

HARALD HARDRADA: HIS EXPEDITION AGAINST THE PECHENECS*

Harald Hardrada, half-brother of St. Olaf, had travelled far and wide before he became king of Norway in 1046. As a mercenary he served in the Varangian guard in Constantinople. First the Russians had formed the main element in this regiment, but gradually their role was taken over by the Scandinavians in the first half of the eleventh century (cf. note 52). Harald's arrival in Miklagarth, the regular name for the Byzantine capital, took place about 1034¹. Here he served three successive emperors: Michael IV the Paphlagonian (1034-41), Michael V Calaphates (1041-2) and Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-55). When serving the Byzantine emperors he took part in many expeditions of which only a few are known of². Sometimes he campaigned under the command of Georges Maniakes, the famous Greek general, sometimes he went out with his own men³. In this article we hope to throw some more light on one of the expeditions Harald undertook with his band of Northerners.

The activities of the Norwegian prince are testified by several sources, Greek and Scandinavian. The Greeks, understandingly enough where a foreign military commander was concerned, are very sparse with information on his military achievements. In the *Admonition to the Emperor*, an eleventh century

*I am greatly indebted to Andrea van Arkel—de Leeuw van Weenen and Christopher Sanders for their very valuable criticism and their suggestions.

1. J. Shepard, A Note on Harold Hardrada: the Date of his Arrival at Byzantium, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 22, 1973, p. 145-50.

2. P. Lemerle, Prolégomènes à une édition critique et commentée des "Conseils et Récits" de Kékauménos, *Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres et des Sciences morales et politiques* 54, Brussels 1960, p. 62-3.

3. For the Sicilian campaign cf. A. A. Vasiliev, *A History of the Byzantine Empire, 324-1453*, Madison 1961, p. 313, 329, 393; G. Ostrogorski, *Geschichte des Byzantinischen Staates*, München 1963, p. 274s.; R. Jenkins, *The Imperial Centuries AD 610-1071*, New York 1969, p. 345-6; *Cambridge Medieval History, IV, The Byzantine Empire*, p. 197, 201-2. To Palestine he seems to have gone with his own men, cf. *Heimskringla, Saga of Harald Sigurtharson*, ch. 12, ed. F. Jonsson, Copenhagen 1893-1901, III, p. 92 (references in this article are to this edition)= L. M. Hollander, *Heimskringla, History of the Kings of Norway by Snorri Sturluson*, transl. with introd. and notes, Texas, Austin, 1964, p. 586-Morkinskinna, ed. F. Jonsson, Copenhagen 1932, p. 78, cf. Vasiliev, *ibidem*, p. 393.

Greek treatise written by Kekaumenos (the only Greek source that mentions both Harald and Olaf), the Norseman is quoted as an example of a foreigner upon whom one should not confer high titles or ranks⁴. We are told how Harald was given the rather modest title of *spatharocandidate* after a successful military expedition against the Bulgarians in 1041⁵. The emperor himself, Michael IV, was in charge of the operations, wanting to suppress the revolt broken out after the introduction of a new tax-system in the Bulgarian theme⁶. The Greek army achieved its aim and Harald and his men contributed to this success:

...After this [i.e. Sicily] it befell that Delianos began a revolt in Bulgaria, and Araltes and his company went campaigning with the emperor and achieved mightily against the enemy, as befitted a man of his lineage and valour. The emperor returned home once he had subjugated Bulgaria. I, too, fought for the emperor as best I might. And as soon as we reached Mesinopolis the emperor appointed him *spatharocandidate* as a reward for his services...⁷

Scandinavian sources are more detailed in their description of Harald's Eastern adventures. His expeditions to the Greek islands, Africa, Sicily and Palestine are duly praised and magnified. The above mentioned expedition to Bulgaria is referred to in the poem *Six-stave* (*Sex-steffa*) by Thiodolf Arnorsson who calls Harald the 'burner of Bulgarians' (*Bolgara brennir*)⁸.

Apart from some Scaldic songs as the *Six-stave* and the ones made by

4. V. Vasilievsky and V. Jernstedt, *Cecaumeni Strategicon et incerti scriptoris de officiis regiis libellus*, St. Petersburg 1896, p. 97 (German transl. H.-G. Beck, *Vademecum des Byzantinischen Aristocraten*, Graz 1964, p. 141 (=Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber V); the new edition of Kekaumenos by G. G. Litavrin, *Sovety i rasskazy Kekaumena*, Moscou 1972, is inaccessible to me.

5. R. Guiland, *Recherches sur les Institutions byzantines*, Berlin-Amsterdam, 1967, I, p. 75, 78, 158, 284, 567, II, 103, 222.

6. Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, IV, ch. 39, ed. E. Renauld, Paris 1926, p. 76 (English transl. E.R.A. Sewter, Harmondsworth, 1966, p. 109s.); Lemerle, *op. cit.* (n. 2), p. 62s.; see also the interesting view expressed by D. Obolensky, The Cult of St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki in the History of Byzantine-Slav relations, *Balkan Studies* 15, 1974, p. 17s.

7. *Admonition to the Emperor*, ed. cit. (n. 4), *ibidem*. The translation is by Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, Oxford 1968, p. 405, n. 1 (I have changed Mesina into Mesinopolis).

8. *Heimskringla, Saga of Harald Sigurtharson*, ch. 1, III, p. 74=Hollander, p. 577. For the complete text of the poem *Six-stave*, cf. *Dennorsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. F. Jons-son, Copenhagen 1912, IB, p. 339, and G. Vigfússon and F. Y. Powell, *Corpus poeticum boreale*, II, Oxford 1883, p. 204 (with English translation).

Harald himself and some of his companions⁹, we have to rely for information on his adventures in the Byzantine empire on the *Saga of King Harald*.

The surviving versions of the saga can be divided into three main groups: firstly the *Morkinskinna ms. kgl. sml. 1009 fol.* and the ms. called *Flateyjarbók*, and secondly the *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* compilation¹⁰, while finally there is Snorri Sturluson's work *Heimskringla*¹¹. There is a further, shorter version in a ms. called *Fagrskinna*, which need not concern us here. The original text must have originated at a very early date, probably during the lifetime of king Harald; Scaldic songs were incorporated in the Saga¹². According to J. de Vries the written tradition started already in the second half of the eleventh century; he also drew the attention to a certain interrelation between the Norman literature of Southern Italy (where the Varangians served from time to time) and the Scandinavian literature of the North; de Vries gives as an example an anecdote of which we will speak below¹³.

Snorri Sturluson's version of *Harald's Saga* in the *Heimskringla* (compiled in the third decade of the thirteenth century) is the one that has become best known to students of Byzantine history because there have been many translations of it into English¹⁴. Of the first two groups of versions of the saga only two translations into Latin, both of the *Hulda* text and one of them fragmentary, have ever been made¹⁵. The *Morkinskinna/Flateyjarbók (Hulda-Hrokkins-*

9. *Skjaldedigtning*, *ibidem*, e.g. p. 339s., 360, 368. Cf. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Harald the Hard-Ruler and his Poets*, Dorothea Coke Memorial lecture, London 1966.

10. On the relationship between *Morkinskinna*, *Flateyjarbók* and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, cf. Jonna Louis-Jensen, *Kongsagastudier, Kompilationen Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, Copenhagen 1977, p. 194. The editions of the texts are the following: *Morkinskinna*, ed. F. Jonsson, Copenhagen 1932; *Flateyjarbók*, ed. S. Nordal, Akraness 1944-5 (based on the edition of G. Vigfússon and C. R. Unger, Christiania 1860-68, with a new introduction); the *Hulda* text (*ms. AM 66*) is printed in *Fornmanna Sögur*, VI, ed. S. Egilsson, R. Rask, C. C. Rafn e.a., Copenhagen 1831,—a new edition of the *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* compilation by Jonna Louis-Jensen, *Editiones Arnemagnaeanae Series A*, 11-12, Copenhagen, is at the press—. For a general introduction to *Morkinskinna*, cf. J. de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, II, Berlin 1967², p. 280-1, and E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *The Origins of Icelandic Literature*, Oxford 1953, p. 217s.

11. *Heimskringla, Saga of Harald Sigurtharson*, III, p. 74-224. Cf. de Vries, *ibidem*, II, p. 286; Turville-Petre, *ibidem*, p. 220s.

12. J. de Vries, *Normannisches Lehngut in den isländischen Königssaga*, in *Kleine Schriften*, Berlin 1965, p. 336s. (= *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 47, Lund 1931, p. 51-79).

13. *Ibidem*, p. 343s.

14. Hollander, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 577s.; S. Laign, *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla of the Norse Kings*, London 1930, p. 160s.; M. Magnusson and H. Palsson, *King Harald's Saga*, Harmondsworth 1966.

15. *Scripta Historica Islandorum*, VI, ed. cit. (n. 10), Copenhagen 1835, p. 119-401 (Latin

kinna) versions deserve more attention from Byzantists. They contain a few tales about Harald's journey in the East that are not included in the *Heimskringla*. Some of these tales have a fantastic quality which may have induced Snorri Sturluson, when doubting their historicity, to omit them from his own work.

In this article we wish to argue that at least one of these *Morkinskinna*/*Flateyjarbók* (*Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*) tales seems to reflect a historical event that took place during the reign of Michael IV (1034-41). It is the description of Harald and his Northerners, Norwegians and Icelanders¹⁶, showing their excellency in fighting heathen invaders, although they realized not to be able to win a victory unless their patron St. Olaf would help them. Indeed we see that thanks to the intervention of the saintly brother of their leader the victory was theirs.

The tale survives in *Flateyjarbók*¹⁷ and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*¹⁸, but it is missing in the *Morkinskinna ms. Gl. kgl. sml. 1009 fol.*, which is defective at this point. In this article we will cite the *Flateyjarbók* text in translation¹⁹. A summary of the *Hulda* text was published earlier in this century in an article by R. M. Dawkins to which we will shortly refer²⁰. The text of the *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* compilation has fundamentally the same contents as *Flateyjarbók*, but it contains more details and shows clear signs of stylistic revision in the form of explanatory phrases and smoother transitions between individual elements in the narrative²¹. For convenience sake we will refer to the tale in both its *Flateyjarbók* and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* form as the *Morkinskinna* tale, since the *Morkinskinna ms. Gl. kgl. sml. 1009 fol.* is the earliest surviving manuscript that can be presumed to have contained it.

translation of the *Fornmanna Sögur*), and fragmentarily, *Antiquités russes*, II, ed. C. C. Rafn, Copenhagen 1852, p. 19-62.

16. Halldor Snorrason and Ulf Ospaksson, who distinguished themselves in Sicily, were Icelanders (*Heimskringla, Saga of Harald Sigurtharson*, ch. 9, 14, III, p. 87-9, 95 = Hollander, p. 583-5, 588; *Morkinskinna*, p. 60, 74, 76, 80-2. Halldor is considered to be the author of the account of Harald's journey in the East, cf. de Vries, *op. cit.* (n. 12), p. 339s.

17. Vigfússon and Unger, *ed. cit.* (n. 10), vol. III, p. 294-5.

18. Jonna Louis-Jensen, *ed. cit.* (n. 10, forthcoming), p. 103-6.

19. The *Flateyjarbók* text is used by Finnur Jonsson to fill the lacuna in *Gl. kgl. sml. 1009 fol.* in his *Morkinskinna* edition, *ed. cit.* (n. 10), p. 65-6; cf. Jonna Louis-Jensen's comments on this use of *Flateyjarbók* in *Kongesagastudier*, *op. cit.* (n. 10), p. 79.

20. R. M. Dawkins, An Echo in the Norse Sagas of the Patzinak War of John Komnenos, *Mélanges E. Boisacq*, Brussels 1937 = *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 5, 1937, p. 245-6.

21. Cf. Jonna Louis-Jensen, *op. cit.* (n. 10), p. 195-6 on stylistic revision in *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*.

The next thing told is that news of war came to the ears of King Michael. Gyrgir then said to the king, "Now is the time to call upon the Varangians, that they may be tested, and, my lord, many suspect that you are here dealing with a man of royal blood, and you know that it is not the custom here for men of royal blood to serve as mercenaries". The king says, "That has yet to be proved, but what is clear is that this man is exceptional both in his ingenuity and in his bravery, and men of his calibre are those we can expect the most of when it comes to defending the country. It is therefore a good thing to now let them show their mettle". The Varangians now hold meetings and Harald tells them that he very much suspects that people feel we are overbearing in our attitude towards them here in Miklagarth, and that people make various conjectures as to what we are doing and do not mind at all 'though we are thrown into war or danger. I now want us to call upon the holy King Olaf to give us victory and have a church built here to his and God's glory. They all agreed to this and to make the agreement binding, and afterwards they go out against the heathens in accordance with his wish. And the heathens had many kings as commanders of their army, and one of them was blind, yet he was the wisest. They had wheels on their chariots and intended to drive them (ms: it) against the Varangians with the equipment that was prepared for the purpose. But when they wanted to send the chariots against the Varangians they all stuck fast. And as well as this the blind man who was a king then sees a man riding on a white horse at the head of the Varangian army, and this man inspired so much fear in the heathens that many of the kings fled, but six remained. And it ended in victory for the Varangians, and they returned home after that in great triumph and honour and immediately have an imposing church built. But because of people's urgings the king forbids the consecration of the church. Harald then has a feast prepared and plans to have the bishop come and consecrate the church. The king then denied them firewood with which to prepare the feast and declared that Harald's contentiousness and opulence were an encroachment on the due rights of the king. And yet a way was soon found that the feast was prepared, even though it was against the king's will. Then Harald asked the bishop to go and consecrate the church, but he said that he did not dare to do so for fear of the king, whereupon Harald said that he would bring it about that the king did not forbid it. And then Harald goes

before the king and explains to him how unjust it is that he should put obstacles in the way of honouring King Olaf for the honour he had shown, and for the miracle he had performed for them, and for the peace he had brought to his country, and in this way he succeeds in persuading the king to go with him in person to the feast, and the bishop too. And the feast was outstanding. And the king was very puzzled that he had managed to get so much firewood since he had forbidden his getting it in any way. But Northbrikt²² tells him that for this he had used timbers from broken-up ships and ship's shrouds and walnuts. Now the church was consecrated and the king paid generously for the feast, and later the church was consecrated and beautifully adorned with a bell so large that there were none like it in Miklagarth, but through the persuadings of bad people the king has the clapper removed. Then they prayed to the holy King Olaf that he should have the clapper returned to his bell. And later on he frightened the king of Garth in his sleep, but he did not yield to this. And later he was smitten with such a violent illness that he could hardly bear it. But the queen made the right guess as to what the cause of his trouble might be. She asked Northbrikt to come and give the king some good advice. And Northbrikt immediately goes to the king and advises him to have the clapper taken back to King Olaf's bell, and that he should subsequently give the church three things and go there himself, and that he should do great homage to King Olaf as long as he lived. And the king promised to do this, and later lived up to his promise. Both Northbrikt and Gyrgir now leave the country once again...²³

That the tale has a nucleus of historical truth has been confirmed by several scholars²⁴. In 1711 Torfaeus used the tale for his *History of Norway*, giving a résumé without any further comment²⁵. We have to wait until the nineteenth

22. Northbrikt seems to have been the assumptive name of Harald in Byzantium.

23. The translation given here is by Christopher Sanders, Copenhagen, to whom I am very grateful.

24. S. Blöndal, *Vaeringjasaga*, Reykjavik 1954 (in Icelandic), translated and revised by B. S. Benediktz, *The Varangians of Byzantium*, Cambridge 1978, p. 68 s.: "...and we may assume without undue strain that the numerous stories in the two lives of king Haraldr have a base of sorts of events, even if, as we have already suggested, there is a certain amount of 'after the event' distortion in them". In this article we will refer to the English edition.

25. T. Torfaeus, *Historia Rerum Norvegicarum (Historia Norvegicae)*, Copenhagen 1711, III, p. 267-8: "...et semel quidem Barbaris ditionem Imperatoris Constantinopolitani

century before real interpretations of the *Morkinskinna* tale are given. P. E. Riant was the first to comment on it, although in a rather indirect way: in his chronology of Harald's adventures in the East, based on Norse accounts (he refers to the *Antiquités russes*, cf. n. 15) he says that Harald was active against the Bulgarians and during the siege of Thessalonica in 1041. By then the *Admonition to the Emperor* had not yet been discovered. Riant seems to refer here to our tale. One must admit, however. That he does not express himself very clearly²⁶. A decade later Vasilievsky, the Russian authority on Varangian affairs, in a rather elaborate commentary, corroborates the theory that the *Morkinskinna* tale relates the Bulgarian revolt of 1040/1²⁷. More than half a century later R. M. Dawkins expressed as his view that the tale speaks of events that took place during the reign of John I Comnenus (1118-1143)²⁸.

ferro flammaque vastantibus, curribus falcatis alioque apparatu pene invictis, missum in eos cum Vaeringis, suasore Georgio, templum S. Olafo Constantinopoli statuendum, consentiente Imperatore, si victoria potiretur, vovisse. Visum tum Olafum ex albo equo dimicantem idque cuidam inter hostium principes caeco, terrorem, formidinem, et caedes prae se agentem: currus vero Barbarorum in Vaeringos fortiter propulsos, occulta quadam vi defixos, victoriam penes Vaeringos, spoliaque ampla in urbem translata, templumque S. Olafo Vaeringorum impensis extractum, ejusque numini, Imperatore praesente, dedicatum; quod longa deinceps annorum serie religioso cultu celebratum posteritas prodidit". Some of the details (ferro flammaque, curribus falcatis) are unknown to the versions preserved nowadays, but they may be the result of an *Hineininterpretierung* of Torfaeus.

26. P. E. Riant, *Expéditions et pèlerinages des Scandinaves en Terre Sainte*, Paris 1865, p. 124, where the chronology seems erroneous, and p. 68, where the author simply states that St. Olaf churches were built after victories over barbarians in Thrace. Cf. Dawkins. *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 244.

27. V. G. Vasilievsky, The Varangian-Russian and Varangian-English Guard (druzhina) in Constantinople in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, *Journal of the Ministry of Public Instruction* 177, St. Petersburg 1875, p. 432s. = *Trudy*, I, St. Petersburg 1908, p. 268s. (Reprint The Hague 1968), in Russian. In a later publication of 1881 Vasilievsky seems to speak of the Pechenegs. Whether he changed his view is not clear to me, since the publication is inaccessible, cf. O. Delarc, *Les Normands en Italie*, Paris 1883, Appendice, *Harald Hardradr en Sicile et en Bulgarie*, p. 561, n. 3: "Les sagas ont parlé de l'expédition de Harald contre les Bulgares que la *Morkinskinna* et *Flateyrbok* appellent des Pestchenègues (sic!)...", Delarc refers to the article *Sovjety i razkazy vizantiiskago bojarina XI vjeka*, *Journal of the Ministry of Public Instruction* 216, St. Petersburg 1881, p. 148 (also published as a separate volume under the same title, St. Petersburg 1881). Blöndal seems to have ignored this publication.

28. Dawkins, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 244-5. Now that we doubt the interpretation given by Dawkins, our statement that the Comnenian emperor did not help the Scandinavians to build their church, only applies to the *Harald's Saga*, cf. A. van Arkel-de Leeuw van Weenen and K. N. Ciggaar, St. Thorlac's in Constantinople, built by a Flemish emperor, *Byzantion* 49, 1979, p. 15.

This view was shared by S. Blöndal and more recently by H. R. Ellis Davidson and B. S. Benedikz, the reviser and translator of Blöndal's work *Vaering-jasaga*²⁹. Finally there is the interesting interpretation given by the Hungarian scholar M. Gyoni who saw in the *Morkinskinna* tale the account of a battle against the Comans during the reign of Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118)³⁰. As one can see three different Greek emperors are involved: Michael IV (1034-41), Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118) and John I Comnenus (1118-1143). In the course of this article we will try to refute these theories and propose an alternative interpretation, i.e. that the *Morkinskinna* tale refers to events that took place during the reign of Michael IV on the Danube frontier in the 1030s.

G. Schlumberger had, in 1905, made the casual remark that Harald may have been active in repulsing the Pechenegs who had crossed the Danube in 1033. Schlumberger referred to a passage in Adam of Bremen's *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg and Bremen*, but he ignored the *Morkinskinna* tale³¹. This may explain why not much attention was paid to this suggestion. Although I will not completely follow his view, we will see how right he may have been by placing Harald in the context of the Pecheneg invasions. Of those Pecheneg tribes we will speak later. Let us now return to the text.

If we accept the chronological order of *Harald's saga*³², the battle took place some time after Harald's arrival in Byzantium, and before the expedition to Sicily (1038-40)³³, where he assisted the Greek general George Maniakes. In this light we have to consider a minor detail that might prove to be decisive: the role played by the Byzantine general, the Gyrgir of the Norse texts. It was Gyrgir who advised the Greek emperor to send his Varangians to attack the heathen invaders. We must keep in mind that after having subdued Sicily, Maniakes was accused of planning a *coup d'état*. For this reason he was

29. S. Blöndal, The last exploits of Harold Sigurdsson in Greek service, *Classica et Mediaevalia* 2, 1939, p. 14, n. 1, where he rejects at the same time Vasilievsky's interpretation, cf. Idem/Benedikz, *op. cit.* (n. 24), p. 74; H. R. Ellis Davidson, *The Viking Road to Byzantium*, London 1976, p. 191, is rather vague.

30. M. Gyoni, Les variantes d'un type de légende byzantine dans la littérature ancienne-islandaise, *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 4, 1956, p. 295s., 303s., 310.

31. G. Schlumberger, *L'épopée byzantine*, III, Paris 1905, p. 201. Blöndal/Benedikz, *op. cit.* (n. 24), p. 63, make the same suggestion, but not in relation to the *Morkinskinna* tale.

32. Cf. Shepard, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 148. The *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna* offer the same chronology, although their statement that Harald spent many years in Africa must be an exaggeration, cf. *Morkinskinna*, p. 64, and *Heimskringla*, *Saga of Harald Sigurtharson*, ch. 5, III, p. 82=Hollander, p. 581.

33. John Scylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. J. Thurn, Berlin 1973, p. 400-1 (=ed. I. Bekker, Bonn 1839, III, p. 516-7); cf. *Morkinskinna*, p. 66.

transferred to Constantinople where he was imprisoned. His release from prison only took place during the reign of Michael V (1041-2)³⁴. It is clear then that in the years 1041-2, when events took place in Bulgaria, Maniakes was not able to exert his influence with the Byzantine emperor.

In the *Morkinskinna* tale Harald went out with his own men to fight the heathen invaders. There is no indication that he was involved in a naval expedition. This may help us to identify the heathen troops who took part in the hostilities. Dawkins, although probably wrong in his final conclusion, has greatly contributed to their identification. He saw in the heathen troops the Pechenegs living in the Balkans who constantly raided Byzantine territory. We will resume in a few words Dawkins's theory put forward in the article *An Echo in the Norse Sagas of the Patzinak war of John Komnenos* (cf. note 20). In 1121 John Comnenus won an important victory over the Scyths (=Pechenegs) near Eski Zagra in the Balkans³⁵. Varangian troops contributed to the final victory as we are told by the Greek historians John Cinnamos and Nicetas Choniates³⁶. The nationality of the Varangians is given as 'Bretons', but there must have been Scandinavians among them³⁷. Among the texts studied by Dawkins were *King Harald's Saga* and *St. Olaf's Saga*³⁸. Unfortunately Dawkins overlooked another almost 'contemporary' Norse account of a battle that appears to be the one of 1121, the poem *Geisli* by Einar Skulason³⁹. By comparing *Harald's Saga* with the *Geisli* poem, the difference between the contents of the texts might have become more clear to him.

In this article we will not discuss *St. Olaf's Saga* and the *Geisli* poem,

34. Scylitzes, *ibidem*, p. 406 (=Bonn, p. 523), and p. 422 (=Bonn, p. 541); Amatus de Montecassino, *History of the Normans*, ed. V. de Bartholomaeis, Rome 1935, p. 68-9, 73. Cf. R. Janin, Un ministre byzantin: Jean l'Orphanotrophe (XIe siècle), *Echos d'Orient* 30, 1931, p. 439-40. L. Bréhier, Hommes de guerre byzantines: Georges Maniakès, *Province*, Tours, novembre 1902, is inaccessible to me, cf. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 12, 1903, p. 411.

35. The ancient Beroe (Berroia) in Thrace; cf. Dawkins, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 243s.

36. John Cinnamos, *Chronicle*, ed. A. Meineke, Bonn 1836, p. 8 (French transl. J. Rosenblum, Nice 1972, p. 19-20; English transl. Ch. M. Brand, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, New York 1976, p. 16). Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. J.-L. van Dieten, Berlin 1975, p. 15-6 (=ed. I. Bekker, Bonn 1835, p. 20-3; German transl. F. Grabler, Graz 1958, p. 46-9, *Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber* VII).

37. Dawkins, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 244; Idem, The later History of the Varangian Guard: some notes, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 37, 1947, p. 39-40.

38. In a forthcoming article I will cast some more doubt on his interpretation.

39. Cf. Ellis Davidson, *op. cit.* (n. 29), p. 191, n. 1; *Geisli* was published with an English transl. in *Corpus poeticum boreale*, *op. cit.* (n. 8), II, p. 291-2; no mention is made of the building of a church for St. Olaf. Vasilievsky, *op. cit.* (n. 27), p. 366, referred to the poem under its Latin name *Radius*.

or their eventual relations with the reign of John Comnenus, although St. Olaf plays an important role in all the texts concerned⁴⁰. We will limit ourselves to *King Harald's Saga* in its *Morkinskinna* version, in order to make clear how Dawkins may have come to the wrong conclusion. At the same time we will see how right he was in identifying the heathen as Pecheneg tribes.

Let us first have a closer look at the various elements studied by Dawkins who described the *Morkinskinna* tale as follows: "...the incident [battle of 1121] was fitted in defiance of chronology into the adventures in the East of Harald Hardrada...", and "...we shall see then how it was locally coloured by the Norse writer, and a role given to the national saint entirely ignored by the Greek historians"⁴¹. Dawkins noticed that in these texts mention was made of, what seems at first view, the same military tactics and equipment of the heathen troops. When confronting their enemies the heathen soldiers would use their war-waggon as a fortification, a 'waggon-fort', as it is sometimes called. Indeed the Pecheneg tribes were reputed for having these tactics, as we are told by different sources, Greek and others⁴². But the fact that such a behaviour was not unusual for them (accounts of different battles mention these tactics), should warn us not to draw too hasty a conclusion. By emphasizing too much the element of the military behaviour of the heathen people, Dawkins overlooked the fact that his texts did not necessarily all have to apply to the same event. Neither did he see that in the *Harald's Saga* the war-waggon is mentioned in a general way, not mentioning their use to form a fortification, although one may presume that, if necessary, the heathen would use them in their traditional way. Indeed we learn from the *Morkinskinna* tale that St. Olaf, by a timely miracle, prevented them from using them at all: the Northern saint had immobilized the chariots of the invaders! During the battle of Eski Zagra on the contrary, the Varangians, with their hawks, forced a breach into the chariot-fortification behind which the heathen, their

40. I hope to deal with this problem in another forthcoming article.

41. Dawkins, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 244-5. It is understandable that Greek sources ignored the role of a foreign saint; the *Admonition* is the only Greek source to mention Olaf as King of Varangia (=Norway!) and brother of Harald.

42. Anna Comnena, *Alexiade*, ed. Leib., II, Paris 1943, p. 97 (battle of Drista = Silistra, 1087), II, p. 141 (battle of Lebonion, 1091), cf. G. Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, Oxford 1929 (Reprint 1968), p. 378, 435, 438. Cinnamos, *op. cit.* (n. 36), *ibidem*, Choniates, *op. cit.* (n. 36), *ibidem*; Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, ed. J.-B. Chabot, III, Paris 1905, p. 207; *Geisli*, *op. cit.* (n. 8), *ibidem* (at first view all three sources seem to refer to the battle of 1121). Cf. C. A. Macartney, The Petchenegs, *The Slavonic (and East European) Review* 8, 1929-30, p. 352 and 354. Some centuries later this same way of war-faring is testified of the Hussites, cf. F. Lot, *L'art militaire et les armées au moyen âge en Europe et dans le Proche Orient*, Paris 1946, II, p. 198, 202-3, 205, 208-9, 241.

wives and children had withdrawn. In Dawkins's interpretation of the tale the capture of this fortification constituted the main element.

Another common feature of the texts studied by Dawkins was the miracle performed by St. Olaf. Here again we have to make some objections against Dawkins's theory, who jumped too quickly to conclusions. It is hardly credible that the Norse saint limited his intervention to just that specific battle of 1121, whereas the many Northerners, either on their way to Jerusalem, or during their periods of service in Byzantium, were so often in need of a miracle! Was not the saint's brother the person *par excellence* to need and get help during his peregrinations in the remote Byzantine empire? Norse literature tells us that once Harald escaped from prison with the help of St. Olaf⁴³.

Dawkins also neglected the 'historical' character of the *Harald's Saga*. Although certain facts may have been rendered in a rather distorted way, others are confirmed by Greek sources: the empress Zoe, the general Georges Maniakes, the expedition to Sicily⁴⁴. Why then should our *Morkinskinna* tale not reflect another 'contemporary' fact, instead of having been interpolated in the twelfth century as suggested by Blöndal and Gyoni? In this light we have to consider the anecdote told at the end of our tale: Harald facing a shortness of firewood when he had to prepare the banquet for the inauguration of the newly built church. The Norse prince then bought walnuts, old shipwood and ropes instead, and in this way he was able to prepare the feast. De Vries argued that this anecdote was very popular in Byzantium in the first half of the eleventh century, thus corroborating the 'contemporary' character of the events told in the Norse text⁴⁵.

43. *Heimskringla, Saga of Harald Sigurtharson*, ch. 14, III, p. 95 = Hollander, p. 588, where St. Olaf helped Harald to escape from prison; Harald then build a church for the saint. Since the *Heimskringla* does not contain our *Morkinskinna* tale, this episode may be an explication for the St. Olaf's church built by Harald.

44. For his imprisonment in Constantinople, cf. Blöndal, *op. cit.* (n. 29), p. 1 s.

45. The same anecdote, mentioning only walnuts, is told of king Sigurd when he visited Constantinople in 1111, in some later manuscripts of the *Heimskringla*, e.g. Laing, *op. cit.* (n. 14), p. 286, *Morkinskinna*, p. 164s., cf. de Vries, *op. cit.* (n. 10), p. 345s., who left in suspense which saga influenced the other. I think that priority may be given to the *Harald's Saga*: the story was popular in Byzantium in the 1020s and 1030s; the empress mentioned in our tale may be the well-known Zoe, daughter of Constantine VIII (1025-28) and married to three successive emperors, cf. Ch. Diehl, *Figures byzantines*, Paris 1906, p. 245s.; she is mentioned several times in the account of Harald's adventures in the East. The wife of Alexius I Comnenus, Irene Doukas, was a less prominent person who may not have made an impression on foreign visitors, cf. D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai*, London 1968, p. 70s. As far as I know she is not mentioned in Western sources.

So far we have tried to refute the dating and interpretation of the *Morkinskinna* tale by Dawkins. There is another element in the text that needs some attention: the construction of a sanctuary dedicated to St. Olaf. This element also occurs in the *Olaf's Saga*, but is lacking in the *Geisli* poem. Janin, the author of the monumental work on the churches and monasteries of Constantinople, did not list the Scandinavian sanctuaries⁴⁶. We may be sure, however, that a church or chapel dedicated to St. Olaf did exist in the Byzantine capital where foreign communities had the disposal of their own places of worship. But if we take the Norse accounts of Varangian activities in Byzantium too literally, and if we accept Dawkins's conclusion as well, we arrive at a total of four churches, which number cannot be true⁴⁷. The cult of St. Olaf certainly was popular among the Scandinavian Varangians, especially among those who had been with him on the battle-field of Stiklastad in 1030⁴⁸. Harald Hardrada, half-brother of the saint, is the most likely person to have had a church constructed in his honour in the Byzantine capital where he was to stay for almost ten years.

It will have become clear that all the objections against Dawkins's thesis are also valid where Gyoni's interpretation is concerned. Therefore we need not go into any further detail to refute the theory that by heathen invaders Cuman troops should be meant who invaded Byzantine territory during the reign of Alexios I. Comnenus.

Now that we have tried to identify the heathen as Pechenegs, we have

46. R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin. Première partie: le Siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat œcuménique, t. III, Les églises et les monastères*, Paris 1969^a. There was also a church dedicated to the Icelandic bishop St. Thorlac, cf. A. van Arkel-de Leeuw van Weenen and K. N. Ciggaar, *op. cit.* (n. 28).

47. 1) The church of our *Morkinskinna* tale; 2) The chapel built by Harald after his escape from prison, cf. n. 43; 3) The church built during the reign of Kirjalax (referring to Alexius I Comnenus?), *Heimskringla, Saga of Hákon the Broadshouldered*, ch. 21, III, p. 430 = Hollander, p. 788; 4) The sanctuary built after 1121, cf. Dawkins, *op. cit.* (n. 20). This enumeration makes clear that misinterpretations must have been made in the past. For the Latin texts on St. Olaf's church in Constantinople, with vague indications of the builder (i. e. the Greek emperor), cf. G. Storm, *Monumenta historica Norvegiae*, Christiania 1880, p. 135 (= F. Metcalfe, *Passio et Miracula B. Olavi*, Oxford 1881, p. 77) and J. Langebek, *Scriptores rerum Danicarum medii aevi*, II, Copenhagen 1773, p. 535, 539, 551; the *Homilie-bok*, ed. G. T. Flom, *Codex AM 619 Quarto (Old Norwegian Book of Homilies containing the miracles of Saint Olaf and Alcuin's De Virtutibus et Vitiis)*, Illinois 1929, p. 164-5. Riant, *op. cit.* (n. 26), p. 68, 122, speaks of two churches. See also note 26.

48. Riant, *ibidem*, argues that the cult of St. Olaf even started among the Varangians of Constantinople. This thesis has not been proven so far.

to consider the relations between Byzantium and its neighbours on the Danube frontier in the 1030s. As we have seen Schlumberger, and later Blöndal as well, hinted at the possibility that Harald was active in this area. But the year 1033, as referred to by Schlumberger, seems too early a date for Harald's activities in the Balkans, since he only arrived in Constantinople around 1034. Moreover, other expeditions had preceded before he set out on this specific campaign according to the *Saga*.

After a period of rather peaceful relations between Byzantium and its Pecheneg neighbours, hostilities started again in 1033 when the first of a whole series of invasions took place. In the spring of 1036 the Pechenegs raided Byzantine territory as many as three times in succession, on which occasion the local population suffered badly, was tortured and massacred or carried off as prisoners⁴⁹. Such a fate also befell five Greek *strategoi*, who were made prisoners and were never heard of again. It is not known whether they were captured during military actions or attacked in their garrisons⁵⁰. Information on these events is very scarce and is only supplied by the chronicler John Scylitzes who also gives a description of the Pecheneg tribes⁵¹. Immediately after telling of the cruel events of 1036 Scylitzes continues: "also the *archontes* of the Russians, Nesisthlabos and Hierosthlabos perished, and their relative Zinisthlabos was elected to be commander". Recently J. Shepard has argued that the Russian *archontes* must have been commanders of the Russian Varangians⁵². The death of two of them and the necessity to elect a new leader⁵³, following upon the news of the Pecheneg invasions, including the disappearance of the five Greek *strategoi*, suggests that the Russians were mixed up in military actions. One may even conclude that a counterattack took place by troops

49. Scylitzes, ed. Thurn, p. 385, 397, 399 (=ed. Bonn, p. 499, 512, 514, 514-5).

50. From the end of the tenth century onwards a *strategos* is the military commander of a theme and even a town garrison's commander, cf. Guiland, *op. cit.* (n. 5), I, p. 381 (= *Ἐπετηρίς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 29, 1959, p. 36-7).

51. Scylitzes, ed. Thurn, p. 399 (=Bonn, p. 515), cf. Zonaras, ed. M. Pinder, Th. Büttner-Wobst, III, Bonn 1897, p. 590^{a-b}.

52. J. Shepard, Byzantinorussia, I. Three Russian *archontes*, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 33, 1975, p. 211-5. For the Russians in the Guard, cf. B. S. Benediktz, The Evolution of the Varangian Regiment, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 62, 1969, p. 20-4; for the Scandinavians, cf. Blöndal/Benediktz, *op. cit.* (n. 24), Ellis Davidson, *op. cit.* (n. 29).

53. For some inexplicable reason, Riant, *op. cit.* (n. 26), p. 124, assumed that Harald was from the beginning commander of the Russian auxiliary troops. The Russian military commanders in Scylitzes's work are unique insofar that their names have come down to us, cf. J. Shepard, The English and Byzantium: a Study of their Role in the Byzantine Army in the late eleventh century, *Traditio* 29, 1973, p. 86, n. 202.

sent by the Greek emperor. These troops probably included Varangian soldiers who, as it seems, were scattered all over the Byzantine empire⁵⁴. Although Greek sources are silent about such a counterattack, it is hardly conceivable that Michael IV let the Pechenegs do as they liked on his territory⁵⁵. Sending Russian Varangians together with the newly arrived Norsemen may have been part of the military measures taken by the emperor⁵⁶.

Our *Morkinskinna* tale speaks of a victory by the Varangian troops. It is true that after 1036 the Pechenegs kept quiet for a while, at least until 1048/9 when a new war broke out. In his book *Les Petchénègues au Bas-Danube*, P. Diaconu thinks that a peace treaty was concluded in 1036, thus explaining the peaceful relations existing afterwards. It is very likely that the Byzantines were able to conclude such a peace treaty after having defeated some of the Pecheneg tribes by troops sent from Constantinople and elsewhere among whom probably Harald Hardrada and his 500 men may be numbered⁵⁷.

We have already discussed the active role played by Georges Maniakes. In the *Morkinskinna* tale he advises the emperor to send his Varangians⁵⁸. We have seen how his imprisonment after the Sicilian campaign prevented

54. In 1034 we hear of Varangian troops scattered in the Thracian theme (not to be confused with Thrace!) in their winter quarters, Scylitzes, ed. Thurn, p. 394 (=Bonn, p. 508), cf. Blöndal/Benediktz, *op. cit.* (n. 24), p. 62-3, who even suggest the presence of Harald Hardrada there. This is not unlikely when we consider that he was active in the Aegean.

55. During the Pecheneg invasion of 1027 the catepan of the Bulgarian theme, Constantine Diogene, received orders to attack them, cf. N. Banescu, *Les duchés byzantins de Paristion et de Bulgarie*, Bucarest 1946, p. 121s., P. Diaconu, *Les Petchénègues au Bas-Danube*, Bucarest 1970, p. 40. Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, IV, ch. 19, ed. Renauld, p. 64, says of Michael IV that 'he stopped the nations beyond our borders from invading Roman territory. This he did partly by the dispatch of envoys, partly by bribery, partly by annual displays of military strength' (transl. Sewter, p. 98). I do not see why Janin, *op. cit.* (n. 34), p. 437, came to the conclusion that the emperor was short of troops and thus unable to counterattack the Pechenegs.

56. It is not exceptional in that period to see Russians and Scandinavians fighting side by side, e.g. in Sicily and Southern Italy, cf. Ostrogorski, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 274-6, and Blöndal/Benediktz, *op. cit.* (n. 24), p. 70. For a detailed account of both expeditions, cf. Vasilievsky, *op. cit.* (n. 27), I, p. 288-303. See also note 53.

57. The six kings of the *Morkinskinna* would rather be military commanders or chieftains. It is unlikely that Harald had to face six out of thirteen tribes (Scylitzes, ed. Thurn, p. 455-60 = Bonn, p. 582-7), where on another occasion mention is made of 140 Pecheneg chiefs, cf. Diaconu, *op. cit.* (n. 55), p. 57 and 64.

58. Georges Maniakes had some unpleasant experiences with Harald, *Heimskringla, Saga of Harald Sigurtharson*, ch. 4s., III, p. 78s. = Hollander, p. 579s.; *Morkinskinna*, p. 63. By sending him on a dangerous expedition he may have tried to get rid of an unpleasant rival.

him from being active during the Bulgarian expedition of 1040-1. This leads us to the interpretation given by Vasilievsky who saw similarities between the *Morkinskinna* tale and the report of the Bulgarian revolt, including the siege of Thessalonica, given by Michael Psellos and John Scylitzes⁵⁹. In order to refute this interpretation⁶⁰ we have to examine the various elements brought forward by Vasilievsky, in order to see the differences between the two events, i.e. the Bulgarian revolt with its implications, and the Pecheneg invasions:

1. The Norse poet Thiodolf (cf. p. 2) called Harald the 'burner of Bulgarians', recalling thus his glorious reputation after the Bulgarian revolt. But such a qualification does not prevent Harald from having been active on other occasions, e.g. on the Danube frontier. The fact that the *Morkinskinna* tale does not give the name of the invaders, whereas the Bulgarians were known by name to Norse writers, supports this view⁶¹. Besides one cannot apply the name heathen to the Bulgarians who had been christianized by Greek missionaries long before.
2. The war engines used by the Bulgarians, the ἐλέπολεις and μηχαναὶ during the siege of Thessalonica⁶², are not the chariots of the heathen invaders, which were used as a defence-line.
3. The siege of Thessalonica by the Bulgarians is quite unlike the hostilities undertaken by the heathen invaders who plundered and looted whatever was in their way and who are not told to have systematically besieged a major town.
4. The appearance of St. Demetrius, patron of Thessalonica, during the siege of that town, indeed resembles the appearance of St. Olaf⁶³. But was it not a common thing to do for a saint to relieve his devotees when in danger? Why should not St. Demetrius have come to the rescue of the inhabitants of Thessalonica and St. Olaf in his turn to the rescue of his compatriots when they had to face heathen invaders? The white horse on which St. Olaf was seated certainly is not the prerogative of St. Demetrius: on other occasions a white horse is attributed to both St. Demetrius and St. Olaf, and to numerous other saints as well⁶⁴.

59. Cf. note 27.

60. In Norse accounts of what is probably the battle of Eski Zagra (1121), the identity of the Pechenegs is indirectly revealed by the name of the battle-field, i.e. 'Petzina plain', in *Geisli*, *op. cit.* (n. 39), *ibidem*. E. Lozovan, *De la Mer Baltique à la Mer Noire*, in F. Altheim-R. Stiehl, *Die Araber in der alten Welt*, Berlin 1965, II, p. 530-1, argues that modern Rumania is referred to as Blōcumannaland and Blōcumannavöllu in Norse texts.

61. E. g. *Heimskringla*, *Saga of the Sons of Magnús*, ch. 13, III, p. 283 = Hollander, p. 698 (itinerary of king Sigurd, returning home from his visit to Jerusalem).

62. Scylitzes, ed. Thurn, p. 413 (= Bonn, p. 532).

63. Both saints are said to have been fairhaired, cf. *Heimskringla*, *Saga of Harald Sigurt-harson*, ch. 99, III, p. 220 = Hollander, p. 661; for St. Demetrius, cf. A. Tougard, *De l'histoire profane dans les actes grecs des Bollandistes*, Paris 1874, p. 116-7.

64. Ellis Davidson, *op. cit.* (n. 29), p. 191. For St. Olaf, cf. *Morkinskinna*, p. 41-6, and

5. The blindness of the leaders involved in both battles seems, at first view, another common feature. But here again differences can be detected: Delianos was blinded by another Bulgarian leader named Alousianos, after the unsuccessful siege of Thessalonica, whereas the heathen leader of the invading troops was blind already during the battle itself. And let us not forget that to blind one's political opponents was a very common thing to do in Byzantium where it happened hundreds of times; Byzantium's neighbours may well have imitated this example⁶⁵. The blindness of the heathen king may have been pure coincidence, but it may have been introduced by the story-teller to enhance the saint's radiation.

I would like to add some more arguments to demonstrate the differences between the two battles. First there are the Bulgarians who rose in rebellion after a new tax-system had been imposed upon them by the Byzantine authorities; the Pechenegs, on the contrary, invaded Byzantine territory by what one may call an outburst of energy and an inclination to plundering and looting. Secondly there is the different way in which Harald was treated after his return to Constantinople. His contribution to the successful campaign against the Bulgarians brought glory and had positive effects; he was decorated and honoured, receiving the title of *spatharocandidate*, a modest title, but a great honour when conferred upon a foreigner. Yet after his victory over the heathen invaders, the Norse prince met with jealousy and obstruction when he was to carry out the building of St. Olaf's church.

All the above-mentioned facts must lead to the conclusion that it was Harald who fought the Pecheneg invaders on the Danube border. We find support for our theory in an unsuspected, almost contemporary Western source, the before mentioned *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg and Bremen*. In this work Harald is mentioned to have been fighting the Scyths (another name to designate the Pechenegs): "...Constantinopolim exul abiit, ubi miles imperatoris effectus, multa proelia contra Sarracenos in mari et Scitas in terra gessit..." and "...qui prius in Graecia et in Scythiae regionibus

Turville-Petre, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 9; for St. Demetrius, cf. Vasilievsky, *op. cit.* (n. 27), p. 269 (who refers to Tougard, *ibidem*). See also Obolensky, *op. cit.* (n. 6), p. 18s., who gives the interesting view that "...it is possible though by no means certain, that the bizarre appearance of St. Demetrius in this tale was the work of the great Viking Harold Hardrada and his retinue'.

65. Did not Harald himself witness, or possibly perform himself, the blinding of the emperor Michael V? Cf. Psellos, *Chronographia*, V, ch. 50, ed. Renauld, p. 115 (transl. Sewter, p. 150); *Heimskringla, Saga of Harald Sigurtharson*, ch. 14, III, p. 95-6 = Hollander, p. 588; *Morkinskinna*, p. 83-4, cf. *Scripta Historica Islandorum*, *op. cit.* (n. 15), p. 156-7.

multa contra barbaros proelia confecit..."⁶⁶. If referring to heathen tribes in Asia Minor (who were also very troublesome to the emperor), the author would certainly not have used the term Scyths.

In conclusion we may say that the *Morkinskinna* tale, supported by indications in the work of Scylitzes and Adam of Bremen, and by the role played by Georges Maniakes, appears to suggest that Harald Hardrada participated in an expedition against the Pechenegs in 1036, whereby he was commander of the Norse regiment. Although ignored by Greek sources, his victory was memorized and magnified by his own people and in his own language. One more glorious adventure may thus be added to the list of Harald's military successes in South Eastern Europe.

66. Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. B. Schmeidler, Berlin 1961, p. 340 and 346 (*Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters*, XI). The author never mentions the Bulgars and only once speaks of 'Pescinagos', *Scholium* H 17, p. 254. In an earlier publication I mistakenly concluded that Adam of Bremen in this context referred to the Bulgars, cf. K. N. Ciggaar, *Byzance et l'Angleterre*, thesis Leiden, 1976, p. 159, n. 261. By *Scythi* the different tribes living East of the Hungarians are meant. At the time of Harald Hardrada Scandinavia was subject to the archbishop of Bremen, thus explaining the information included in the work of Adam, cf. L. Musset, *Les peuples scandinaves au Moyen Age*, Paris 1951, p. 141-2.