
THE MYTH OF SIGURD OF NORWAY AS A CRUSADER

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Resumen

Con la presente contribución me gustaría abordar un triple objetivo: deshacer el estereotipo de los noruegos como viquingos durante toda la Edad Media, negar al rey Sigurdo y a su expedición al Mediterráneo la categoría de cruzados, y, finalmente, mencionar el episodio militar de la toma de Mallorca y Menorca por refugiados anglosajones en 1066 en su huida hacia Constantinopla después de la derrota anglosajona ante los normandos en la batalla de Hastings.

Paraules clau: viquingos, cruzados, primera cruzada, godos de Crimea, gótico de Crimea, Constantinopla

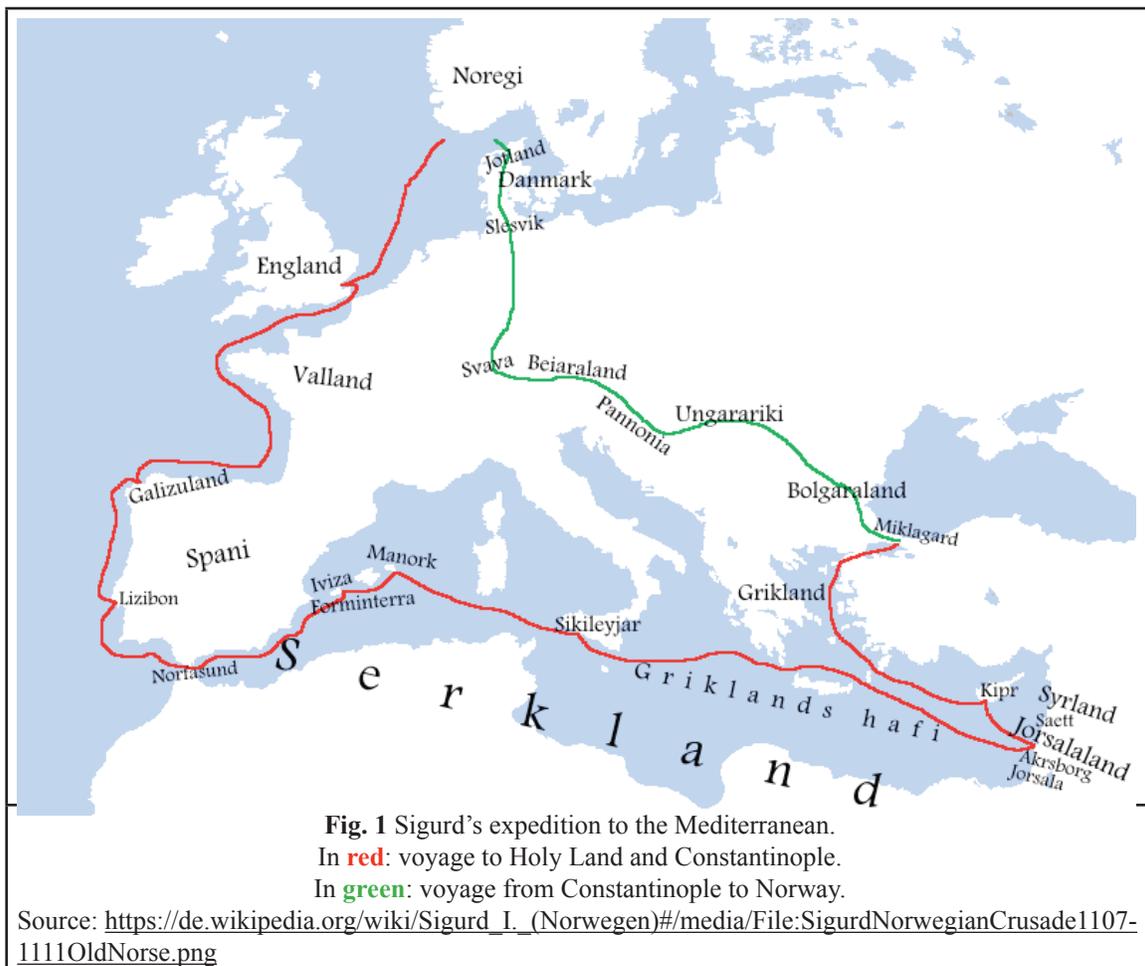
Abstract

This paper has three different aims. First of all, it aims to undo the stereotype of Norwegians as Vikings during the whole Middle Ages. Secondly, it will reject definitions of King Sigurd's expedition to the Mediterranean as a crusade. Finally, it will reflect on the military episode of the siege of Majorca and Menorca, which was carried out by Anglo-Saxon refugees in 1066. This took place during their flight towards Constantinople after the Norman defeat of the Anglo-Saxons in the Battle of Hastings.

Key Words: vikings, crusaders, first crusade, Crimean goths, Crimean gothic, Constantinople

1. Sources on Sigurd I's journey to Byzantium and the Holy Land

At the beginning of the 12th century, in 1107, Sigurd I Magnusson (ca 1090-26 March 1130) set out on a journey that took him first to the Holy Land and then to Constantinople (RIUTORT 1991). Between 1108 and 1109, he circumnavigated the Iberian Peninsula with his fleet. During the voyage he carried out various acts of arms both on the Iberian Peninsula and in the Balearic Islands, in search of prestige and loots.



In 1112, Sigurd I began his return journey to Norway. However, he did not make this journey by sea, but by land, passing through Bulgaria, Hungary, the Holy Roman Empire and Denmark. During his time in the Holy Roman Empire, he is recorded as having been received by Lothair of Supplinburg, later crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1133. In Denmark he was received by the

king, Nicholas I. This is recounted by Snorri Sturluson in chapter 13 of his *Magnússona saga*, which is part of the *Heimskringla*:¹

“Sigurðr konungr fór útan fyrst á Bolgaraland ok þá um Ungararíki ok um Pannóníam ok um Sváfa ok um Býjaraland, þar fann hann Lózaríum keisara af Rómaborg, ok fagnaði hann honum forkunnar vel, fekk honum leiðtoga alt um sitt ríki ok lét halda þeim torg, svá sem þeir þurptu til allra kaupna. En er Sigurðr konungr kom í Slésvík á Danmörk, þá veitti Eilífr jarl honum dýrlega veizlu; þat var um miðsumarsskeið. Í Heiðabý fann hann Nikulás Danakonung, ok fagnaði hann honum afar vel ok fylgði honum sjálf norðr á Jótland ok gaf honum skip með öllum búnaði, þat er hann hafði í Nóreg” (*King Sigurd first went into Bulgaria and from there through Hungary, Pannonia, Bavaria and Swabia. There he found the Emperor Lotharius of Rome, who greeted him well, gave him guides through all his kingdom and caused markets to be held for him for such kinds of goods as he needed. And when King Sigurd came to Sleswick in Denmark, Eiliv the Jarl made a sumptuous feast for him; that was near midsummer. In Hedeby he found the Danish king Nicholas who greeted him well, and who himself followed Sigurd north to Jutland and gave him a fully manned ship on which he sailed to Norway*).²

This information is confirmed by the similar passage provided in the *Morkinskinna*:³

Sigurðr konungr fór þá leið af Miklagarði um Ungaraland, Saxland ok Danmörk. Í þessi ferð fann Sigurðr konungr Lótharíum keisara af Rómaborg í Sváfa ok fagnaði keisari honum forkunnar vel, fekk honum leiðtoga ok lét halda honum torg um allt ríki sitt. Ok þá er Sigurðr konungr kom til Heiðabýjar í Danmörk, þá hitti hann þar Nikulás Danakonung ok gerði hann móti Sigurði konungi veizlu mikla ok fylgdi honum sjálf norðr á Jotland ok gaf honum skip með öllum búnaði, þat er Sigurðr konungr hafði í Nóreg. Ok um miðsumarsskeið tók Eilífr jarl við honum í Slésvík ok veitti honum ágætliga veizlu. Ok nú eptir þrjá vetr frá því er Sigurðr konungr fór ór landi átti allr lýðr honum at fagna í Nóreg. Hann var þá tvítögr at aldri ok var orðinn inn frægsti af ferðum sínum ok stórlyndi. (UNGER, p.165)

The details of this Norwegian expedition to Byzantium and the Holy Land are known to us from four different types of sources: Norwegian or, if you prefer, Icelandic-Norwegian sources, written in Old West Norse; Muslim sources, written in Arabic; non-Norwegian Western Christian sources, written in Latin; and finally, Byzantine sources, written in Greek.

¹ *Magnússona saga*, Chapter 13, pp. 283-284, ed. Finnur Jónsson. This saga is part of the *Heimskringla*. Snorri presents Duke Lothair of Supplinburg as Emperor of Rome. However, at the time of the encounter with Sigurd, Lothair was only Duke of Saxony. It was not until 1125 that he was crowned *Rex Romanorum*, and after that, Emperor of Rome (i.e. of the Holy Roman Empire) in 1133..

² TN. Heimskringla, Sigurd the Crusader, Chapter 13, *King Sigurd the Crusader's Return Home* <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=fulltext&vid=883&view=fulltext&level=2&cid=677048#permlink>

³ TN. “King Sigurd then set out from Constantinople through Hungary, Saxony, and Denmark. On this journey King Sigurd met with the Holy Roman Emperor Lothar in Swabia. The emperor gave him an excellent reception and provided him with an escort. He established markets for him throughout his realm. When King Sigurd came to Heioabir (Hedeby) in Denmark, he met Nicholas, king of the Danes, there. He prepared a great feast for King Sigurd and escorted him in person north to Jutland. He gave him a fully equipped ship to take to Norway. In the middle of the summer Jarl Eilífr received him in Schleswig and entertained him splendidly. And now three years after King Sigurd departed, all the people could welcome him back in Norway. He was then twenty years of age and had gained great fame because of his voyages and his magnificence.” *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)*, Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, 2000

1.1. Old Norse sources

Norwegian sources about this episode are basically of two types, which I shall call primary sources and secondary sources.

The primary sources consist of four literary works:

- ⇒ The *Magnússona Saga*, included in the *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson (STURLUSON 1951)
- ⇒ an anonymous *Magnússona Saga*, included in the *Fagrskinna*, also known as the *fair vellum codex* (MUNCH & UNGER 1847, FINNUR JÓNSSON 1902-1903)
- ⇒ the also anonymous *Magnússona Saga*, included in the *Morkinskinna*, also known as the *mouldy parchment codex* (JÓNSSON 1932) from the second half of the 13th century.⁴
- ⇒ and the *Magnússona Saga* included in the *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*⁵ (according to the two extant manuscripts), a late 13th century recension.

Together with these Old Norse primary sources, we have other Old Norse sources that we can call secondary sources. These are fragments of skaldic works quoted in these four works. In particular, it is worth noting:

- ⇒ The *Stutfeldardrápa*, verses 1-4, by the Icelandic skald Þórarinn Stutfeldr ('Shor-cloak') (ÓLASON, 1952: 78), composed in *tøglag* metre, which recounts King Sigurd's expedition to the Holy Land.
- ⇒ The *Útfararkviða* or *Poem about the Journey Out* by Halldórr skvaldri, aka Halldórr Prattler (ÓLASON, 1949: 271) who was probably Icelandic. There is only one verse left in *fornyrðislag* metre.
- ⇒ The *Útfararkviða* or 'Poem about the Journey Out' by Halldórr skvaldri. Composed in *dróttkvætt* metre. Verses 1-10.
- ⇒ The *Sigurðardrápa* or *Drápa about Sigurd* by the Icelandic priest and skald Einarr Skúlason (ÓLASON, 1948: 382). Of this poem, composed in *fornyrðislag* metre, only a single verse has survived.

⁴ Neither the *Fagrskinna* nor the *Morkinskinna* contain epigraphs referring to this saga under the title: *Magnússona Saga*. The *Morkinskinna* contains only a generic epigraph *K. 45. Vpphaf ríkis sona Magnvs konvngs*, that is: *inning of the rule of King Magnus' sons*, and *K. 46. Vtferþar saga Sigurþar konvngs*. The *Fagrskinna*, opens the part devoted to the life of King Magnus' sons under the epigraph *Kap. 72. Vm Iorsala Sigurð oc um hans fraegd*, which can be translated as *About King Sigurd and His Reputation* and *Kap. 73. Vm færð Sigurðar konongs til Sikilæyjar*, which translates as *About the Journey of King Sigurd to Sicily*.

⁵ Jonna Gerda Louis-Jensen produced in 1968 a critical edition of *Hulda* (LOUIS-JENSEN 1968). She later published several studies on this work (LOUIS-JENSEN 1977). For the purposes of this paper, we have not had access to these two works by Professor Louis-Jensen. We did, however, have access to the critical edition of the *Saga Sigurðar konungs jórsalafara ok bræðra hans, Eysteins ok Óláfs* (1832), a recension of the *Heimskringla*, the *Morkinskinna* and the *Hrokkinskinna*, which is available online: <http://baekur.is/bok/000121941/7/Fornmannasogur>.

A significant difference between the historical-literary prose sources and the poetic sources is that the latter only provide us with what could be described as impressionistic glimpses of the Sigurd expedition. In any case, the information they provide can only be understood on the basis of the background knowledge provided by the parallel prose texts.

1.1.1. Reception of the Old Norse Sources

Part of the information included in the Old Norse sources about this episode de la información norrena sobre este episodio became known in European scholarly circles from 1697⁶ and especially from 1783 onwards, thanks to two Latin translations of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*:⁷ one by Johan Fredrik Peringskiöld, and the other one by Gerhard Schöning and Skúli Þórðarson Thorlacius. The other sources mentioned above have never been translated into Latin, but these Latin translations were sufficiently relevant for the facts discussed here to enter European historiography. Thus, the Italian historian Cesare Cantù gave extensive coverage of Sigurd's expedition to Constantinople and the Holy Land in his monumental *Storia Universale*,⁸ and through the translation of his work into Spanish, this expedition became known in Spain.

Because of the importance of this text, I would like to reproduce here, preserving the original spelling, the version of this journey given by César Cantú in his *Historia General*, translated into Spanish by Antonio Ferrer del Río (FERRER DEL RÍO 1848):

Entre los cristianos que habían acudido a socorrer á sus hermanos en Palestina, mencionaremos á aquellos noruegos, cuyas correrías aventureras hemos seguido en el siglo antecedente. A la primera cruzada había ido Esvendo ó Suenon, hijo del rey de Dinamarca, con un refuerzo de los suyos; pero fueron destrozados por los turcos, y él mismo pereció con Florina que le acompañaba en los combates. Los escandinavos que volvieron á ganar el Báltico después de haber tomado parte en esta expedición, contaron sus piadosas impresiones, describieron el hermoso cielo de Palestina, las riquezas de Constantinopla; dijeron cuán bien recibidos y generosamente hospedados eran en la capital los hombres del Norte que querían consagrar su brazo á la defensa del imperio.

Llenos de valor los hijos de Magno, á pesar de [471] su temprana juventud, iban a ascender al trono: Sigurdo, el segundo de ellos, que no tenía más de quince años, cedió de buen grado á las instancias de los que le estrechaban, á fin de que los guiara á ganar indulgencias, gloria y dinero. Altos barones (*rikis-menn*), un gran número de feudatarios (*lendir menn*), soldados, y

⁶ *Heims Kringla eller Snorre Sturlusons Nordländske Konunga sagor - Sive Historiæ Regum Septentrionalium à Snorrone Sturlonide. Johann [Fredrich] Peringskiöld.* Stockholmia: Literia Wankiwland, 1697. Pp. 231-240. Available online: http://baekur.is/bok/000365879/Heims_Kringla.

⁷ *Heimskringla eðr Noregs Konunga Sögur af Snorra Sturlusyni – Snorre Sturlesøns Norske Kongers Historie – Historia Regum Norvegicorum, conscripta a Snorrio Sturlæ filio.* Post Gerhardum Schöning, operi immortuum, accuravit Skulius Theodori Thorlacius. Tomus III. Hafnia: typis Augusti Friderici Steinil, 1783: 231-240.

⁸ Published from 1838 onwards, it ran to 35 volumes. It is said in the *Dizionario biografico italiano* that: “Dopo i primi accordi orali (primavera 1837) il contratto fu steso il 26 giugno 1838; e, preceduta e accompagnata da un'abile campagna pubblicitaria, tra il 1838 e il 1846 usciva a Torino quella che fu forse la più fortunata speculazione editoriale dell'Ottocento italiano, e l'opera storica certo più letta e consultata per un cinquantennio in Italia”.

una multitud de individuos pertenecientes á la clase de hombres libres y de aldeanos, partieron de los puertos de la Noruega (1107) sobre sesenta *buitres del mar*.⁹ Como ya estaba la estación adelantada, pasaron el invierno en Inglaterra, donde reinaba un príncipe de su raza, Enrique sobrino de Guillermo el Conquistador.¹⁰

Se volvieron á hacer á la vela por la primavera (1108), y después de haber tocado en las costas de *Franquia*, llegaron en otoño al país de Santiago, donde invernaron de nuevo. Allí un conde de Galicia se obligó á mantener para su comodidad mercados bien provistos; pero en breve quedaron agotadas las provisiones del país, y Sigurdo se aprestaba á dar pasto á los lobos, lo cual hizo que el conde huyera, abandonando al sacrilegio y al incendio su territorio.

Vueltos al mar en la nueva estación, los noruegos encuentran en las costas lusitanas la escuadra árabe que corría en ayuda de los emires de Evora y de Lisboa contra Alfonso Enrique, conde de Portugal. Era una ocasión excelente para ejercitar su denuedo, su devoción y su rapacidad. Se lanzan, pues, sobre las naves musulmanas y las dispersan. En seguida ayudan á Alfonso a la toma de Cintra, y pasan á cuchillo á todos los habitantes para volverla á poblar de cristianos: Lisboa los harta á su vez de botín y de matanza.

Al alejarse se abren un sangriento camino por el estrecho de Gibraltar: luego siguiendo las costas de Berbería abordan á Formentera, nido de piratas africanos. Como los habitantes se han refugiado dentro de una vasta caverna, cuya entrada han fortificado, Sigurdo trepa á la cumbre del monte que la domina: desde allí hace bajar hombres que suscitan la guerra en las laderas de la montaña, se engolfan en puntos donde no penetra la luz, propagan el incendio y hacen perecer á los musulmanes.

Alcanzan nuevas victorias y hacen un inmenso botín en Ibiza y Menorca; después van á pasar el invierno á Sicilia, donde encuentran la raza normanda en todo su brillo. Trata el duque Rugero magníficamente á sus huéspedes, y sirve por su propia mano á Sigurdo (1110), que en pago le saluda con el título de rey [...].

Finally, it should be noted that recently, both the *Morkinskinna* and the *Fagrskinna* have been translated into English (ANDERSSON, GADE 2012, FINLAY 2003), so the scholarly world has now access to them.

1.2. Latin Sources

- Albert of Aix (between the 11th and 12th centuries), *Historia expeditionis Hierosolymitanae*, liber XI, caps. XXVI, XXX, XXXIV: *De Magno, rege Norwegiae, qui uenit adorare Jerusalem*.

Albert of Aix calls Sigurd *Magnus*, that is, he mistakes him for his father. He does not mention the episode in the Balearic Islands. His description of Sigurd's arrival in the Holy

⁹ No doubt a misinterpretation of the medieval word *buza*, *bucia*, although I cannot say whether the error is made by the author of the work or by the translator.

¹⁰ This expedition is recounted by Snorri Sturluson. In the *Heimskringla*, he combines the narrative with lyrical pieces.

Land “ hints” at the king’s arrival as a crusader, without actually stating this outright. He states that he arrived in the Holy Land with forty *buzae* and ten thousand warriors: «in buzis quadraginta, in decem millibus uirorum pugnatorum».

- Fulcher of Chartres, *Fulcheri Carnotensis Historia Hierosolymitana*, liber II, cap. XLIV: *Quomodo Sidon, quae et Sagitta dicitur, a rege Balduino et a Norrensibus obsessa atque capta sit.*

He does not mention Sigurd’s name, only that the king of Norway was young and that he arrived with a fleet of fifty ships.

- William of Malmesbury (ca 1095 - ca 1143): *De gestis regum anglorum.*

This text is particularly important because, unlike the Scandinavian sources, it mentions Majorca together with Menorca –the Scandinavian sources only mention Menorca– and not only that, but it does so by pointing out that, shortly afterwards, he handed over the dominion of these islands to Count William of Montpellier, which opens the interesting question of whether King James the Conqueror of the Balearic Islands, born in Montpellier, might have heard the story and felt legitimised by it as lord of Majorca and Menorca:

Denique Siwardus rex Noricorum, primo aevi processu fortissimis conferendus incepto itinere Ierosolimitano, rogataque regis pace, in Anglia tota resedit hieme; plurimoque per ecclesias auro expenso, mox, ut Fauonius ad serenitatem pelagi uernales portas aperuit, naues repetiit; prouectusque in altum, Baleares insulas, quae Maiorica et Minorica dicuntur, armis territas, faciliores ad subigendum praefato Willelmo de Monte Pislerio reliquit. Inde pertendit Ierosolimam, nauibus omnibus incolumibus praeter unam (MALMESBIRIENSIS, 1964a: 486)¹¹

- The *Liber Maiolichinus*.

It describes the Pisan-Aragonese expedition to the Balearic Islands in 1114. Sigurd is most probably the *rex Norgvegus* in verse 2624 of the *Liber Maiolichinus*. In this text, the Norwegian king is mentioned by name:

Plures qui fuerant loca per longinqua remoti / Ad castrum veniunt, quod rex Norgvegus olim / [p. 101] [2625] Destruxisse datur, predam de rure trahentes, / Carneque viventes, siliquis et agrestibus erbis, / Radicibus plures etiam, modicisque steterunt / Impensis in eo discrimina plura ferentes, / Sepeque perpingues his esca fuistis, aselli. / [2630] Hosque Saraceni pugnantes crebro petebant. / Castrum tutamen Latiis erat hospiciumque.¹²

¹¹ «Finally, Siwardus, king of Norway, in his early years comparable to the bravest heroes, having set out on a voyage to Jerusalem, after asking the king’s permission, hibernated in England. After spending vast sums of money on churches, as soon as the western breeze opened its spring gates to tame the ocean, he took up his ships and, setting sail, terrified by arms the Balearic Islands, which are called *Maiorica* and *Minorica*, leaving them as an easy conquest to the aforementioned William of Montpellier. He then proceeded on his journey to Jerusalem with all his ships in safety except one». All excerpts have been translated by the author of the article.

¹² «Many [Christians] who had found themselves far away, in distant places, went to the castle or fortification, which

The text attests that in 1114 the Norwegian invasion of Formentera was still remembered. Carlo Calisse, the editor of the *Liber maiolichinus*, states in a footnote:

Si osservi la più ampia dichiarazione di questo fatto nelle varianti R B al v. 2625. *Il re Norvegio, qui menzionato, è il normanno Sigurd I, il quale si recò dalla Scandinavia in Palestina costeggiando l'Europa occidentale e meridionale, e lasciando sul suo passaggio le tracce della sua barbarie. Non risparmiò le Baleari. Ed il visibile ricordo della devastazione da lui poc'anzi fatta (1107-1108) rimaneva ancor vivo al tempo della spedizione pisana, onde il poeta poté raccoglierne l'eco come da questo luogo apparisce* [stress is mine] (CALISSE, 1904: 101).

In the critical apparatus, Carlo Calisse mentions:

2625. Manca in R B ed è sostituito dai versi seguenti: Tradiderat flammis, cum centum Hispana carinis / Equora sulcabat, spolioque ex hostibus acto / Victor Hyerusalem sanctas properabat ad arces. / Istud Pisani retinent, villas repententes (B repententes) / Carneque viventes (CALISSE, 1904: 101).¹³

It is also worth mentioning verses 998-1005 from the *Liber Maiolichinus*:

Insula stat pelago, partes ea respicit austri / Aduersum Libycos, cui Frumentaria nomen. / Hanc Latii petiere uiri properanter, et illic / Ceperunt uictus, placidae solatia praedae, / Perpinguesque boues, quibus et uesci potuissent, / Ni pia Christicolis prohiberent tempora carnes. / Lustrantesque locum, quo gens inamata latebat, / Abstractos caueis Ebusum duxere ligatos.¹⁴

1.3. Castilian Sources

- *La Gran Conquista de Ultramar* (1877):

Non tardó mucho despues que las nuevas sonaron por todo el mundo en cómo los cristianos de Ultramar conquirieran é guerrearán los enemigos de la fe. Mas quando lo supieron en Occidente, en la tierra de Noruega, hobo muchos caballeros é otras muchas gentes que hobieron deseo de ir en romería al sepulcro. E luego aparejaron sus naves é otros navíos, é entraron sobre mar, é passaron por la mar de Inglatierra é por la mar de España é por los estrechos de Cepta, é entraron

it is accepted it had formerly been destroyed by a Norwegian king, and, carrying to it the loot they had taken in the countryside [of Formentera], many remained there, living on game, carob and wild herbs, roots and modest rations, and enduring no little hardship. And often you well-fed asses served them as food. And the bellicose Saracens attacked them repeatedly and the castle was, for the Latins, a bastion that defended them and a place that offered them refuge».

¹³ «2625. It is missing in R B where this verse is replaced by the following verses: ...gave to the flames when, with a hundred ships, he was sailing the seas of Hispania, and having conquered and taken much loot from the enemies, he hastened on his way to the holy bastions of Jerusalem. The Pisans took possession of this [castle], repeating from it the attacks against the farms and living off hunting.»

¹⁴ «There is an island in the middle of the sea –facing the south-western regions that overlook the Libyans (i.e. facing Africa on the south-western side)– called Formentera. The Latin men attacked it at once and obtained the satisfaction of an easy loot by capturing provisions and fat oxen with which they could have fed themselves, if the pious time of Lent had not forbidden the Christians meat; they explored, raiding it, the place where the unwanted people were hiding, and after bringing them out from inside the caves, they took them, tied up, to Ibiza». The passage is of some importance because of the distant parallel it shows with the Balearic episode of Sigurd.

en la mar meridiana por la mar de Mayorqas é de Cecilia, hasta que arribaron al puerto de Jaffa, en Suria (GAYANGOS, 1877: 389).¹⁵

1.4. Muslim and Byzantine Sources

Logic also dictates that this episode is probably also described in Muslim historical-literary works written in Arabic, as well as in Byzantine chronicles. This is information that only Semitic or Byzantinists can or could have access to. However, I mention it here because, except for some isolated work such as that of SEIPPEL 1896-1928, Arabic and Byzantine sources have received little attention in historiography and Old Norse studies. By alluding to these possible new sources, I wish to emphasise the need to search for them, something that will only be achieved in the framework of interdisciplinary projects.

2. The Norwegian kings were not Vikings

There is a deep-rooted popular opinion that all northern men during the Middle Ages were “Vikings”. Jana Krüger has studied the origins of this concept in the Middle Ages and her research makes it clear that our concept of “Viking” is a concept that originated mainly in the environment of Scandinavian romanticism in the 19th century, and from there it spread to the other European languages (KRÜGER 2008).

If we leave aside the stereotype of northern men as Vikings created by Romanticism, which made the Viking the prototype –not to say the ideal– of the medieval Scandinavian man, it becomes clear that the word *wicing* is already encoded in Old English with the meaning of “pirate” at the end of the 7th century (KRÜGER 2008: 2), that is, almost a hundred years before the beginning of viking activity in England. It would be reasonable to think that the word was borrowed from Anglo-Saxon in the Old Norse, or at least that the word never designated a sea warrior, but a simple pirate. think it is therefore imperative that we begin to discern in our writings Viking activity –which we should understand as a private activity, carried out by groups of individuals–¹⁶ from what we should designate as Scandinavian military activities in England and elsewhere, “public” activities insofar as they were carried out by real armies.

¹⁵ In the preface to this edition, it is mentioned that the king of Norway was called *Segur* or *Sigur*, but the source of this statement is not given.

¹⁶ Therefore, the Vikings acted neither under the control nor under the supervision of any state of the time that was ultimately responsible for their actions. Their actions were governed only by their own rules; they had no need to share their spoils with any ‘official’ authority. Therefore, they were not privateers, although they might occasionally act as such in the service of a king, as exemplified in the *Egil’s Saga* or the *Jómsvíkinga saga*.

In the description of Sigurd's expedition to Constantinople in the *Heimskringla*, it is often¹⁷ stated that Sigurd encounters Vikings, i.e. pirates, whom he attacks and defeats. It is precisely this fact that should make us realise that Sigurd himself would (more than likely) have been outraged if someone had called him a Viking.

In fact, the stronger the royal power became in the Scandinavian countries, the more the Scandinavian Viking activity declined: like the pirates they were, the Vikings were a threat to the royal power, which fought them and eventually eradicated them. In all the passages in Old Norse in which I have found this word, it always appears with the meaning of *pirate*, and therefore almost invariably has negative, if not outright pejorative, connotations. Had it not been for the Scandinavian romantics who rescued this word, and, by turning it around, turned it into a word with positive connotations, the stereotype of the Northmen as Vikings would never have taken root among us. Sigurd and his men certainly were not. Moreover, the Old Norse sources make it clear that the clashes of the Norwegian king's fleet with people from the Iberian peninsula were always against pagans (i.e. Muslims), never against other Christians, which would have been unthinkable for a Christian Norwegian king in the early 12th century, but entirely possible for a Norwegian Viking of the 8th century.¹⁸ Also, fighting other Christians would have subsequently tarnished Sigurd's pilgrimage to the Holy Land from Constantinople. One could not travel to the Holy Land as a pilgrim and attack other Christians.

The Scandinavian Romantics embedded the concept of viking in the common European ideology. This concept is therefore an invention that has nothing to do with the real Vikings of the Middle Ages, mere pirates and/or mercenaries. Similarly, I would argue that we should

¹⁷ See for example chapters 4 and 6 of the *Heimskringla* edited by Finnur Jónsson, pp. 534-535. The same is recounted in the *Morkinskinna*, pp. 341 and 345 and in the *Fagrskinna*, chapter 74, p. 329, both edited also by Finnur Jónsson. These sources remain silent about the ethnicity of these *vikingar*, but the *Morkinskinna* mentions that “en þar eru jafnan víkingar við sundin” (*and there are always Vikings in the vicinity of the Straits [of Gibraltar]*) and all three sources note that the Vikings who attack the royal fleet do so in *galeiðir* ‘galleys’ – a very unusual type of vessel for Northmen – which leads me to think that in these passages of King Sigurd's history we must understand the term *vikingr* as referring to Berber or Muslim pirates, not northerners. To the best of my knowledge there is no record of where the information from these two sources comes from.

¹⁸ It is true that in Chapter 4 of the *Magnússona saga* an episode is mentioned which apparently contradicts this statement: in this chapter Snorri describes how King Sigurd leads a large troop to the castle of a Galician jarl (count), a castle which Sigurd finds abandoned and which he ends up sacking. Notice that Snorri justifies this action by presenting it as the result of a raid to which Sigurd is driven by the lack of food for his people, while at the same time making it clear that there was no confrontation between Christians because the Galician jarl had left the castle before the Norwegians arrived there. Moreover, Snorri carefully avoids describing King Sigurd's action as a military action, that is, as an attack. Snorri indicates that Sigurd simply *för með miklu liði til kastala* ‘went or marched with a large troop to the castle’, he does not use military terminology such as the verb *sækja* ‘attack’. However, it is true that he also reports that the Norwegians not only took advantage of the occasion to take a large amount of provisions from the abandoned castle (*vist mikla*) but also to take a large amount of loot (*ok mikit herfang annat*). Snorri does not specify what kind of *herfang* ‘loot’ was taken. The *Morkinskinna* further specifies that Sigurd's action against the duke (hertogi, as this source refers to the Galician nobleman) was due exclusively to his failure to keep his word and to having broken the pact sealed with the Norwegians (*Morkinskinna*, ed. Finnur J., p. 340: „Nú þykki mér,“ segir hann, „sem hertoginn hafi brugðiz í málinu við oss fyrri ok sagt í sundr sættum“. *I consider, he told them, that the duke has departed from his previous agreement with us and has broken our pact*).

stop using concepts such as “Viking culture” or “Viking religion”, because, are these concepts different from contemporary Scandinavian culture and religion? I doubt it, since I have found no record of such a difference in any medieval text. The 8th and 9th century Vikings were bearers of Scandinavian culture, language and religion, not of their own culture, language and religion.

3. Sigurd I did not take part in the First Crusade

The third objective of the present work is showing that Sigurd I should not be seen as a crusader, even though he took part in the siege of Sidon alongside Baldwin I of Jerusalem (Baldwin of Boulogne), as described in the aforementioned sources. Indeed, in accordance with these sources, Sigurd was not a crusader, but a Norwegian king who went to Constantinople in search of adventure and fortune like so many other Scandinavian nobles of his and later times, and who used this journey to embark on a pilgrimage to the holy places.

Medieval sources agree that Sigurd’s expedition to the Mediterranean was part of his journey to Constantinople. The *Heimskringla* clearly states that King Sigurd, at the age 17 or 18, set sail for the Mediterranean after being enthused by the story of those who had gone to Constantinople with a certain Skopti Qgmundarson, who spoke of the wonders of that city. Nowhere in the *Heimskringla* does Snorri mention a religious motivation for such a journey, but rather the desire to achieve honour and wealth in Constantinople, to which we can add the desire to rebuild the battered prestige of the Norwegian royal family after the unfortunate death of the father of the three kings in Ireland. The words *við skop hreins goðs* that can be found in the *Stutfeldardrápa* by the skald Þórarinn stutfeldr ‘Short-cloak’, which could also be interpreted as *following the destiny that the pure God had resolved to impose on him* are not enough proof to see it that way. A religious motivation or a religious pretext is, however, an indispensable condition for describing a military expedition to the Holy Land as a crusade.

Quoting from the *Heimskringla*:¹⁹

Þá er synir Magnús konungs vöru til konunga teknir, kómu utan ór Jórsalaheimi, ok sumir ór Miklagarði, þeir menn, er farit höfðu út með Skopta Qgmundarsyni, ok vöru þeir hinir frægstu ok kunnu margskonar tíðindi at segja. En af þeim nýnæmum girntist fjöldi manns í Noregi þeirrar ferðar; var þat sagt, at í Miklagarði féngu Norðmenn fullsælu fjár, þeir er á mála vildu ganga. Þeir böðu konungana, at annarrhvár þeirra, Eysteinn eða Sigurðr, skyldi fara ok vera fyrir því liði, er til útferðar gerðist. En konungarnir játtu því, ok bjoggu ferð þá með beggja þeirra kostnaði. Til þeirrar ferðar réðust margir ríkismenn, bæði lendir menn ok ríkir bæendr. En er ferðin var búin, þá var þat afráðit, at Sigurðr skyldi fara, en Eysteinn skyldi hafa landráð af hendi beggja þeirra.²⁰

¹⁹ Chapter 1 of the *Magnússona saga*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson, p. 533.

²⁰ «After Magnus’ sons had been crowned kings, those who had travelled abroad with Skopti Qgmundarson returned [to Norway]. Some had been in Palestine, others in Constantinople. They enjoyed the highest status and could tell all sorts of interesting stories. This tales awakened in Norway the desire of a great number of men to make the

As we can see, there is no mention of any pretext or religious motivation for this Norwegian expedition other than to earn a fortune by serving under the Emperor of Byzantium, who at the time (1107) was Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118). And, although Snorri does not say so, I think it is very likely that the reason why Sigurd did not stay in Byzantium was the fact that in order to be part of the Varangian guard, one had to pay the enormous amount of sixteen pounds of gold,²¹ which would be about eight kilos of gold nowadays. If we consider this hypothesis (i.e. that Sigurd did not have enough wealth to enter the Varangian guard) Sigurd was simply unable to serve the emperor for a few years following the model of his predecessor on the Norwegian throne, King Haraldr harðráði, who had been an officer in the Varangian guard between 1033/34 and 1043/44, according to the *Heimskringla*. Therefore, Sigurd decided to return to Norway, even though such a decision is in stark opposition to the words from the first chapter of the *Magnússona sag*: “En af þeim nýnæmum girntist fjöldi manns í Noregi þeirrar ferðar; var þat sagt, at í Miklagarði féngu Norðmenn fullsælu fjár, þeir er á mála vildu ganga” (*This news stirred up the desire of a large number of men in Norway to make the same journey. It was said that in Constantinople, men from the north who wanted to serve under the emperor would receive a real fortune in pay*). If my assumption is correct, Sigurd, as king of Norway, could not serve the Emperor of Constantinople as a mere mercenary, but as a member of the Varangian guard, and being unable to do so, he decided to return to Norway, leaving behind, however, a large number of men who stayed in Constantinople as mercenaries: “Fór þá Sigurðr konungr brot af Miklagarði, en eptir dvalðisk mikill fjöldi manna ok gekk á mála”.²²

Another point which, in my opinion, also speaks in favour of Sigurd not having undertaken his journey to take part in the First Crusade, but to go to Constantinople, is that, according to the *Heimskringla*,²³ the *Morkinskinna*,²⁴ and the *Fagrskinna*,²⁵ Sigurd, after a brief stay in Sicily,

same journey. It was said that in Constantinople, men from the north who wanted to serve under the emperor would receive a real fortune in pay. The kings were requested that one of the two of them, Eysteinn or Sigurd, should be placed at the head of the troop that would be assembled to go. And the kings agreed and arranged the expedition at the expense of both of them. Many noblemen joined the expedition, both landowners and royal lieutenants (*lendir menn*). And when the expedition had been arranged, it was resolved that Sigurd should go and that Eysteinn should stay [in Norway] and rule the country in the name of both of them.»

²¹ This is what is recorded in the *Book of Ceremonies* (ἐκθεσις τῆς βασιλείου τάξεως, *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae*) of the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, according to Sigfús Blöndal: «Constantine VII observes that anyone wanting to join the Grand Hetairia had to pay an entrance fee of at least 16 pounds of gold, for which he was to receive a *roga* <...> up to 40 nomismata, while if he wanted a higher one the entrance fee was raised at a rate of 1 pound of gold (72 nomismata made up the pound) for each 7 nomismata of additional *roga*» (BLÖNDAL 2007:26).

²² *Heimskringla, Magnússona saga*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson. p.540: “King Sigurd then left Constantinople. A large number of [his] men remained behind, however, and took wages (i.e., and enlisted as mercenaries of the emperor)”

²³ *Heimskringla, Magnússona saga*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson, pp. 537-539.

²⁴ *Morkinskinna*. Neither the Carl Richard Unger’s edition (p.163) nor the Finnur Jónsson’s edition (p.348) mention Sigurd’s stay in the Holy Land due to a lacuna that runs across the space of a folio. The text allows us to deduce that Sigurd first went to the Holy Land and then to Constantinople because the lacuna ends at the moment Sigurd and his men arrive in Constantinople.

²⁵ *Fagrskinna*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson, pp.331-332.

went directly to the Holy Land, where he arrived in the summer of 1109, remaining there for only a few months, namely during the following autumn and the first part of the winter.²⁶

While the *Heimskringla* does not mention where King Sigurd landed, the *Fagrskinna*²⁷ notes that he landed at *Akrborg*, that is, Acre. Both the *Heimskringla* and the *Fagrskinna* agree that, once he landed, he went by land to Jerusalem, where he was received by King Baldwin I, who, after entertaining the Norwegian king with a banquet, accompanied him to the Jordan River, where King Sigurd bathed. After that, both of them went back to Jerusalem, where, with the Patriarch's consent, King Baldwin presented Sigurd with a fragment of the True Cross and other relics. Sigurd's journey to the Holy Land was thus concluded. After receiving the relics, the Norwegian king set out on his return journey to Acre with the intention of setting sail and leaving the Holy Land. The *Heimskringla* points that:

Sigurðr konungr fór síðan til skipa sinna í Akrsborg; þá bjó ok Baldvini konungr her sinn at fara til Sýrlands til borgar þeirar, er Sæt heitir; sú borg var heiðin. Til þeirar ferðar rézk Sigurðr konungr með honum. Ok þá er þeir konungarnir höfðu litla hríð setit um borgina, gáfusk heiðnir menn upp, ok eignuðusk konungarnir borgina, en liðsmenn annat herfang. Sigurðr konungr gaf Baldvina konungi alla borgina <...> Eptir þat fór Sigurðr konungr til skipa sinna ok bjósk brot af Jórsalalandi.²⁸

Here, I understand *ráðask til til ferðar með e-m*, expression with which Snorri refers to how Sigurd marched on Sidon with Baldwin I's army, as "joining someone on a journey or expedition". Therefore, Snorri does not explain what motives could have induced Sigurd to delay his journey to Constantinople in this way. However, I believe these motives are easy to understand: aware of the prestige that his having bathed in the Jordan, visited the holy places of Jerusalem, and returned with a fragment of the True Cross and other relics would bring him in Norway, he saw his participation in the siege and capture of Sidon as a way to cement this prestige.

The *Heimskringla* recounts that Sigurd took part in the siege and capture of Sidon, but not as an act of war by someone taking part in the first crusade—an act planned in advance—but as a totally fortuitous event that coincided in time with Sigurd's visit to the Holy Land, and enabled him to carry out a deed that would enhance his prestige among his Norwegian subjects and strengthen

²⁶ *Heimskringla, Magnússona saga*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson, pp.537-538: "Um sumarit sigldi Sigurðr konungr út um Griklandshaf til Jórsalalands <...> [p. 538] Sigurðr konungr dvalðisk mjök lengi á Jórsalalandi um haustit ok öndurðan vetr" (*In summer King Sigurd sailed to the Holy Land across the Greek Sea <...> King Sigurd stayed a long time in the Holy Land, all autumn, and also the first part of winter*).

²⁷ *Fagrskinna*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson, chapter 74, p.331.

²⁸ *Heimskringla, Magnússona saga*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson, pp. 538-539: "King Sigurd then headed for his ships at St. John of Acre. King Baldwin also readied his army to march with him against the Syrian city of Sidon. The city was still pagan. King Sigurd joined him in this expedition. And after a brief siege of the city, the pagans surrendered and the kings took possession of the city, while their soldiers made other plunder (*that is, while they let their soldiers plunder the city*). King Sigurd gave King Baldwin the whole city. <...> After that, King Sigurd went to his ships and prepared to set sail for the Holy Land."

his position with the papacy and the Church in the face of a likely internal war breaking out in Norway between him and his brother kings for the sole dominion of the Norwegian crown. There is no doubt that Sigurd took part in this event in the Holy Land –the sources are clear on this point– but it was an event that he knew how to take advantage of, since it happened when he was about to leave the Holy Land, and he was aware of the political advantage he might gain from it. His intervention went no further.

According to the *Heimskringla*, Sigurdo’s journey to the Mediterranean was a journey in search of prestige and wealth (in Constantinople) that ended up having a certain religious background with the king’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land and his participation in the capture of Sidon. It is likely that, if the siege of Sidon had taken place a few weeks later, Sigurd would not have engaged in and armed conflict in the Holy Land.

The *Fagrskinna* describes King Sigurd’s involvement in the capture of Sidon as follows:

Á þeirri sömu tíð fór Baldvini konungr meðr herr sinn til borgar þeirrar á Sýrlandi er Sett heitir. Sigurðr konungr fór auk meðr konunginum til þeirrar sömu borgar meðr herr sinn ok í þeirri ferð unnu þeir borgina Baldvini konungr ok Sigurðr konungr. En þegar gaf Sigurðr konungr Baldvina konungi borgina ok setti til varðveizlu yfir borgina kristna menn.²⁹

To conclude this section, I would like to point out that the Old West Norse noun *jórsalafar*, which is the nickname by which this king is known, does not mean and has never meant ‘crusader’, but someone who has gone –on pilgrimage or not, although the former is the most common meaning– to Jerusalem. The ending *–fari* was used –and is used in modern Icelandic– to designate someone who has gone somewhere “special”: a *Índíafari* is someone who has been to India, an *Íslandsfari* is someone who has been to Iceland, and by the same token, an *Englandsfari* is someone who has been to England. There is nothing religious about it. Therefore, translating the nickname of this king as “The Crusader”, as some do, is incorrect. A “crusader”, that is, a man who participated or took part in one of the crusades, was called in Old West Norse a *krossfari*, and a crusade, a *krossferð*. For the same reason, “taking part in a crusade” was *krossask* or *krossask til Jórsalaferðar*. They are different terms for different realities. In the Scandinavian sources Sigurd is never referred to as *krossfari*, but only as *Jórsalafari*.³⁰

²⁹ *Fagrskinna*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson, chapter 75, p. 332: “At the same time, King Baldwin marched with his army against the Syrian city of Sidon. King Sigurd also marched with his army with the king [Baldwin] to the same city, and in this expedition King Baldwin and King Sigurd conquered the city, and immediately afterwards King Sigurd gave the city to King Baldwin, who set Christians to guard the city.”

³⁰ For the meaning of all of these Old West Norse terms, please see Baetke 1987¹, sub vocibus. I would like to point out here that the generic term used to designate a pilgrimage to a site anywhere in southern Europe (i.e. Rome, Jerusalem, Santiago de Compostela, etc.) was *suðrganga*.

5. Conclusions

The Norwegians who arrived to the Iberian Peninsula in 1108 and to the Balearic Islands the following year, were no longer Vikings, but quite the opposite, and the expedition to the Holy Land led by Sigurd I of Norway was in fact an expedition to Constantinople in order to obtain privileges and prestige, either by serving in the Byzantine imperial army or by serving in the Varangian guard. Medieval Scandinavian sources never characterise Sigurd as a crusader, but as a pilgrim who travelled to the Holy Land at the time of the First Crusade.



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