Norwegian Crusaders and the Balearic Islands

Author(s): Gary B. Doxey

Source: Scandinavian Studies, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Spring 1996), pp. 139-160

Published by: University of Illinois Press on behalf of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40919854

Accessed: 17/06/2014 05:50

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

University of Illinois Press and Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Scandinavian Studies.
Norwegian Crusaders and the Balearic Islands

Gary B. Doxey
Brigham Young University

In 1108 or 1109, a Norwegian fleet on its way to the Holy Land attacked the Balearic islands, which had then been in Muslim hands for roughly two centuries. This island chain, today a part of Spain, is situated near the center of the western basin of the Mediterranean Sea. It includes the islands of Majorca, Minorca, Ibiza, and Formentera. These islands are now, of course, a popular tourist destination. In the Middle Ages, the Balearics had a different allure. They held the key to strategic control of the sea lanes in the western Mediterranean, the age-old route des îles, which allowed safe and swift passage for medieval ships—provided the islands were in friendly hands. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Balearic islands achieved enormous prestige and wealth as an emporium and staging post. Much less is known about the significance of the Balearic islands prior to the definitive Catalan conquest in 1229, although the islands had already become an international entrepôt under Muslim rule by the 1180s. At the time of the Norwegian raids, however, the more common Christian perception of the Balearic islands was that of a pirate haven and slaving center.

The seemingly obscure Norwegian raids on the Balearics have a twofold significance. First, they comprise a significant part of one of the

This article is based on a paper presented at the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association annual meeting in Utah State University, Logan, Utah, 11–13 May 1995.


2 See Abulafia, chapters 6–10, which are dedicated to Balearic commerce after the Christian conquest.
most celebrated chapters in the history of Scandinavian crusading: the expedition of King Sigurðr Jórsalafari. (Whether this expedition was a crusade or a pilgrimage is a topic of some debate to which I will return below.) The history of Scandinavian crusading, though, is greatly in need of updating. Paul Riant wrote the only comprehensive treatment in 1865, long before the gigantic leaps forward crusade scholars have achieved in the last decades. Another nineteenth-century scholar, the eminent Arabist Reinhart Dozy, described the Norse raids on the Balearic islands as part of a larger history of Islamic Spain. Dozy had a fairly limited knowledge of the sources, and he did not deal with any further consequences of the attacks. Yet subsequent historians of Spain and the Balearic islands trace their knowledge of the raids almost exclusively to him. One of my purposes is, therefore, to present an updated, more critical description of the raids in their broader context.

Second, the raids are related to the rise to preeminence of Christian maritime powers in the western Mediterranean—a field of inquiry ultimately linked to later European expansion via the Atlantic. The Norse raids have the distinction of predating all other recorded attacks on the Muslim Balearic islands by a Christian force.


7 Before Campaner published his *Bosquejo*, the accepted time line of Balearic history mistakenly included an earlier crusade by Pisa against the islands, which was supposed to have taken place in 1108. Campaner regarded the 1108 crusade as specious, although he could not explain how it had entered the literature. Campaner, 98–100. The error was the result of a faulty sixteenth-century transcription of a twelfth-century epitaph in Marseille honoring Pisans who died during the well-attested siege of Majorca in 1115, not in 1108. The supposed expedition of 1108 has appeared in histories of the Balearic islands even in
attacks by Christians had surely occurred previously, but most were probably small operations and were well outside the pale of “Holy War,” piracy being the main form of conflict in the region. In contrast, the Norse were participating under royal leadership in a large expedition that appears to have been religiously motivated, at least in part. Consequently, my second purpose is to investigate what connection, if any, the Norse attacks may have had to later Christian attempts to conquer the islands. The evidence indicates that later crusaders knew about the Norwegian expedition and may have found inspiration for their own assaults in its dazzling success.

**Sources**

The history of Sigurðr’s expedition depends heavily on the *Konungasögu*, or Kings’ Sagas. *Ágríp af Nóregskonunga sögum*, which could have been composed as early as 1190, is the earliest surviving account in Old Norse of the expedition to the Holy Land. Although it supplies a few important details, its treatment is brief and says nothing about the Balearics. 8 A Latin text written in Norway, probably in the 1180s, the *Historia de antiquitate regum Norvagiensium* by Theodoricus Monachus, also reports Sigurðr’s journey to the east. The author of *Ágríp* obviously made use of Theodoricus’ *Historia* for parts of his work; but with regard to Sigurðr’s exploits, the two sources show true independence. Theodoricus does not mention the Balearics by name but alludes indirectly to fighting on the island of Formentera. 9 Most of the particulars of the

---

8 *Ágríp af Nóregskonunga sögum*, in *Ágríp af Nóregskonunga sögum, Fagrskinna: Nóregskonunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarrson, Íslensk fornrit, 29 (Reykjavik, 1989). Though there is some consensus as to the late twelfth-century dating of *Ágríp*, the extant manuscript is from the first half of the thirteenth century. *Ágríp* deals with Sigurðr’s journey to Jerusalem at pp. 47–9. It mentions the stop in England, fighting at Sidon, receiving a piece of the True Cross from Baldwin I of Jerusalem, and visiting Constantinople; but it says nothing about Norse deeds in Spain, Portugal, the Balearics, or Sicily.

expedition, including virtually all the information about the attacks on the Balearic islands, come from Iceland of the early thirteenth century: Morkinskinna (c. 1220?), Fagrskinna (c. 1225) and Snorri’s Heimskringla (c. 1225–35).

This is not the place for an extensive discussion of Konungasögur texts, their evolution, or their important literary contributions. Two points from that discussion, however, are essential for understanding the Kings’ Sagas as sources of history. The first is that the information the Kings’ Sagas contain derives from earlier written sources and reliably transmitted oral accounts. Thus, even though the thirteenth-century saga compendia date from more than a hundred years after Sigurðr’s journey, they draw upon sources composed much nearer the fact. However, the identity of these sources is not resolved.

One written source from the early twelfth century is thought to be the now-lost Konunga ein of Kings’ Lives of Ari Dorgilsson, which he must have written slightly before Islendingabók between about 1122 and 1132, easily within living memory of the expedition. However, most

10 Morkinskinna, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 51 (København, 1932); Fagrskinna, in Ágrip af Nörgaks konunga sögum, Fagrskinna: Nörgaks konunga tal, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Íslensk fornrit, 29 (Reykjavík, 1981); Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, ed. Bjarni Ædaljarnarson, 3 vols., Íslensk fornrit, 26–8 (Reykjavík, 1941–51). One of several English translations of Heimskringla, particularly useful because of its notes, is Heimskringla: History of the kings of Norway by Snorri Sturluson, translated with introduction and notes by L. M. Hollander (Austin, 1964). The dating of Morkinskinna is disputed. The extant manuscript is from c. 1275; but it is a reworking of an earlier lost text, thought to date from the 1220s, known in the literature as the “Oldest Morkinskinna.” The “Oldest Morkinskinna” was the main source of the latter part of Fagrskinna, which includes the account of Sigurðr jórsalafari. Fagrskinna is thus more truly representative of the state of the Morkinskinna text in the early thirteenth century than is the extant manuscript (and edition) of Morkinskinna.


12 Ari mentions the Konunga ein in the preface to Islendingabók, explaining that he left out of the latter the genealogies and the Kings’ Lives that had been included in an earlier version of the work. Islendingabók in Islendingabók-Landnamabók, ed. Jakob Benediksson, 1 vol. in 2 parts, Íslensk fornrit, 1 (Reykjavík, 1968) part 1, 3.
scholars suspect the Kings’ Lives were quite brief, possibly not consisting of much more than chronological notes.13 A considerable body of other early source material must account for the highly developed narratives appearing in the Kings’ Sagas of the 1220s.

Skaldic poetry is a major component of this material. The Kings’ Sagas quote many stanzas of poetry and show a reliance on many more not quoted directly.14 The chapters of Morkinskinna and Heimskringla covering Sigurðr’s journey quote fourteen and eighteen stanzas or partial stanzas respectively. (Fagrskinna quotes one and a half stanzas for the same events; Ágrip quotes none.) The vast majority of the stanzas and fragments about Sigurðr are from Halldór skvaldri, an Icelandic skald who seems to have accompanied the king to Jerusalem.15 The verses appear to have been part of a longer lay about the journey to Palestine, little else of which survives.16

Though skalds were verbal artisans first and recorders of events second, they often witnessed the deeds they celebrated. Snorri comments in his preface to Heimskringla that poems are a major source of his historical information and that he considers them to be basically accurate, having been passed down from earlier generations when they were recited in the presence of those who had participated in the deeds, or their sons.17 The tightly-regulated structure of skaldic poetry helped assure accurate transmission through the generations.

The second point to understand about Konungasógur texts as sources of history concerns their interrelatedness. Kings’ Sagas share similarities in structure, content, and phrasing, which reveals that the authors drew upon common sources, consulted each other’s work, or both. For all the advantages textual relatedness gives to those attempting to determine the evolution of the sagas or to recover lost passages, it calls into

13 Andersson, 200–1.
14 For a discussion of skaldic poetry in Kings’ Sagas texts, see Bjarne Fidjestol, Det norrøne fyrstelútet, Nordisk Instituts skrifterie, 11 (Øvre Ervik, 1982).
15 Heimskringla, tr. Hollander, 690, n. 4. For a general introduction to skalds and their association with patron rulers, see Medieval Scandinavia, s.v. skáld.
16 For the reconstruction of this lay, see Finnur Jónsson, ed., Den norsk-isländske skjaldeeldning, 4 vols. (København, 1912–15) vol. A (diplomatic text), part 1, 486–8 and vol. B (normalized text), part 1, 458–60. Finnur Jónsson guesses the date of composition for this lay is 1120.
question the corroborative value of the sagas \textit{inter se}. Outside sources, therefore, play a crucial role in substantiating the sagas' historical reliability. Several such sources mention Sigurðr’s journey to the Holy Land. Two of these in particular shed important light on the attacks against the Balearic islands. The discussion of these sources is more effective if deferred until after outlining the events themselves.

**Outline of Events**

The story of Sigurðr’s journey, as recounted in the sagas, begins with the accession of the three sons of Magnús berfættir after his death in Ireland in 1103. The three sons were Óystein, Sigurðr and Oláf, all quite young, the last being a small child. The three young men ruled Norway jointly, each using the title of king. Not long after coming to the throne, and following the counsel of his brothers and the best men of the kingdom, Sigurðr became eager to undertake an expedition to Jerusalem. \textit{Heimskringla} adds that the journey was prompted by the reports of Norsemen returning to their homes from Palestine and Mikligardr (Great Stronghold = Byzantium) about the time of the young kings’ accession, that is soon after the First Crusade. The men brought with them news of the wonders of the east, not to mention the high pay they earned as mercenaries in the service of the Byzantine

---

18 The outline of the expedition in the succeeding paragraphs is taken from \textit{Ágríp}, 47–9; Theodoricus, 65–6; \textit{Fagrskinna}, 315–20; \textit{Heimskringla}, vol. 3, 238–54; and \textit{Morkinskinna}, 338–52. Each of the three later sagas (\textit{Morkinskinna}, \textit{Fagrskinna}, and \textit{Heimskringla}) tells almost the same tale. \textit{Heimskringla} and \textit{Morkinskinna} are especially similar. \textit{Heimskringla} treats the story of Sigurðr and his brothers as a separate saga, \textit{Magnísson saga}, whereas the story comprises multiple separate sections in the other accounts. \textit{Ágríp} and Theodoricus are mainly cited here for a few interesting details they include in otherwise much briefer treatments.

19 At the time of their accession, the ages of Óystein, Sigurðr, and Oláf were, respectively, fourteen or fifteen, thirteen or fourteen, and four or five, according to \textit{Heimskringla}, vol. 3, 238; or sixteen, fourteen, and three in \textit{Fagrskinna}, 315. \textit{Morkinskinna}, 337, agrees that Oláf was not older than three and dates his death twelve years later. \textit{Ágríp} places Oláf’s death at age seventeen, also claiming it was twelve years after Magnús’s death, thus making Oláf five years old at the time he began his reign. Theodoricus says Oláf died “three” (should read thirteen) years, Óystein twenty years, and Sigurðr twenty-seven years after their father’s death. Historians generally place Oláf’s death in 1115, Óysteinn’s in 1122 or 1123, and Sigurðr’s in 1130.

20 \textit{Morkinskinna}, 337; closely following \textit{Ágríp}, 47.
emperor. The people of Norway begged the young kings to sponsor an expedition. The kings agreed and decided Sigurðr would lead the fleet.\textsuperscript{21}

In the third or fourth year of his reign, Sigurðr left Norway with his fleet of sixty ships and wintered in England, where Henry I extended a welcome.\textsuperscript{22} The fleet departed from England the next spring, sailed down the coast of France, and then reportedly spent another winter in Jákobsland.\textsuperscript{23} This is a reference to the land of St. James, the region of Galicia in northwestern Spain. The chief town of this region is Santiago (St. James) de Compostela, the destination of one of the great medieval pilgrimages. If the extra winter in Galicia can be believed, perhaps it was due to the desire to drink in the religious significance of the land of St. James. The jarl who ruled the land (perhaps the local castellan of a port) agreed to sell food and supplies to the Norse throughout the winter. When the jarl instead closed his market soon after Yule, the Norwegians overpowered his troops and occupied his castle, where they appropriated his own supply of food in addition to other booty.\textsuperscript{24}

In spring the Norwegians started out once more and sailed along the coast of Portugal, capturing eight Saracen “viking” (pirate) galleys along the way. They conquered a castle in Sintra; had a battle at Lisbon, half of whose inhabitants were Christian; and sacked “Alkasse,” which might be a reference to Alcacer do Sal, though the Arabic al-qasr means simply “fortification.” Then they defeated a Muslim squadron near the Straits of Gibraltar, known to the Norse as Nørvasund.\textsuperscript{25}

The Norse fleet continued eastward along the coast of Serkland, that is, the land of the Saracens, to the Balearic islands. They first came to the

\textsuperscript{21}Heimskringla, 238.

\textsuperscript{22}All four Old Norse sources agree that there were sixty ships, a number found in a verse by Þórarinn stuttflædr quoted in Heimskringla and Morkinskinna. The year of the fleet’s departure is uncertain. See my discussion about this and other issues of chronology below.

\textsuperscript{23}Agrip, 47, says the first winter was spent in England and the second in Jerusalem. It does not report any of the deeds between Sigurðr’s departure from England and his arrival in Jerusalem.

\textsuperscript{24}Fagrskinna, 315–6; Morkinskinna, 340–1; Heimskringla, vol. 3, 240–1.

\textsuperscript{25}This is the sequence of Sigurðr’s battles against the “heathens,” as reported in Heimskringla, vol. 3, 241–4, and Morkinskinna, 341–5. Fagrskinna, 316, has a much briefer version of these battles, and gives them a slightly different sequence: The battle at Lisbon, an unidentified battle on land, the capture of eight “viking” galleys, the attack on Alkasse, and the sea battle in the Straits of Gibraltar.
small island of Formentera—a mere thirty square miles—which is separated from Ibiza to the north by a narrow channel. Ibiza and Formentera were called the Pityoussae or Punic islands anciently. Ibiza is the natural landfall from Spain on the route des îles across the Mediterranean.

Settlement on Formentera has always been precarious. It appears that when Sigurðr arrived the island was a pirates’ nest. According to the sagas, a large force of blámen [black men] and serkir [Saracens] had established themselves in a cave high in a sea-cliff, where they kept the considerable loot they had gained from raiding. The cave was protected from above by an overhang; and, in front of the cave’s entrance, the Saracens had built a stone wall. The Norwegians advanced toward the cave but hesitated to attack because of the advantage the cliff and the wall gave to the cave’s defenders. The Saracens taunted the Norwegians by shouting and displaying from the wall samples of the treasures that were stored within. The sagas attribute to young Sigurðr an ingenious plan to overcome the pirates. The Norwegians dragged two launches out of the water and up the mountain to the cliff above the cave. After tying ropes to the bows and sterns and under the ribs, they lowered the launches over the side of the cliff. Protected inside these boats, Norse archers and stone throwers succeeded in forcing the Saracens to retreat from the defensive wall into the cave. Sigurðr and his troops were thus able to climb up the cliff and reach the wall. Upon breaching the wall, the Christians stacked large pieces of wood near the mouth of the cave, lit bonfires, and burned or asphyxiated the people inside and cut down all who tried to escape. The booty recovered from the cave was reputedly the richest of the entire expedition. Indeed, the battle on Formentera receives the most detailed treatment in the sagas of any of Sigurðr’s battles, and it probably qualifies as the most notable event in the tiny island’s history.26

Theodoricus’s Historia de antiquitate regum Norwegiensiunm, also alludes to the fighting on Formentera, but without clarifying where the action took place:

caveam etiam quandam in cuindam montis latere, latronibus plenissimam
totam regionem infestatibus, non minus ingenio quam viribus cepit
patriamque ab illorum latrocinio liberavit.27

26 Fagrskinna, 316–7; Heimskringla, vol. 3, 244–6; Morkinskinna (very similar to
Heimskringla), 345–7.
27 Theodoricus, 66.
(He also took, no less by ingenuity than by manpower, a certain cave in
the side of a certain mountain that was completely filled with pirates
who raided the whole region; and he liberated the patria from their
piracy.)

The mention of the cave is sandwiched between a reference to Sigurd's
participation in the battle for Sidon and his being granted a fragment of
the True Cross in Jerusalem. So, to an uninformed reader, the cave
might seem to be somewhere in the east rather than on an island in the
west. The idea that by rooting out pirates Sigurd was liberating the
patria (meaning the Christian homeland) is a notion loaded with sig-
ificance to which I shall return.

Balearic historians and archaeologists in our day have attempted to
identify the cave on Formentera, but at present their efforts are incon-
clusive. Concrete evidence for the various possible sites suggests only
that the farthest reaches of Formentera were inhabited during the
period (at some other times in its history, Formentera has been virtually
abandoned) and that a number of caves and cliffs on the island could
have been the scene of the battle. An educated guess with wide popular
acceptance is that the cave might have been situated in the vicinity of
Torrent des Gat on the northern side of La Mola, the highest point on
Formentera. La Mola lies at the eastern end of the island, and its slopes
rise precipitously above the sea. A cave on the north shore bears the
name Cova d'es Fum [Cave of the Smoke], although the origin of the
name is uncertain.

After leaving Formentera, Sigurd and his men raided Ibiza and
Minorca. There is no mention of attacking Majorca, the largest island,

---

28 All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.
29 The most widely known archeological speculations are found in Busquets, 215–20. An
older, less scientific analysis confidently identifies Cova d'es Fum as the sight of the Norse
attack without the least reservation. J.M. Maná de Angulo, “Notas arqueológicas sobre
Formentera,” Memorias de los museos arqueológicos provinciales (1952–53), vol. 13–4 (Madrid,
in Morkinskinna beginning in the middle of its mention of Minorca and ending during
the visit to Byzantium on the return voyage. One of Fagrskinna’s two manuscripts is
missing four pages beginning with the sea battle in the Straits of Gibraltar and running
through the end of the expedition. The other Fagrskinna manuscript supplies the story
about Formentera, though nothing about Ibiza and Minorca, and so on up until midway
through the visit to Constantinople, where this manuscript, too, breaks off its narrative
due to a missing a page. See Fagrskinna, 316, n. 1; 320, n. 2.
which lies between Ibiza and Minorca. At the time of the Norse adventure, Majorca was the capital of an independent state not yet incorporated into the Almoravid empire of the mainland. Majorca was populous, prosperous, and well-fortified—more so certainly than the much smaller Ibiza and that outpost of animal husbandry, Minorca.31 The Norwegians were clearly using the Balearic islands as a transit point, opportunistically attacking as they passed rather than settling in for the prolonged siege warfare required for conquest: the expedition’s objective remained Palestine.

Heimskringla, besides saying that the attacks on Ibiza and Minorca were Sigurðr’s seventh and eighth battles against “heathens,” adds the sketchy information contained in a few verses by the skald Halldór skaldrí:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Margdýrkadr kom merkir} \\
\text{morðhjóls skipa stóli,} \\
\text{fúss vas fremdar varsr} \\
\text{fríðolits, til Ivizu.} \\
\text{\ldots} \\
\text{Knútti enn en átta} \\
\text{oddhríð vakid siti,} \\
\text{Finns raðr gjöld, á grenni,} \\
\text{grams ferð, Manork verla.}^{32}
\end{align*}
\]

(The highly renowned marker [= reddener] of slaughter-wheel [= shield] came with his stock of ships [= fleet] to Ibiza. The chieftain of peace-severing [= battle] was eager for glory. [or, according to a an alternate interpretation: The glory chieftain was eager for peace-severing.]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\ldots} \\
\text{The eighth storm of weapon points [= battle] was yet later stirred up} \\
\text{on green Minorca. The king’s host reddened the tributes of the Finn [= arrows].}^{33}
\end{align*}
\]

31 For archeological data and literary sources regarding Majorca’s considerable urban settlement and defensive fortifications, see G. Rosselló Bordoy, “La evolución urbana de Palma en la antigüedad: II Palma musulmana,” Boletín de la Cámara Oficial de Comercio, Industria y Navegación de Palma de Mallorca, no. 612 (Palma de Mallorca, julio-septiembre 1961) 182–97; rpt. in G. Rosselló Bordoy, Mallorca Musulmana (estudis d’arqueologia), introduction by M. Barceló (Palma de Mallorca, 1973) 80–113.


33 I am grateful to my colleague at Brigham Young University, George Tate, for his views on, and translation of, these verses.
Halldórr’s description of Minorca as being green gives reason to pause when one considers that the island is a good deal more arid than the northern lands to which the poet was accustomed. The skald’s word choice, grønn (\textless grønn \textequal green), supplies the alliterating [g] for gjöld and gráms and provides the requisite skotbending—internal rhyme with different vowels but similar post-vocalic consonants—in [n] for Finns.\textsuperscript{34} The color green also provides a contrasting image to rauð (\textless rauðr \textequal red). At any rate, Minorca’s greenness, while perhaps exaggerated to fit the poet’s art, is not implausible. Minorca is a fertile island, greener certainly than Formentera; and it was probably still spring when the Norsemen arrived.

Sigurðr and his men proceeded from the Balearic islands on a speedy voyage to Sicily, another node on the route des îles. Although the fleet may have taken a direct course across the open sea, the usual route to Sicily involved running with the wind from Minorca for three or four days to landfall in Sardinia (less commonly Corsica) and then heading south along the island coast. Sardinia’s east coast leads toward Messina, and its west coast toward Palermo. If the Norwegians followed the eastern route, they may have made a stop in Rome to visit pilgrimage sites, as travelers \textit{en route} to the Holy Land often did. In any case, the sagas mention nothing about Sardinia or the details of sailing, but they do report a comfortable and lengthy stay in Sicily in the splendor of Count Roger II’s court.\textsuperscript{35} (\textit{Fagrskinna} claims the Norwegians spent yet another winter in Sicily; \textit{Heimskringla} says simply that Sigurðr remained there a long time.) A long layover in Sicily would be natural for a large fleet, which would constantly need to regroup and wait for favorable sailing conditions so as to reach its destination intact. To Sigurðr is ascribed the role of conferring upon young Roger the title of king. This detail is certainly of late origin and reflects the international renown Roger attained in later years. The young count would have been twelve or thirteen at the time of Sigurðr’s visit; his powerful mother Adelaide was firmly in control as regent; and other sources

\textsuperscript{34} For a recent introduction to dróttkvøtt see K.E. Gade, \textit{The structure of Old Norse dróttkvøtt poetry}. Islandica 49 (Ithaca, 1995); and H. Kuhn, \textit{Das Dröttkvøtt} (Heidelberg, 1982). See also R. Frank, \textit{Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dröttkvøtt Stanza}. Islandica 42 (Ithaca, 1978).

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Fagrskinna}, 317–8; \textit{Heimskringla}, vol. 3, 247–8.
confirm that Roger began using “king” as his title only in 1130.36 Sicilian sources make no mention of Sigurðr’s visit.

Finally, Sigurðr and his companions reached the port of Acre after a summer passage through the eastern Mediterranean. They marched to Jerusalem, where King Baldwin I received Sigurðr with honor. Baldwin bestowed many relics upon the Norwegians, including, by permission of the patriarch of Jerusalem, a splinter taken from the True Cross. The Norwegians spent several months of the autumn and winter in Palestine and participated in the fight for Sidon in the following year. After departing, they visited Byzantium, where several of them enlisted as mercenaries. Sigurðr and the rest gave their remaining ships to the emperor and placed gilded dragon heads that had adorned the king’s ship in the church of St. Peter. Then the Norsemen returned overland through Europe to Norway. The entire journey supposedly lasted three years.37

**Non-Scandinavian sources**

Several non-Scandinavian sources deal with Sigurðr’s expedition. The majority of these cover only what happened in the Holy Land after Sigurðr’s arrival.38 Two non-Scandinavian sources record the attack on

---

36 See, e.g., H. Takayama, _The administration of the Norman kingdom of Sicily_ (Leiden, 1993) 60–1, which briefly notes documentary sources showing the steps in the process leading to Roger’s coronation. J.J. Norwich, _The Normans in the south_ (London, 1967) 303–31, paints a highly readable portrait of the political complexities surrounding Roger’s rise to kingship.

37 Theodoricus, 65–6, mentions Sidon and the True Cross. Ágríp, 48–9, pays special attention to an oath required as a condition to receiving a piece of the True Cross, vaguely mentions victory over heathen cities, briefly tells of the stay in Constantinople and of the return journey, and indicates that the whole journey lasted three years. Fýgskínna, 318–20, includes Acre, Baldwin, the True Cross, Sidon, and Constantinople. Heimskringla, 249–54, has the complete account. Morkinskína, 348–52, due to a lacuna, skips all events in Palestine but has an extended version of the stay in Constantinople. An article on the Balearic islands, unfortunately, cannot do justice to the significant issues concerning Norse activities in Palestine and Byzantium. For instance, the lacuna in Morkinskína can be reconstructed in part with text from the Codex Frisianus and particularly from Hulda-Hrókkinskína, a conglomeration of the last part of Heimskringla and Morkinskína. Several occurrences reported in later sagas for the stay in Constantinople are suspiciously similar to other tales about Norsemen in Mikilgarðr and warrant further investigation. See H.R. Ellis Davidson, _The Viking road to Byzantium_ (London, 1976) 261–3.

the Balearic islands. The most intriguing of these is the Liber Maiorichinus, a source with which saga scholars have thus far not been acquainted. The Liber Maiorichinus is an epic Latin poem of more than 3,500 hexameter verses. The importance of the Liber’s corroborating evidence is magnified by the fact that the poem easily predates the surviving sagas; it was written in Pisa probably no later than 1125.39

The Liber Maiorichinus tells the story of a crusade against Muslim Majorca in 1113–15. The expedition brought together, under the sanction of Pope Paschal II, the naval might of Pisa and an international host of Catalan and Occitan knights led by Count Ramón Berenguer III of Barcelona. Internal evidence indicates that the Liber’s anonymous author was a member of the Pisan clergy who accompanied the expedition.

After several false starts, the expedition resulted in the short-lived conquest of Majorca following a seven-month siege of the capital. A preliminary step in the campaign was the conquest and dismantling of Ibiza’s defenses since conquering Ibiza, which is closest to the mainland, made interference from Muslim reinforcements less likely. The conquests came at tremendous cost. With their resources taxed to the limit, the victorious Christians simply departed. They had temporarily broken the Majorcan threat and were unable—perhaps never intended—to occupy the islands in the long term. Majorca and Ibiza were soon taken by the Almoravids of the mainland.40

Certain passages of the Liber are reminiscent of Sigurðr’s expedition a few years earlier. One passage has Pisans taking captives on Formentera who were trying to escape by hiding in caveae, which could be rendered “caves.”41 A direct reference to Sigurðr and his men occurs in a scene in


40 For fuller analysis of this crusade, see Doxey “Christian attempts.”

41 Liber Maiorichinus, vv. 1004–5. “Lastrantesque locum, quo gens inamata latebat, Abstractos caves Ebussum duxere ligatos” [And reconnoitering the place where the enemy people lay hidden, having forcibly removed them from their caves [basic meaning of cavea is hollow place, cavity], they led them bound to Ibiza].
the poem in which six Pisan ships patrolling the waters near the island of Ibiza are attacked by a squadron from the mainland port of Denia, an important Almoravid naval base. Only two of the Pisan ships escape. The fleeing Pisans take refuge in a stronghold described as the very one the king of Norway attacked and burned when he sailed the seas of Spain with 100 ships on his way to the Holy Land. The prizes taken by the Norwegians stand in sharp contrast to the meager existence the Latins were able to extract from their hostile surroundings. One of the three surviving manuscripts of the poem reads thus:

*Plures qui fuerant loca per longinquam remoti*
*Ad castrum veniunt, quod rex Norwegius olim*
*Destruisse datur, predam de rure trabentes,*
*Carneque viventes, siliquis et agrestibus erbis,*
*Radicibus plures etiam, modicisque steterunt*
*Impensis in eo discrimina plura ferentes,*
*Sepeque perpingues his ecas fuistis, aselli,*
*Hosque Saraceni pugnantes crebro petebant.*
*Castrum tutamen Latii erat hospiciumque.*

(Several who had gotten away came to a stronghold that the Norwegian king is said to have once destroyed. And dragging off plunder from the countryside, and living on flesh, husks and wild grasses, roots, and excessively meager portions, many also survived in it [the stronghold], confronting many critical situations. And often you plump young donkeys were food to them. And the warlike Saracens repeatedly attacked them. The stronghold was a defense and a lodging for the Latins.)

Variants from the other two manuscripts agree on these important additional details:

*... Ad castrum veniunt, quod rex Norwegius olim*
*Tradiderat flammis, cum centum Hispana carinis*
*Equora sulcabat, spolioque ex hostibus acto*
*Victor Hyerusalem sanctas properabat ad arces*
*Istud Pisani retinent, villas repetentes*
*Carneque viventes, siliquis et agrestibus erbis...* ⁴³

(... came to a stronghold that the Norwegian king had once delivered up to flames, when he sailed the Spanish seas with 100 ships; and

⁴³ Calisse, 101, according to the variant for verse 2625.
having taken spoil from the enemy, the victor made haste to the holy
castles at Jerusalem. That [stronghold] the Pisans held, attacking
farm houses, and living on flesh, husks and wild grasses....)

Despite some discrepancy in the details, such as 100 ships instead of
sixty, it is remarkable that the early twelfth-century poet of the Liber
Maiorichinus was so familiar with Sigurðr’s assault on Formentera. The
poem shows that Sigurðr’s deeds were the topic of popular conver-
sation well outside of Scandinavia. Such fame may have helped stir
popular interest in the Balearic islands as the target of a future crusade.
The image of abundant pirate treasure— if that was part of the story
that reached Pisa—undoubtedly had power to fire the imagination.
However, it is quite clear that the Liber’s cleric author viewed the taking
of spoils as being only incidental to the Pisan mission in 1113–15, that
being the rescuing of Christian captives held as slaves on Majorca and
the suppression of Balearic corsairs. According to the Liber, these cor-
sairs plagued the seas and shores of Christendom from Spain to Greece. 44

News of Sigurðr’s attack on the Balearic islands reached England as
well, where we find the second of the two non-Scandinavian sources to
refer to the raids, William of Malmesbury’s Gesta regum Anglorum. The
Gesta record Sigurðr’s winter in England during the first stage of his
voyage, the attack on the Balearics, and later events when the Norwe-
gians reached the Holy Land and Byzantium. 45 William of Malmesbury
is a fairly dependable author, particularly with regard to contemporary
events, of which this is one; the first composition of his Gesta was
completed in 1125. His histories are scholarly and are based on written
sources. 46

According to the Gesta, after leaving England in the spring, the king
of Norway attacked “the Balearic islands, which are called Majorca and
Minorca,” before proceeding to Jerusalem. This source stands alone in

44 Liber Maiorichinus, vv. 5–10; see also the variants.
45 William of Malmesbury, De gestis regum Anglorum libri quinque (A.D. 449–1127);
Historiae novellae libri tres (1125–42), ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series, 90, i vol. in 2 parts
(London, 1887–89) part 2 (1886) 485–6. The portion relevant to the early part of
the voyage is as follows: “Denique Siwardus rex Noricorum, primo aevi processu fortissimus
conferendus, incepto itinere Jerusolimitano, rogataque regis pacem, in Anglia tota resedit
hyeme; plurinmiqae per ecclesias auro expenso, mox, ut Favonius ad serenitatem pelagi
vernales portas aperuit, naves repetit; provectusque in altum, Baleares insulas, quae
Majorica et Minorica dicuntur, armis territas, facilesai ad subigendum praefato Willelmo
de Monte Psilerio reliequit.”
mentioning Majorca, and it fails to recount anything about the more notorious adventure on Formentera. Doubtless, William of Malmesbury intended merely a general reference to the island group, not individual islands. William goes on to observe that Sigurðr left the islands easier for Guillem of Montpellier to conquer. This is a reference to the lord of Montpellier’s participation in the later Pisan-Catalan crusade. Curiously, William remembered Guillem’s role in the conquest more than the count of Barcelona’s. While Guillem was a prominent figure in the crusade, he acted more out of duty to his lord and ally, the count of Barcelona, than on his own initiative. At any rate, William of Malmesbury saw the Norse expedition as a forerunner to the Pisan-Catalan crusade.

**Chronology**

A persistent weakness of earlier treatments is confusion over the correct year of Sigurðr’s assault on the Balearic islands. Alvaro Campaner, a Balearic historian writing in 1888, assigned 1108 as the year of the raids. Numerous Spanish and Mediterranean historians since Campaner have accepted this date without questioning it. In fact, Campaner’s discussion is based solely on the summary by the Arabist, Reinhart Dozy. Dozy’s summary actually suggests 1109 as the year of the raids because of the two winters spent in England and Galicia after the fleet’s departure in 1107.

The sources themselves do not agree. The sagas use relative chronology, fixing only certain dates within a king’s reign. In this case the date fixed is the death of Sigurðr’s father, Magnús berfoettr in 1103. *Heimskringla*, agreeing with *Agrip*, says Sigurðr set sail four years after this date, *ergo*, 1107. *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna* put the departure

---

47 Riant disagrees. He reads William of Malmesbury as proof that Majorca was the scene of another battle. Riant, 182.
48 Judging from other brief references in his *Gesta* to Montpellier and several extensive ones to the count of Toulouse, William of Malmesbury was evidently well acquainted with affairs in southwestern France. In contrast, he says very little about Barcelona. Moreover, Henry I of England was on friendly terms with Guillem of Montpellier, who sent Henry a porcupine for his menagerie at Woodstock. William of Malmesbury, part 2, 485.
49 Campaner, 94.
51 *Heimskringla*, vol. 3, 239; *Agrip*, 47.
only three years after Magnús’s death, i.e., in 1106. The *Historia de antiquitate regum Norvagiensium* uses its own formula to calculate the year the fleet departed: “septimo, posteaquam illa civitas [Jerusalem] a tyrannide Persarum Dei misericordia erepta est, anno” [the seventh year after that city [Jerusalem] was recovered by the mercy of God from the tyranny of the Persians]. Jerusalem fell to the Christians in 1199, making 1106 the beginning year of the journey.

The year of Sigurðr’s arrival in England is attested independently in the so-called *Annales Radingenses* from Reading Abbey. These curious and tersely-worded “annals” are derived from marginal notes concerning mostly contemporary local events kept on a table of the Paschal cycle in a codex from the abbey. For the year 1108, the entire entry reads simply: “Sivurdus rex venit” [King Sigurðr came]. While the very fact the Norwegians’ stay in England inspired this notation is itself interesting, it is difficult to decide how much credence to give to 1108 as the year of the Norse arrival.

There is also a discrepancy in the sagas about how long the outbound journey took. *Agrip* reports the first winter spent in England and the second winter in Jerusalem. *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla*, and *Morkinskinna* all maintain that the second winter was spent in Galicia, while *Fagrskinna* asserts an implausible third winter in Sicily. *Agrip* appears to have the most reasonable chronology, as the outward voyage according to the other sagas seems unnaturally slow. The second winter in Galicia is apparently taken from a verse by Einarr Skúlason quoted in *Heimskringla* that tells of “annan vetr” [second winter] in Jákobsland. “Vetr” does not participate in the structure of the verse, neither in the alliteration nor in the rhyme and is, therefore, possibly incorrect, although there are no manuscript variants.

52 *Fagrskinna*, 315; *Morkinskinna*, 338.
53 Theororicus, 65.
55 Reading Abbey also produced a later set of “annals” derived from marginal notes on another document. See C.W. Previté-Orton, “*Annales Radingenses posterioriores, 1135–1265*,” *English historical review*, 37 (1922) 400–3.
56 *Agrip*, 47.
58 I am indebted to the Scandinavian Studies referee who pointed this out to me and made many other useful suggestions in a detailed and helpful review of this article prior to publication. The verse in question in *Heimskringla*, vol. 3, 240, (see also Finnur Jónsson,
Ibn al-Athir dated the siege of Sidon, in which the Norwegians participated, as beginning on 19 October 1110; William of Tyre placed it between April and December 1111; Albert of Aix, said the Norse arrived in Palestine in 1110.59 These dates are inconsistent with the Norse version that the whole journey lasted three years starting with the departure from Norway late in the sailing season of 1106 or 1107. Three years only barely allows for a return journey if 1108 is accepted as the departure date, as in the Annales Radingenses. Of course, the expedition may have filled more than three years.

Short of manipulating the evidence to solve this puzzle, I offer simply my guess: the Norse assault on the Balearics did not occur before 1107 by any measure, 1108 sounding closer to the truth and 1109 possibly even more likely. The sojourn in the Holy Land and Constantinople probably occupied a good portion of 1110 and either the last months of 1109 or the first months of 1111, with the return trip stretching well into 1111.

PIllGRIMAGE OR CRUSADE

An important question not addressed in earlier treatments is whether Sigurðr’s raids on the Balearics should be considered a pilgrimage or a crusade.60 The evidence is ambiguous.

The sagas consistently apply the word ferð [journey] to the expedition. Útférð [journey abroad] is also used.61 In this context, útférð nearly

Den norsk-islandske skjaldeigning, vol. A, part 1, 435 and vol. B, part 1, 423) is as follows:

Ok, sás øertz gat riki,
ol þjóðkonungr, sólar,
ønd á Jákobs landi
annan vetr, und ranni.
Par frák hilmi herjar,
hjalds, lausmæli gaidla
gram bitti svan svartan,
snarlyndr, fromum jarli.

60 The question has, at least, been raised. J. Riley-Smith, The Crusades: A short history (London, 1987) 90.
61 E.g., “Teir báðu konungana, at annarr hvárr þeira, Eysteinn eða Sigurðr, skyldi fara ok vera fyrir því liði, er til útférðar gerðisk” (Heimskringla, vol. 3, 238, emphasis added) [They asked the kings whether one or the other of them, Eysteinn or Sigurðr, would go and lead a fleet that was being readied for a journey abroad].
always means the Holy Land and corresponds to the French *outremer* or Latin *ultramare* (both meaning “overseas” or “beyond the sea”) used in reference to pilgrimages and crusades to Palestine. Likewise, Sigurðr’s byname “Jerusalem Farer” is in keeping with the theme of travel.

This emphasis on the journey itself suggests a pilgrimage but does not foreclose a crusade. Indeed, before the Third Crusade in 1187, the distinction between crusading and armed pilgrimage or other types of “holy” violence was blurred. Early crusaders unquestionably viewed themselves as pilgrims and viewed their enterprise as a type of pilgrimage. They had actual destinations in mind as goals of pilgrimage. Early crusader vows were essentially those of a pilgrim, and the crusader indulgence was a development of the indulgence granted to pilgrims to the Holy Land. Likewise, the protections and privileges given to crusaders under canon law were the same as those afforded to pilgrims. Even the crusader badge and clothing were reminiscent of pilgrim attire. Cognomems, such as Sigurðr’s *Ísralafir* or Robert of Flander’s (a leader in the First Crusade) *Hierosolimitanus* [Jerusalemite], though they smack of pilgrimage, were quite common marks of prestige for early crusaders who returned from the Holy Land. The Norwegians were at least armed pilgrims and in that sense were crusaders.

More troublesome is the fact that the sagas seem to dwell on glory and plunder when referring to victories. Very little suggests piety or altruism in taking up arms in defense of one’s neighbor—a prime concern for canonists to justify the use of violence in Christ’s name. Neither is there a clear indication of papal or even episcopal approval for the expedition, clerical leaders being present with the troops, crusader badges being worn, crusader oaths being taken, liturgical observances being kept, indulgences for sin being offered, or any other of the usual indicia of a crusade.

By comparison, French monks who authored the chief accounts of the First Crusade around 1107 took pains to harmonize the events with the sensibilities of the Gregorian Reforms. Men like Robert the Monk, Guibert of Nogent, and Baldric of Bourgueil portrayed crusaders as temporary religious, whose camp was a monastery on the move, whose

---

64 Ibid., 121.
65 An excellent brief introduction to these indicia can be found in Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, xxviii–xxx.
motive was Christian charity, and whose victories revealed the hand and will of Providence. The influence of these authors on crusading was tremendous. They helped transform it into a movement that would last generations.66 Contributors to the Kings’ Sagas, in contrast, were obviously not inclined toward overtly preaching the reform, nor did they feel a need to explain Sigurðr’s exploits in theologically acceptable terms. Theirs was a different focus, one that partook of the panegyric tradition of court skalds, that of describing great deeds of great men.

Theodoricus displays a tone that is more consonant with the continental theologians.67 He refers to the battle against “pagan” pirates at the mountain cave as being the means of “liberating” the Christian patria.68 Liberation theology is at the very core of the crusades, and its roots are in the reform movement in the church, where libertas meant papal supremacy over lay rulers and freedom from secular meddling in church government. Liberation was the most frequent theme of crusade preaching and was applied to call for violence to free both Christians as well as the lands that were thought to rightly belong to Christians.69 The problem with accepting Theodoricus as clear proof that Sigurðr’s journey was a crusade is that although his Historia predates the composition of the sagas, he wrote at a time when these notions had become commonplace. It is safest to conclude that he thought Sigurðr had been engaged in a crusade when he wrote in the 1180s.

Even in the adventure-laden tones of the sagas, a rough-and-ready religious motive for the fighting is sometimes apparent. The account of the conquest of Sintra castle in Portugal, for instance, while not failing to mention abundant booty, states that the Norse invaders put to death all of the castle’s defenders who refused to accept Christianity. More to the point, clauses in Heimskringla and Morkinskinna say that Sintra castle was a stronghold from which the Saracens had harried Christians.70 The inference is that the attack on Sintra was partially prompted by the desire to defend fellow Christians. Subsequent northern European crusaders who passed through Spanish waters en route to Palestine regularly stopped to fight Moors along the way, usually in aid of some

66 See Riley-Smith, The First Crusade, 135–52.
67 Others have made the point about Theodoricus’ possible education in France. See Medieval Scandinavia, s.v. Theodoricus: Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium.
68 Theodoricus, 66.
70 Heimskringla, vol. 3, 242; Morkinskinna, 342.
mainland Christian prince. Defense of fellow Christians, even if that defense took the form of offensive action, constituted a *causa iusta* under canon law justifying Christian violence. This rationale had existed long before the crusades. But in failing to develop or take note of the obvious theological argument, saga authors reveal their more or less secular orientation.

Despite the ambiguity of the evidence regarding whether Sigurðr’s journey was a pilgrimage or a crusade, it is hard to imagine how the expedition could possibly fall outside the crusading movement as a whole. The Norwegians were treated as allies by the Christians they encountered in the east, and they fought in the cause espoused by the Latins there. Though not identified as such in the sagas, the First Crusade had to have been an important catalyst for the Norse adventure. In the euphoria that swept Europe after the capture of Jerusalem in 1099, not only the Norwegians but also many other armies and individual fighting men trickled out from Europe over the next several years, many without the benefit of a formal call to arms. Major Christian defeats in 1101 and 1102 did little to curb their enthusiasm, and the first quarter of the twelfth century became the most active period of crusading until 1187, when the Third Crusade was launched in response to the loss of Jerusalem.71 Even without all the religious trappings of a crusade one might expect to find in the sources, there is enough religious substance to the Norwegians’ motivations to reject as exaggerated and anachronistic the assessment of Campaner, the Balearic historian, in calling Sigurðr’s voyage a “salvage e hipócrita pseudo-cruzado” [a savage and hypocritical pseudo-crusade].72

**Epilogue and Conclusion**

Events during the remainder of the twelfth century show that Christian seafaring nations in the Mediterranean gradually came to view access to, or control of, the Balearic islands as a commercial and religious imperative.73 The picture is actually quite complex. At times Christian ships from certain nations were welcome in Balearic ports; at other times, Balearic rulers treated these same nations as enemies. Likewise,
the direction and intensity of Christian policy toward the Balearics varied over time and from one country to another. The fate of the Muslim Balearics was sealed in 1229 when James I of Aragon—himself a crusader with rather worldly, self-agrandizing motives—at the head of a large multinational expedition, finally succeeded in bringing Majorca into the Catalan patrimony. The conquest was bankrolled in large measure by merchants anxious to exploit trade through the Balearics.

Ironically, the Norse raids on the islands of a century earlier had nothing to do with commerce and perhaps not a lot to do with religion. Nevertheless, they are the first recorded attacks on the Balearics by a Christian force. Whether viewed as true crusaders or mere marauders, Sigurðr’s men apparently saw that the most obvious route eastward lay through the Balearic islands. The notoriety of their success may have helped inspire other Christian navies that followed.

75 For a useful account of this conquest in English, see chapter 1 of Fernández Armesto, 11–42. For the complexities of Catalan commercial and dynastic policies in the 13th century and later, as they relate to this conquest and its aftermath, see now Abulafia’s Mediterranean emporium.