light their hairstyle was understood, if indeed it was understood at all. Whether it communicated a message about social roles, status, otherness, or belonging is therefore worth considering, both in terms of what we know about Viking Age hair, but also in terms of how this sits within academic perceptions of Viking Age gendered priorities.

The social significance of hair can be examined on a number of levels. Though we have few instances of Viking Age hair preserved in itself,⁶⁴ both written and pictorial traces can give insights into some aspects of hair-customs. Lotte Hedeager reminds us that Snorre's *Skáldskaparmál*⁶⁵ stipulates the crucial importance of men and women's correct physical appearance in the creation of a gendered

56. Wortley 2010, 290.

57. Davidson 1976, 114-115; Wortley 2010, 290.

58. Duczko 2004; Hillerdal 2009a; Price 2010.

59. Clover 1993, 366; Price 2002, 74.

60. Price 2019, 275.

61. Price 2019, 275.

62. *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*.

63. Andrén 2008.

64. See, however, Lund and Arwill-Nordblad 2016, 428.

65. Hedeager 2015, 134.

social person, and this includes hair and the styling thereof. Hedeager connects this with the social manifestation of bounded gendered identities in a world of shifting and fluid boundaries: a way to stabilise social gender.⁶⁶ The Icelandic Medieval legal code *Grágás*,⁶⁷ moreover, includes strictures on hair for appropriate gendered attire and appearance, citing the punishment for a woman who dresses in men's clothing, or *cuts her hair short*, or carries weapons, as lesser outlawry. Arguably, such an inclusion indicates that women dressing as men was known to happen sufficiently often to warrant prohibition. We can also surmise that by the time this law was recorded there were socially significant coded rules for the hair of men and women. A simple equation of long hair with women and short with men is too simplistic, however, and long hair could be a potent symbol for warriors or ruling classes.⁶⁸ Though late, Icelandic sagas refer to luscious locks for both genders, with hair often playing a part in descriptions of beauty, and with men and women both mentioned as having long hair.⁶⁹ It may in other words be more useful to view the purposeful manipulation of outwards traits as something that was dependent on more than simply gender. By advocating a less binary view of recognised ways of being in the Viking Age, we may open up for variations that could feasibly be communicated by established external traits.

Hair is pliant, versatile, and changeable,⁷⁰ and is thereby a suitable medium through which to communicate social status, group belonging, and cultural identity. Stephen Ashby's work on the coded norms inherent in grooming and the technology behind this shows how belonging to certain social spheres can be subtly communicated by demonstrating command of such norms.⁷¹ Extending the idea that there was a correct way of communicating at least certain gendered identities, we can, moreover, ask whether there were accepted variations, and how subversions of expectations played into this.

How exactly hair was worn in the Viking Age may be inaccessible to some degree, but we can nevertheless surmise that it carried a range of potent symbolism. When Alcuin complained to his correspondent in the 8th century AD of the Anglo-Saxon tendency to emulate the hairstyles of their Scandinavian oppressors,⁷² he reveals that these oppressors had distinct hairstyles (apparently worth copying). Similarly, John of Wallingford's lament regarding the Danes fastidious personal appearance coming four centuries later tells us again that grooming seems to have remained a high priority, with the side effect of making the Danes attractive to Englishwomen.⁷³

Depictions of men and women, on Gotlandic picture stones, woven imagery, amulets and gold foils amongst others, show distinct and recognisable hairstyles.⁷⁴ Women are most often shown with their hair in a coiled ponytail (an 'Irish Ribbon knot') or a simple ponytail. Topknots are also a common style for depictions of women.⁷⁵ As Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh has pointed out, these styles required long hair, and caring for such a length of hair would be quite a lot of work,⁷⁶ carrying implicit messages of competence and control as well as the means and time to maintain it. We can surmise they were hairstyles cultivated by certain social groups in other words, perhaps largely dependent on status.

66. Hedeager 2015, 134.

67. Dennis *et al.*, eds. and trans., 2000, 219.

68. Treherne 1995; Ashby 2015, 74, 88.

69. Ashby 2015, 85-86

70. Arwill-Nordbladh 2016.

71. Ashby 2015.

72. Ashby 2014, 159.

73. Ashby 2014, 159.

74. Hedeager 2015; Arwill-Nordbladh 2016; Borake 2021.

75. Arwill-Nordbladh 2016, 3.

76. Arwill-Nordbladh 2016, 3.

Male hair in pictorial representations is often shoulder-length or short,⁷⁷ often with facial hair, in the form of beards.⁷⁸ This becomes especially relevant when we consider indications of gender-subversions through pictorial language: certain depictions on Gotlandic picture stones for example, show bearded figures with female dress and even one with a ponytail.⁷⁹ This mixing of assumed gendered markers can also be seen on some of the objects in the group often termed ‘Valkyrie brooches’. These tend to show a standing figure in a long dress, holding a shield, faced by a figure on horseback with a coiled ponytail and trousers.⁸⁰ This can be used to argue that for those who had the power to do so, using hair to transgress or blur social boundaries could be a potent way of communicating difference.⁸¹ We also need to bear in mind, however, that these hairstyles may have been pictorial devices of visual communication rather than constant universals of gendered fashions: the apparent subversion of norms in such imagery may reflect social practices of playing with gendered norms on many levels.

In a similar vein, we can see how Saxo Grammaticus used gendered symbolism to demonstrate subverted norms in his tale of the shield maiden Lagertha: in his account she fought with the courage of a man, but her long loose hair showed she was a woman.⁸² If nothing else, we can read from this how hair carried potent messages of social identity in Saxo’s time. Arguably, we can also read from it that it was important to Saxo to highlight that this shield maiden was a woman, acting as a man: her long hair in this sense becomes transgressive.

These examples are tied to elite representations of idealised gender symbolism. They show a pre-occupation, however, with communicating certain recognisable patterns. In some cases, as we have seen, these patterns subvert expectations, in others they show conformity, as may indeed be expected of any pictorial or symbolic language large enough to encompass a wide range of social expressions.

In the case of the close-cropped women of this paper, it seems viable to suggest that their hair was meant to communicate divergence from other female hairstyles. To what intent remains an open question, but by placing conventions around appearances into a wider knowledge matrix of gendered expectations, we may question what we understand as conflicting messages: close cropped women, though perhaps not standard fare, may have been a recognised way of communicating a social role of a kin with Valkyrie brooches with Irish ribbon knots and trousers – transgressive to the modern eye in that it mixes gendered symbolism, but feasibly a normative communication of what social space you inhabited in the Viking Age. A mixing of gendered external attributes thereby need not contravene gender roles if the society in question allows for more fluidity than what has recently been the western norm.

Fluid identities in an unstable world

As we have seen above, the idea that women did not travel of their own volition needs to be reassessed. History as a male-dominated affair in which the main events are their presumed exploits is fast losing ground as a satisfactory way of seeing the past.⁸³ Other approaches, using intersectional outlooks and relational perspectives can instead create new and rewarding approaches to the varied

77. Arwill-Nordbladh 2016, 3.

78. Ashby 2016, 2.

79. Eva Marie Göranson as referenced by Arwill-Nordbladh 2016, 3.

80. Gardela 2018, 406.

81. Ashby 2015, 153.

82. Friis-Jensen (ed) and Fisher (trans) 2015, book IX, 632-633

83. Ghisleni *et al.* 2016; Moen 2019b; Dempsey 2019.

roles, expressions, and manifestations of a past populated by people, rather than by stereotypes. It is in this light that we should consider the material used in this paper.

As noted earlier, the traditional interpretation of gender roles in the Viking Age has tended to posit a strict, binary divide.⁸⁴ Within this knowledge tradition, women and men are believed to have been fundamentally different and strictly segregated categories, socially understood as such, and with resultant cultural boundaries so strict as to be non-negotiable in most cases. As Arwill-Nordbladh has pointed out, this owes more to western expectations of gendered behaviour, deeply indebted to Victorian ideals, than it does to the material itself.⁸⁵ It is also fundamentally situated in a knowledge production tradition that places women and men into different categories without question.

An alternative approach can be sought in a model first explored in Carol Clover's seminal 1993 paper *Regardless of Sex*.⁸⁶ Building on Thomas Laqueur's historical dissection of the modern western two-sex model,⁸⁷ this approach and other alternative readings have been gaining popularity in recent years.⁸⁸ Moreover, such an approach is in line with a current scientific⁸⁹ and indeed archaeological⁹⁰ focus on the restrictions of assumed binary gender.

Understanding the idea of 'biological' sex, and 'biologically coded' gendered behaviours as a modern concept necessitates a critical evaluation of their supposed universality. So-called 'biological' sex differences are deeply culturally engrained, and attributable in part to political agendas of furthering supposed sexual difference in men and women.⁹¹ Such ideas must be carefully examined in light of the history of science and its political leanings.⁹² Perceived 'natural' gendered behaviours have held great power in archaeological narratives, to the extent that they have clouded interpretations of material that otherwise may have given quite different outcomes.⁹³ 'Natural' female ways of being in the modern West lean towards nurturing, kindness, and presumed gentleness – all traits which do not easily reconcile with women as part of aggressive expansion tactics. Recognising that such ideas are not only culturally contingent, but also deeply, though indeed subconsciously, politically informed means we can approach alternative ways of inhabiting gendered bodies in past societies.

Considering the Viking Age as a time in which gender was to some extent negotiable will allow for a different understanding of social dynamics: The close-cropped women can be seen in the light of both 'acting as men', but also signalling difference with their external attributes: either are viable interpretations. Using the intersection of different identities, including age, gender, social class, freedom or lack thereof, and perhaps even ethnicity, we can approach discussions of past group dynamics with an eye less trained to find homogenous groups, and thereby perhaps more likely to open wider discussions of identity and expressions thereof.

Concluding remarks

By discussing the potential for women travelling as part of more than settlement missions, this paper has contextualised potential female presence in raids to the Mediterranean within a wider, long-stand-

84. Jesch 1991; Jochens 1995; Solberg 2003; Sigurðsson 2008.

85. Arwill-Nordbladh 1998.

86. Clover 1993.

87. Laqueur 1990.

88. Danielsson 2007; Hedeager 2011; Danielsson and Thedéen 2012; Moen 2019a; 2019b.

89. Fausto-Sterling 1993; Joel et al. 2015.

90. Arnold 2016; Ghisleni *et al.* 2016; Stratton 2016.

91. Connell 1987; Fine 2016; Haraway 2013.

92. Harding 1986; Butler 1990.

93. As made apparent by the advent of gender archaeology Conkey and Spector 1984; Spector 1991; Wylie 1991.

ing, archaeological debate. By focusing on aspects of appearance used to communicate social codes and roles, I have also attempted to nuance how gendered identities may be more composite than we often envisage.

The resulting paper has sought to contextualise material already known into a different way of thinking about identities and gender: part of a wider redress of the structures that uphold biased knowledge production when it comes to gender and questions of identity. Contrary to the arguments furthered here, the short-haired women of the *Annals of Inisfallen* may be captives or slaves. The fallen female warriors found amongst the Rus' after the battle in 971 may be interpreted as a sign of the true desperation of the Rus' forces manifested by the necessity that women also fight. The Red Girl could be nothing but a literary flourish. Archaeological discourse would tend to position them in such a light, betraying a tendency to doubt female agential manifestations and to minimise women's role outside the family. They could, however, all also be read in the way that I have suggested here, testifying to gender as a negotiable category that did not always limit agency and actions to the extent we often imagine in the Viking Age, nor prescribe a single way of living. These sources describe events and people who go against type, but that does not mean we should treat the sources as anomalies or unreliable by default. I will end with the reflection that sources ought not be treated as unreliable only when they tell us what we do not want to hear. The close-cropped women who formed the basis of this article remain shadowy and vague, and yet their presence in source material can initiate a broader discussion of group and gender identity on a variety of levels, not least of which is why we tend to credit certain narratives with more credence than we do others.

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Fig. 1.
The Hårby female figurine seen from the back, demonstrating an Irish knot hairstyle. Nationalmuseet Denmark. CC-BY-SA, photo by John Lee.



Fig. 2. An example of the so-called Valkyrie brooches, from Tisø in Denmark. Nationalmuseet, Denmark. CC-BY-SA. Photo by Roberto Fortuna and Kira Ursem.

Warriors Wearing Silk

Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson

Introduction

Silk in Viking Age burials has captured the interest of archaeologists and textile researchers since the first fragments were identified during the late 19th century. The delicate and exotic fabric connected Scandinavia to long-distance trade routes and provided a fundamentally different addition and unexpected golden lining to the cloth culture that was dominated by wool and linen fabrics. The archaeological material is highly fragmentary with few preserved larger pieces, and is dominated by fabric cut into long strips with little consideration for the pattern. At times, this has led to a simplified view in which the silk has been reduced to being purely ornamental and an expression of high social standing, wealth, and long-distance trade connections.

In its various places of origin, silk was laden with an extensive world of ideas and values, restricted in use and highly emblematic. It was deeply connected to hierarchic structures with different patterns and qualities relating to specific offices or to the expression of particular ranks. The question is to what extent these intrinsic values and connotations of silk accompanied the fabric when it was transferred into the new context of Viking society. During this period the contacts between, in particular, eastern Scandinavia, Byzantium, the Eurasian steppes, and the Arab World were extensive, as now revealed through comprehensive and varied archaeological evidence. Silk was exchanged as part of the transactions taking place along these routes and featured among the other imported materials.¹

The presence of silk in Viking contexts was initially acknowledged by textile scholar Agnes Geijer in her work investigating and publishing the textiles retrieved from burials in the Viking Age town of Birka in Sweden.² Geijer identified silk fabric in *c.* 45 of the approximately 1200 excavated burials. In addition, Birka's textile material comprises several fragments of tablet-woven bands and *passementeries* that also include silk.³ Through later investigations these notations have been expanded, and today silk is known from over 60 graves in Birka.⁴ Archaeologist and textile specialist Inga Hägg continued the study of Birka's burial textiles, with particular emphasis on the so-called 'Oriental'⁵ features in both male and female dress.⁶ Hägg argued that combinations of silk, gold, and silver in

1. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2020a.

2. Geijer 1938.

3. Geijer 1938, 58-67; Ostrom Peters 2002.

4. Nockert 1994; 2006.

5. The stylistic term *Oriental* as used in this work was established during the period of Imperialism and corresponds to late 19th century – early 20th century European perception of what was characteristic of the cultures of the geographical area then called the *Orient*. It should be acknowledged that 'Oriental' in this stylistic context is complex, embodying traits from various cultures. It is used here in line with established conventions in the discourse (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006, 19-20).

6. E.g. Hägg 1984.

clothing, together with particular objects in graves, signified status and rank in local adaptations of ceremonial costumes of the Byzantine court.⁷ By arguing that elements of dress conveyed symbolic meaning from one context to another, Hägg introduced a new theme in textile research in which she emphasised the intentional choices and conscious selections that were being made. She wanted to distance herself from what she considered a prevailing attitude in Viking research where Vikings were seen as ‘curiosity-loving barbarians who liked to adorn themselves with strange and precious things’.⁸

The role of silk and its connotations in the Viking world have since been investigated and discussed by several scholars. Agnes Geijer continued her work on this material, publishing several highly important studies.⁹ Also notable are the many works by Anna Muthesius,¹⁰ the extensive review of the Oseberg silks by Margaretha Nockert,¹¹ and the excellent publication *Silk for the Vikings* by Marianne Vedeler.¹² Other important contributions have been made by Annika Larsson,¹³ Ulla Mannering¹⁴ and Anita Malmius.¹⁵ In this paper I draw upon many of these works, particularly on Hägg’s research on symbolism mediated through silk in a deliberate manner.

The study is a reflection on the intangible values that surrounded silk in the silk-producing regions and the extent to which these ideas accompanied the fabric into Scandinavian society. Using the two sites of Birka and Valsgärde as a starting point, I examine the Scandinavian context of silks, their possible origin, and the trade routes of silk to Scandinavia. Although silk is present in various contexts, my focus is on the martial sphere of society, in which the need to express affiliation, status, and rank was fundamental, and clothing offered an opportunity to do so.¹⁶ Subsequently, I discuss some of the martial connotations of silk in its regions of origin and explore how these ideas may have been materialised in the silk itself. By exploring the biographies of the silk, and the ideas, cultures, and people that shaped them on their path to the north, I argue that part of the silk material in Viking-Age Scandinavia represents an *intellectual import* of the Byzantine, and Arabic, practice of warriors wearing silk.

Silk in eastern Scandinavia – time, context, and origin

Although delicate and fragmentary, silk in Scandinavian early Medieval contexts has proven more frequent than perhaps expected. With a renewed interest in silk, fuelled by the works of Nockert,¹⁷ Vedeler¹⁸ and others,¹⁹ as well as a growing interest in crafts and reconstruction,²⁰ new examinations of textile materials have provided more extensive knowledge of the ways in which silk was perceived and used by different groups throughout the Viking Age.

When the material first started to arrive in Scandinavia is a matter of discussion. Indirect evidence of silk has been found in the form of tablet-woven bands dating to the Vendel period (550 – 750 CE),

7. Hägg 1984; 1991; 2002; 2003.

8. Hägg 1984, 209.

9. E.g. Geijer 1964; 1972.

10. E.g. Muthesius 1992; 1995; 1997; 2001.

11. Nockert 2006.

12. Vedeler 2014.

13. Larsson 2007; 2020.

14. Mannering 2017.

15. Malmius 2020.

16. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006, 33-34; 2015a, 81-83; forthcoming.

17. Nockert 2006.

18. Vedeler 2014.

19. E.g. Andersson Strand 2020; Larsson 2007; 2020.

20. E.g. Wählander 2020.

or perhaps even as early as the Migration Period (375-550 CE) in elite burials in the Lake Mälaren region of eastern central Sweden.²¹ Of these tablet-woven bands only the gold thread remains, but they are thought originally to have included silk thread as well. The earliest confirmed piece of silk fabric found in a Scandinavian archaeological context is a fragment retrieved from an 8th century burial at Birka.²² The grave is dated to approximately 750 CE and bridges the transition from the Vendel period to the Viking Age. It constitutes one of the very first burials that can be connected to the town-like settlement of Birka and was integrated into the rampart of the fortifications.²³ Although characterised as a shaft grave, the grave largely follows the so-called chamber burial practice, in which the interred was placed in a subterranean chamber. Chamber burials are considered high status burials in general, often with extensive furnishings that may include one or two horses as well as weaponry.²⁴ In this particular case the interred was an older male, buried without weapons but with a horse placed on a separate platform at the foot of the grave.²⁵ The contents of the grave, together with its prominent location, indicate that this was an individual from the highest levels of society, and he has even been suggested to have been one of the founding members of the settlement.²⁶ The silk fabric, thought to be part of a small bag or covering for a pair of tweezers, further underlines the special status of the individual. According to the investigations by Anita Malmius the fabric may be of ‘mulberry silk’,²⁷ an exclusive material found only in a few continental elite burials at this time.²⁸

Context and distribution

Early Scandinavian examples of silk have appeared predominantly in mortuary contexts. The closed context of a grave has often provided more favourable preservation conditions than an open settlement area. Traditionally, cemeteries have also received greater archaeological interest and have thus been excavated more frequently. With preserved silk in over 60 graves, the Birka cemeteries contain the most extensive collection of Viking Age silks so far retrieved from one site.²⁹ (**Fig. 1**) Birka was a major centre of crafts and trade, connecting the trade routes of Western Europe with the extensive networks of the east (i.e. present-day Russia, Ukraine, and beyond). The close interactions with the regions along the great Volga and Dnieper rivers, and further on to Byzantium and Central Asia, have left their marks on Birka’s material culture, not least in terms of dress fashion.³⁰ Hägg noted that ‘most of the richest men’s and women’s graves at Birka contain remains of splendid “oriental” attire – partly or wholly of silk, with fur trimmings and ornaments of gold and silver’.³¹ This attire included caftans or riding coats and tunics inspired by garments of the Byzantine court and following the fashions of Kyivan Rus’. The male costume also comprised eastern-type or ‘Oriental’ belts studded with bronze fittings, recurrent among the nomadic groups of the Eurasian steppes. Recent investigations have

21. Gleba 2013, 201-204; Ljungkvist 2010, 428 and tab. 1.

22. Holmquist Olausson 1997; Malmius 2020, 120.

23. Fennö Muyingo 2000.

24. Gräslund 1980; Ringstedt 1997.

25. Fennö Muyingo 2000.

26. Fennö Muyingo 2000; Holmquist Olausson 1997; Holmquist Olausson and Götherström 1998.

27. Mulberry silk is obtained from the fibres of the cocoon of the raised mulberry silk moth. Silk can also be obtained from wild species of moth, but the fabric is then coarser than mulberry silk. For further clarification, see Malmius 2020, 12-13.

28. Malmius 2020, 129-130, 133.

29. Nockert 1994; 2006.

30. Hedenstierna-Jonson and Holmquist Olausson 2006, and references cited therein.

31. Hägg 1984, 204.

also identified possible silk headgear, with direct parallels in the material from the Moščevojaja Balka cemetery in the northern Caucasus.³²

Finds of silk in eastern Scandinavian Viking-Age burials, however, have not only been made in the burials of the urban and largely non-local population of Birka. They also occur in cemeteries connected to rural regional elites.³³ For reasons of preservation, textiles including silk have primarily but not solely been retrieved from inhumation burials. As cremation was the predominant burial practice during the period, inhumations represent something out of the ordinary and are, due to their relative 'richness' in grave goods including weaponry, usually seen as an expression of the social elite. A remarkable example is the boat burial cemetery of Valsgärde, located close to the political and religious centre of Gamla Uppsala. The cemetery was in use for a long period of time, spanning from the pre-Roman Iron Age to the very end of the Viking Age. Despite the long period of use, the number of graves is relatively limited, with a few more than 60 cremations and 15 inhumations and chamber graves. The cemetery is, however, mostly known for its spectacular 15 boat burials, dating from the Vendel (Merovingian) period to the late Viking Age.³⁴ In Valsgärde, the boat graves are exclusively male burials, richly furnished with a wide variety of objects including full sets of weaponry. Textile archaeologist Annika Larsson has examined over 2000 fragments of textiles deriving from Valsgärde's Viking Age boat burials. According to Larsson, the absolute majority of the fragments are silk.³⁵ As at Birka, the graves also include remains of fine tablet-woven bands with silk and silver thread.³⁶ The textile remains in general, and the silk in particular, indicate that the men buried in boats in Valsgärde during the Viking Age followed a similar fashion to those buried in Birka's chamber graves. Their style was strongly influenced by the fashions of Byzantium, its border zones, and the Eurasian steppes.³⁷ Silk did not feature only as part of male costumes, however, as ample material has been retrieved from female graves at both Valsgärde and Birka, as well as other sites such as Tuna in Badelunda and Turinge.³⁸ These sites are all located in the Lake Mälaren region, with Gamla Uppsala as a centre of power. While the overall geographical distribution of silk is difficult to assess due to differences in preservation, burial practices, and archaeological investigations, it is clear that access to silk was not restricted to the area surrounding Lake Mälaren. A unique find of silk in a grave in Vivallen, Härjedalen,³⁹ indicates that the geographical region in which silk was accessible was extensive.

Places of production and routes of trade

The next question concerns the origins of imported silk, as well as the routes by which it reached eastern Scandinavia during this period. According to the current state of knowledge, the three major silk processing regions were China, Central Asia with Sogdiana and Sāmānid Persia as important contributors, and Byzantium. Traditionally the focus of academic research has been on Byzantium, with scholars such as Geijer and Nockert both considering the eastern Mediterranean and Byzantium as the main source of silk. The fabric thus reached Scandinavia either via European trade networks, or more particularly via the Dnieper route leading through Kyivan Rus' and the established network of trading

32. Ierusalimskaja 1996, 37, pl. LXXIX; Wähländer *et al.* 2020, 162-167.

33. Larsson 2020; Nockert 1994; 2006.

34. Gräslund and Ljungkvist 2011.

35. Larsson 2020, 119.

36. Pallin 2019.

37. Larsson 2020, 116.

38. Larsson 2020, 117, and references cited therein; Nockert 1994; 2006, 297.

39. Bender Jørgensen 1986, 239.

settlements known as Garðaríke.⁴⁰ The use of this route and the connections and interactions between Byzantium and Kyivan Rus' are mentioned in both Byzantine and Rus' textual sources, which make extensive references to peace and trade treaties between the two. Specific mention of silk is made several times in these treaties, further emphasising that this particular type of trade lay at the heart of their interactions.⁴¹ Hägg also anticipated a Byzantine origin for the silk as she explored the possible transfer of symbolic elements and ideas patterned after ceremonial costumes of the Byzantine court.⁴² In one of her final publications, however, Geijer acknowledged that the silk found in Viking Age contexts could have been produced in Persia as well as in Byzantium, making it 'difficult to determine if this product may have come via the Volga or Dnieper routes'.⁴³ (**Fig. 2**)

With the long-awaited publication of the textiles from the Oseberg ship burial in Norway came a renewed interest in silk and silk-producing regions.⁴⁴ Vedeler, who undertook the extensive task of new investigations, considers the majority of the early 9th century silk fabrics to have been produced in Central Asia.⁴⁵ The main area of production was situated in Transoxania, roughly corresponding with modern-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Transoxania included some of the major trading hubs on the Silk Roads, including Samarkand, Merv and Bukhara. The region is often referred to as Sogdiana, and during most of the 9th and 10th centuries, this region was part of the Sāmānid Empire.⁴⁶ Vedeler further argues that these 'Sogdian silks' mainly reached Scandinavia via the route over the northern Volga, often called the *Fur Route*, which is known from the travel accounts of Ibn Fadlan.⁴⁷ A striking example of Chinese Tang dynasty silk, retrieved from a 10th century grave in Birka, should also be considered in the light of the markets of Central Asia, as this is most likely where it was initially traded.⁴⁸ Although long considered a unique find, other possible examples of Chinese silk have now been identified at Valsgårde.⁴⁹ In making these identifications, Larsson questions the importance of Byzantium altogether, suggesting Central Asia as the only region for silk imports.⁵⁰ Larsson also upholds the Fur Route as the main road for silk imports, arguing that taxes and demands of tribute leveraged on merchants by the rulers of Kyivan Rus' meant that the northern route became the preferred axis of trade.⁵¹ This argument is questioned by Vedeler, who sees no reason for the 'keepers of the Kyiv strongholds' to hinder trade by a tax overload.⁵²

Central Asia was unquestionably a region of great significance and frequent interaction for Viking Age Scandinavians,⁵³ but disregarding the impact of Byzantine influence is less convincing. Although there is a relative paucity of objects in Scandinavia produced in Byzantine core regions when compared to the wealth of, e.g., Sāmānid coins minted in Bukhara and Samarkand, the evidence for Scandinavian interaction with Byzantium is palpable.⁵⁴ As an assemblage, however, the Byzantine artefacts appear more heterogenous than coins, and may therefore be more difficult to identify as

40. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2020b, and references cited therein; Vedeler 2014, 69-72.

41. E.g. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, ed. and trans., 1953, entries for years 907 and 911; Lind 1984; Vedeler 2014, 69-72.

42. Hägg 1984.

43. Geijer 1972, 261.

44. Christensen and Nockert 2006.

45. Vedeler 2014; 2015.

46. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2020a; Vedeler 2014, 88-89.

47. Vedeler 2014, 72-77, see also Kovalev 2005; Michailidis 2013; Montgomery 2003.

48. Cyrus-Zetterström 1988.

49. Larsson 2020, 119.

50. Larsson 2007, 231; 2020, 109, 115.

51. Larsson 2007, 232; 2020, 115.

52. Vedeler 2014, 70.

53. E.g. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2020a, and references cited within.

54. Cf. Kovalev 2003.

cohesive. For example, one should not overlook the importance of the vast Byzantine border zones, where people from different regions interacted creating new and hybrid forms of social practices as well as material culture. The mix of steppe nomadic and Byzantine fashion, weaponry and design known from these areas, is, e.g., characteristic for the garrison warriors stationed at Birka, a matter to which we will return further on.⁵⁵

In this context, another (and slightly overlooked) trade route stands out as highly relevant. Known as the Iranian-Georgian branch of the Silk Road, this route passed over the northern parts of the Caucasus, through Khazar areas and over the Pontic-Caspian Steppe, connecting the Caspian Sea with the Black Sea. Based on numismatic evidence, the route constituted an early link between the Arab world and Northern and Eastern Europe.⁵⁶ It is along this route that the previously mentioned cemetery of Moščevojka Balka is situated, with spectacularly well-preserved pieces of silk clothing, which many of the fragmentary finds in eastern Scandinavia closely resemble.⁵⁷ I argue that this was a route that connected the Eurasian Steppes, Kyivan Rus', and the Byzantine Empire with their vast northern border zones and in extension with Scandinavia. It was a melting pot of peoples and cultures that, as such, corresponds well with the heterogeneous archaeological evidence in Birka.

Inherent and associated values of silk

Regardless of where the silk originated, or which routes it took on its way to Scandinavia, this precious textile did not exist in a void. The availability, roles, and value of this material were produced/generated not only by the many connotations it had in its respective places of origin, but also by the uses and values that were added along the way. It all became part of the fabric's life history or biography.⁵⁸ Considering the life history of an object, or in this case, a material, acknowledges the ways meanings and values are accumulated and transformed, but also the changing effects these have on people and events.⁵⁹ Silk was indeed traded and thus appreciated in economic terms. This material, however, also embodied inherent values connected to power, influence, and social structure. These associated values gave silk a vital position in formalised gift exchange. Gift exchange was an intrinsic part of negotiations, alliances, and diplomacy in silk producing regions like Byzantium and the Arab world. Gifts, including silk, were also used to sweeten agreements or to maintain equilibrium in diplomatic relationships.⁶⁰

In the core regions of silk production, the fabrics had strong social and political implications. At either end of the Silk Roads, i.e. within Tang Dynasty China and the Byzantine Empire respectively, silk was closely connected to the emperor and his administration – a formalised expression of status and power in which rank was encoded into particular designs, materials, colours, and motifs.⁶¹ Production and use of silk were strictly regulated as 'Chinese and Byzantine emperors tried to enforce sumptuary laws on silks to protect their status as rulers and to differentiate the various levels of their bureaucratic echelons and social hierarchy'.⁶² In Byzantium, costume was an active part of upholding social hierarchies, regulating the use of particular items as well as motifs, colours, and qualities with

55. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006; 2012; 2015b; Holmquist Olausson and Petrovski 2007.

56. Kilger 2007, 211-212.

57. Ierusalimskaja 1996; Vedeler 2014, 77-80.

58. Kopytoff 1986; cf. Jody 2009; Gosden and Marshall 1999.

59. Gosden and Marshall 1999, 172-177.

60. Cutler 2001; Jacoby 2004; Liu 1998, 163; Muthesius 1992; Vedeler 2014, 200.

61. Muthesius 1992; Parani 2008, 407.

62. Liu 1998, 137.

the specific aim of underpinning Imperial authority.⁶³ The precious silk fabric was at the heart of these regulations. But despite the regulations, some of the silks assumed to be restricted, displaying motifs like lions and eagles, found their way to the hands of both allies and adversaries of the Byzantine Empire.⁶⁴

Within the evolving and expanding Muslim world, which during this time dominated most of the Silk Roads, there was a double-sided relation to silk. The basic rule that one should not exalt oneself through luxuries was challenged by the wealth and opulence of Byzantium and Sassanian Iran, not yet then a centre of Islamic power. Silk was arguably considered a luxury item, a marker of both profane and religious power and a symbol of Paradise, and as such not easily rejected by elites. Oral traditions – *Ḥadīth* – were developed to manage the ambiguous relationship with silk. Using silk as decoration could therefore be acceptable, as long as the decoration was in the form of narrow strips sewn onto the garment. A cloth woven in silk warp but with other fabrics as weft could also be considered suitable.⁶⁵ Still, silk became the preferred cloth of the rulers of the Abbasid Caliphate, to which the Sāmānid Empire with its centres for silk production was closely linked.⁶⁶ Unlike the elaborate restrictions known from Tang dynasty China and Byzantium, there were no particular restrictions as to who could dress in silk garments. The delicate balance that maintained an acceptable use of silk was formalized in the *tirāz* system, and silk production flourished.⁶⁷ *Tirāz* were textiles marked with the date of production and ruler, similar to the contemporary minting of coins. The markings were either embroidered or woven with silk thread on the border of the textile, making the width of the border important. The strict rules of the *tirāz* system started to loosen, however, during the 10th century, the period when Scandinavian interaction with the Caliphate was at its height.⁶⁸

The use of silk among Arab and Byzantine warriors

How, then, was silk used, perceived and regulated within the martial sphere of the silk-producing regions? During the period predating the Abbasid Caliphate (before 750 CE), strict clothing regulations prohibited Arab warriors serving in Persian areas from dressing in the Persian kaftan and leggings. These regulations were gradually loosened, however, and by the time of the Abbasid Caliphate, with Sāmānid rule in the silk-producing regions, both the Persian fashion of dress in general, and silk in particular, had become widespread among the higher social strata of Arab society. The military elite in general wore distinctive *tirāz* coats and turbans, and in the Persian regions of Khorasan, the warriors wore tunics of satin silk.⁶⁹

In Byzantium, ‘imperial silken ceremonial was entrenched upon the battlefield’ and comprised silk standards as well as apparel.⁷⁰ The Book of Ceremonies, compiled during the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenetos (c. 950 CE), contains a comprehensive packing list for when the emperor is about to go on campaign, thus providing an insight into what was considered essential equipment. The list includes everything from silk cushions for the emperor to recline on, to clothing used by the Byzantine soldiers and ‘garments dispatched to foreigners as gifts’. There is mention of tailored tunics

63. Cutler 2003; Küllerich 2014; Muthesius 1992; 2001.

64. Cf. Cutler 2003; Muthesius 2001.

65. Liu 1998, 137.

66. E.g. Liu 1998, 163-165; 2010, 104-105.

67. Liu 1998, 136-138; cf. Marzouk 1955, 63.

68. Liu 1998, 141-149.

69. Stillman 2000, 39-40, 51-52.

70. Muthesius 1992, 101.

decorated with silk, leggings of silk patterned with eagles and other Imperial symbols, and striped cloaks decorated with silk of different colours.⁷¹ Silk borders decorating the garments were a means to demonstrate military rank and distinction.⁷² Similar items, but of lesser qualities, or silk as fabric, were given as diplomatic gifts, or were included to ‘sweeten’ negotiations. In the trade agreements between the Rus’ and Byzantium (in 907 CE and 911 CE), the Rus’ were singled out among other foreigners, gaining access to the most exclusive of Byzantine silks marked by the Imperial stamp. They managed to negotiate a remuneration of two pieces of silk for every slave lost in Byzantine territory and demanded and received sails of Byzantine silk. Silk provided an important means of attracting allies and the Rus’, in return, fought to defend Byzantine interests.⁷³ Under the later reign of Emperor Basil II the Bulgar Slayer, the Rus’ together with Scandinavians came to form the so-called Varangian Guard of the Imperial army. Depictions of the Varangian guardsmen show them with blonde hair and long beards and armed with the characteristic axe. They are, however, dressed like the Imperial Guard, in long robes with elaborate silk decorations, following the descriptions in the Book of Ceremonies.⁷⁴ Is it then possible that these close contacts between the Scandinavians, the Rus’, and the Byzantine Empire not only resulted in economic remuneration and political and military alliances, but also in transfer of knowledge and practices connected to the *Imperial silken ceremonial*?

Silk as intellectual import

Kent Andersson introduced the concept of ‘intellectual import’ while investigating Roman imports to Scandinavia during the late Roman Iron Age. Andersson inquired to what extent the inherent meanings, or ideas, that were connected to finger rings in particular, were transferred to their new Scandinavian context.⁷⁵ Other examples, like so-called Charon coins placed in the mouth of the deceased, or the ceremonial aspects of wine drinking that possibly accompanied the wine utensils imported to the North from Roman areas have been subject to similar reasoning.⁷⁶ I followed a related line of inquiry regarding the imports of steppe nomadic weaponry to Birka during the 10th century.⁷⁷ The composite bow, thumb ring and closed quiver of the mounted eastern archers, together with steppe nomadic elements of dress, were introduced and used by the warriors of Birka, in particular those stationed in the so-called garrison.⁷⁸ The material from the garrison also includes lamellar armour of a type known to have been used in the Byzantine border regions.⁷⁹ The archaeological context shows that these weapons were used in actual combat, thus indicating that they were not merely exotic objects of status and display. Their users most likely had learned to master the advanced skills of archery with the composite bow, possibly also from horseback. They also dressed in appropriate attire, and it may be assumed that the art of eastern archery also implied a certain level of identification with the distant peoples and cultures from which it was imported. Thus, eastern-style archery in Birka constitutes an example of intellectual import in which the imported goods still reflected status and connections, but also involved experiences, knowledge, skills, and new influences that were – in part – incorporated into a new context.

71. Moffatt and Tall 2012, 468-471.

72. Muthesius 1992, 101.

73. Muthesius 1992, 103-104.

74. D’Amato 2013, 71.

75. Andersson 1985, 136-142; 1998, 122.

76. Jennbert 2006, 136; Ingemark 2014.

77. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2012; 2015b.

78. Lundström *et al.* 2009.

79. Stjerna 2004.

To consider the intangible as well as the tangible values of imported materials can thus provide a more complex and nuanced picture of how objects were perceived and used in their new contexts. Acknowledging the possible transfer of ideas and intellectual values also provides an insight into the character and level of interaction that was involved in the acquisition of the objects. While some imports may have been the result of brief, perhaps hostile or violent encounters, others were the outcome of trade negotiations, diplomatic gifts, or personal items brought back from travels. Whereas imports simply signifying status and wealth could be the result of a brief encounter, the transfer of knowledge and ideas required an in-depth interaction of some duration.

What could therefore be anticipated if a similar approach were applied to silk? Within Scandinavia, silk appears both as fabric and as *raw* material used in local production of, e.g., embroideries and tablet-woven bands. At the most basic level, silk could have functioned as a pure status symbol reflecting the owner's wealth, international connections, and possible control over imported goods. It does not provide a satisfactory explanation, however, for what was likely to have been a more complex and long-term import of raw materials, and it reduces silk to 'exotic objects at the end of the trade chain'.⁸⁰ Regardless of where the silk had originally been produced, and in what form it reached Scandinavia, it had, as noted, acquired a sort of biography before it arrived and was used in its new context. All silk-producing regions had an extensive world of ideas connected to the fabric that regulated production, access, and use. From the beginning, silk was thus intricately linked to meanings and values that could be seen as the initial entries into the material's biography. It was not only the area of production that was of importance, however, but also the regions through which the material passed and was in use before it reached Scandinavia. What happened to the silk when it travelled? The encounters along the route itself produced new entries into the biography of the silk, adding further to the values and meanings of the material. The material and its origin, journey, and circumstances along the way compiled a multi-layered package of values and meanings on its arrival in Scandinavia. How much of this was transferred and incorporated when used in its new context is difficult to ascertain, but one should not underestimate the awareness and transfer of associated values and ideas of objects at any level of interaction.

Table 1: Illustrating levels of interaction

DISPLAY	Pure status symbols reflecting the owner's international connections and control of import.	e.g. silk as fabric or as complete items of dress
USE	Interaction included the exchange of ideas and values linked to the objects.	e.g. silk as raw material used in local production and becoming part of local fashion
MASTER	Learning, adapting and developing new knowledge, becoming an integrated part of life, practices and culture.	Silk as intellectual import, transferred and locally developed symbolic meaning

During the Viking Age, coats decorated with silk strips, tablet-woven bands, and passementerie decorations made from silk and gold or silver thread became part of elite fashion.⁸¹ In Denmark and Norway, these types of decorations were restricted to the very highest level of society, while in Eastern Central Sweden they appear more frequently in high status burials (e.g., in Birka and Valsgärde). The strips could be explained as mere adornment or as a display of access to wealth, but they could

80. Ljungkvist 2010, 436-437.

81. Mannering 2017, 156-157, 175; Nockert 2006, 296-297.

also be regarded as an adaptation of the ideas of the Byzantine system of borders indicating rank and status that had, in an adjusted form, been integrated into Viking society.

Another interesting example of silk attire is the headgear in Birka's well-known warrior grave Bj 581⁸², considered to be a parallel to finds from the aforementioned cemetery of Moščevaja Balka in the northern Caucasus. The interpretation is based on meticulous field drawings clearly showing the locations of various fittings together with a fragment of samite silk corresponding to the silk of the Caucasus cap.⁸³ (**Fig. 3**) Similar fittings are so far only known from one other grave in Birka, and a contemporary grave in Shestovitsa in the Ukraine.⁸⁴ The three graves display distinct similarities in burial practice, grave goods, and dress, making the silk cap part of a larger and more cohesive context. The rare but significant finds of the silk caps in Birka, Shestovitsa, and Moščevaja Balka could be seen as reflections of the contacts between Scandinavia and the Georgian-Iranian branch of the Silk Roads by way of Kyivan Rus'. There is further support for these connections in the local production of tablet-woven bands made from silk thread and gold or silver wire. In Birka, the wire was drawn in accordance with steppe nomadic technology, while tablet-woven bands from other parts of Scandinavia are made from metal strips twisted around a fibre core, in accordance with Byzantine technology.⁸⁵ The technology transfer between steppe nomadic cultures and the textile production in Birka is yet another indication that there were direct links between them. Silk did not travel alone but was part of a greater movement that included other types of imports, both material and intellectual.

Warriors who wear silk – reflections

To summarise so far, it can be stated that the evidence for silk in Viking-Age contexts is relatively extensive and that it implies an import that was not only material but also included intellectual transfer. The long-term import of raw silk is an example of this, as is the suggested use of silk borders as expressions of rank, possibly modelled after the Arabic *tirāz* system and the Byzantine silken protocol (cf. **Fig. 1A**). The predominant find circumstances are graves, both male and female, that, based on both burial practice and archaeological wealth of grave goods, are considered to represent individuals of high social standing. So, is there any evidence for transferred practices of warriors wearing or using silk in any particular way?

When investigating a possible connection between warriors and the use of silk within the martial sphere, several caveats appear. Who could have been considered a warrior? And how can we identify these individuals within the archaeological remains? The presence of weaponry is problematic. Warriors and warrior graves remain a debated and complex research field.⁸⁶ We can question whether the presence of weapons in a burial assemblage inherently implies that the deceased was a warrior in life, as has been conventionally assumed. It is equally problematic, however, to dismiss the existence of warriors and warrior burials completely. In a society that was built on martial values and practices, social standing and power were intrinsically linked to *warriorhood*. The presence of warriors, also in mortuary contexts, should thus not be surprising. It is also conceivable that an elite position within such a society was upheld with, and expressed through, weaponry.

Like weapons, silk is generally considered to be a sign of high social standing, and it is therefore not unexpected that the combination of these two is recurrent in high status burials. Those in society

82. Price *et al.* 2019.

83. Wähländer 2020.

84. Androshchuk and Zotsenko 2012, 335.

85. Gleba 2013, 202-205; Larsson 2007, 141-149; Pallin 2019.

86. For an overview see Price *et al.* 2019, 192, and references therein.

who had comprehensive sets of weaponry and the skills to use them were probably the same as those who had access to silk, and perhaps also apprehended what silk might imply. This rather imprecise relation between silk, weapons, and social standing may be illustrated through the extensively furnished boat graves in the Valsgårde cemetery. Due to the amount of weaponry, the burials have been characterised as warrior graves. At the same time, the cemetery, which also includes other types of high-status burials, is considered to represent a regional elite. Regardless of weaponry, Valsgårde's Viking-Age inhumation burials generally contain silk.⁸⁷ In this context, there is thus no discernible direct connection between warriors and silk – or the connection is on another and more complex level that is difficult to discern archaeologically. Silk could consequently in this local community simply be seen as a marker of high social standing, power, and connections. Since it has emerged that the import of silk also included a transfer of knowledge and ideas, however, it may be relevant to rephrase the question and reflect on whether the transfer of intellectual values in connection to silk was particularly defined in a martial context.

We know that silk was used in martial contexts among several of the peoples and cultures with whom the Scandinavian warriors were in contact and by whom they were influenced. The eastern Scandinavian warrior, in particular, had close connections to the Byzantine cultural sphere, as well as to the nomadic groups of the steppes. In Birka, these contacts are visible in dress and accessories, but also in weaponry and battle techniques. The latter required in-depth contacts and transfer of knowledge, something that could imply a more informed use of silk as well. It is not only a question of the silk itself; Birka has produced other evidence of Byzantine contacts, not least within the martial sphere. The aforementioned lamellar armour from the garrison is of Byzantine Klibanion type, the only such find from Viking-Age Scandinavia.⁸⁸ Gilded copper mounts from a helmet of Kyivan type, assessed to have originated in the Byzantine border zones, have also been found in Birka.⁸⁹ The burials contain other evidence of Byzantine influence, in garments suggested to be patterned after 'ceremonial costumes of the Byzantine court' that also include particular rank-indicating decorations known as *tintinnabula* and *mala punica*.⁹⁰ The burials in question (Bj 496 and Bj 524) both include grave goods that mainly consist of different types of weaponry, and could be called warrior graves, with all that this entails. (Fig. 4)

To what extent, then, did the ideas and values that surrounded these garments in their regions of origin accompany the material into the new context of Viking society? And what functions did they fill in their new environment? Hägg expresses that 'it can hardly be a coincidence, that the inexplicable "oriental" elements of Birka's richest costumes are identical to precisely those elements, that, following the Late Antique-Byzantine model, during this time were perceived as indicative of rank?'⁹¹ The framework in which these items have reached Scandinavia is also of importance for a more holistic understanding of their value and function. Byzantine as well as Islamic society incorporated an elaborate system of gift giving, regulating gifts in contexts of negotiations, alliances, diplomatic ventures, etc. This was also an important part of society at the time, and the conceptual aspects of gifts would likely have been understood by the Scandinavians.⁹² It was therefore probably not a question of not understanding the significance but rather of translating it to fit another type of social structure in which group affiliation was at the heart of society. Although from a later date, the Icelandic sagas

87. Hedenstierna-Jonson and Ljungkvist 2021; Larsson 2020; Ljungkvist 2006, 70-73.

88. D'Amato 2013, 71; Dawson 1998; Stjerna 2004.

89. Holmquist and Petrovski 2007.

90. Hägg 1984, 204, 212-213.

91. Hägg 1984, 213, free translation from Swedish.

92. Cutler 2001; Vedeler 2014, 56-66.

reveal that silk held a special place in society. In them, silk garments are recurrently mentioned as gifts from kings to their followers, or as symbols of friendship between men of equal (high) social standing.⁹³ In *Laxdaela Saga* for example, Bolli Bollason, on his return from the Varganian Guard in Constantinople, is described as ‘wearing clothes of silk, given him by the king of Miklagarð’.⁹⁴ Another interesting passage can be found in *Heimskringla* in which Magnus Barelegs, king of Norway from 1093-1103, is described as wearing a red silk doublet over his tunic ‘with a lion embroidered in gold silk, both front and back’. It appears that silk fabric, decorated with the Byzantine Lion, and ‘woven specifically as diplomatic gifts’ may have found its way to early Medieval Norway, and, in accordance with the original regulations, it was used by a king.⁹⁵

Concluding remarks

To conclude, the aim of this study has been to contextualise silk from a martial perspective, and to explore the possibility that the import of silk also included an intellectual transfer of the values and ideas that saturated the material in its various places of origin. The added biography the material acquired on route to Scandinavia is also considered. It is argued that the need to express affiliation, status, and rank was fundamental in a martial context, and that by embracing at least some of the associated ideas the fabric brought with it, silk garments offered one possible means of doing that. It is therefore not inconceivable that the Scandinavian warriors, like their counterparts in both the Byzantine and Arab armies, entered combat dressed in silk.

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93. Sauckel 2019, see also Sauckel 2013.

94. Ciggaar 1996, 116; cf. Gleba 2013, 193.

95. Somerville and McDonald 2020, 177-178, see also Cutler 2003, 68; Muthesius 1997, 47; 2015, 353.

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Fig. 1. Examples of silk in various forms, retrieved from burials in the Viking town Birka.
 A) pieces and strips of silk fabric, from burial Bj 464;
 B) passementeries attached to silk fabric, from burial Bj 977;
 C) tablet woven band of silk and silver thread, from burial Bj 977;
 D) Chinese silk from burial Bj 944, photos by Ola Myrin, Swedish History Museum.



Fig. 2. Map with sites and routes mentioned in the text. Map CC-BY Natural Earth, modified by author.



Fig. 3.

The head gear from Birka burial Bj 581, reconstructed by textile archaeologist Amica Sundström and textile historian Maria Neijman, based on field documentation, silver fittings and samite silk retrieved during excavation, and parallel finds of silk caps from Moščevaja Balka cemetery. Drawing by Hjalmar Stolpe, photos by Tallee Savage, with kind permission.



Fig. 4.

Passementeries or silver thread ornaments interpreted as *Tintinnabula* and *Malapunica*, from Birka graves Bj 496 and Bj 524. Drawings by Harald Olsen, photos by Ola Myrin, Swedish History Museum.

Seeing the Viking World Through the Eyes of a Mediterranean Lion

Sources, Source Critique, and the Use of History as Educational Tools at the Swedish History Museum

Linda Wåhlander

The Museum as an educational tool – a discourse of history applied in practice

The study of sources, source criticism, and the use of history has in recent years become a more prominent part of school teaching. In the current government school curricula in Sweden, called LgR 22 (and it also goes for the earlier one LgR 11) (upper stage compulsory school) and Gy 2011 (upper secondary school), it is stipulated that teachers should incorporate source criticism and the use of history in the courses, so students can learn and shape complicated reasoning, evaluate and value sources, and develop their understanding of methods for writing history and the use of history, all from different interpretations and perspectives.¹ Since 2018 it is also meant to be taught from preschool to third grade and all through school, with several university papers reporting on teacher and student experiences of implementing the curriculum at different levels.² Some museums offer guided tours with a critical focus, and it has become popular for teachers to take part with their students from high school up, or sometimes with even younger classes. Through the objects on display, exhibitions, and the study of how history is used, we can make the concept of sources and source criticism more concrete for the students. In the case study I have selected here, we use these methods to broaden the understanding of the Viking Age and to help the students sort out the usefulness of these methods when incorporating the Piraeus Lion (**Fig. 1**) in our school tour ‘Sources, source criticism and use of history’.

The educational school tour ‘Sources, source criticism and use of history’

As a museum teacher I work as the link between the objects in an exhibition, the researcher/archaeologist, and the visitor, or student. I am an interpreter.³ At the same time, I am challenged by the visitors and students, and it is a dual learning process. When I give this tour, I often start by introducing the museum. I ask the group questions such as, ‘*Why do we keep stuff? Why are historical objects important? Why don’t we just throw away all these old things?*’ And we usually reach the conclusion that the objects provide different sources of evidence to aid us in understanding the people who came before us and the ways they lived. The expression ‘You have to know the past to understand the present and the future’ seems to be used frequently in schools, and it has acquired some kind of truth in the students’ minds.

I then ask them about source criticism: ‘*Why do we need it, why do we need to be critical of history, of things we read in the paper?*’ This is trickier, and groups either believe that they already

1. Eliasson 2014.

2. Petterson and Enlund 2019.

3. See Cassel 2001.

know a lot, or have their minds set on criticism and the idea that one should not believe everything one reads. We talk about how paying attention to source critique can make the ways in which we interpret and present things visible, for example in exhibitions.

Finally, we approach the issue of how history can be used. In small groups the students come up with ideas or time periods which they know have been in focus for the use of history, for example in commercials, films, games, and so on. The intention is to understand that history is used all the time in different ways and with different agendas.⁴

We also wish to bring out and spotlight the variety of thinking that underpins all these ideas, and where it stems from – for example from an economic, religious, or ideological perspective. During the guided tour we invite the students to reflect and engage. The aim is to open up new thought patterns that not only help them to reason independently, but also hopefully will become usable tools for future schoolwork. This is a starting point for the process of how to evaluate and value different sources.⁵

There is another side to source criticism and the use of history. In the course of my work, I have realized that many individuals in school, indeed what sometimes feels like the whole group, no longer believe in any historical interpretations or facts at all: the ‘criticism’ has taken over. They question everything they read and hear, and this approach makes them insecure and without historical identity. In other words, criticizing is easy for them, but valuing sources is difficult. They do not trust what they read. They have no truths in the sense that they seem not to have any trust in authority – including in researchers, the idea that history is to be believed. It is good to question things, but in my opinion, there are also extremes. It is therefore important for me to give them tools, or just openings to the very idea of facts and sources on which they can base historical knowledge. We therefore talk about truth: current truth and changing truth. How you can always be prepared to change your views, but still know that there are some facts that are just that: facts. It is important to be honest with the students and to make it clear that we, as historians and archaeologists, try to fill in the blanks of what has happened. We must admit that we can never know everything, but that there are also things that we do know, and we can explain why that is, how we know it. These are important basic starting points. By asking questions about and around it, the Piraeus Lion can be one such tool for understanding different sources, source criticism, and the making of history. It is a gateway to many things – and a good companion to talk about when trying to understand different concepts in the Viking Age.

Case study: introducing the Piraeus Lion

I often start my school tours on this topic by introducing the Piraeus Lion to the class (**Fig. 2**). I ask them ‘*Why do we have a replica of an antique marble lion here in the museum?*’ They look at it and usually someone sees the inscribed runes on its shoulders. I make a statement about the lion, both the original and the copy, and then I ask the pupils what they think, what pops up in their minds, when I say ‘Vikings wrote on the lion when it was still placed in Piraeus harbour outside Athens in Greece a thousand years ago’ (**Fig. 3**). Sometimes a student asks me ‘*How do we know that it was written in the Viking Age?*’ I reply that the question is a good example of source criticism. I tell them, if I have not already done so, the story of the lion and how runologists have compared it with other runestones, and that they can date the style and the runes. The students get to discuss my inquiry in smaller groups for a few minutes and then report back on their thoughts.

4. Hutton 1993.

5. See Karlsson and Zander, eds. 2014.

A short history of the Piraeus Lion and his gypsum copy

The sculpture of a male lion is of Antique date, about 2300 years old. It was made in Greece from Pentelic marble in the 4th century BCE. The lion is seated, 3.2 meters tall with gentle eyes, sitting with its tail between its legs. It has a curly mane that continues all along its back. The lion was installed in Piraeus harbour outside of Athens, which for that reason was later known as *Porto Leone*. It is one of many lion statues made during the 4th century BCE to commemorate fallen warriors, so it is a memorial monument. The Piraeus Lion is the biggest of its kind known. In the museum near the site today are other similar, but smaller, monuments. Vikings made rune inscriptions on the lion at least three times during the 11th century. One of the texts commemorates *Haursi bōnda*, Haursi the farmer. Thorgunn Snædal, to whose work I shall return below, finds a special sense of emotional resonance in that the Norse inscriptions make the monument into a double memorial to dead warriors, the function of the Greek original and of the later inscriptions about dead Varangians.⁶ A man called Djan Pulat-zade Mustafa left the first known record of the lion, but this account is lost in its original form. In addition, the lion appears on French maps from 1685-1687. In that last year, after their war with the Turks who at that time ruled over Greece, the victorious Venetians took the lion as a trophy back to Venice (appropriately as the animal is a symbol of the city). It was placed in front of the Arsenal by Francesco Morosini. Before the lion was moved, a young Swedish woman, Anna Åkerhjelm, saw it in Piraeus in 1687. She was accompanying the wife of the Swedish field marshal Otto von Königsmarck, who was commander-in-chief of the Venetian forces. Anna wrote in her diary that they went in small boats into the harbour to see this grand lion. It is possibly also during this war that the lion sustained gunfire damage, producing the shot holes that can be seen all over its surface. According to a 17th-century writer, the Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi (1611-1684), it once had fresh water coming from its mouth, supposedly during ‘the time of infidels’. Pipes went along its back and into a cistern in front of it, but the exact date is unknown. When the lion arrived in Venice in 1688, it was restored for some time and the repairs along the back can be seen on the original statue. It was then put on display in 1692, together with other lions that had been brought to Venice.⁷

The runes were discovered in Venice by the Swedish diplomat Johan David Åkerblad, sometime between 1798 and 1799 (**Fig. 4**). He then wrote an article in 1800, published in 1803, *Om det sittande marmorlejonet i Venedig* (‘On the seated marble lion in Venice’). Åkerblad’s text was reprinted in Copenhagen by C. C. Rafn in 1856, in *Antiquités de l’Orient*;⁸ Kempff also wrote about the lion in 1894.⁹ Fredrik Sander then wrote about *Marmorlejonet från Piraeus* (‘The marble lion from Piraeus’), in Stockholm in 1896.¹⁰ Rafn had made gypsum casts of the runes in 1843 and examined them again in 1854 in Venice. His interpretation of them remained the ‘official’ one for a long time, even though some scholars had their doubts. Sophus Bugge wrote in 1875, ‘There is now a consensus among the experts that this [Rafn’s] interpretation was based on fantasy and not on reality.’

Brate reinterpreted the runes, made drawings, and took photographs. His interpretations, and all the others with the exception of a few individual words, were then disregarded by the great Swedish runologist Sven B. F. Jansson, known as “Run-Janne”, who was of the opinion that these inscriptions could never be truly interpreted and read. This then became the received wisdom until Snædal was

6. Sander 1896; Snædal pers. comm. 2020.

7. Sander 1896; Brate 1914; Jarring 1978; Jansson 1984; Snædal 2014.

8. Rafn 1856.

9. Kempff 1894.

10. Brate 1914; Sander 1896.

invited to study them.¹¹ The lion was restored in 2007-2008 by Anna Keller, to attempt to halt the ongoing deterioration of its surface.¹²

The copy at the Swedish History Museum has a story of its own

Fredrik Sander, a poet, a translator, art connoisseur and member of the Swedish Academy as Chair no.7 between 1889-1900, commissioned the cast of the Piraeus Lion in Venice 1890, citing as his reason that:

the lion should be welcomed as an easily accessible check on what was or was not carved on to it from the runes. Regardless of all other memories that bind our interest to this grand monument and its history, this is its rightful place, since the runecarvers were probably Swedish “Varangians”.¹³

It was a student of the teacher Antonio del Zotto at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice who, under tutelage, made the copy. In October 1895 it was shipped to Stockholm and the National Museum on a warship. When the Swedish History Museum was built and opened in 1943, the copy was first placed in the main entrance hall, and with the help of archaeologist Jan Peder Lamm it received its inventory number in the collections (16/1 1976, 30595, fid. 604699) (**Fig. 5-6**). As a fond nickname the gypsum lion was called *Huskatten* – the House Cat. The lion replica has moved around inside the museum over the years. During the period 1960 to 1980, when it was regarded as ‘just a copy’ and therefore not important, it was moved to the back of the museum by the staff entrance. There it stood in front of the National Heritage Board’s offices and the back door to the gallery for temporary exhibitions, the Blue Hall. At some point in time, it was placed in a space which thereafter was called *Lejongången*, the Lion Passage. The lion was placed together with a large collection of sculptures from Cyprus, now in the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities. Its reason for being in the museum fell into oblivion. For a time it was even thought to have been a gift from Mussolini, but Jan Peder Lamm started investigating and found a note about the lion from 1898 by Fredrik Sander.¹⁴ The lion was moved back into the main entrance hall before 2007, but I have not been able to find out exactly when, or why. There it now has a prominent place, greeting visitors.

The Piraeus Lion - a versatile source

Tangible – Textual – Abstract - Verbal

I introduce the Piraeus Lion as a tangible source. Even though our lion at the museum is a copy of the original marble monument and a secondary source, it is still important. The Piraeus Lion is also a textual source with a long tradition of being studied, since the 18th century. Many scholars have written about the Piraeus Lion. They have not always agreed in their interpretations of the runes, but we can be certain that the original once stood in Athens and that Scandinavians were there and wrote upon it sometime during the Viking Age. It is also an abstract source, in the sense that we know that Vikings saw and touched the original lion. Our lion is, one could say, a substitute source. I also tell students and visitors that as a museum teacher I am also a source – a verbal one.

In teaching, I usually only use the runic inscription on the left side of the lion. I ask the students: ‘Do you want to know what they wrote? Is it interesting or important what the Vikings wrote on the

11. Bugge 1875; Jansson 1984; Ullén 2009; Snædal 2014.

12. Snædal 2014.

13. Sander 1898; translated from Swedish by the author.

14. Sander 1898; Brate 1914; Ullén 2009; Zetterström Geschwind 2017; Lamm pers. comm. 2019.

lion?’ Often, they answer ‘Yes’. I then ask, ‘Why is it interesting? What do you think we can learn from it?’ I then continue to tell them about the different past interpretations of the runes, and about the current reading by Thorgunn Snædal from 2014. Would they like to hear it in modern Swedish or in Old Swedish/Old Norse? They almost always choose the latter, and I then ask them if they can recognize words when I read it.

We conclude that ‘*the text is a tangible source for the ancient Scandinavian language and ancient Scandinavians; a source of memories of the dead; a (secondary) source of knowledge about travelling to the Mediterranean during the Viking Age; a source regarding the making of art during the Viking Age; and a source regarding one or two rune carvers going on a trip. The copy is a unique source as the original is increasingly deteriorating; the copy is a source relating to the Swedish History Museum and its own history; and it is a source for the study of runes.*’ As a written source ‘*the words are sources for different activities; it is a source (if one believes that interpretation) regarding the “Svear”, (one of the ethnic groups of early Swedish people)*’ and much more.

I tell them that with this lion, in combination with other sources, we can get deeper into the history of the Viking Age – maybe even challenge the way we see the Vikings. I inform them about complementary sources such as those from Constantinople that describe Scandinavians working for the Byzantine emperor, and also that here in Sweden there are rune carvings similar to the inscriptions on the lion. Several from Uppland are very close in style (for example U341), with the same kind of rune bands as on the lion’s left side.¹⁵ All this opens up questions about why the Scandinavians ‘went viking’ in the first place, as well as discussions of the word *vikingr* itself, and similarly *Rus’*, *Varangians* and its analogues, *Madjus*, and so on. These are all terms through which researchers of the Viking Age have interpreted the Viking world.

In debating these terms on the Piraeus lion, and their (in)correct use, we can discuss the Viking Age. Thus, in speaking of the *Svīar* as a collective, we can talk about ‘Sweden before Sweden’; we can talk about memorial stones and the purposes of the runestones; words such as *hilfniks* (‘troop’) and *trikir* (‘young warrior’) lead to arguable definitions of fighting men; and so on. We can talk about Haraldr harðráði, who went to the Mediterranean, as we know from other sources. The word *giald*, which means that a tribute must be paid, also used in ‘Danegeld’, is interesting since we still use it in the modern Swedish *gäldenär* (‘debtor’). ‘What happens if someone did not get the stipulated tribute, or was deprived of their rightful inheritance? What would be the implications in this life and in the afterlife’ The inscription says *bōnda* – ‘was he a farmer (the literal meaning), or is it a personal name, or a nickname? What was it like to be a farmer during the Viking Age and what was Hauri Bonde doing in the Mediterranean?’ Words that are used in this way become small peepholes into the Viking Age.

The Piraeus Lion is also an abstract source, allowing us to imagine when the Vikings were there, looking up at it and talking about it. We can see them drinking from it, if it was a fountain at the time. Was there water there when they carved the runes? If we look up, now, we still see the same view of the lion as a Viking or Varangian would have had. We can think about the ‘Viking gaze’, of the men who saw it and interacted with it in different ways, and maybe told relatives at home about the lion that they had seen. As a museum teacher I can never relate every aspect to the class. I also choose my narrative; it is important for me to keep that in mind as well.

15. Snædal 2014, 33.

The Piraeus Lion and source criticism

I give the students a short introduction to source criticism. When scholars produce different interpretations of the same subject, in this case the runic inscriptions, it can be tricky to evaluate the information. The value of a source must be presented and assessed, but just knowing about different points of view is a start. Of course, it can be overwhelming when some say that the runes can never be read, while other scholars have made very long and detailed interpretations. So, the questions arise: *'Whom should we believe? Whose history is it? Ours or theirs? The museum's? We need to read all we can on the subject'*. Therefore, we can use questions like tools to address these issues, such as *'Is it a first- or a second-hand source? Have some sources been left out? How many sources have disappeared?' and 'What agenda did the writer have?'* It is sometimes difficult to get hold of all necessary source material, but in fact that was the reason our gypsum lion was made, so that a person who wanted to study the runes would not have to go to Venice.

What is the truth or the current truth?

I ask the students, *'What is the truth? Can there be more than one truth?'* I introduce the concept of the *current* truth. When we have a plausible interpretation, we can also use source criticism on the original writers' intentions – the Viking message. I ask the students *'Can we trust the original source? Can original sources lie? Can there be a misunderstanding or just an incorrect translation somewhere along the line? How do we know that this dead Varangian did not get paid, just because they wrote it...?'*

We talk this topic through and then I ask: *'Why do you think the Vikings wrote what they did?'* The answer is often *'to remember'* or because *'someone died'*. So, taking this further, *'What does it say about Viking Age?'* Often, I also take up the spatial crookedness of the last part of the inscription, the way the runes have been carved. I then make a parallel to the Arabic diplomat Ibn Faḍlān, who met with Rus' along the Volga in 922 and his account of them being drunk at a funeral.¹⁶ *'Were these runic inscriptions made as a memorial monument (on a statue at that time still most probably understood by the Greeks as itself a commemoration of dead warriors), to Scandinavian mercenaries in the service of the Byzantine Emperor?'* For many years in Greece there was actually a denial that the signs were even runes, and the inscriptions were seen as Greek.¹⁷

Interpretation rights, who goes first?

Things that we also discuss are *'Who has the right to interpret, with what priority, and what happens when that order is challenged? Does it matter who questions an interpretation? How do we know that it says what the runologists claim? Does it matter who has come up with the interpretation? A student, an old teacher, a regular enthusiast?'* And *'What tone should be used when you criticize someone else's research?'* In runological studies of the Piraeus Lion, the tone has often been harsh, to say the least. Nobody has a monopoly on interpretation; all studies are important and can be built upon. Old drawings and photos are also a vital resource. It is also important to know that it is still possible to gain wholly new knowledge, as Thorgunn Snædal did with her interpretation. Snædal told me that first she

16. Wikander 1978.

17. Snædal pers. comm. 2020.

tried to read the runes without consulting the earlier interpretations (**Fig. 7**), to form her own opinion, and then she later studied all the other readings, especially Brate's.

In relation to the students' own studies and assignments, we then talk about what *they* need to do, in writing essays, doing thorough research, using different kinds of relevant source materials, about issues of credibility and being believed; that they need to present the history of research, to show how *they* think, to document the pathways to their conclusions, and so on.

Can source criticism go too far, too early?

Exploring and diversifying the narrative through positive source critique

I have experienced an extreme form of source criticism among students that leads them not to believe in anything any longer. Source critique can begin too early. Some teachers think that the students believe everything, which might be true in some cases, but often I meet students who do not know *what* to believe when it comes to historical facts. And what then are historical facts? Who is writing them, and how is history used? How can we, in dialogue with the students, find our way through this historical maze? Often it feels as if all the fun has been taken out of history, and I want the fun to be there.

I want to suggest a move to 'positive source criticism', a shift from the need to 'criticise' everything. Instead, I want to promote the value of seeking the small clues in history, the shiny pearls from which to string a historical necklace. It can also be *restrung*, with the same beads and occasionally new ones. We can, for example, ask 'what do we know that is true?' We know that the original lion was made of marble in Greece, that it is around 2300-2400 years old, that it was placed in Piraeus Harbour, that it was carved with at least three rune inscriptions during the Viking Age, that Scandinavians/Svear saw it and touched it, that rune carvers travelled to the Mediterranean a thousand years ago, that it is some kind of memorial stone, that it was moved from Piraeus to Venice in the 17th century, that many of the runes are readable but difficult to interpret, that some words are the same as their equivalents today, and so forth.

Positive reinforcement of this kind can help young students. It can challenge their thinking, and in the process they learn how to analyse and interpret written texts in a positive and comprehensive way, that they should not be intimidated by texts, or feel that they cannot believe in anything anymore. Of course, they should not believe *everything* either, but most importantly, they should be able to approach facts and believe in the veracity of the past, and the positive forces of making history.

The Piraeus Lion, the gypsum lion and the use of history

We now return to the subject of how history is used. Apart from falling in and out of favour at the museum and being moved around, the gypsum lion has long been part of the museum's tours and exhibitions, and most recently featured as a primary figure in an augmented reality audio guide for children called *The Lonely Lion*.

As an assignment they then get to talk amongst themselves in small groups and come up with ways they could use the history of the Piraeus Lion. They suggest different ideas about writing books, making commercials, games, films and so on. We then go on to talk about the fact that history is written by people in different ways – it is *made* – and that history is in a sense our collective memories, that there can be points of view when we look at history. It can be materialistic and focus on economic and material factors, or idealistic and focus on the origins of change and new ideas. There is also an existential use, a moralistic use, a political-didactic use, a commercial and scientific use of history,

and even a refusal of history can be a form of ideological usage. In other words, history can also be religion, society, ideology, feminism, politics, innovations, children, craft-based knowledge, and so on.¹⁸ The key questions here are *What, Why, When, Who, How and For Whom?*

Abuse of history

Sometimes I also bring up the harmful *abuse* of history.¹⁹ In war, monuments are often destroyed in order to erase the history and pride of the enemy. Destruction is also a weapon to build new national identities, to write new histories, often with a political agenda. ‘*Who has the power over our historical memory?*’ One adage that the pupils often raise is that ‘the winners write the history’.

How the runes came to be on the lion has been speculated upon in many ways and from many perspectives. How we use words is important. How would the meaning differ if I described the runes carved on the lion as ‘doodles’, or ‘graffiti’, or ‘art’? If I said they were ‘carved’ or even ‘hacked into’ the lion? Or if I were to talk about ‘a Viking who could not keep his fingers in check...’, or who ‘defaced the lion’. What if we were to talk about the rune carvers as masters instead?²⁰ What does the wording convey about the narrative of the Viking Age? Would we call rune stones in Sweden doodles or graffiti or say they were hacked into stones? Thorgunn Snædal, for example, thinks that nothing other than *art* is the appropriate word in this context.²¹ We do not know if they carved the runes into the lion, its surface perhaps still shiny and polished, with permission, or if they did it unlawfully²². This action was repeated on three occasions. Just imagine seeing the runes of the first carving, and then adding to them with your own carvings. This is also an important way to get the students to feel the presence of the Vikings in the Mediterranean.

The Piraeus Lion as a part of the art exhibition History Unfolds

An alternative view that challenged me a lot – it even made me angry – was when our gypsum lion at the museum was incorporated into the exhibition *History Unfolds*, as part of the artwork *Virkad one-piece* (‘Crocheted one-piece’) (**Fig. 8**). The artist Elisabeth Bucht covered the lion with a colourful, crocheted coverall suit, supposedly so the lion could again find its own identity. Her idea was that the runes on the lion had always been used to show the Vikings as cosmopolitans who travelled the seas and left their mark, and that the lion had always been connected to overtly masculine power. She thought of the lion as violated by Vikings, who (remembering my words above) hacked the runes with *klåfingriga*, ‘grabby’ hands, an intrusion on the lion’s body, in contrast to the craftperson’s hands which made the lion. She saw the runes as involuntary tattoos to which the lion could not object, and she wanted to cover up this history of the Vikings. To do this she wanted to emphasize the lion’s gaze of goodness, with the cloth mask and with a softer, feminine textile graffiti tradition. The warming wool was to be like the blankets covering refugees, and the suit was to resemble that of a superhero. On the lion’s new outfit she crocheted ‘My identity lies in your gaze; changes every time you blink’ – meaning that the story is changed from one of national power to a future where everyone is welcome

18. Larsson 1998; Karlsson and Zander, eds. 2014.

19. Karlsson and Zander, eds. 2014.

20. Shetelig 1923; Marling 2003; Bucht 2017, Ullén 2009; Zetterström Geschwind 2017.

21. Snædal pers. comm. 2020.

22. See Kitzer Åhfeldt this volume, arguing that the effort involved would have required permission.

under this border-free blanket.²³ So why did it provoke me? Am I a nationalist of the worst kind? I like crocheting and of course I thought it was cute, but I do not like the lazy vilification of the Vikings; it is itself a stereotype and I think, in this case, an easy target. They were not perfect, but it is part of the past. We can talk about it. And the lion, in my eyes, is not the powerful, masculine symbol of the Vikings. It is a great, sensitive lion with sad eyes, that she covered up, who sits there with its tail between its legs. But at the same time, it made me realize how important history and the Viking Age are to me, and so I got a glimpse of who I am – which is one of the purposes of art.

Imagining history and use for children

Children often want to pet the lion and it is very popular, so we had to put up a sign that says it is a sensitive creature that does not want to be stroked, to try and save it from wear and tear. At the museum we have a collection of children's trails called *The History Detectives* and our gypsum lion figures in two of them: 'History Detectives: Vikings' with a runic note under the lion's chin saying 'Birka', and the augmented reality audioguide 'The Lonely Lion', in which the lion is the main character who needs help from the children to find a friend. 'The Lonely Lion' was written by my colleague Anna Wilson and me, and that makes me a part of the history of how the lion has been used. We give the lion a voice and it tells the story about the original Piraeus Lion and itself, being sad and feeling a bit stiff in the joints, and in need of help. All in all, it made it very clear to me how an object such as this big lion can be used as an educational tool in a playful way, mixing what is real and what is not. Hopefully, someday some student will study this kind of use at the museum as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as museum pedagogues we can facilitate teachers in their curriculum when it comes to sources, since we often have the tangible material to hand in the form of exhibitions, and we use history to tell stories. The museum can function as a platform for student education, as a complement to the classroom where we investigate evidence, source criticism, and the use of history. The museum in itself is also an example of this, where the same object can be exhibited in different ways and be presented through a variety of stories that in turn change over time, or with their authors. The objects have their own stories and there are many people behind every story and artefact. We do not want to lose sight of the actual human beings.

The museum fulfils its purpose in society when we, in an educational setting, by means of a guided tour, or with a school class, talk about more than just the objects. We use them as facilitators of the discourse of history, sometimes even in helping to change the narrative or broaden the view of the objects. We believe in the importance of museums and want them to be relevant. The Piraeus Lion learning programme is one example of this.

For a young person today, it is not easy to navigate the vast sea of information, but we should help them try to believe in things, not simply to criticize history and information without any knowledge of their own, discarding facts as irrelevant. Our wish is that the museum class will help them understand that they themselves are part of history. They are participating in its formation, and they can make their own histories. They will use history in the future, but hopefully they will know how they are doing so.

23. Bucht 2017.

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Fig. 1.
The copy of the Piraeus Lion in the entrance hall of the Swedish History Museum, 2019. Photo by Linda Wähländer.



Fig. 2. Our replica of the Piraeus Lion, welcoming the visitors in the entrance hall at the Historical Museum (as it was then called) when it opened in 1943. Photo by A. Wahlberg, ATA, Bildmapp 8a.



Fig. 3.
The copy of the Piraeus Lion in the entrance hall, 2019, detail of runes on his left side. Photo by Linda Wähländer.



Fig. 4. The Piraeus Lion in Venice. Photo by Didier Descouens, Venetian Arsenal, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia commons.



Fig. 5.
Our Piraeus Lion in a protective wrapping during the redecoration of the Historical Museum. Photo by RAÄ, ATA, Fotosamlingen, SHM bildmapp 5.



Fig. 6.
The Lion copy in its original white state before getting its current 'marble' colour, but with the runes filled in. Photo by RAÄ, ATA, Fotosamlingen, SHM bildmapp 5.

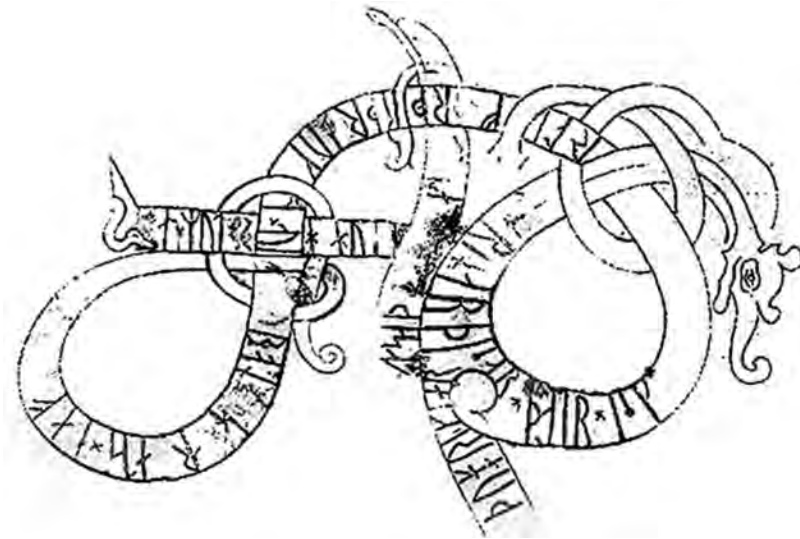


Fig. 7.
Drawing of one of the rune bands
by C. C. Rafn. 1855–57.



Fig. 8.
The copy of the Piraeus lion wrapped for the art exhibition *History Unfolds*. Photo by Linda Wähler.

Remembering the Greek Connection

Thomas Lindkvist

The connections between the world of the Vikings and the Mediterranean were many and of different kinds. Scandinavia was part of a world system in which one of the main economic, cultural, and political centres was in the Eastern Mediterranean. In a 1939 article, the Swedish historian Sture Bolin outlined a northern (or Viking) connection between the empires of the Eastern Mediterranean – the Caliphate of the Abbasids and the Byzantine Empire – and the Carolingian empire and the Anglo-Saxon polities in the West. This questioned and modified the thesis advanced previously by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, who had claimed that the end of the ancient world was not the fall of the Western Roman empire in the 5th century, but the rise of Islam and the Arab conquest of the southern shore of the Mediterranean and the Iberian Peninsula from the 7th century onwards. An economic and cultural iron curtain, more-or-less impenetrable, fell over the Great Sea, and the ancient economic coherence of the Mediterranean world was broken. According to Pirenne, this led to a political concentration in Western Europe: the rise of the Carolingian empire, facing the North and the East rather than the South; Charlemagne would have been inconceivable without Mohammed according to the Pirenne thesis, in brief. Bolin countered that the economic and cultural contacts changed, but they were far from interrupted; an important northern route for the exchange of products, and of ideas and cultural influences, ran from the Black and Caspian Seas along the river routes in Eastern Europe to the Baltic Sea and Scandinavia, and thereafter further to the North Sea and Western Europe. The Abbasid silver wandered along this path. The *Austervegr*, the way to the East, was a vital link of a world system with important trading emporia like Birka. Between the worlds of Charlemagne and Mohammed there was one of Ruric, the Viking chief or king considered to have founded Rus'.¹

Later archaeological studies underline and overwhelmingly confirm the Scandinavian connection between two different worlds – the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Europe.² In his comprehensive synthesis, however, Michael McCormick demonstrates that the Northern connection was one amongst many material and intellectual links between Western Europe and the Eastern realms and empires – and a rather tiny one. The Northern route was not exclusive; there were other more important lines of material and immaterial exchange.³

Around 1000 this world system and its East-West routes faded away and ended. The Caliphate was disrupted by internal strife from the 940s. The communication along the rivers in Eastern Europe became insecure due to nomadic invasions. The influx of silver from the Caliphate dwindled and Birka and other emporia ceased to exist around 980.

1. Bolin 1939; 1953; Pirenne 1922; 1954.

2. Hodges and Whitehouse 1983, 102-122. See also P. H. Sawyer 1982, 113-130.

3. McCormick 2001, 606-613.

Instead, a new world system gradually emerged. It was a Western European world where the Roman church was the unifying and cohesive element.

The integration of Scandinavia into this world system was a huge social, cultural, and political transformation. It was also an economic revolution with new forms of exchange of products and of trade, and partly new geographical arenas of interaction and communication. It was the Christianization of Scandinavia, the establishment of a Roman Church organization, and the emergence of the Christian monarchies. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden became part of a new Europe in making, or, according to the Swedish historian Nils Blomkvist, following a Catholic world-system. Sweden, which bordered the outside world, was at the frontier of the new world system of the Roman church; the Eastern gateway closed and turned into a barrier.⁴

These general social and political transformations also involved the introduction of a new form of literacy whose most remarkable expression was the comprehensive law texts in the emerging Christian kingdoms of Scandinavia. Law and legislation became important instruments of power during the 13th century. Extensive laws maintained and legitimized the new political and cultural order.⁵ The Swedish provincial law codes are mostly from the late 13th and early 14th centuries. The first version of the Västgöta Law, the provincial law code of Västergötland, is an exception; it is from the 1220s and may have been written on the initiative of the Lawman (*lagman*) Eskil Magnusson. It was the longest text and literary achievement to date in (Old) Swedish, in the vernacular but written with the Latin script. This law text, as well as the other provincial laws, reflected the new social order of the Middle Ages. The law of the Church and the rights of the King influenced society, although a customary or a traditional, orally transmitted law was still vital and strong. The Västgöta Law differs somewhat from the other, and later, provincial law codes of the emerging Swedish realm. There are some similarities with Norwegian legislation. The influence of the international Canon law of the Church was less than in the provincial laws of the late 13th and early 14th centuries.⁶ The possibilities for the Church and the emerging kingdom to impose legislation were limited; the norm was still the legislation accepted at the provincial assembly. The law had, according to a chronicle from the middle of the 13th century, been founded and invented in ancient and heathen times by the lawmen, the leading regional aristocrats, of the province. The chronicle also stressed that the good kings of Sweden were those who respected the laws of the province; ancient customary rules of the province had precedence.⁷

In the Västgöta Law, there are therefore several reminiscences of ancient relations and circumstances. References were made to the past and to a collective memory. An established village was one with a mound, referring to pre-Christian times.⁸ There could even be invocations to gods (in plural) in some oath formulations. There is also one reference to activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the book (or section) about inheritance, one chapter (12) concerns the complications of men leaving their native province and travelling abroad.⁹

If a man leaves the province (Västergötland) and puts a steward (*bryti*) in charge of his home, saying that he is going to Rome; the steward shall have the control of the home for one year. Then the heir shall be in charge rather than the steward, if not the heir prefers it so.

4. Blomkvist 2005. Concerning the general transformation of (Western) Europe from c. 1000, see Bartlett 1993.

5. Watts 2009, 73-89; Bagge 2014, 86-107.

6. Holmbäck and Wessén, trans., 1946, xxi; Inger 1999.

7. Lindkvist 2014, 92-95.

8. Older Västgöta Law, Land (*Jordabalken*) chapter. 15; Younger Västgöta Law, Land (*Jordabalken*) chapter 36: Collin and Schlyter, eds., 1827, 49, 189; Holmbäck and Wessén, trans., 1946, 138, 339.

9. Older Västgöta Law, Inheritance (*Ärvdabalken*) chapter 12. Collin and Schlyter, eds., 1827, 28; Holmbäck and Wessén, trans., 1946, 78.

If a man leaves the province and his wife remains at home with (one child) on the knee and another in the womb, then the child is christened and he turns heel and neck from his place of residence and walks on foot from his home province, his heirs will be those who were closest in kin when he left home, if he does not return to his native place. He does not take any man's inheritance while he is sitting in Greece.

The revised Younger version of the Västgöta Law from around 1300 reproduces this rule, which is exceptional among the Swedish laws.¹⁰ In the section about trade the Norwegian Gulathing Law, however, mentions Greece and going to Greece. This was the law of the province of Vestlandet and is older than the Västgöta Law. A free man could plead his rights within the province. If he went abroad, his property should be in custody of his deputy (*ombud*) for three winters. If, however, he went to Greece, his property should be under the custody of his closest heir.¹¹ He was in this case assumed to be away for a longer period. This reflects a legal tradition of the 12th century.

Being in Greece is in the section about inheritance in the Västgöta Law. Inheritance – especially the inheritance of land – was important to regulate and the Medieval laws treat these matters in detail. There is an extraordinary rule that a man residing (literally 'sitting') in Greece (*mæn i girklandi sitær*) was therefore not entitled to take inheritance as long as he was there.¹²

Some runic inscriptions from the 11th century commemorate men who had been in Greece (*Grikkland*), where they often met their deaths. There are 33 inscriptions mentioning connections with Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean; they are mostly from the region around Lake Mälaren, which was a central link in the East-West connection of the Viking Age world system. There are 20 in Southern Uppland and 9 in Södermanland, but only a few examples from other provinces: two from Östergötland and one each from Småland and Västergötland.¹³

The historian Birgit Sawyer argues that runic inscriptions in general are a form of inheritance document. They were monuments in memory of a deceased person that clearly state the relationship between the dead and the commissioner.¹⁴ The content of the inheritance is never mentioned; whether it was land, movable goods, or a social position was something left to be understood.

Greece was a general term used for the Byzantine Empire and the inscriptions could memorialise men in service at the Varangian guard at Constantinople. Emperor Basil II introduced this service in 988. The organization and recruitment of the Varangian guard is fragmentarily known. There are several sources about martial activities of Scandinavians, notably the expeditions of Haralðr Sigurdsson in the middle of the 1030s in the Mediterranean. Haralðr and his followers were serving in the regular imperial army rather than at the guard in Constantinople.¹⁵

10. If a man leaves the province and puts a steward (*bryti*) in charge of his home, saying that he is going to Rome; the steward shall have the control of the home for one year. Then the heir shall be in charge rather than the steward, if not the heir prefers it so. If a man leaves the province and his wife remains at home with [one child] on the knee and another in the womb, then the child is christened and he turns heel and neck from his place of residence and walks on foot from his home province, his heirs will be those who were closest in kin when he left home, if he does not return to his native place. He does not take any man's inheritance while he is sitting in Greece. Younger Västgöta Law, Inheritance (*Ärvdabalken*) chapters 15-16. Collin and Schlyter, eds., 1827, 137-138; Holmbäck and Wessén, trans., 1946, 272.

11. Gulathing Law, chapter 47: Robberstad, trans., 1969, 66.

12. See also Beckman 1924, 39. Beckman discusses this rule in relation to Ingeborg, a sister-daughter to Queen Margareta Fredkulla in the beginning of the 12th century. Ingeborg lost her inheritance since her mother was married in Novgorod. She could not claim inheritance after a person who lived abroad. Margareta later compensated Ingeborg. Saxo 13:1.4: Friis-Jensen, ed., 2005, 86-87.

13. Jansson 1963, 44-49; Larsson 1990, 154; Larsson 1991, 143-145.

14. B. Sawyer 1988, 38; B. Sawyer 2000.

15. Jansson 1963, 45-46; Larsson 1991, 44-61; Herrin 2007, 244-246; Snædal 2014, 35-39. The founding of the Varangian guard is recorded by Michael Psellos, who called them Scythians: Linnér, trans., 1984, 18. The most famous narrative of the activities of Harald and his followers is the *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, chapters 3-15, in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*. 3: Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., 2002, 71-89.

Sometimes going to Greece with martial and economic aims was combined with a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. An inscription from Broby in Täby in Uppland commemorates Östen who intended to go to Jerusalem and died in Greece.¹⁶

There is only one example of an inscription mentioning Greece from Västergötland. In Kølaby (Redväg härad) relatives commissioned a monument in memory of Åsbjörn, who died in Greece.¹⁷ Like most other runic inscriptions, it is impossible to get more detailed biographical information and the historical circumstances are unknown. Åsbjörn could have been contemporary to Haraldr Sigurdsson and in his levy of Scandinavian mercenaries, but this is not more than a guess.

The Older Västgöta Law, however, is from the 1220s, more than two centuries after the high tide of the Varangian guard. There was still a guard with Danish-speaking men at the beginning of the 12th century when King Erik Ejegod was in Constantinople on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, according to Saxo.¹⁸ After 1204, there was, furthermore, no Emperor to guard at Constantinople.

This rule was therefore obsolete around 1220 and even more obsolete when the revised version of the Law, the Younger Västgöta Law, was written in the very late 13th or beginning of the 14th century; it no longer had practical use. Inheritance was one of the crucial issues treated in the Medieval legislation. The new society and its social order required new rules. The Church encouraged the right of the individual to alienate land, which countered an ancient and established collective disposal of land. The transition from the Viking to the Medieval world meant new concepts of property and ownership. Individual possession of land became possible, like the right to donate land. Rent in different forms, tithes, taxes, fees, and duties to a landowner were essential means to acquire wealth in that society. The right to transfer land from one generation to another became vital for social reproduction.

In the Viking world, wealth and movable property were inherited; in the Medieval (or feudal) world, it was foremost land. This transition was an essential part of what Georges Duby termed 'the feudal revolution'. A society based upon the appropriation of land rents of different kinds emerged. Medieval society was based upon an internal appropriation of the produce of, in general, small-scale units run by peasant households.¹⁹ In Viking society external appropriation of wealth played a great role, especially precious objects acquired through exchange of products or through different predatory activities far away. The change of world systems was a change in the mode of production.

The legislation concerned those who for some reason were away and thus unable to defend their rights. A brother on a merchant journey had the same right to inheritance as one sitting at home by the ashes,²⁰ since it was a legitimate reason to be away from home. Some other reasons for being away from home and province were illegitimate.; the man who ran to a warship and made himself a pirate, a *bunkabiter* (one who was breaking the deck in order to steal) committed a non-compensable crime and the culprit was therefore excluded from society.²¹ Residing in Greece was exceptional, but a legitimate absence.

In this rule of the Västgöta Law, there is a difference between absence in Rome and that in Greece – between two different Mediterranean destinations. To go to Rome could be part of a Church

16. Wessén and Jansson, eds., 1940-1943, 202-203 (no. U 136).

17. 'Åsmund raised this stone after Åsbjörn, his kinsman, and Åsa after her husband, and he was son to Kolben. He died in Greece.' This translation follows the interpretation and edition of Jungner and Svärdström, eds., 1958-1970, 320-322 (no. Vg 178). An alternative, but less probable, interpretation is that Kolben died in Greece.

18. Saxo 12:7.1: Friis-Jensen, ed., 2005, 78-79.

19. Duby 1978, 183-205. Cf. also Hilton 1975, 3-19.

20. Older Västgöta Law, Inheritance (*Ärvdabalken*) chapter 19: Collin and Schlyter, eds., 1827, 30; Holmbäck and Wessén, trans., 1946, 79.

21. Older Västgöta Law, Non-Compensable Crimes (*Urbotamål*) chapter 10: Collin and Schlyter, eds., 1827, 24; Holmbäck and Wessén, trans., 1946, 70.

penance. Certain acts of abomination, such as adultery, necessitated that the culprit go to Rome; cases would be 'brought from the province and to Rome' and the offender should return with a letter from the pope.²² To go to Rome was a part of the world of literacy. Going to Rome could, of course, also be a pilgrimage, which probably included other destinations like Santiago de Compostela or the Holy Land. According to the section concerning the Church in the Tiohäräd Law of the neighbouring province of Småland: 'No one is baptized twice, except if he is such a good man that he baptizes himself in Jordan'.²³

The return of a Rome traveller was expected and the *bryti*, a kind of steward, took care of the land for a year. That was not the case for the one who went to Greece.

Little, if anything, is known about what was inherited (or not) from a man in Greece. The runic inscriptions are from a society in which the acquisition of wealth and prestigious movable property was important. At least two runic stones have information about such appropriations. Horse from southern Uppland, was remembered since he fared bravely and acquired wealth in Greece for his heir. In this example, movable property was brought to the home province to be distributed. Olev (or Olov) from Södermanland 'gained booty, since he divided gold in Greece'.²⁴

It is seldom specified how the men in Greece died. There are examples of men who fell in combat in the South-Eastern Baltic area; regular expeditions of plunder and of demanding tribute targeted that area. Less is known about the destinies of men who went to Greece but did not return.²⁵ A man who went to Greece was probably more unlikely to return than one who went elsewhere, like the Norse world around the North and Baltic Seas and the Northern Atlantic.

The rules of the Västgöta Law discussed here were outdated and of no practical use, but the Greek connection was remembered. Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean were regarded as outstanding achievements – something exceptional and not forgotten for long periods of time; those who went to Greece and lived there were extraordinary men. The Greek connection remained part of a collective memory into the 13th century.

22. Older Västgöta Law, Marriage (*Giftermålsbaken*) chapter 8; Younger Västgöta Law, Church (*Kyrkobalken*) chapter 52, Non-Compensable Crimes (*Urbotamål*) chapter 3, Marriage (*Giftermålsbalken*) chapter 15: Collin and Schlyter, eds., 1827, 34-35, 98-101, 120, 148, 258; Holmbäck and Wessén, trans., 1946, 99, 214-215, 248, 285-286.

23. Tiohäräd Law, Church (*Kyrkobalken*) chapter 9: Holmbäck and Wessén, trans., 1946, 427.

24. Wessén and Jansson, eds., 1949-1951, 379-385 (no. U 792); Brate and Wessén, eds., 1924-1936, 123-124 (no. Sö 163).

25. Larsson 1990, 125-128; Lindkvist 1990, 44-49.

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Ejnar Dyggve, Jelling, and the Mediterranean

Anne Pedersen and Per Kristian Madsen

Introduction

The royal monument complex in Jelling, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1994, is one of the best-known Viking-Age sites in Denmark. In the 1940s, during WWII, the Danish architect and archaeologist Ejnar Dyggve (1887-1961) was responsible for one of the most extensive archaeological campaigns in Jelling to date. He was not the first to excavate there, nor was he the last. The latest excavations, now under publication, took place in the years 2009 to 2013 as part of the National Museum Jelling Project, and the new features, a huge palisade, associated buildings, and part of an immense stone setting, have since been visualised on site (**Fig. 6**). Rather than discussing the full history of the Jelling site, we will focus on Ejnar Dyggve and his achievements. The aim of this paper is therefore to reevaluate some of Dyggve's ideas and look at Jelling as an architectural expression of power, governed by rituals and purposes that may find parallels in monuments and traditions that can be traced back to a Mediterranean sphere. When he was unable to travel to the Balkans during the war, Dyggve had been offered the opportunity to head an excavation at Jelling, in part to counter a perceived threat that the occupying German forces might do so instead.¹ Drawing upon his experience in the Mediterranean, Dyggve introduced new views about the religious and political nature and function of Jelling which have, however, largely been forgotten over the years, particularly since his interpretation of the earliest stone monument on the site was abandoned. This paper thus presents a deep connection between Scandinavia and the Mediterranean across time and in diverse ways, although it does not directly address the Vikings in the Mediterranean.

Much of the fame of the Jelling monuments derives from the two rune stones standing immediately south of the church (**Fig. 1**). The smaller stone was raised shortly before or around the middle of the 10th century by King Gormr in memory of his wife Queen Thyra (Þórví). Its original position remains unknown; in contrast, excavations have shown that the large three-sided rune stone of King Haraldr still stands where it was put up around AD 963, although slightly raised and supported by a later stone packing.² The layout of its decoration, with one side bearing the main inscription and the other two displaying images accompanied by concluding albeit small parts of the text, may be compared to the pages of an illuminated manuscript.³ The three faces of the stone are framed and tied together with narrow bands or ribbons, and the inscription runs in horizontal lines like in a manuscript although it is written with runes in Old Danish. It proclaims the focus of King Haraldr for his reign: his royal dynasty (the *stirps regia*), the king's claim to power and territory, and his acceptance of the

1. Krogh 1993, 135.

2. Krogh 1982.

3. Cf. Roesdahl 1999; Wamers 2000.

Christian faith as the official religion of his Danish kingdom or rather its people, the Danes. This was in effect a clear programmatic demonstration that from that time on, Denmark was to be a Christian kingdom ruled by a king with a proper dynastic background to his claims.

Studies of the two rune stones dominated early antiquarian research into Jelling, beginning in the late 16th century.⁴ The inscriptions commemorated the royal couple Gormr and Thyra (Þórví), while the two great mounds immediately north and south of the church served as visual confirmation of the traditions and myths that linked the king and queen to Jelling. Archaeological excavations were to come much later, and they have in a sense followed the development of archaeology as a scientific discipline. The burial chamber in the North Mound was discovered by accident in 1820 by local farmers in their attempt to clear the well they believed to be at the centre of the mound. It was noted early on that the chamber had been reopened/looted already in antiquity. The few finds from 1820 and the subsequent investigations in 1820/1821 included the small silver cup, kept in the National Museum, which was to become the type example of the Jelling art style.⁵ The chamber and finds supplemented the information provided by the rune stones and by the chronicles of the medieval historians Sveinn Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus written in the decades around AD 1200, which had attracted the attention of scholars since the 1500s. Despite further excavations, initiated on behalf of King Frederik VII in 1861,⁶ questions remained. Queen Thyra (Þórví) was believed to have been laid to rest in the North Mound. Was the South Mound truly empty, and if so, where was the grave of King Gormr? And where was the royal residence, the *Regis curiam* mentioned by Sveinn Aggesen? These questions formed the point of departure for Ejnar Dyggve in the 1940s.

Ejnar Dyggve and Jelling

Dyggve graduated in 1920 as an architect from The Royal Academy in Copenhagen, and until his death in 1961 he had an outstanding and prosperous career as an archaeologist and researcher, mainly occupied in the Eastern Mediterranean within the field of Classical, Early Christian, and Byzantine monuments. Shortly after his death Dyggve was celebrated with commemorative speeches in the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, of which he was a member. Both speakers, H. P. L'Orange and Johs. Brøndsted, paid tribute to and expressed their esteem for Dyggve's scholarly and scientific work, and a full bibliography of his numerous works was printed by the Academy, following the two speeches. Another of Ejnar Dyggve's biographers, Carl Johan Becker, later wrote that Dyggve left a significant personal and professional mark on Danish archaeology.⁷ His work was commemorated at a conference, *Ejnar Dyggve: Creating Crossroads*, in 2013 in Split, Croatia where he had worked in the 1930s, and where the documentation is now kept from his work there.⁸ Dyggve's investigations in Jelling were, as mentioned, in part caused by the outbreak of WWII, which forced him to return to Denmark. It is evident that he, on the one hand, brought extremely valuable experience and inspiration from his work in the Mediterranean, while, on the other, he also managed to influence profoundly the direction of the relatively new discipline of church archaeology emerging in Denmark from c.

4. Pedersen 2006a with references.

5. Thomsen 1836.

6. Cf. Kornerup 1875.

7. See the speeches by L'Orange and Brøndsted in Ejnar Dyggve 17. oktober 1887-6. august 1961. Taler i Videnskaberne Selskabs møde den 27. april 1962; see further Becker 1980.

8. The conference was arranged by the Cvito Fisković Centre Split in collaboration with the University of Copenhagen (IKK). Cf. Belamarić and Kačunco 2014. Accessed 23.03.2021; See further Bužančić 2014.

1950.⁹ Dyggve was a keen excavator who published his results continuously; he did not complete his final publication on Jelling, however, because he was entrusted by the Danish Carlsberg Foundation to write the final, great publication on the excavations of the temple of Athena Lindia on the Island of Rhodes, which had been initiated in the very first decades of the 20th century.¹⁰

Unlike his predecessors in 1861, who tunnelled into the centre of the Jelling South Mound from the side, Dyggve decided to excavate from above. The mound fill was removed by hand and wheelbarrows, a tremendous effort requiring a large work force – probably not unlike the one originally required to build the mound in the second half of the 10th century. (**Fig. 2**) shows Dyggve standing on a ledge to the left, dressed in his characteristic architects' uniform with light plus fours and stockings, apparently taking a photo with a small camera (the most significant features in the excavation were documented in photographs on large glass plates). The excavation reached subsoil level. The mound had apparently never contained a central burial, but other features came to light, among them a wooden lattice frame and two upright joined posts, which marked the centre of the mound. Large boulders that had caused the excavators much trouble in the narrow tunnels in 1861 proved to belong to two rows of monoliths, which Dyggve interpreted as the southern part of a huge, triangular sanctuary, a pagan *vi* in Old Norse.

Dyggve's excavations continued in the North Mound in 1942. By then, the centre of the mound had already been examined twice, in 1820-21 and again in 1861, when it was decided to reconstruct the burial chamber and open it to visitors. Dyggve chose an approach from the east, a massive and potentially dangerous undertaking considering the size of the mound and the depth of the narrow open cut.¹¹ The excavation revealed that the core of the mound was covered by a layer of large stones. Dyggve interpreted the turf-built core as a Bronze-Age mound, an interpretation in keeping with the known reuse of ancient monuments in the Viking Age.¹² Coring in 2009, however, suggested that the mound may in fact be considerably later, possibly from the Viking Age.¹³

Dyggve's documentation from Jelling includes large and incredibly sharp photos as well as plan and profile drawings with notes and comments in his characteristic handwriting. In addition, soil and wood samples were handed over to the National Museum for future analysis. Together with an older sample, the wood samples have formed the basis for dendrochronological dating of the burial chamber in the North Mound to AD 958/59, a date now assumed to indicate the death of King Gormr.¹⁴ Revision of the evidence from the South Mound suggests a slightly later date for that monument; building commenced in the 970s and may have continued with breaks in the process into the 990s.¹⁵

In the 1940s, following the excavation results from 1861, Queen Thyra (Þórví) and later King Gormr were both believed to have been buried in the timber-built burial chamber in the North Mound – despite the fact that no remains of the royal couple, nor any artefacts that could definitely be associated with the king or queen had been found when the chamber was excavated in the 1820s and 1861. After the excavations, as an explanation for the lack of human remains in the North Mound (and the confirmed lack of a burial in the South Mound), Dyggve suggested that the royal couple, the historical founders of the Jelling dynasty, had been transferred to new graves, possibly a crypt burial either in the first church in Jelling or in Roskilde in eastern Denmark, which was believed to have

9. Dyggve 1954; 1955.

10. Dyggve 1960.

11. Cf. Krogh 1993, 139, fig. 61.

12. Dyggve 1948; Pedersen 2006b.

13. Breuning-Madsen *et al.* 2012.

14. Cf. Krogh 1993, 214-218, 246-247.

15. Christensen, forthcoming.

been chosen as the future seat of King Haraldr, the son of Gormr and Thyra (Þórví).¹⁶

In Dyggve's view, such a *translatio* to Roskilde would have demonstrated that King Haraldr understood and was willing to accept the policy of the Church to connect a church building with the burial of an important individual, in this case the founder of the royal dynasty. It would also establish a connection between the parents of King Haraldr and the king's claims to power and to have made the Danes Christian.¹⁷ Dyggve's excavations in the chancel of Jelling Church in 1947, however, revealed nothing that might relate to the royal couple, nor to a reburial. The documentation from the excavation shows the complicated stratigraphy in the church chancel (**Fig. 3**).¹⁸ A large stone in the profile to the left was believed by Dyggve to have been the toppled altar stone of a pagan temple, later reused on the altar table in the first Christian church, thus providing proof of continuity of cult and place.¹⁹ As seen in the section, however, one side of the stone was found on top of the foundation trench of the stone church, and it probably related to the foundation of this church sometime in the beginning of the 12th century. Moreover, the stone showed no traces of a Christian *sepulchrum* for its necessary relics. Dyggve also recorded two post holes in front of the altar which he suggested might have carried a kind of iconostasis.²⁰ Dyggve's thoughts on royal *translatio* and his proposal for the chancel decoration, which has no known parallels in Danish churches from this period, clearly reflect his Mediterranean background. Rather than an iconostasis, the post holes may be evidence for the later installation of a Romanesque *ciborium* above the altar.

Dyggve summarised his results in a model (**Fig. 4**) for the development of the monument complex, introducing the idea of a huge, triangular sanctuary defined by large stones, which he believed could be traced on both sides of the North Mound and the early 12th century stone church as well as beneath the South Mound.²¹ In this first analysis of the whole monument complex, Dyggve included a pagan temple (phase I), situated on the spot of the later stave church, which had the 'reused altar stone'. The North Mound was built with a chamber grave, and Dyggve proposed that the small rune stone of King Gormr had occupied a place close to its present position. After the official Christianisation of Denmark, the rune stone of King Haraldr was raised, as well as the first, wooden church, both on the main axis of the complex (phase II). The South Mound was added later, covering the southern end of the triangular sanctuary (phase III).

Jelling and the Mediterranean

Dyggve reconstructed the first church in detail from a few scattered finds of post holes and fragments of clay floor, drawing upon his knowledge of later Norwegian stave churches and of early church architecture both of Irish origin and from the eastern part of Europe.²² His assumption of a general continuity of place and worship was followed by his idea of an open-air extension of the wooden church to the west of its nave, distinguished by two parallel rows of large stones.²³ He describes this as the area for the ordinary people attending the activities inside the small church. Inside, the king and his retinue would have been in the nave and the clergy in the chancel. Dyggve's term for this special,

16. Dyggve 1955, 176.

17. Dyggve 1955, 176.

18. Dyggve 1954, 226, fig. 5.

19. Dyggve 1954, 222-229; 1955, 162-167.

20. Dyggve 1954, 222.

21. Dyggve 1954, 236, fig. 15.

22. Dyggve 1954, 236-239; 1955, 170-174.

23. Dyggve 1954, 234 235, figs. 12-14.

open-air feature was that it was *sub divo* (under the open sky). Using this term, he demonstrated the same manner of interpretation as in his work in the ancient Dalmatian city of Salona. There he interpreted his finds as what he called a Christian *sub divo* construction or a *basilica discoperta*, a basilica with no roof.²⁴ Although this idea was much debated at the time,²⁵ there seems to be no doubt that he had it in mind in his writing about Jelling.

Dyggve's fascinating model of the transition from Viking-Age paganism to Early Christianity had a great and immediate impact during his lifetime, although its Mediterranean inspiration was not generally noted. A full-scale reconstruction of the pagan sanctuary was completed in 1951 (the same year as Dyggve's final publication on Salona). This was later misinterpreted by many as a reconstruction of the stone ship setting proposed by Knud J. Krogh and the line of raised stones east of the church (not original) was removed in connection with the visualization of the palisade complex in 2013. In his view of Jelling, Dyggve was probably also to some degree inspired by his work in Thessaloniki, particularly his ideas about the Arch and the Rotunda of the emperor Galerius. The first of his publications from Thessaloniki came out in 1941, shortly before his major excavation campaigns in Jelling.²⁶

Dyggve assumed that the royal residence in Jelling mentioned by the chronicler Sveinn Aggesen might be found to the east of the North Mound in the vicinity of a major farm, the so-called *Fogedgården* (the Bailiff's Farm). This also revealed his previous experience; he referred to Mediterranean traditions in which *palatium* and sanctuary were linked to a royal burial. A test trench east of the North Mound gave some support to this idea, but the presence of a residence was not proven. Dyggve emphasized that the royal estate should not be perceived as a fortified site surrounded by moats in the tradition of a medieval manor but rather as a residential *palatium* built of wood and situated in an agrarian landscape dominated by the old burial mounds.²⁷ In a paper from 1959 on the topic of royal residences,²⁸ he specifically pointed out the plots in Jelling where he wanted to conduct trial excavations to test his ideas; this was part of one of his research themes, which he called *palatium-ecclesia* in another paper from that same year.²⁹

The conference in Split in 2013³⁰ demonstrated the extent of the sources of inspiration available to Dyggve, which formed part of the background for his theories on Jelling. In his publication of the excavations and his interpretation of the monuments from 1955, he compared the size of his proposed sanctuary to the size of the Town Hall Square in the city of Copenhagen, although he commented that 20,000 people as estimated in 1950 for Copenhagen was a highly unlikely number for Jelling.³¹ The comparisons taken from the Mediterranean past included the holy sanctuary of Delphi in Greece (**Fig. 5**). The purpose of this comparison was to illustrate the size and monumentality of Jelling but also to demonstrate the potential number of participants and by extension the possibility of sacred activities apart from burial on the site.

The total rejection of the triangular sanctuary in 1966 (only five years after Dyggve's death) by Olaf Olsen, later professor of medieval archaeology, Danish State Antiquary, and Director General of the Danish National Museum, left the Jelling discussion with a *tabula rasa*.³² The same occurred for

24. See Dyggve 1940a; 1940b.

25. Cf. for instance Schneider 1950.

26. Dyggve 1941.

27. Dyggve 1955, 130-134.

28. Dyggve 1959a, 107.

29. Dyggve 1959b, 6.

30. Belamarić and Kačunco, eds., 2014. Accessed 23.03.2021.

31. Dyggve 1955, 149-150, figs. 20-21.

32. Olsen 1966, 244-267.

any further discussion of potential physical connections between pagan and early Christian places of worship. Discussion of Jelling among archaeologists was to a large extent restricted to the rune stones and the mounds, and instead of a triangular enclosure, the idea of a magnificent stone setting in the shape of a ship (an idea that had been voiced by J. Magnus Petersen and C. Engelhardt already in the 1870s) was put forward and supported by the excavations of Knud J. Krogh.³³ Excavations by Krogh in Jelling Church in the 1970s also modified the sequence of buildings, with the result that Dyggve's pagan temple as the primary building was replaced by a church.³⁴

Ceremonial space

When Dyggve's reconstruction of a sanctuary was abandoned, the idea of a ritual or ceremonial outdoor space also faded. The basic points behind his model, however, deserve to be reconsidered. The most recent excavation campaign by the National Museum's Jelling Project has not only extended the scale of the monument site but perhaps more significantly added an enclosed space far larger than the space west of the first stave church envisaged by Dyggve.³⁵ Today it is revealed as an immense four-sided complex covering about 12.5 hectares, at least five times the area of most known Viking-Age 'manors' and farmsteads, not to speak of the well-known ring fortresses, named after Trelleborg in Sjælland (**Fig. 6**), which it resembles in its types of buildings and the evident skill in planning and construction. The North mound occupies the exact centre (the crossing point of the diagonals between the palisade corners) and a few buildings of Trelleborg type were spaced along the boundary – at least in the northeast quadrant. An excavation in the northwest corner in 2011 revealed no evidence of buildings, and although traces of a building were uncovered in the recent excavation undertaken by VejleMuseerne inside the western part of the palisade in 2020, it is not related to the distinctive architecture of the buildings identified in the northeast quadrant. The complex gives an impression of meticulous planning according to well-defined standards of measurement, implying a high degree of knowledge and building experience. It seems possible that the same planners and architects were at work there as in the Trelleborg ring fortresses and the great bridge at Raving Enge some 10 km south of Jelling.

Dendrochronological analysis in 2013 of 11 samples of timbers preserved in the small pond Smededammen at the southern line of the palisade provided a date range of AD 958-985, with one sample most likely from a tree felled in 968.³⁶ The enclosure may thus have been planned and perhaps constructed only a few years after or even while the North Mound was being completed. The connection between these two parts of the monument site is obvious, but was the palisade complex with its characteristic buildings also a residence – the one mentioned by Sveinn Aggesen and sought by Dyggve?

Surprisingly, little evidence of specialized activity or, indeed, of any activity has come to light in and around the enclosed area, despite extensive controlled excavation and detector surveys by the Jelling Project. There are almost no artefacts and extremely few signs of the crafts or trade associated with a site such as the magnate's residence at Lake Tissø in Sjælland.³⁷ Moreover, the military impression given by the palisade is not convincing. It lacks the rampart and moat characteristic of the ring fortresses of the 10th century associated with King Haraldr, and the straight lines of its sides are less

33. Krogh 1993, 249-267.

34. Krogh 1982.

35. Cf. Pedersen and Madsen 2017.

36. Jessen *et al.* 2014.

37. Jørgensen 2003.

suitable for defence than the circular shape of the fortresses. The total length of 1.4 km as well as the long lines of internal communication would be challenging for any defending forces. The complex therefore does not appear to have been built as a permanently occupied royal residence, nor was it intended as a fortress. Instead, it was probably built for a different, yet no less significant purpose where the large open space was the significant part. To judge from the date of the palisade (AD 968), it seems obvious to link it with King Haraldr, the funeral in the North Mound, and the new king's election – perhaps as a setting for ceremonies following upon the raising of Haraldr's rune stone and its proclamation of his three basic political messages at an assembly of his courtiers and chieftains, including also delegates from foreign powers.

Apart from the ring fortresses, the palisade is linked to other monumental building works, also ascribed to King Haraldr, including the extension of the Danevirke rampart system and the slightly later Kovirke (rampart and moat) at the southern border of Denmark. If the Jelling complex is interpreted as an assembly site, not for use by the local population but for an audience from a far wider social and political sphere, one may speculate whether the impressive timber bridge discovered at Ravning Enge, only 10 km south of Jelling, may have been part of a formal (ceremonial/official) approach to the site, maybe even, as suggested by E. Roesdahl, a route with symbolic religious connotations.³⁸ The bridge has been dated by dendrochronology to AD 979-985.³⁹ It may thus be a decade later than the palisade but contemporary with the building of the South Mound in Jelling, which would probably also have provided occasion for official ceremonies.

Whether a part-time residence or, more likely, a royal assembly site, the palisade complex contains some of the elements originally proposed by Ejnar Dyggve, and not only time but also space is again a significant feature in the discussion of Jelling. The events that took place there could have involved choreographed processions with numerous participants and onlookers, formal ceremonies, and public spectacles and entertainment – events that no archaeological sources may be able to indicate, but which can be deduced for the contemporary Ottonian Empire and ultimately the Byzantine Empire by means of sources such as the *Book of Ceremonies* (*De ceremoniis*) compiled by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (905-959).⁴⁰

Visual communication

Dyggve saw the North Mound and the stone setting as archaic features, deliberately chosen in order to create the most magnificent stage on which the kingdom and the king would act, allowing the king at the same time to demonstrate his claim to power and his ability to rule on a level corresponding to that of neighbouring kingdoms, or even that of the Ottonian Empire.⁴¹ The monuments in Jelling (and other contemporary building works) incorporate well-known materials and construction methods but combine them in an innovative fashion and on a scale not previously seen. Dyggve expressed his views as the rule of 'the power-creating significance of archaism' (*arkaiseringens magtskabende betydning*), clearly referring to a Mediterranean tradition transferred into Carolingian Europe at almost its full measure.⁴²

38. Roesdahl 1990.

39. Christensen 2003.

40. We wish to thank Professor Thomas Meier for inspiration on this point, provided in a paper intended for the Jelling Conference II in 2010. We also wish to thank Casper Mose Hansen, who in connection with the Jelling Project examined the text of *Constantine Porphyrogenetos. The Book of Ceremonies* for evidence of ceremonies and ceremonial practice. See further Wemhoff 2014 on ceremonial space in Jelling.

41. Cf. Dyggve 1955, 144.

42. Dyggve 1959a, 108 with references.

The somewhat archaic yet easily recognizable monument types chosen in Jelling may have served a purpose reminiscent, for example, of the antique *spolia* reused in Carolingian or Ottonian ecclesiastical architecture, by establishing a link to other legendary places in Scandinavia and thereby strengthening the authority and claims of the king. In this context, the South Mound (according to the dendrochronological dates, built after the acceptance of Christianity by King Haraldr and without a burial) gains importance. It may have been added to create an image of two burials (Haraldr's parents) and, with the ship setting and North Mound, a plurality of monuments like that known at sites such as Gamla Uppsala in Sweden or Borre in Norway;⁴³ it thus also conveyed a visual impression of time-depth and a testimony of ancestral legitimacy. Monumental ship settings, although far smaller than in Jelling, are known elsewhere in Scandinavia, for instance at Lejre in Denmark or Anundshög in Sweden; at both sites they are combined with burial mounds, and in the case of Lejre with impressive halls on elevated platforms separated by a small river from the burial ground.⁴⁴

In the 1940s, no fully documented farmsteads or villages from the Viking Age were available to Dyggve seeking models for the royal residence. This has long since changed. The use of timber fences in and around a Viking-Age village and its separate farmsteads was clearly demonstrated in the 1970s at Vorbasse less than 30 km southwest of Jelling,⁴⁵ and evidence of similar fences has been excavated at many other sites from both the Viking Age and the preceding Iron Age. The Jelling palisade complex shows a clear correspondence with contemporary and slightly earlier rural sites. As an example, the manor site excavated at Tissø in western Sjælland has an impressive hall (presumably originally white-washed) and subsidiary buildings enclosed by a strong fence.⁴⁶ There is also a small separate enclosure, erected immediately south of the hall around a centrally placed building possibly designated for worship, perhaps involving the use of small silver cups like the ones recovered from the 10th-century silver hoards of Fejø, Ribe Nørremark, and Terslev.⁴⁷

At Lisbjerg, north of Aarhus, excavations have revealed a local magnate's residence consisting of a main building at the centre and subsidiary buildings placed along the inside of a surrounding fence. The central building was replaced by a wooden church which was later succeeded by the extant Romanesque stone church,⁴⁸ a development not unlike that in Jelling where the present Romanesque church stands near the centre of the complex, the North Mound occupying the exact geometric centre. Nonetheless, the stringent layout of the Jelling palisade and the whole monumental area are unique to this site, paralleled only on a far smaller scale at the slightly older site of Erritsø to the southeast of Jelling and not least the Trelleborg fortresses in the later part of King Haraldr's reign.⁴⁹

Like Dyggve, we may also look southwards, for example to the Ottonian Empire and its Mediterranean connections, for references and sources of inspiration for the complex; in this case not its physical form but perhaps its ideas and monumentality. As mentioned, the South Mound may have been intended to replace the stone ship setting (if it had ever been fully completed) and to create a memorial identical to the North Mound, the two great mounds easier to 'decode' than a stone ship and a single mound and thus better suited to convey the message and enforce the mental image of the king's two parents.

If so, the result would be an impressive, albeit visually very different memorial on par with the burials of the parents of King Haraldr's contemporary the Emperor Otto I, King Heinrich the Fowler

43. Cf. Ljungkvist and Frölund 2015; Myhre 2015.

44. Christensen 2015.

45. Hvass 1979.

46. Cf. Jørgensen 2003; 2010.

47. Wamers 2005, 90, 178-181.

48. Jeppesen and Madsen 1995-96.

49. Pedersen 2016; Ravn *et al.* 2019.

(died 936) and his Queen Mathilda (died 968), in the crypt of St. Servatius in Quedlinburg, Germany. This would correspond also with the development of royal funeral rites in the Ottonian Empire, where the last resting place of not only the ruler but also his queen was given increasing emphasis. According to Thietmar of Merseburg, a Danish delegation took part in the Easter celebration in Quedlinburg in 973. It is possible that they saw or at least heard of the two royal graves in the *confessio* beneath the church of the convent established by Mathilda, which appears to have been built after 962/64 to house a valuable collection of relics acquired by the queen.⁵⁰ Was this environment part of the material and ideological universe that provided the inspiration for King Haraldr?

By their sheer size, impressive architecture, and unusual features the complex of King Haraldr in Jelling would have overwhelmed the senses, possibly even evoking a *stupor Danorum* amongst the king's subjects and followers – not unlike that which the Danes might have experienced when travelling to the courts of their southern neighbours. The terms used by contemporaries of Emperor Charlemagne when viewing the *Pfalzkapelle* of Aachen in the 9th century could equally well be used to describe Jelling in the following century. Like the court chapel, the palisade complex was a structure of amazing ingenuity (*opera mirabili constructa*); it was of remarkable size (*mirae magnitudines*), and was no doubt decorated with features of exceptional beauty (*plurimae pulchritudinis*), one of which was King Haraldr's great rune stone.⁵¹

Apart from the monuments and building works of King Haraldr, one other point is worth noting in discussing the political ambitions and sources of inspiration of the royal family in the 10th century: the important role of women within royal and imperial dynastic policy. On a rune stone from Sønder Vissing in central Jutland, a woman named Tófa describes herself as the wife of Haraldr the Good, Gormr's son (King Haraldr Bluetooth) and daughter of Mistivoi, prince of the Obodrites, a Slav people south of the Baltic on the northeast border of the Ottonian empire. According to Thietmar of Merseburg's *Chronikon*, the first wife of Haraldr's son, Sveinn Forkbeard, who ruled Denmark and later also England until 1014, was a daughter of prince Mieszko I of Poland and sister of Mieszko's son and successor, Bolesław I Chrobry. One of Sven's daughters was married to a Slav prince, possibly the grandson of Mistivoi.

Marriage as means to establish and strengthen alliances with foreign powers was not unique to the Danish kings. On the contrary, it was a common practice and one that also demonstrated the ambitions and aspirations of a ruler. Eadgyth (Edith), the first wife of Emperor Otto I (936–73), was the daughter of Edward the Elder and granddaughter of Alfred the Great of Wessex. She died in 946, and in 2008 her sarcophagus was discovered in the cathedral of Magdeburg, where Otto I was buried in 973.⁵² Otto's second wife was Adelaide of Italy, this marriage perhaps reflecting a shift in focus towards the south on the part of the emperor. His son, Otto II (974–83), married Theophanu, a Byzantine princess and niece of Emperor John I Tzimiskes (969–76). Although not a daughter of the Byzantine emperor, Theophanu was nonetheless to become a highly influential figure, and the wedding in 972 in Rome was a clear testimony to the success of Emperor Otto I's Italian and Byzantine politics.⁵³ The next generation also had Byzantium in view. Princess Zoe, second daughter of Emperor Constantine VIII (co-emperor from 962, sole emperor 1025–8), was on her way to marry Otto III when he unfortunately died in 1002. Connections of this kind between the Byzantine and Ottonian Empires were continued for a long period and this paradigm within the Ottonian court may have had a wider influence as a model for the ambitions of lesser rulers.

50. Thietmar II.31; Leopold 1991, 162–165.

51. Cf. Meier 2002.

52. Kuhn 2012.

53. Schieffer 2001, 457.

In Milan, Otto I and his son with their wives are depicted in stucco on a ciborium dated to *c.* 972/73 in the church of Saint Ambrogio, with the women offering homage to the Virgin Mary and the men to a church dignitary. The scenes of homage hold a symbolic reference to the relationship between secular and religious power, also reflected in an ivory plaque from *c.* 982/83 showing Christ blessing Otto II and Theophanu.⁵⁴ Another ivory plaque, attributed to Milan 983/984, shows the imperial family, Emperor Otto II, Theophanu and their son Otto III, kneeling before Christ. Otto III was crowned in May 983, when he was three years old, and the plaque may have been commissioned by Theophanu after the death of Otto II in December 983 to commemorate the coronation and enforce the claims of her son. Physical form aside, the underlying intentions of the plaque and of King Haraldr's rune stone were probably very much the same – to secure and legitimize power by calling upon ancestry and continuity between generations.

The Danish kings ruling during the transition from pre-Christian times to the Christian epoch thus balanced between aspiring to the ideals of European elites, while at the same time communicating with their subjects at home, who were to accept and understand the messages embedded in monuments such as the palisade complex and King Haraldr's great rune stone. The monuments reflected indigenous traditions, but their purpose did not differ greatly from that of the monuments and visual expressions of power produced on behalf of neighbouring rulers, the Ottonian emperors and ultimately the Byzantine emperors. The suggestion of Ejnar Dyggve that Jelling was a memorial and sanctuary with room for large numbers of people is consistent with this view – that the purpose of the place was to strengthen, legitimise, and not least visually (and verbally, as on the great rune stone) communicate the claims and rights of the king. References to tradition were important as well as features and innovative components that could be deciphered by foreign delegates and visitors to the site.

Conclusion

We have aimed to demonstrate that inspiration from the Mediterranean on a Byzantine background may have been operative at the Danish royal court in the 10th century. The suggestions put forward by Ejnar Dyggve on the basis of his Mediterranean experience therefore still deserve attention although they should not be overestimated to the degree that he himself demonstrated, thus almost uncritically (and unconsciously) making himself an easy target for critique. Inspiration from Classical Antiquity or the Mediterranean has always been part of later European culture in almost all respects and was not novel at the time when Christianity was established in Denmark. Ideas and concepts could either have been transferred along the Eastern routes between Constantinople and the Baltic, or were more probably a result of Danish court connections with the Ottonian Empire and the evident Byzantine influence at the Ottonian court during the second part of the 10th century. After the Viking Age, indirect Byzantine connections appear to have influenced medieval Denmark in a similar fashion, visible in the art history of the 12th century.

In his work with the Jelling Monuments, Ejnar Dyggve was clearly inspired by his many years of experience in the Mediterranean. This is illustrated by his acceptance of a general continuity of place and worship which, when viewed from the perspective of the royal founders, still seems worth considering. The possible transfer of the royal burial of king Gorm has had a major impact on discussions ever since.

Dyggve's idea of a royal manifestation through architecture has become even more evident after the results of the latest excavations, especially the discovery of the great palisade. In principle, his

54. Schieffer 2001, 458-459.

ideas of an open, *sub divo* space where great assemblies could be manipulated and controlled still seems valid, although the area defined by the palisade (12.5 hectares) is much larger than anyone, including Dyggve himself, could have imagined.

Dyggve was right when he saw Jelling as a monument in transition and with clear archaic traits, albeit only in existence for a short period. As stated by Saxo, the place was left to the maintenance of memory after little more than half a century of intense activity during the reign of King Haraldr (and his father King Gormr). It became an ordinary village with a parish church from the beginning of the 12th century and no traces of the former buildings, possible predecessors to the church, or the massive palisade remained. In his bold reconstructions of the presumed first Christian church building in Jelling, Dyggve was profoundly inspired by Mediterranean patterns. With the – albeit anachronistic – idea of an iconostasis inside the chancel of his stave church in mind, we should perhaps even call it a Greek inspiration. Moreover, Dyggve was in some ways very much in tune with current research for contextualising the royal monuments of Jelling in a wider national and international perspective and as part of a larger landscape. And his idea of searching for the royal residence, his *palatium*, outside the area of the standing monuments (and now the newly discovered palisade) still seems valid and inspires us to look for further Mediterranean patterns.

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Fig. 1.
The two rune stones raised by King Gormr and by his son King Haraldr in the 10th century. The larger stone of King Haraldr still stands in its original position whereas the smaller stone of his father was placed in front of the entrance to Jelling Church in the early 17th century. Photo by Anne Pedersen.



Fig. 2.
Excavation of the South Mound in Jelling in 1941. Photo The National Museum.

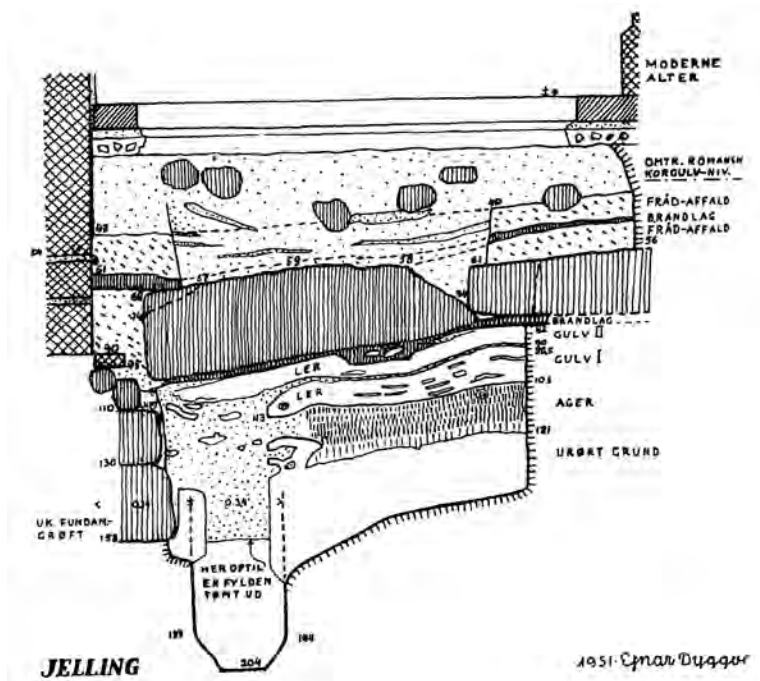


Fig. 3.
Section south of the present altar in Jelling Church, viewed from the east. Floor I (gulv I) beneath floor II was assumed to belong to a building dating back to pagan times. The large, horizontal stone was interpreted by Dyggve as an altar stone. It was lifted and displayed in the chancel but reburied after the excavations in the 1970s. Drawing by E. Dyggve, after Dyggve 1955.

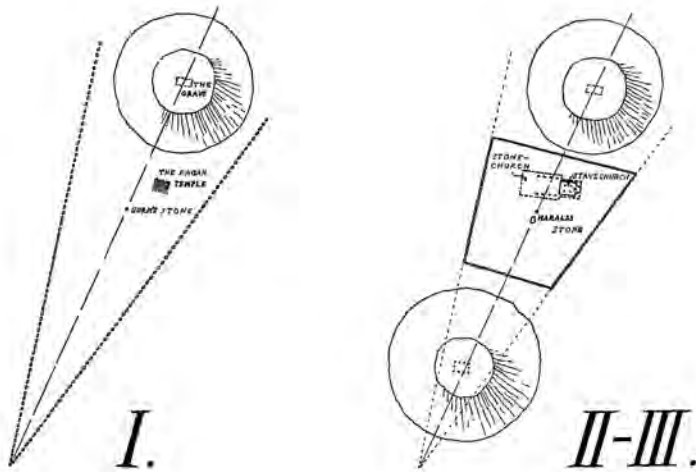


Fig. 4.

The development of the Jelling Monument according to Ejnar Dyggve, from pagan sanctuary to Christian memorial and church. Phase I, the complex of King Gormr; phase II, King Haraldr's Christian complex; phase III, the stave church replaced by a stone church. Model by E. Dyggve, after Dyggve 1954.

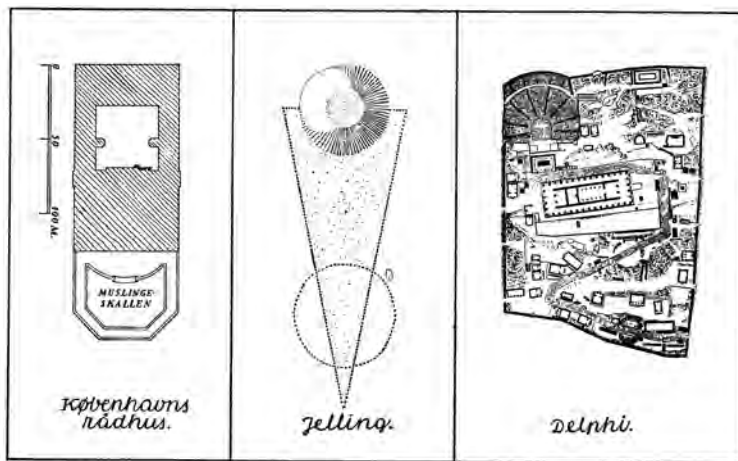


Fig. 5.

Comparison of Copenhagen City Hall and Square, the triangular sanctuary envisaged by Dyggve in Jelling, and the Holy Sanctuary of Delphi in Greece. Drawing by E. Dyggve, after Dyggve 1955.



Fig. 6. Aerial view of the Jelling Monuments from the west, after the visualisation on site in 2013 of the palisade and associated buildings in the northeast quadrant. Photo Vejle Kommune.

