

*THE VIKING EXPEDITIONS TO SPAIN DURING THE 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY*

by

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MAPS

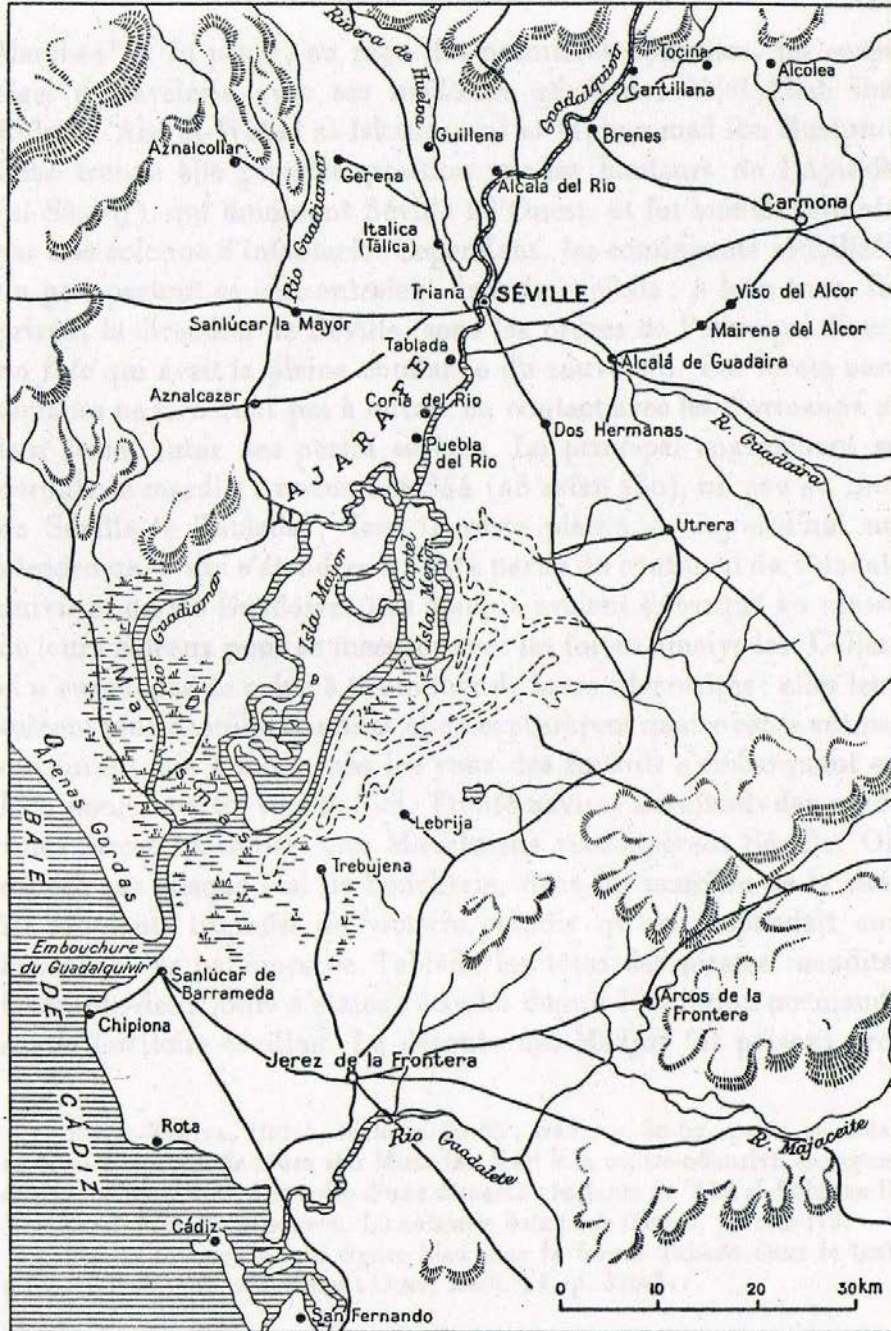
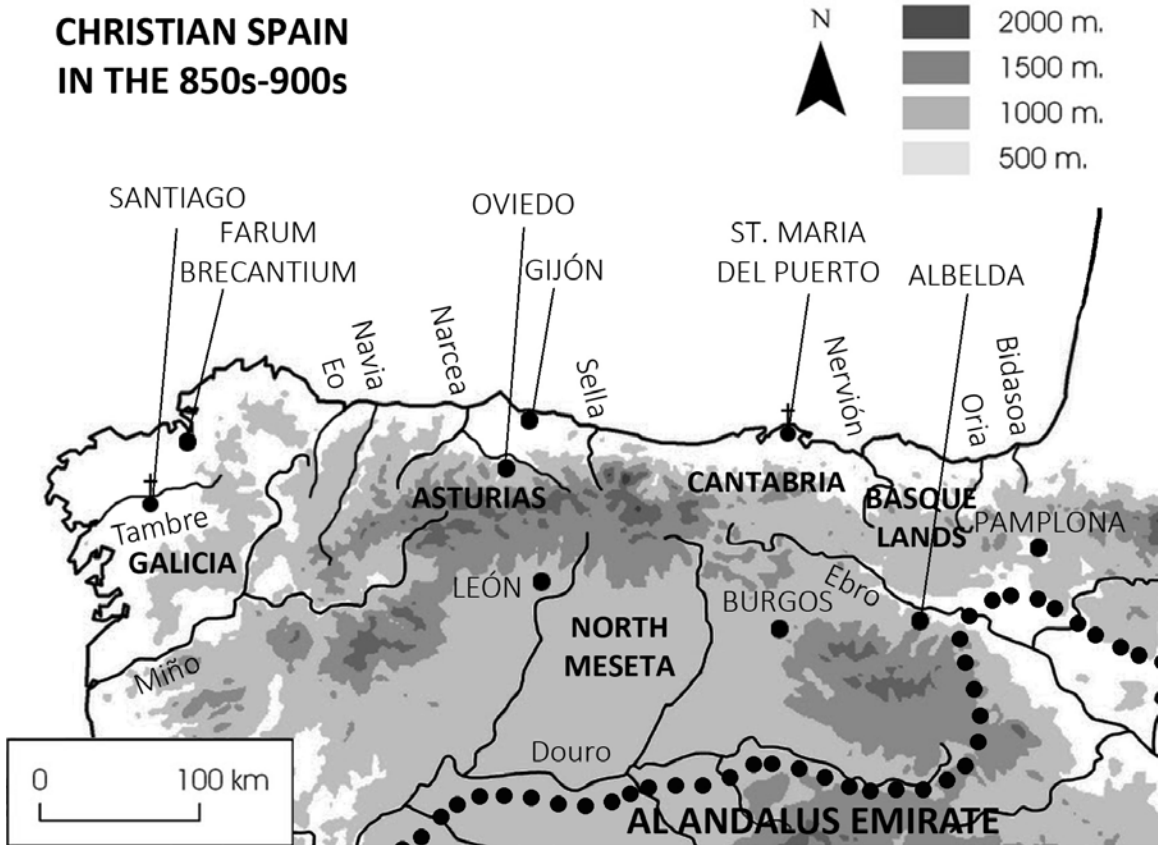


FIG. 10. — LE PAYS DE SÉVILLE ET LA BASSE VALLÉE DU GUADALQUIVIR.

Extracted from E. Levi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, 1950, p. 221.

# CHRISTIAN SPAIN IN THE 850s-900s



## THE VIKING EXPEDITIONS TO SPAIN DURING THE 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### *The Sources*

This article in two parts aims at making the Scandinavian readers a bit more familiar with a topic that has barely been approached by scholars, neither in the north nor in the south. The target of this first part is to contribute to the Nordic historiography with a series of texts that prove useful to track down the movements of the Vikings<sup>1</sup> along the coasts of the Iberian Peninsula during the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The importance of these reports lays in the fact that there is no alternative way of knowing of such events – rather isolated, yet important – that have taken place during the Spanish and Scandinavian Middle Ages. There is no archaeological evidence, and the chances to relay on the study of old place names are very reduced and isolated<sup>2</sup>. Given the consequent importance of chronicles, our efforts should not be merely placed on transcribing them and describing the historical context in which they were created, but we should focus on assessing how useful they are as tools to reconstruct a historical era.

Scandinavian historians and experts in Viking history are all likely to be familiar with the *Annales Bertiniani*, which represent an important source for studying the movements of the Nordic pirates in France. They will however find other Hispanic – and even Arab and Latin – source more obscure, as their contributions to the study of the Vikings has been much less

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<sup>1</sup> \*I would like to dedicate this article to Karen Fog Rasmussen, to show my gratitude for her help, kindness and patience. I'm also in debt to professor Kurt Villads Jensen, Per Grau Møller, Tore Nyberg, Jens Gydelund Andersen and all the History Department of the University of Southern Denmark, for their support and hospitality. I would add this article was kindly translated into English by Aizeti Carlos de Vergara.

In Spain, the words used to refer to the Vikings are usually 'Northmen', *lordemanos*, *lodimanos*, in the case of the Christian kingdoms; or magicians or *Al Mayus* when used by the Muslim authors, although it is not strange to find the use of the word 'Northmen'. In the international congress *Visions of Community*, in June 2009, professor Ann Christys gave a presentation with the title *The Vikings in the south through Arab eyes*, where she offers a well-documented description of the perception Arabs had to the Vikings. When this article was finished the proceedings had not yet been published, but I take this opportunity to thank Ann Christys for having given me access to her article.

<sup>2</sup> There are three enclaves whose names do not leave any doubt, given their evident relation to one of the names used to refer to the Northmen in the Iberian Peninsula: *lordemanos*, in its multiple variants – although the place names as such are not Scandinavian. This places are *Lordemanos* – a village in the province of León –; *Lordemao*, near Coimbra; and *Lodimanos*, a disappeared village in Galicia whose name could indicate a connection with the Vikings (see E. Morales Romero's work, *Historia de los Vikingos en España*, 2006, pp.87-88). Where documented after 9<sup>th</sup> century.

prominent. Medieval sources are normally problematic in different ways, and the Hispanic texts are not an exception, the main reason being that behind every report there is an agenda, which in turn can develop into a subtle manipulation, a clumsy distortion or, worse, directly a fabrication. The use of sources that are questionable from a historical point of view has led to mere legends being regarded as real facts in both older and newer studies on the Vikings in the Iberian Peninsula. This is certainly an area where historiography needs to improve.

It is also important to note that there is a massive difference between the Hispanic and the Muslim chronicles of the first centuries of the Middle Ages. The extremely brief Christian accounts are belittled by the Muslim narrations as far as our area of study is concerned. The former, concise and brief, mirrored a society that feared the end of the world was near<sup>3</sup>, hence their providentialist conception of the world and their belief of the end of the times being God's plan. All information in these accounts was taken from older narratives, and was enriched by other pieces of information that came to the ears of the author. The Muslim chronicles are, on the other hand, full of rich details – the depiction of kings go beyond their physical appearance and virtues, and extend to their religious self – that also refer to the monarch's ministers, wives, wars, and palace plots. These texts are bewilderingly vivid, yet, as in the case of the Christian versions, they lack geographic accuracy, are driven by political agendas and mix historical details with fictional stories<sup>4</sup>. The sources of these Muslim texts varied from war reports kept in palace shelves, to correspondence between monarchs, old stories and oral traditions, or the author's

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<sup>3</sup> This is an idea that was expressed by many authors of those times, who believed that the end of the world was near. This concern was captured in Bede the Venerable, Alcuin and the author of the *Rotense* chronicle himself, a text that we will study here. But the one who expressed his restlessness with greatest eloquence was the Cantabrian monk Beato de Liébana in his work, *Comentarios al Apocalipsis* (Comments on the Apocalypse), see J. González Echegaray's 'Beato de Liébana y los terrores del año 800', in *Milenarismos y milenaristas en la Europa Medieval. IX Semana de Estudios Medievales de Nájera*, 1999, pp. 87-100.

<sup>4</sup> There are several examples of each of the mentioned landmarks. It is not strange that the Muslims see Galicia as the whole of the Asturian Kingdom, for they followed the old Roman demarcation, and it is not surprising either to see how they consider it possible to reach Pamplona by river. It is however more problematic when they present fictional stories as real historical events. This is the case of the embassy of Al Ghazal. See the following works for reference: E. Levi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane. La conquete et l'emirat hispano-umayyade*, I, 1950, pp. 253-254; S. Pons Sanz, 'Whom did Al-Ghazal meet? An exchange of embassies between the Arabs from Al Andalus and the Vikings', *Saga-Book*, XXVIII, 2004, pp. 5-28; and the defense of the text by E. Morales in *Vikingerne på Den Iberske Halvø*, 2004, pp. 62-64 – although the author offers a more detailed presentation in the Spanish version, *Historia de los vikingos ...*, 2006, pp. 149-158.



personal experience<sup>5</sup>. And despite their late appearance, these reports can be considered as close to the original sources due to the compilation strategy followed by Muslim historians – focused on literal meaning<sup>6</sup>, and not on personal interpretations.

Given the limited space for this article, it is necessary to make a selection of the chronicles to be studied, and I have chosen to focus on the oldest ones, due to their proximity to the events they describe. This is the main reason why these sources are the most widely accepted from a historical point of view. We will look at texts from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries – the existing sources from the 9<sup>th</sup> century are all Christian (*Annales Bertinian* and the *Asturian Chronicles*), as all Muslim chronicles from this period have been lost. Although the 10<sup>th</sup> century was not particularly prolific in producing such chronicles – mainly because those were hard times for the Spanish Christians –, it did see a fruitful development in the *andalusi* historiography. Among the most prolific writers are Ahmad al Razi, great historian of the time, and his son, Isa b. Ahmad; and the scholar Ibn Al Qutiyya, “the son of Goda”. Unfortunately, their works have been lost throughout the centuries, and the few texts that survived from the 10<sup>th</sup> century do not offer relevant information for our purposes. Luckily, however, two important works from the 11<sup>th</sup> century still exist today: (1) the anonymous meeting about the doctrines of the 10<sup>th</sup>-century scholar, Ibn Al Qutiyya, and (2) Ibn Hayyan’s *Al Muqtabis II-I*, and *II-II*. These works are all in Arab and are extremely interesting for the study of the Viking movements in Spain at the time, because they copied previous works on the topic – with more or less accuracy – before they were lost. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards more and more works on the topic were produced, although their overall contribution to the study of the Vikings in Spain is very limited.

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<sup>5</sup> Muslim authors usually provide reference the sources of the information they use. These can be letters (we can find an example on the topic of the Viking attacks in Ibn Hayyan’s work), previous chronicles, war reports, documents of emirs or caliphs, poems, etc. See work by C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes del feudalismo*, II, 1942, pp. 131-133, where he gives account of the materials used by Ahmad Al Razi.

<sup>6</sup> L. Molina says that *the treatment that Andalusian chroniclers give to the sources they use to report historical events differ from other methods used in other cultural areas in two main characteristics: the importance they give to literal meaning, and the formal objectivity. The chronicler limited himself to quote – often extensively – previous authors without modifying anything, and staying away from the narration. Besides, even if they were Andalusian chroniclers, the method they used is that of the Arab historiography [...]. And another characteristic about their method of creating chronicles was that when the author felt it was necessary to summarise a text that he was reproducing, he did not paraphrase it a brief text, but he just extracted the parts he was interested in transmitting – he selects and keeps these sentences without any alteration, and leaves out the rest.* If this were the case the texts should be trustworthy, for even if they were reduced the extracts selected by the chroniclers would be a source to be trusted. However, studies of the related texts show that the extracts are not as accurate as we were led to think at the beginning, (in ‘Técnicas de amplificatio en el Muqtabis de Ibn Hayyan’, *Talia Dixit*, 1, 2006, pp. 58; 77).

Seeing as the *Al Muqtabis II-II*, relating to the ruling of Muhammad I (852-886), have not been translated yet, we can only rely on later chroniclers to gain some sort of access to the original Muslim version of the expedition that took place between 858 and 859.

The works outlined above are the main sources to track down the Viking movements around Spain during the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Other texts on these expeditions can be considered as mere appendixes with less important contributions, but they are still likely to be quoted in publications and critical editions.

### *9<sup>th</sup> Century Sources*

Among the texts that were written during the period of the Viking expeditions are the *Annales Bertiniani*<sup>7</sup>, a French chronicle written in the 9<sup>th</sup> century that followed the *Annales Regni Francorum*, and the *Asturian Chronicles* – the latter being a series of historical texts written in Oviedo towards the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Although there existed Muslim chronicles that dealt with the Viking expeditions during this century, they have all been lost in some way.

The *Annales Bertiniani* were named after the Belgian monastery of Saint Bertin, where the 9<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript was kept<sup>8</sup>. As a continuation of the *Annales Regni Francorum*, which was left incomplete in the palace of Louis the Pious in 829, the *Annales Bertiniani* cover the period between 830 and the death of the last chronicler, Hincmar of Rheims, in 882<sup>9</sup>. Although several authors contributed to this work, all contributions from 843 were made by Prudence of Troyes, who wrote until 862, and by Hincmar of Rheims, who wrote until his death. Both authors had great influence and power during their lives, and their outlooks are evident in their work. This is so because the *Annales Bertiniani* were not written as an official chronicle of the kingdom, as was the case of the *Annales Regni Francorum*. Quite the contrary, most part of the manuscript mirrors the outlook of individuals outside the Carolingian Court, with their own ideas and often critical to the monarchs. The chronicles go beyond the Carolingian boundaries and can

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<sup>7</sup> There are several publications about the French sources. The original text in Latin was edited by G. Waitz, *Quellen zum Karolingischen Reichsgeschichte zweiter teil*, 1883; and is the text that I have used as reference. The English version used here corresponds to one of the most recent publications – translation and critical edition by Janet L. Nelson, *The Annals of St. Bertin*, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2

<sup>9</sup> Both authors, Hincmar and Prudence, are of great relevance for 9<sup>th</sup> century. Our interest is mainly focused on Prudence, author of the news about the Vikings in Spain, and himself a Spaniard. His real name, Galindo, seems to point to the region of the Pyrenees from where he had to flee to avoid persecution by the Muslims (for a biography see M. Menéndez Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles*, I, 1880, pp. 117-135; and also Janet L. Nelson, *The Annals of St. Bertin*, 1991, pp. 7-13).

be considered as a general Western work, because even if most of the events mentioned are focused on episodes that within the Frankish borders, other in England, Denmark and the Iberian Peninsula are mentioned too. The authors showed a great interest in the Viking invasions, from which we benefit today.

The *Annales Bertiniani* contain several entries about the Viking expeditions in the Iberian Peninsula in the years 844, 859, and 862.

844. The Northmen sailed up the Garonne as far as Toulouse, wreaking destruction everywhere without meeting any opposition. Then some of them withdrew from there and attacked Galicia, but they perished, partly because they met resistance from missile-throwers, partly because they were caught in a storm at sea. Some of them, though, got to the southwestern part of Spain, where they fought long and bitterly with the Saracens, but were finally beaten and withdrew to their ships<sup>10</sup>.

859. Danish pirates made a long sea-voyage, sailed through the straits between Spain and Africa and then up the Rhône. They ravaged some civitates and monasteries, and made their base on an island called the Camargue<sup>11</sup>.

862<sup>12</sup>. Most of them made for the Bretons, who live in Neustria with Salomon as chief; and these Danes were joined by the ones who had been in Spain<sup>13</sup>.

These contributions by French chroniclers are of great interest for research on this topic. Not only are they the earliest account of the Viking expeditions in the Iberian Peninsula, but they also contain valuable details that are compatible with later Hispanic chronicles, which can be considered as original, written by monks that could have barely had any contact with Prudence's

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<sup>10</sup> *Nordomanni per Garonnam Tolosam usque proficiscentes, praedas passim inpuneque perficiunt. Unde regressi quidam Galliciamque adgressi, partim ballistariorum occursum partim tempestate maris intercepti dispereunt. Sed et quidam eorum ulterioris Hispaniae partes adorsi, diu acriterque cum Saracenis dimicantes, tandem victi resiliunt*, (see the work by G. Waitz, *Quellen zum karolingischen...*, 1883, p. 64). See also the translation into English by Janet L. Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 1991, p. 60).

<sup>11</sup> *Pyratae Danorum longo maris circuitu, inter Hispanias videlicet et Africam navigantes, Rodanum ingrediuntur, depopulatisque quibusdam civitatibus ac monasteriis, in insula quae Camarias dicitur sedes ponunt*, (in *Ibid.*, pp. 98 y 100). English version by Janet L. Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 1991, p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> At this point, the *Annales Bertiniani* do not refer directly to the Spanish expedition, but the participants do appear when the fleet of Weland leaves the Seine and divides in small fleets, one of which heads to Brittany to take part in the war between Solomon and Robert. The newly arrived from the Mediterranean join the fleet that supported the Bretons.

<sup>13</sup> *Maior autem pars Brittanos, qui Salomone duce habitant in Niustria, petit; quibus et illi iunguntur qui in Hispania fuerant*, (in the work by G. Waitz, *Quellen zum Karolingischen...*, 1883, p. 110). See the English version in Janet L. Nelson, (*The Annals of St-Bertin*, 1991, p. 99)

manuscript, and this adds credibility to the text. This work also contains original elements in relation to other chronicles, such as details about the storm and the archers.

I certainly consider these works as deserving of some historical credit. I have tried to outline the way in which the different pieces of information were carried around Europe in the 9<sup>th</sup> century – from the time in which the actual events happened all the way through such a far-away place from Galicia as Troyes, headquarters of Prudence. It was probably the random travellers that carried the stories of the events along the pilgrimage routes. Embassies can be ruled out in this regard, as there are no records of any after the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>14</sup>. We know of some well-known travellers that took the risk of crossing large countries under dangerous circumstances during the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>15</sup>, but the pilgrimage routes must have been a bit more “congested”. There are three sources that record the arrival of pilgrims from the Asturian Kingdom, more precisely from the only relatively bustling *civitas* of Gijón<sup>16</sup>, towards Bordeaux, up to Saint Martin of Tours<sup>17</sup>. If monks and pilgrims alike arrived in Tours rather frequently, it

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<sup>14</sup> We do not have any documentation about the relations between the Frankish and Asturian kingdoms, aside from those established by King Alfonso II in late 8th century. Unlike other areas, it is unlikely that there were more relations, as the legations were usually included in the chronicles – particularly the Frankish ones. Asturian chronicles, however, ignore all the missions that Alfonso II sent to Carlomagno and his son, Louis (see article by M. Defourneaux, 'Carlomagno y el reino asturiano', as part of *Estudios sobre la monarquía asturiana*, 1971, pp. 91-114).

<sup>15</sup> There were travellers but it is difficult to find record of their travels. Eulogio of Cordova travelled to Pamplona at the end of 840's, with the intention of meeting his brothers that were for some reason exiled in Bavaria, but he was unable to cross the Pyrenees (see, P. Herrera Roldán, *Obras completas de San Eulogio de Córdoba*, 2005, p. 219). In mid 9th century, there was a wide knowledge of the travels of monk Usuard from France to recover the relics of martyr Vicente, which had been taken previously to Italy. Shortly afterwards he learned about the movement of the voluntary martyrs, he travelled to Cordova and finally collected several relics (see 'Usuard's journey to Spain and its influence on the dissemination of the cult of the Cordovan Martyrs', in *Comitatus*, 24, 1990, pp. 21-37; and see the recent contribution of Ann Christys, *Christians in Al Andalus, 711-1000*, 2002). Among these documented travels, the only one that had the Asturian Kingdom as destination was that of archbishop of Orleans, Jonas, in early 9<sup>th</sup> century, as a response to Charlemagne to the last embassy of Alfonso II (see article by M. Defourneaux, 'Carlomagno y el reino asturiano', *Estudios sobre la monarquía asturiana*, 1971, pp. 91-114).

<sup>16</sup> Gijón is the only port in the Cantabrian Sea that appears in the sources of the period subject to study. This does not mean that it was the only one, as the documentation that we keep today came from Asturias (where Gijón is), and it is probably more difficult to find documented evidence of places outside the Asturian Kingdom. Gijón was of considerable importance at the beginning of 8th century, when a Muslim governor briefly settled in there. According to the *Rotense* chronicle, *Per idem ferre tempus in hac regione Asturiensium prefectus erat in ciuitate leione nomine Munnuza conpar Tarec* (J. Gil, *Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, pp. 122).

<sup>17</sup> It is only fair to point out that two of these three correspond to the 100-year period in which the Asturian Kingdom reached its maturity – between late 8<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> century. The first news that covered a pilgrimage was in Gregory of Tours's work dedicated to Saint Martin, *Libri I-IV de virtutibus Sancti Martini*, where he explains the reasons and details of the travel that Maurano to Tours towards the end of 7th century (see F. J. Fernández Conde, *La religiosidad medieval en España*, I, 2008, pp.

would not be surprising if the news of different events travelled with them, first-hand reports reaching Prudence. It is therefore quite likely that the saint from Tours, praised in the Iberian Peninsula, received more pilgrims than previously estimated<sup>18</sup>. Given all this, we must assess both scenarios – on the one hand, the travellers carrying the information; on the other the pilgrims passing the news – the latter being, in my opinion, the most plausible.

The *Asturian Chronicles*<sup>19</sup> consist of three texts – including two versions of the chronicle of Alfonso III (*Rotense* and *A Sebastián*) that were written in the court of the Kingdom of Oviedo during the late 9<sup>th</sup> century. The writing of these two chronicles was like the coming of age, from an intellectual point of view, of the Asturian monarchy, which steadily expanded throughout the North West of the Iberian Peninsula during the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The texts gave an idea of continuity between the Visigoths and the Asturian monarchs<sup>20</sup>, who seemed to be the legitimate power

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175-176). The second one dates back to 8th century, when Vicente, an Asturian pilgrim in Tours, received from Alcuin of York the mission of bringing Beatus of Liébana a letter about the adoptionist controversy, a topic that was in those days the centre of theological disputes in the Western world (see article by L. Vázquez de Parga, 'Beato y el ambiente cultural de su época', *Homenaje académico a D. Emilio García Gómez*, 1993, p. 75). The last reference dates back to early 10th century, and appears in the letter that Alfonso III sent to the clergy of Tours. This letter was supposed to be handed in Tours by a group of pilgrims that were to part from Asturias; the part of the letter corresponding to this information is credible for A. Floriano and M. Lucas Álvarez (see A. Floriano Cumbreño, *Diplomática española del período astur*, II, 1949, pp. 339-345; and M. Lucas Álvarez, *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media*, VIII, 1995, pp. 149-151).

<sup>18</sup> News about pilgrims always reach us only indirectly, as they are only briefly mentioned when the authors consider them of interest for the purposes of the chronicle. The story of Maurano was reported by Gregory of Tours because Saint Martin made a miracle for the pilgrim – therefore the interest was not in the pilgrim, but on the miracle. About Vicente, the importance relies on the fact that he carried the letter from Alcuin, not in the fact that he is a pilgrim. And a similar case is that of 906, where the pilgrims are only relevant in the text because they are carrying the letter of King Alfonso III to the clergy of Tours. Seeing this, how many pilgrims that did not witness any miracles or carried important letters existed? Undoubtedly, many more than those that were reported in these three cases.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout the last decades, the four texts of the *Asturian Chronicles* have been subject to several critical revisions since A. Barbero and M. Vigil considered their contents distorted, and therefore containing little historical credit (see *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica*, 1978, pp. 232-278). The manipulation of the contents of the texts, aimed at presenting the Asturian kings as successors of Visigoths, was long known as C. Sánchez Albornoz himself dismantled such idea in his works (see *Orígenes de la nación española*, I, 1972, pp. 483-484). The new theories radicalise the critical approach and rejected great parts of the text. These were firmly refuted by A. Besga (*Orígenes hispanogodos del reino de Asturias*, 2000, pp. 49-65). In any case, the reflection of the Viking attacks in the Asturian chronicles is trustworthy, for it has been validated by the testimony of the *Annales Bertiniani* and by the Muslim chronicles, and we do not know of any hidden interest to invent such accounts. In the worst case, the Asturian chronicles could silence war accounts that were not favourable, and they do this often when they are covering the war against Islam.

<sup>20</sup> I recommend the reading of an excellent research on the topic, *Crónicas Asturianas* by Juan Ignacio Ruíz de la Peña (*Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, pp. 31-42). The ideological manipulation of these texts – quite common in general in all historical periods – led to a great controversy that remains till these days about the validity of these accounts to reconstruct historical events. There are numerous editions and articles

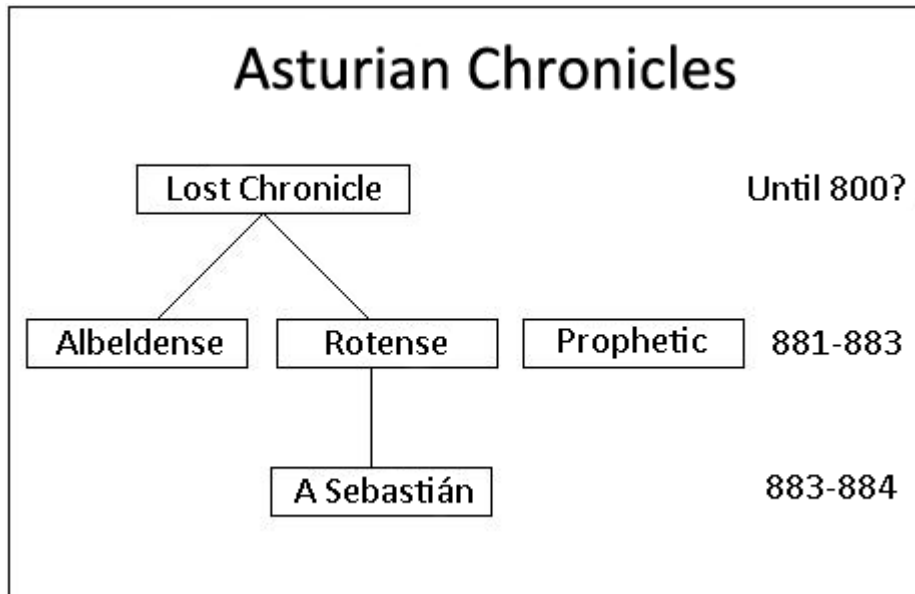
after the Kingdom of Toledo to face Islam in the Iberian Peninsula. The three accounts that make up the *Asturian Chronicles* are the *Albedense Chronicle*, the *Prophetic Chronicle* and the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* (including its two versions, *Rotense* and *A Sebastián*). These sources are extremely valuable for scholars, given their proximity in time and space to the events to which they refer – when they were completed during the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, forty years had passed from the first Viking attack, and over twenty from the second one. This meant that the authors might have even lived during the time of the happenings, and if not, they could have well known some direct witnesses, which makes their accounts extremely valuable from a historical point of view.

It is important to note that the contents of the three main texts, which stand out because they go beyond mere annalistic references – the *Albedense Chronicle*, *Rotense*, and the *Chronicle of A Sebastián* – are related and influenced each other in ways that are difficult to reconstruct. There is no doubt that *A Sebastián* is a copy of the *Rotense* version – although some information contained in it was altered. And although there is also certainty about the *Albedense* and the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* being related, it is still difficult to make out the point in which these two came into contact. Some historians defended the idea that there was a *Lost Chronicle*, written during the reign of Alfonso II (791-842), that covered the years before 800, thus working as reference for both texts. This would explain the similarities between the accounts of the two texts up to that year 800, and their differences in the reports referring to later dates – although, as many authors have stressed, there are still many parallelisms in the 9<sup>th</sup> century reports of the two versions<sup>21</sup>.

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about these Christian chronicles. The most relevant in 20th century are the following: M. Gómez Moreno, *Las primeras crónicas de la Reconquista*, 1932; A. Ubierto Arteta, 'La redacción "ovetense" de la crónica de Alfonso III', in *Symposium sobre cultura asturiana de la Alta Edad Media*, 1967, pp. 365-369; R. Menéndez Pidal, 'La historiografía medieval sobre Alfonso II', in *Estudios sobre la monarquía asturiana*, 1971, pp. 11-41. There are also several articles by C. Sánchez Albornoz and that are all included in his work *Orígenes...*, 1974-75, volumes II and III. Also worth mentioning are M. C. Díaz y Díaz, 'La historiografía hispana desde la invasión árabe hasta el año mil', in *De Isidoro al siglo IX*, 1976, pp. 218 onwards; A. Barbero and M. Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica*, 1978; J. Prelog, *Die Chronik Alfons' III*, 1980; J. Gil, *Crónicas asturianas*, 1985.

<sup>21</sup> M. C. Díaz y Díaz writes: *A few years later, around year 800, someone wrote a chronicle containing several Visigoth elements, but always coming from the NorthWest of the Peninsula – it was more a compilation of news about the Asturian kings, from Pelayo to Alfonso II. The existence of such chronicle has been strongly defended with arguments and convincing evidence by the master Sánchez Albornoz* (in *De Isidoro al siglo XI*, 1976, p. 215). Later in time, J. I. Ruiz de la Peña also gave credit to the theory of the *Lost Chronicle* of C. Sánchez Albornoz and his predecessors (*Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, p. 33, note 98).



The *Albedense Chronicle* was named after the monastery in the region of La Rioja in which the manuscript was found. The text was probably finished in Oviedo by an anonymous author<sup>22</sup> around the year 881, and several additions were made later in 882 and 883. This work can be considered as a universal narration, a chronicle with greater aspirations than other Christian-Hispanic sources of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It covers several passages – from the biblical outlook of the ancient world and the history of Rome up to the rule of Tiberius II, to the Goths and the Asturian Kings. It also comprises a geographical description of the world, and a more detailed depiction of Spain. This chronicle is of great importance when it comes to recomposing the history of the Asturian Kingdom, as it offers pieces of information that are somewhat blurred in other versions. However this does not mean that its structure and contents differ greatly from the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, especially in the narrations up to the reign of Alfonso II.

In the *Albedense Chronicle* there are several references – though brief – to the Viking attacks in 844 and 858-859. The first allusion appears within the narration of the civil conflict between Ramiro and Nepociano, unleashed after the death of Alfonso II. Its appearance in this text, breaking the narration in two, leads us to think that it was not originally there.

<sup>22</sup> The authorship of this text has been cause of controversy among the main experts in the field during the 20th century. M. Gómez Moreno considered that the author was a Mozarabic monk that wrote in la Rioja, given the details he provided about the characters and the conflicts that took place in the Ebro valley and that were covered in the mentioned chronicle (*Las primeras crónicas de la Reconquista*, 1932, pp. 600-609). R. Menéndez Pidal and C. Sánchez Albornoz argued it was written in Oviedo by someone close to the monarch (R. Menéndez Pidal, 'La historiografía medieval sobre Alfonso II...', 1971, pp. 10-41; C. Sánchez Albornoz, 'El autor de la crónica llamada de Albelda', in *Bulletin Hispanique*, 50, 1948, pp. 291-304).

Ramiro reigned for seven years. He governed with justice. He did away with the bandits by gauging out their eyes. He killed the magicians by the means of fire, and slaughtered the rebels promptly. First, he defeated Nepociano on the bridge of Narcea, thus taking over his kingdom. It was around that time that the first *Lordomani* came to Asturias. Later, he beat another rebel, Androito, and Nepociano himself, and gauged their eyes, and victorious did away with arrogant Piniolo<sup>23</sup>.

It is possible that there exists an older reference to the Viking attack in the Asturian Kingdom in the original version of the text. The allusion to the “magicians” – pagans, sourceres?–being killed by the means of fire is somehow suspicious if we try to make sense of it within the usages of that time. There are some similarities between this account and other longer narrations in the *Rotense* and *A Sebastián* chronicles about the Viking attacks, which also allude to the arson attack of the invaders’ ships<sup>24</sup>. Leaving all details aside, these two chronicles aim at informing that Ramiro killed the pagans with fire – the *Albadense* does not specify who are these people, while the other two, do make a reference to the Northmen. Could it be possible that the attack to the magicians was a reference to the pirate attack, but that, after some time, this was misinterpreted in such a way that the monk that transcribed this passage considered it necessary to explain that the Vikings arrived in Asturias in that year?

I will present some arguments that support this thesis. Apart from the similarities between the *Rotense* and *A Sebastian* chronicles, on one hand, and the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, on the other hand, the latter does not make any reference – in any of its versions – to any pagans that were not the Viking invaders<sup>25</sup>. It is true that, in some isolated occasions, the

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23 *Ranemirus rg. an. VII. Uirga iustitie fuit. Latrones oculos euellendo abstulit. Magicis per ignem finem inposuit, sibique tyrannos mira celeritate subuertit atque exterminauit. Prius Nepotianum ad pontem Narcie superauit et sic regnum accepit. Eo tempore Lordomani primi in Asturias uenerunt. Postea idem Nepotiano partir cum quodam Aldroitto tiranno oculos ab eorum frontibus eiecit, superbumque Piniolum uictor interfecit.* According to professor J. Gil, the interpolation was in origin a gloss that was later incorporated onto the main paragraph in following versions. He writes: *the marginal annotation about the Northmen [...] ended up being incorporated to the text, thus affecting the logical sequence of the adverbs prius/postea and interrupting the narrative line*, (*Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, pp. 103 and 175).

<sup>24</sup> I suggest the reading of the versions of *Rotense* and *A Sebastián* chronicles to compare these two texts with the news of the burning of the magicians.

<sup>25</sup> An original diploma from the times of Ordoño makes reference to the havoc caused by bandits and magicians in the monastery: *samguimistios, latrones refugas monasterii, magicos* (*Diplomática española...*, I, 1949, pp. 270-272). The existence of these magicians does not invalidate the hypothesis that



*Albedense* offers precious information – though often schematic – that other chronicles omit. One example could well be the passage of the magicians. But there is no doubt that the Vikings were present during the reign of Ramiro in Asturias, because more sources validate this information. It is however more doubtful that the king battled magicians or pagans of Hispanic origin within the borders of his realm, as no text apart from the *Albedense* chronicle makes reference to this clash.

Moreover, it is strange, to say the least, that Ramiro punish magicians with such harsh penalty. If the *Liber Iudiciorum* was being applied, burning the magicians to death was an absurdity, and indeed, the Asturian law was effectively a continuation of the Visigothic law<sup>26</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that C. Sánchez Albornoz remained perplexed while writing about the history of the reign of Ramiro, and judged the sentence extremely severe when compared with other punishments applied to these people<sup>27</sup> – *Ramiro's stake penalty to the magicians represents a cruel development of the old traditional judgments*<sup>28</sup>. He tried to find a justification for this in the harshness of a time marked by a civil war<sup>29</sup>, but this is a weak argument. He also tried to find evidence of pagans who were burned in the French kingdom but, even during a time

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has been defended so far, as it does not suggest that no magicians actually existed. At this point of time it is impossible to deny that there existed remains of the pagan era in the Asturian Kingdom in 9th century.

<sup>26</sup> J. Alvarado Planas writes: *The legal documentation dating from the Asturian suggests an application of a law that was, in general terms, coherent with the Liber Iudiciorum*. And a few lines afterwards he clarifies that *indeed, specific references to the precepts of the Liber only appear in the second half of 10th century [...]. Up to that moment, references to the law are very generic – sometimes they cite the Visigothic text, other times they only take inspiration from it, and others they follow formulations from the Visigoth times. [...] Despite the frugality of the sources, it can be said that the procedural law in the Asturian kingdom does not differ from the law set out in Liber Iudiciorum* ('El problema de la naturaleza germánica del derecho español altomedieval', *Semana de Estudios Medievales*, Nájera, VII, 1997, pp. 121-123).

<sup>27</sup> In *Etimologías*, Saint Isidoro made a beautiful compendium of the magic arts known in his time (a summary can be found in M. Menéndez Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxos...*, 1880, pp. 306-308). The Visigoth councils legislated against paganism in Spain between 6th and 7th centuries, which evidences its permanency. M. Menéndez Pelayo summarises part of such legislation: *Just as the Visigoth empire declined, the magic arts expanded; Chindasvinto and his son, Recesvinto, tried to stop this expansión with severe prohibitions. The laws 1, 3 and 4 of title 2, book 6 of the Fuero Juzgo talk about the magicians and prophets that hoped for the king's death, and destroyed harvests. They killed and muted, and could sterlise the fruits of the soil. Any naive man that was involved in those acts would be condemned to loosing all his possessions and to serve all his life. And this slave could be whipped, hit, sold in a foreing land (probably Mauritania), tormented in many ways, exposed to public shame, and condemed to a life-long captivity so that he could not do any harm to any living creature. Moreover, they were also punished according to the talion law if they had conspired agains the wellbeing of other people* (Ibid., pp. 307-308).

<sup>28</sup> *Orígenes...*, III, 1975, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> See the work by C. Sánchez Albornoz, *Orígenes...*, II, 1974.

when punishments against these people were turning more and more severe beyond the Pyrenees, no one was slaughtered in such a way<sup>30</sup>.

A clear argument against is that the chronicler may have called the victims “magicians” instead of “Northmen” – or *lordemanos* –, as they are called in Hispanic chronicles. But the origin of this account may be old, and the original source on which the final version was based on may have been written during the same time of the arrival of the Vikings. If this was the case, the monk that wrote the account did not necessarily need to know about the movements of these people around France and England, and therefore he might not even know the word “Northman” – or its variants –, thus using another term that was expected from a religious man: instead of referring to the nationality or activity of the men, he alluded to their religion, the paganism. The word “magicians” was probably chosen because what stood out in this first contact with these people was not so much the piracy in itself (which has been happening throughout history), but their religious rituals.

In the *Albeldense* chronicle there is also an account of an attack in year 859 that offers an exclusive detail: the name of one of the main actors in the battle against the Vikings. Unfortunately, there is very little we get to know about him.

In that time (Ordoño's reign, 850-866), the *Lordomani*, that came for the second time, were slaughtered off the coast of Galicia by count Pedro<sup>31</sup>.

Following the *Albeldense* version, there is the *Prophetic Chronicle*, which, despite its brevity, offers a view of the two Viking attacks known in Asturias during the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It has been attributed to Dulcidio, a cleric of Mozarabic origin who was very close to Alfonso III and was a prominent scholar on Arabic history. The longest section of the chronicle includes a prophecy, hence the title of the work, that foresees the close end of the Arabic control of Spain. The author brings the biblical myth of Gog and Ismael to the 9<sup>th</sup> century context by identifying Gog with the Goths, and Ismael and his lineage with the Muslims. He thus predicts the return of Gog is close, just as Ezequiel had envisaged. Professor J.I. Ruiz de la Peña, great expert in this period,

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<sup>30</sup> See argumenatation in *Orígenes...*, III, 1975, pp. 70-71. In note 32 he admits that no death or bonfire penalties are established in the French chapters. *Annales Bertiniani* refer to the death of a man in the bonfire, which was, however, not for a crime related to the magic arts, but for bestiality (see Janet L. Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 1991, pp. 195-203).

<sup>31</sup> *Eius tempore Lordomani iterum uenientes in Gallicie maritimis a Petro comite interfecti sunt* (see J. Gil, *Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, p. 176).

writes the following about the prophecy: *In light of all the political events of the time, such prediction [...] did not seem illusory – the armies of Alfonso III won every battle against the Cordovans, while in al-Andalus, the regionalist outlook, the ethnic and religious differences, as well as the internal upheavals seemed the prelude of an imminent downfall of the Muslim power*<sup>32</sup>. After a detailed explanation of the genealogy of the Ummayyads, and a brief description of the way Spain was lost to the Muslims, the prophecy finally registers the date of the two Viking attacks to the Iberian Peninsula (please note that the dating system used here was the Hispanic Era<sup>33</sup>):

The Vikings arrived in Spain in the era of 882 (844), on the first of August<sup>34</sup>.

Then [Vikings] came later in the era of 896 (858), in the month of July, and those killings took place in Lisbon<sup>35</sup>.

The testimonies from this chronicle are of great value, especially when it comes to comparing the dates with those set out in other chronicles with the aim of accurately placing the attacks in the history.

Finally, as far as chronicle testimonials are concerned, we must consider the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* in its two versions. It is widely agreed that the *Rotense* manuscript should be prioritised over the chronicle of *A Sebastián*, both of these works presenting several similarities between each other. The *Rotense* version, a copy of which is still preserved today – it was found in the *Códice de Roda*, which owes its name to a town in La Rioja with the same name<sup>36</sup>–, was written in clumsy Latin and has been attributed to a layman who has often been identified as Alfonso III himself by some of its most prolific scholars such as M. Gómez Moreno and C. Sánchez Albornoz<sup>37</sup> – although other academics, such as R. Menéndez Pidal<sup>38</sup>, oppose this

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> The Hispanic Era, which prevailed in the Iberian Peninsula until 15th century, started with the recognition of the *Pax Romana* in Hispania by Augustus, 38 years before the birth of Christ. In reality, however, it took him longer – over 20 years – to bring this *Pax Romana* to the Northern territories. To calculate the year in the Christian era, we only need to subtract 38 years to the Hispanic date.

<sup>34</sup> *Ingressi sunt Lothomanni in Spania era DCCCLXXXII Kalendas Augustas* (Ibid., p. 188).

<sup>35</sup> *Iterum uenerunt postea era DCCCXLVI Iulio mense et fuit ille homicidius in Olisbona*, (Ibid., p. 188).

<sup>36</sup> Roda de Isábena, near Nájera. Some authors believe that the real origin of this text is in the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla (M. C. Díaz y Díaz, *De Isidoro al siglo XI*, 1976, p. 222).

<sup>37</sup> See M. Gómez Romero, *Las primeras crónicas...*, 1932, p. 602-621; and C. Sánchez Albornoz, *Orígenes...*, III, 1975, pp. 755 and the following. Such argument finds a ground on the pleasure that Alfonso III took in the writing, evidenced by his collection of books and historiographic interest, which was reflected in the

theory, and attribute the work to someone who was close to the monarch. The agenda of this text is different from that of the manuscripts detailed above: it is not aimed at offering a universal or prophetic chronicle, but is more nationally orientated and traces the history of the Goths back to Wamba, following his dynasty all the way to the Asturian monarchs themselves, who are therefore presented as their legitimate successors<sup>39</sup>.

Once the *Rotense* version was finished, his author – Alfonso III perhaps – sent it attached to a letter to the cleric Sebastián<sup>40</sup>, who was at the time serving as legate of the priest Dulcideo, for him to review it and correct it. This is how the second version, the *chronicle of A Sebastián*, was created (probably around 884). This work alters the information contained in the original version – some passages are reduced and other accounts are expanded –, aims at improving the Latin of the author, and also shows an interest to *praise the Goths and excuse the clergy by omitting information that the original chronicler had naively stated following the tradition*<sup>41</sup>. The use that compilers in the Middle Ages made of this version was limited, and the *Rotense* chronicle is widely accepted by many historians as being more prestigious over the *A Sebastián* – both today and in the past – given its spontaneity and naïveté.

These two manuscripts are the most abundant sources of information about the Viking attacks in the Cantabrian coast during the 9<sup>th</sup> century. As we will see later on, they transmit different pieces of information regarding the attacks, but never contradict each other – quite the opposite, they complement each other. Please note that the entries about the second attack – around 858-859 – are exactly the same in both texts.

First expedition in the *Rotense* version: Around the same time, the Normans, pagan and extremely cruel people previously unknown to us, came to our land with an army. Upon their arrival, the already mentioned King Ramiro gathered a large legion and battled the attackers in a place called *Faro de Brigancio*, killing many of them and burning their ships<sup>42</sup>.

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collection of chronicles that we are studying now (see C. Sánchez Albornoz, *Orígenes...*, III, 1975, pp. 755-774).

<sup>38</sup> See 'La historiografía medieval sobre Alfonso II', *Estudios sobre la monarquía asturiana*, 1971, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> What C. Sánchez Albornoz called Neogothicism was widely known in the Hispanic historiography from 20th century. See J. Gil, *Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> The letter presents several errors and there are many opposing opinions about its authenticity. See introductory study in *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> *Per idem tempus Nordomanorum gens antea nobis incognita, gens pagana et nimis crudelissima, nabali exercitu nostris peruenerunt in partibus. Renimirus iam factus rex ad eorum aduentum magnum*

First expedition in *A Sebastian* version: And later, there came the Northman fleets from the northern ocean to the city of Gijón, and from there they advanced to a place called *Faro de Brigancio*. When the already mentioned King Ramiro found about the attack, he sent a powerful army with his generals and earls and annihilated many of the intruders and burnt their ships<sup>43</sup>.

Second expedition in both versions: The Northman pirates attacked our coasts again around that time. Then they continued their way through Spain and destroyed all its seas with their swords and fire. Later on, they sailed the sea and attacked Nekur, a city in Mauritania, and there they killed a vast number of Muslims. Then they assaulted Mallorca and Menorca and left them desolated. Later on, they advanced to Greece, and after three years they returned to their homeland<sup>44</sup>.

These informations form the closest accounts, both in time and space, that we have. The evidence relating the 844 attacks can be easily linked to the events transmitted in the *Annales Bertiniani*, a work that is known to have had no relation with the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*. And this fact is even more outstanding when considering the great distance that separated the two accounts. Regarding the 859 expedition, the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* narrates it in exactly the same terms in its two versions: it is worth pointing out the lack of new information about the Asturian kingdom – even the *Albeldense* offers more details in this regards -, and also the length of the narrations about the events that had taken place in the south of the Iberian Peninsula and even in Greece. Could this mean that this news came from monks from Muslim Spain? And are these monks using the versions of 9<sup>th</sup> century Muslim chroniclers? There is evidence that in the erudite circles of the court of Al Hakam II (961-976) this expedition was known to have reached Alexandria, and this information could have well arrived to the southern Spain through the flow

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*congregavit exercitum et in locum cui nomen est Farum Brecentium eis intulit uellum; ibique multa agmina eorum interfecit et nabibus igni consumsit, (Ibid., p. 142).*

<sup>43</sup> *Itaque subsequenti tempore Nordomannorum classes per septentrionalem oceanum ad litus Gegionis ciuitatis adueniunt et inde ad locum qui dicitur Farum Brecentium perrexerunt. Quod ut conperit Ranimirus iam factus rex, misit aduersus eos exercitum cum ducibus et comitibus, et multitudinem eorum interfecit hac naues igni combusit, (Ibid., p. 143).*

<sup>44</sup> *Iterum Nordomani piratide per his temporibus ad nostris litoribus peruenerunt; deinde in Spaniam perrexerunt omnemque eius maritimam gladio inique predando dissipauerunt. Exinde mari transiecto Nacchor ciuitatem Mauritanie inuaserunt ibique multitudinem Caldeorum gladio interfecerunt; deinde Maioricam et Minoricam insulas adgressi gladio eas depopulauerunt. Postem Greciam aduecti post triennium in patriam suam sunt reuersi, (Ibid., p. 149).*

of important works between Al Andalus and the Eastern world. If this was the case, then it is not surprising that these accounts reached the Asturian region as well.

All these chronicles complement each other, thus offering a sharper image of the events and allowing us to learn about dates, locations, characters and other details of battles and tempests. We would not be fair if we said that we have little information about the Viking attacks in the Cantabrian sea coming from the chronicles of that time – especially when considering the amount of accounts that we normally get from the works of those centuries. And to convince ourselves, we only have to compare it to the volume of information coming from other major events, which were often given no more than a line or two. And even more, there must have been important events that happened and which we will never read about.

### *11<sup>th</sup>-century Sources*

Most of the 11<sup>th</sup>-century sources come from Muslim chronicles, and all of them were based on the works of the previous century, none of which is kept today. One of the most interesting documents coming from this century is the compilation of the teachings of Al Qutiyya, which were put together in an anonymous chronicle called *History of the Conquest of Al Andalus*. Another important piece of work is the compilation of the several volumes of *Al Muqtabis*, which was put together by Ibn Hayyan, and benefited from the authority of the texts written by Ahmad Al Razi and his son, Isa b. Ahmad – *History of the Emirs of Al Andalus* by the former, and *Annales of Al Andalus* by the latter, not to mention *History of Seville*, by Alfihri, and *History of the Ummayyad Dynasty*, by Muawiyah b. Hisam.

At the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Cordova, an anonymous compiler put together a work attributed to Ibn Al Qutiyya<sup>45</sup>, *History of the Conquest of Al Andalus*<sup>46</sup>, which was put in the

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<sup>45</sup> He was one of the most reputed scholars of in 10<sup>th</sup> century Muslim Spain. He belonged to the court of Al Hakam II and was a master in Grammar, History, Jurisprudence, and Literature. His date of birth is unknown, but we do know that he died in 977. For more details about his life and works, see the following works: F. Pons Boigues, *Ensayo biobibliográfico sobre los historiadores y geógrafos árabe-españoles*, 1898, pp. 83-87; C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes del feudalismo. Fuentes de la historia hispanomusulmana del siglo VIII*, II, 1942, p. 166-172; M. Fierro, 'Ibn al-Qutiyya, el hijo de la Goda', in *Historia 16*, 217, 1994, pp. 111-119; and D. James, *Early Islamic Spain*, 2009, pp. 22-29.

<sup>46</sup> It is not easy to know the exact time in which Al Qutiyya's teachings were compiled. As D. James notes, the work begins like this. *Abu Bakr Muhammad...Ibn Al Qutiyya told us...*, (in *Ibid.*, p. 29). This suggests that it was not written by him but by a third party. Now, his main disciple, Ibn Faradi, did not know of any edition of his work (*Ibid.*, p. 26). Al Faradi was an important scholar in his time, and died in 1012, murdered during the assault of the berebers in Cordova in the *fitna* (civil war). Between the violent murder of Al Faradi and the compilation of Ibn Hayyan, who lived between 987 and 1076, someone must have put together the teachings of Al Qutiyya, as it is obvious that Ibn Hayyan repeatedly quotes this

written form by one of Qutiyya's disciples. The fact that this work was finished so late, and the lack of order of its passages leaves no doubt: it was based on disciples' notes of the teachings of the master, notes that could have well been taken from sketches of Ibn Al Qutiyya himself if these ever existed<sup>47</sup>. The chronicle covers the period that goes between the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by the Muslims, and the rule of the emir Abd Allah (888-912). It focuses on anecdotal facts and offers very few dates, but gives a very detailed picture of the private life of the emir's court – details about the lives of ministers and chiefs and the daily life in Cordoba. Al Qutiyya certainly found plenty of oral sources in the masters that preceded him, but he also had several written sources, such as the Sevillian scholar Ibn Habib and Tammam Ibn Alqama<sup>48</sup>.

The chronicle offers an extensive account that is of great relevance as far as the 884 Viking attack is concerned:

Abd al Rahman built the Great Mosque of Seville. He also built the walls of that city, because of the seizure of Seville by the Majus [the pagan Vikings] when they invaded, during his reign, in the year 230/844. The inhabitants panicked and fled the city for Carmona and the hills nearby. None of the inhabitants of the western Al Andalus attempted to resist the invaders, so volunteers were recruited from among the people of Cordova and its neighbouring provinces. Accompanied by some ministers they set off, together with volunteers recruited from the Marches who had assembled after the invaders had occupied the far western seaboard and the area around al-Ushbuna [Lisbon], in their first invasion.

The ministers and their men established their camp at Carmona, but were not able to attack the enemy, because of their ferocious bravery, until the volunteers of the Marches<sup>49</sup> arrived led by Musa ibn Qasi, who had been implored by Abd al Rahman II to help. He reminded him of his client status with the former caliph al Walid ibn Abd al Malik [86-96/705-715], and his ancestor's acceptance of Islam at his hands. So Musa softened in his attitude, and came with a large army,

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work. This takes us to the first half of 11<sup>th</sup> century, after 1012 (see *Ibid.*, pp. 24-31). As for the title, it seems to be an attribution of 17<sup>th</sup> century, as we do not know of any previous title: *The History of the Conquest of Al Andalus is the title of the work by which he has become known in the West from the eighteen century onwards*, (*Ibid.*, pp. 25-26).

<sup>47</sup> See D. James, *Early Islamic Spain*, 2009, pp. 29-31.

<sup>48</sup> Both authors wrote about the period that went up to the ruling of Abd al Rahman II (822-852), and not up to the ruling of Muhammad I (852-886), so it is probably these authors that first gave account of the first Viking attack. We will never be certain about this, however, as none of these two works have been found. For more information about the sources used by Ibn Al Qutiyya, see *Ibid.*, pp. 34-38.

<sup>49</sup> The march (*tagr*) was in Al Andalus a border territory that was constantly militarised. The Arab term that referred to the march can be translated as 'fissure', and has religious connotations – for instance, it can also be used to refer to a place to practice *yihad*. The *cora* is an administrative demarcation similar to a province (see E. Manzano Moreno, *La frontera de Al Andalus en época de los Omeyas*, 1991).

which he kept separate from the ministers' men and the other troops from the Marches, after he had arrived at Carmona, and encamped next to them. Then those from the Marches asked the ministers about the movements of the enemy. They told them that they went out of Seville every day in raiding parties (...) some towards Firish [Constantina], and Fuente de Cantos, others towards Cordova and Moron. So they inquired after a place in which to ambush them near Seville and the village of Kintush Mu'afir [Quirtas de Moafer], south of Seville was suggested.

The troops descended at the dead of night and hid themselves there. In the village was an ancient church and they sent a look-out up to its highest point with wood for a beacon fire. At dawn a party of the enemy, some sixteen thousand men appeared, some going in the direction of Moron. When they got near the village the watchman signaled. The troops waited until the enemy had gone some distance, then they cut off their retreat, and put them all to the sword.

The ministers and their men entered Seville and found the governor besieged in the citadel. He came out to meet them, and the inhabitants returned. In addition to the group that was killed, another had gone towards Fuente de Cantos, another towards Cordova and yet another towards Bani'l-Layth [Benilaiz]. But when those of the enemy who were in the city became aware of the approach of the cavalry and the army, and the destruction of the group making for Moron, their fled to their boats and went up the river towards the fort of Al Za'waq, and met up with their compatriots. They embarked, and set off downstream, with the troops shouting insults at them and firing stones and animal bones (?). When they were some distance below Seville, the enemy called out to the troops, 'If you want to ransom the hostages we have, stop firing!' So they stopped and most of the hostages among their prisoners were ransomed. The enemy did not want gold or silver: rather food and clothing.

Thus they departed from Seville and made for Nakur [Nuqur] [in North Africa] where they captured the ancestor of the Banu Ibn Salih (...) They devastated the coasts on both sides of the Mediterranean, until they reached Byzantine territory. On that expedition they reached Alexandria<sup>50</sup>. The voyage took 14 years.

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<sup>50</sup> We have seen in previous pages how the Asturian chroniclers believed that the expedition of 858-859 had reached Greece. I think it is possible that both Christians and Muslims mention the same event, as the information contained in the Asturian chronicles was almost certainly brought to Greece through Al Andalus. It is not difficult to imagine how a Greek name such as Alexandria can be interpreted as a place in Greece. Moreover, as professor Tore Nyberg at University of Southern Denmark kindly suggested to me, we must not forget that this city hosted an orthodox patriarchy despite the Muslim occupation, and this is a Hellenic attribute for a Western monk.



(...) The ministers advised the building of a wall around Seville, and the emir entrusted that to Abdallah ibn Sinan, from among the Syrian clients, who had been close to him while he was a boy, and after becoming ruler he had elevated him. He made the Pilgrimage to Makka, but his return coincided with the invasion and he was chosen to build the wall around Seville. His name was inscribed on the gateways of the city.

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The emir made preparations to avoid a reoccurrence. He ordered the establishment of a shipyard in Seville and the construction of ships. He got together sailors from the coasts of Al Andalus and enlisted them and paid them well. He made ready engines (catapults) and naphtha. So when the Vikings came again (in the year 244/858), in the time of the emir Muhammad, they were confronted at the mouth of the river of Seville and defeated, with some of their ships being burnt before they made off.<sup>51</sup>

As seen in the passage above, the entry by Ibn Al Qutiyya about the Viking expedition is extremely vivid, and it has the added value of not following the account by Ahmad Al Razi, which means that the passage does not depend on the views of the latter historian but offers a new perspective<sup>52</sup>. It is worth drawing attention to many details about the 844 attack in Seville that do not appear in the works by other authors, something that can be attributed to the fact that Ibn Al Qutiyya's predecessors lived in Seville, and he therefore had access to family traditions that were unknown to other chroniclers<sup>53</sup>. Some of the details offered in this account are so intricately vivid that it is impossible to think of them as inventions. Such is the case of the humiliation of the Emir asking Muza b. Muza for help<sup>54</sup>; the depiction of the ambush laid to the

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<sup>51</sup> See edition of the work of Al Qutiyya: D. James, *Early Islamic Spain*, 2009, pp. 100-102.

<sup>52</sup> All the historians that came afterwards and we know today followed Ahmad Al Razi or Isa b. Ahmad in one way or another – either by taking their accounts directly, or by copying authors that had previously resorted to one of the Al Razi. Al Qutiyya seems to use similar sources to those of Ahmad al Razi when it came to the study of the Vikings, and it is clear that their texts are intrinsically related, although they are not a copy of each other. Al Qutiyya offers less information at some points, and more information in other occasions. I recommend a close reading of his chronicle in comparison with Ahmad Al Razi and his son Isa b. Ahmad.

<sup>53</sup> His lineage came from Seville, and although Al Qutiyya was born in Cordova, he spent a lot of time in Seville. Moreover, his father held high positions in the city and the region: *His father was judge of Seville and appointed judge of the province of (kura) of Écija by Abd Al Rahman III in 301-302/914*, (in *Ibid.*, p. 24).

<sup>54</sup> Muza b. Muza, of the family of the Banu Qasi, was a key figure to understand mid 9<sup>th</sup>-century Spain. For many years, he fought for the control of the Ebro valley in the Northern March, and challenged the emirs of Cordova in a way that he ended up calling himself the Third King of Spain (see *Crónicas Asturianas*,

invaders; the expected image of insults and attacks coming from both sides of the conflict; and the key moment in which Vikings demand food, not gold or silver, in exchange for the hostages. On the other hand, at some points it is easy to notice a certain modification of the real events, which can be attributed to the fact that the information was transmitted orally. This is the case of the exaggerated number of Vikings that is given in one of the episodes, and the mix-up with the 844 and 859 expeditions – the campaigns of Nekor and the East are mistakenly linked to the first expedition<sup>55</sup>.

Not long after *History of the Conquer of Al Andalus* was finished – a work based on the teachings of Al Qutiyya –, around mid 11<sup>th</sup> century the Cordova-born Ibn Hayyan (987-1076)<sup>56</sup> finished his major work<sup>57</sup>. The collapse of the Ummayyad Caliphate after a long civil war (1008-1031), and the renewed pressure on the Muslim world coming from the Christians did not prevent the flourishing of the Cordovan, and therefore Andalusian, traditions. And this movement met its culminating point in the works of this author<sup>58</sup>. Ibn Hayyan gathered various chronicles and histories from previous scholars, and put them together in *Al Muqtabis*, a monumental work divided in ten volumes that cover the centuries from the Muslim conquest of Spain up to the 10<sup>th</sup> century – although at times the distribution seems unbalanced, the first two centuries reduced to only three volumes. Only part of these volumes has survived, but we can consider ourselves fortunate to have the sections that cover the time of the rulings of Abd Al Rahman II (822-852) and Muhammad I (852-886) – this volume containing details about the

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1985, p. 146). His family connections with the lords of Pamplona was the key for the creation of a new kingdom in the Pyrennes region, although his relations with the Arista family – the lords of Pamplona – were not always positive. It seems he had an important role in the Viking expeditions that we know today. See biography, already a classic in this topic, by C. Sánchez Albornoz, *Orígenes del reino de Pamplona. Su vinculación con el valle del Ebro*, 1985, pp. 117-148.

<sup>55</sup> This was already noted by E. Morales Romero, *Historia de los vikingos...*, 2004, pp. 133-134.

<sup>56</sup> For information about the life and works of this author, see these works: F. Pons Boigues, *Ensayo bibliográfico...*, 1898, pp. 152-154; C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 200-208; and P. Chalmeta, 'Historiografía medieval hispana: arábica', *Al Andalus*, 37, 2, 1972, pp. 353-404.

<sup>57</sup> About the date in which this was written, M. J. Ávila thinks that *Ibn Hayyan started his historiographic work towards the end of 4<sup>th</sup> century, with a work that would compile events that took place immediately beforehand – the ruling of Al Hakam and Hisam, and the beginning of the fitna [...]. Later on he would decide to write the history of the first centuries of the Muslim occupation using previous sources, and thus giving shape to Muqtabis – which belongs to mid 5<sup>th</sup> century (1050-1060)*. It is important to note that around these dates, the Cordovan author (987-1076) was already an old man. See the article 'La fecha de redacción del Muqtabis', *Al Qantara: revista de estudios árabes*, 5, 1984, pp. 93-108. See also the work by C. Sánchez Albornoz, with his defense on the youthful style of the author (*En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, p. 202).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

second expedition to Al Andalus is still to be translated from Arabic<sup>59</sup> –, including the narration of the two Viking attacks in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

It is important to stress that *Al Muqtabis* is a compilation of previous works, and Ibn Hayyan is but a mediator between the original writer and us. As far as the Viking attacks are concerned, he took the works by Ahmad Al Razi, his son, Isa b. Ahmad Al Razi, Al Qutiyya, and other two authors, Muhammad b. As'at y Muawiyah b. Hisam, and he summarised them and quoted his sources in a comprehensive way. It is thanks to Ibn Hayyan's work that we have all the information we have now, as the works by the cited authors have been lost – except for that of Al Qutiyya. Apart from the praise deserved by Ibn Hayyan for having transmitted this information, it is also a fact that his compilation is not rendering the original expressions by Ahmad al Razi or his son, but have been re-written by Ibn Hayyan, and this implies the following: the information contained in the original works was only partially extracted; some parts of the text may have been completely rewritten, some important details being omitted according to the author's judgment.

The first event that was narrated in *Al Muqtabis* came from the chronicle *History of the Emirs of Al Andalus*, which was written by Ahmad Al Razi (887-955)<sup>60</sup> even before Al Qutiyya's teachings in Cordoba. This means that the version in *Al Muqtabis* is the oldest account of the events we have today, even if it is not the original. *History of the Emirs of Al Andalus* is an extensive and respected work that dates back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century and covered not only the history of Andalusia, but also the history of Spain as a whole, thus referring to a mythical prehistory and reviving the times of the Roman society, the arrival of the Visigoths, the Muslim conquest up to the emirate of Abd Allah (888-912), and even the times of the Asturian kings, whose lives were also included in the manuscript due to the shared geographical context. The accounts of the Viking attacks contained therein are taken as valid by scholars for two reasons: (1) because these accounts are based on sources from the prolific century in which Ahmad Al Razi was born and the Viking expeditions took place, and (2) because this author has been recognised as using a comprehensively rigorous method in his work.

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<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, the second volume has not been translated to any Western language, so we need to trust later authors to reconstruct the second expedition of 858-859.

<sup>60</sup> For details about his life and works, see F. Pons Boigues, *Ensayo bio-bibliográfico...*, 1898, pp. 62-66) and the extensive dissertation of C. Sánchez Albornoz about the author (*En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 122-158).

This is the version of *History of the Emirs of Al Andalus* that Ibn Hayyan left us. Please note the author's honesty in the first lines of the extract:

Ahmad b. Muhammad Arrazi says:

Towards the end of 229h., there appeared the ships of the Northmen – known in Alandalús as magicians – in the Western coast of Alandalús, and on the first Wednesday of the month of that year's *dulhiggah* they stopped in Lisbon, taking the city as the gate to what then seemed a game reserve. They stayed there for thirteen days, in which they got involved in three battles with the local Muslims. Then they arrived in Cadiz and then in Sidonia, where they fought another battle with the Muslims – Lubb b. Musa, protected by the aman of the emir Abdarrahan, took part in this combat. The emir had received a letter where the governor of Lisbon, Wahballah b. Hazm, informed him that fifty four Northmen ships – plus another fifty four smalls boats from each ship – had stopped off his shores. Immediately afterwards the emir sent out letters to the governors of the coastal towns for them to be alert.

On Wednesday, following the fourteen nights of the *muharram* month in year 230h., the Northmen ships anchored in Seville, which had remained without protection, and they took advantage of the consequent lack of local resistance to loot the city. As soon as the emir Abdarrahan heard the news, he was quick to send his cavalry to this area [...]; they took Aljarafe and camped there, and they were joined by yet another group of men. He sent letters to the governors asking them to send a call for help to all Muslims that could help fight such unexpected tyrants, immersed as they were in an unprecedented situation. People coming from many places, and led by Abdarrahan's favourite – the eunuch Abulfath –, gathered in Cordova to set off with great drive and strength.

Meanwhile, the Northmen kept on arriving with countless ships and dominating the city of Seville. There they spent seven days killing men and catching women and children, until the governors arrived and fought them repeatedly, thus causing the enemy many losses, which led them to exhaustion. The bloodiest battle against them took place on Wednesday near Seville, when there were five days left in the *safar* month of 230 in the parish of Tlyatah (Tejada). In this fight many died and many were annihilated by god: thirty of his boats burnt, many of their dead hung in posts, and others tied to trucks of Seville palm trees. From the moment in which they entered Seville beating the locals, until the day in which they were beaten and finally left the city, forty days lapsed. God made their chief die and diminished their numbers, and tokens of this victory were sent around the provinces not only in Alandalus, but also to Berber emirs in the North African coasts: Aflah b. Abdalwahhab, lord of Tahart and client of the Ummayyads and others received the heads of the enemies' prince and other two hundred paladins. God relieved

the shock all over Alandalus, which had been left trembling after such calamities were turned against its peoples and even challenged the sultan, and dispelled all fears<sup>61</sup>.

The information used by Ibn Hayyan and contained in the chronicle of *History of the Emirs of Al Andalus* is of great eloquence, yet it presents some flaws that come, in my opinion, from the compiler's selection, thus showing his work up in comparison to his son's, which is far more detailed. Throughout history, however, critics have considered Ahmad Al Razi as the most important historian of the first three centuries of Spanish Muslim era. According to C. Sánchez Albornoz' argument, Ahmad Al Razi used trusted sources to write his works. He could rely on *some chronicles and annals [...], a great number of diplomas, orders and official messages, and several private documents and poems*<sup>62</sup>. His method of work was very strict for his time: *his meticulousness when it came to citing his sources has saved from oblivion many of the Islamic 1<sup>st</sup> century fragments he refers to in his work. [...] Al Razi paid much attention to the chronological order of his works*<sup>63</sup>. Considering the fact that Ahmad Al Razi wrote from the early to mid 10<sup>th</sup> century, the material he used to substantiate his narration of those expeditions could not be too far in time from the events, and it could even be contemporary to the writing of the chronicle. Unfortunately – and quite surprisingly –, the sources used by Al Razi are not specified at this point, perhaps because Ibn Hayyan or Al Razi himself omitted it. We do, however, know that when writing *History of the Emirs of Al Andalus*, he repeatedly used material by Ibn Habib (790-854)<sup>64</sup>, a jurist from Granada that lived at the time of the Viking attacks. He was the alfaqui in the capital of the emirate in 844, and we know that he sent a letter to Abd Al Rahman II to urge

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<sup>61</sup> Extracted from Ibn Hayyan's work, *Crónica de los emires Alhakam I and Abdarrahan II entre los años 796 and 897 [Al Muqtabis II-1]*. 2001, pp. 312-314, translated by F. Corriente and M. J. Viguera.

<sup>62</sup> See C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, p. 133.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132 and 135.

<sup>64</sup> His work still remains unknown to us. A manuscript belonging to the Bodleian Library in Oxford is attributed to Ibn Habib, but it seems to be no more than a bunch of random notes taken by a disciple, Ibn Abil-Riqa (see critique of this text by D. James, in *Early Islamic Spain*, 2009, pp. 36-37; and C. Sánchez Albornoz in *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 90-92). As no work by Al Razi has survived, we do not know the source he used – he probably cited it in his work, but this was probably not taken by Ibn Hayyan. If Ibn Habib had been such source, his proximity to the events would have been extraordinary. The historian from Granada had lived in the East for almost ten years (823-831), and back in Al Andalus, Abd Al Rahman II appointed him as counsellor to the judge of Cordova for his intellectual giftedness. He died in 854, and we must assume he was a very influential person in the capital of the emirate when the Vikings attacked the Andalusian coast. It is hardly difficult to imagine him in the first moments of those agitated times fearing that the enemy fleets could manage to reach Cordova. The information we got about such events must have been very fresh. F. Pons Boigues also offers a generous portrait of Ibn Habib (*Ensayo bibliográfico...*, 1898, pp. 29-38)

him to build a wall in Seville to protect the city against possible attacks<sup>65</sup>. The historians that wrote both during and after his life considered Ibn Habib as a distinguished expert in history. On this background, I believe it plausible that the original news of the events came from him.

To conclude the analysis of this entry, I think it is necessary to refer to the deficiencies it presents. Ahmad Al Razi's version on the 844 Viking attack is poorer than his son's, Isa, which is in turn the best in terms of sources. This is somewhat striking, as it is difficult to understand how Isa – who obviously lived after Ahman Al Razi – came to know of more documentation. The explanation can be that Ibn Hayyan simply reduced the original entry by Ahmad to what we know today, after having left out a lot of information. The arguments I have to support this hypothesis are simple: the entry of Ahmad, which is in turn owed to Ibn Hayyan, does not contain any conclusion; the narration ends abruptly right after the battle of Tejada. Centuries later, the eastern chronicler, Ibn Al Atir, used *History of the Emirs of Al Andalus* by Ahmad Al Razi to narrate the events occurred in Al Andalus in his chronicle of Muslim history: in the entry about the 844 Viking attack, the introduction is more detailed, the main body is richer than the narration by Ahmad – and poorer than that by Isa –, and the end (with the return of the Vikings via Niebla and Lisbon) is completely new, as it was omitted by Ibn Hayyan in his *Al Muqtabis* for reasons unknown to us<sup>66</sup>. All later chronicles used to some degree Ahmad's material – his son included. Then, the only explanation to the additional information in all these later versions is that Ahmad actually wrote more than what Ibn Hayyan passed on to later historians.

After Ahmad al Razi, Ibn Hayyan reproduced the entry about the chronicle *Annals of Al Andalus*, which was written by the former's son, Isa b. Ahmad Al Razi (?-989 or 1016)<sup>67</sup>, and is the most fruitful source we have today about the Viking attacks in Spain in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This work was dedicated by the author to Al Hakam II (961-976), a caliph that was passionate about

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<sup>65</sup> Thanks to Ibn Hayyan, we have access to an information that came through Muawiyah b. Hisam Asabinasi. According to him, after the Northmen attack, Ibn Habib recommended Abd al Rahman II to raise a wall in Seville.

<sup>66</sup> There are so many possibilities that it can not be known with certainty why *Al Muqtabis* does not have the ending to the account of Al Razi, which is contained in the works of later chroniclers. It is possible that Ibn Hayyan used a partial copy of Al Razi, and he himself reduced it after considering some of the information irrelevant, or simply because he did not want to ruin the account of the victory over the Vikings that the emir had led. There is also the possibility that Ahmad Al Razi did not record such information, and the authors of *Kamil* and *Bayan* took it from another author. This is, however, less likely as the rest of the account is a blunt copy of Al Razi.

<sup>67</sup> We do not know the date of his birth, and there are doubts about the date of his death – some say it was in 989 and others argue it was in 1016. For more information about his life and works, see F. Pons Boigues, *Ensayo Bio-bibliográfico...*, 1898, p. 82; and C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 178-184.

books. It can therefore be presumed that this work was produced during the late 10<sup>th</sup> century and finished during the reign of the marwani caliph, whose court was described in great detail. This was a historical narration of Al Andalus, starting from the Arab conquest of the Iberian Peninsula through to the last days of the wise caliph. This chronicle has survived up to this point thanks to the work of later authors, such as Ibn Hayyan, who remains loyal to the Isa b. Ahmad Al Razi's material, just as he did with Ahmad al Razi's work. From the late compilations, the father's skills as a historian appear evident in the son's work. C. Sánchez Albornoz praised him in these terms: "*on the [Annals of Al Andalus] we can see the author remaining loyal to the tradition followed by his father. He was very meticulous and detail-oriented in his writing, and very knowledgeable of the people and events that he wrote about, just as his father was*"<sup>68</sup>. In the following entry about the Viking attack of 844, which was accounted by Ibn Hayyan following Isa b. Ahmad, we come across an example of the view held by Albornoz:

Isa b. Ahmad Arrazi says when commenting the following event:

The Northmen squad, may God destroy them, took Seville in 230h. from the Western Sea, nearby to them. They first disembarked in the the isle of Qabtil (today, Isla Menor), which is in the Guadalquivir river and was used for horse breeding. They disembarked on a Sunday, twelve nights after *muharram* in year 230h., from eighty ships. On the second day after their landing they sent five ships to Coria, by the Western bank of the river, where Yemeni Muslims from Yahsub – Banu Ma'di – lived. This point lied four miles from the landing point in Qabtil. They immediately looted the parish and killed those who lived there, and this was the first attack against the Muslims. This parish has been shaken by violence ever since, and today, under the caliphate of Abdarrahan III, a public mosque that didn't exist before.

Then on Wednesday, three days after disembarking, the Northmen, may God curse them, left the hamlet of Qabtil towards the city of Seville, and when they arrived at the church of the Water, two leagues away from the city, the Muslims that lived there and others that joined them went out and faced them – all spirited and eager to battle, but without any order or designated chief given the desertion of their governor, who had fled to the city of Carmona, leaving them without protection. When the Northmen got to the banks of the town, it became evident to them the weakness of its inhabitants, and so they sailed their ships against them, and by shooting arrows they dispersed the groups. They went out of their ships and fought against them on the banks of their river. The citizens of Seville were thus defeated, and none of them was able to resist the attacks – most of them run away separately from the city, and the Northmen were able

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68 Ibid., p. 179.

to enter the walls attacking those who still remained there and were too weak but still determined to fight, including women and children, who were killed or captured. The attackers seized the opportunity to run acts of mutiny and disrespect the sacred traditions for seven days. Then, when eight days remained of the *muharran* month, the Northmen left the city and brought the plunders onto their ships. They returned to their first camp in the *Qabtil* island, where they remained several days. Here they allowed for the release of prisoners as an evil strategy to bring the citizens that had been able to escape back towards their camp and attack them once again. But the locals were sensible and did not come back, so the Northmen went back to the city a few days afterwards but found no one in there except for some fugitives that seek to take refuge and counter attack from a mosque. They were surrounded and massacred, and from that moment that place was called the “Mosque of the martyrs”.

When the emir Abdarrahan heard the news shortly after, he got furious and sent letters to all *coras* in order to encourage people to come from all territories. The first step he took after receiving the news was to make Muhammad b. Rustum part towards Seville with a cavalry squadron that would allow him to reach the *cora* near the Northmen very soon and start laying traps against them. He set a lure in a place called Tablada, two miles south of Seville, near the river. He detached some of his strongest men - taken among the Tagarins – and some others along the way towards the city in order to cause a skirmish in the Norman lines. This was on a Friday, when nine *safar* nights remained in year 230. When the Normans saw the detached men, they considered the squadron to be weak and low in numbers and sailed their ships along the river in order to attack them. They disembarked and followed the men to the parish of Tejada, where Muhammad b. Said b. Rustum waited with his strong squadron.

When the Normans reached the place, he went out and faced them. And the men that were running away from the enemies counterattacked, beating the Northmen and leaving them shocked and dismayed by such an atrocious defeat. God granted the Muslims their heads, for there were thousands of deaths in the barbarian lines, and there were more than four hundred captures – the only ones that were saved were those who rushed to the ships in fright, and defended them, leaving thirty ships abandoned by their occupants, that had been either killed or captured. And before these ships stood the governor Ibn Rustum, ordering the beheading of the enemies before the eyes of the barbarians that remained, thus increasing their fear, while the Muslims seized their ships and burned them all.

The enemies of God, shamefully defeated, finally left, thanks God<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> In Ibn Hayyan’s work, translated by F. Corriente, *Crónica de los emires...*, 2001, pp. 314-316.



Looking at the *Al Muqtabis*, there are notable differences between Ahmad's and Isa's chronicles. Originally their information must have been very similar, because the source of Isa b. Ahmad for the above passage written for the Emir Abd Allah (888-912) was undoubtedly his own father<sup>70</sup>. But for us, heirs of highly altered texts, the quality and quantity of the second in comparison to the first is obvious. Isa's chronicle narrates in great detail the arrival of the Vikings to the Andalusian coast, while his father has left us with a very vague passage in this respect. Isa describes in detail the tricks of the Muslim leaders in the style of the *History of the Conquest of Al Andalus* based in Al Qutiyya<sup>71</sup> – and we miss this type of information in Ahmad's chronicle. None of them contains any conclusion to the passages they narrate. Al Atir, on the other hand, does, as he summarised the information gathered by Ahmad Al Razi in 13<sup>th</sup> century and was able to build a text of considerable length. This evidences the distortion of both chronicles in some parts of *Al Muqtabis*. Overall, we can consider this text as being rich in detail, which allows us to reconstruct much of the fundamental facts of the war. It may also be the closest testimony we have of the original text by Ahmad Al Razi, even though it has reached us in the form of his son's work – a son who limited himself to copying his father when writing about the events that took place up to the end of the ruling of Muhammad I (852-886).

The chronicle continues extracting *Al Muqtabis* information from various works to provide the semblance of the Viking expedition. This does not mean it differs from *Annals of Al Andalus* by Isa b. Ahmad, as the story attributed to Muhammad b. Alqurasi Asat – also known as Alfihri<sup>72</sup> and written in the mid to late tenth century – is in great deal connected to Isa. Some honest quotes evidence this argument:

Isa b. Ahmad says:

I read in the report of the Northman victory, which was sent to the North African coast mentioning them [the following]:

“There arrived to our shores magicians called Northmen, coming from their country beyond the seas, close to the land of France. Towards those shores they parted killing men, captivating

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<sup>70</sup> See C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, p. 182.

<sup>71</sup> We must not forget that Isa b. Ahmad and Al Qutiyya were both from Cordova and lived in the same period – they worked during the mid and late 10<sup>th</sup> century. They were also very close to emir Al Hakam II, so it can be assumed that they knew each other. See the biography of both figures in the notes above.

<sup>72</sup> Very little is known about this author, although he has written a work with the title (in its Spanish translation) *Historia de Sevilla*, which Ibn Hayyan copied frequently. See F. Pons Boigues, *Ensayo bibliográfico...*, 1898, pp. 124-125; and the edition of Ibn Hayyan's chronicle (F. Corriente, *Crónica de los emires...*, 2001, p. 316 and note 671).

children, looting property and staying in the country to bringing only destruction, for they killed whoever they caught. Then they continued their route through the Mediterranean, doing the same in other enemy nations they passed. And no one would pose resistance, until they arrived to one of our lands and one of our *coras*, Lisbon, and they were crushed by war and defeat.” Then he says: "And they left from where they came, beyond our shores, and they attacked our enemies’ coasts in Gilliqiyah, where they found no resistance and where they could stay and did not have to leave, as the locals are weak and coward when it comes to war. Thank God.”

Isa says:

The mission of these cursed Normans finished in Alandalus, where they did not return, but after years, in times of Amir Muhammad b. Abdarrahan<sup>73</sup>.

He says:

When God saved Alandalus from this Norman pest, the Emir Abdarrahan took effort in building a strong marine, and took precautions. He launched boats with crews along his coasts, and began the construction of the wall of Seville, but then he stopped fearing the insurgency of its population, when they were protected by it.

I have read in Abdallah b. Kulayb’s letter about Seville to emir Abdarrahan: “When arriving in Beja, God bless the emir, I have seen on the banks of the river of Cordova remains of the cities, castles, fortresses and watchtowers, all well connected and close to each other. Then, when approaching Qalat Gazwan, I have noticed these fortresses are connected with Italica and Coria all the way to Seville, and then they extend from there to Qalat Ward, Jerez (belonging to the *cora* of Sidonia), and Astah, all the way to Cadiz and that part of the coast. I have no doubt that those people built all those fortresses and watchtowers as a defence against the Northman enemies that kept attacking for many years. And there we have the city of C...<sup>74</sup>, in the *cora* of Niebla, and at the gates there stand ancient statues of people that resemble the Northmen that Muslims are now fighting, and images of ships that also look that their boats. There is no doubt that they reproduced those images at those gates in order to build a talisman that protects them from the attackers.”

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<sup>73</sup> Reference to the expedition of 858-859.

<sup>74</sup> Given the imprecise formulations, the editor prefers not to give more credit to one place over the other. See F. Corriente, *Crónica de los emires...*, 2001, p. 318 and note 675.

Those works have disappeared, and it is thanks to the remains that are left today that wise men and researchers can deduce that these were not made for the enemy, although God almighty knows better<sup>75</sup>.

This passage offers interesting new information and contains precious quotes about the sources from where the information was taken: war reports and letters that may have been used in Ahmad Al Razi's lost work. Aside the positive aspect of gathering such valuable information, it is also important to point out the negative aspects. The confusing reference to the Mediterranean Sea allows me to mention the problem of geographical references in the Muslim chronicles, that are at least vague and certainly inaccurate when referring to areas that are far from Al Andalus – and this passage is an obvious example. If we were to believe Isa b. Ahmad, the Vikings would have left their country crossing France and other nations, and then arriving into Lisbon after sailing the Mediterranean. Calling the Atlantic Ocean for the Mediterranean is a mistake made also by Ibn Hayyan, when in his *Al Muqtabis* he writes the following in the heading for the 844 Viking attack passage: *News about the appearing of the Norman fleet, God curse them, from the Mediterranean Sea, in the Western coasts of Alandalus*<sup>76</sup>. The evidence of such mistake becomes irrefutable after the reference to the *Western coasts*. I think it is important to point the error out, because the text could mislead the readers to think that the fleet came from the East sailing the Mediterranean, which was not the case.

In his gathering of information about the Viking expeditions, Ibn Hayyan finally turns to the work *History of the Dynasty of the Andalusian Ummayyads*, attributed to Muawiyah b. Hisam<sup>77</sup>, who was himself an Ummayad – it is difficult to identify the time in which he lived, although we can assume he wrote during the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century as his father died in 913. This author was widely praised by his contemporaries because of his knowledge, hence his nickname, *Assabinasi* (the Wise). Ibn Hayyan used his work in many occasions when he was writing *Al Muqtabis*, so we can assume he did give the author credit.

Passage by Muawiyah b. Hisam Assabinasi.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 316-318.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>77</sup> We know very little about his life, aside from the fact that he belonged to a royal family, which explains the flatteries he sent to the Marwani governour and the propagandistic tone of his work. See F. Pons Boigues, *Ensayo bio-bibliográfico...*, 1898, p 125; and C. Sanches Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, 1942, pp. 97-98.

He says: The Northmen, God curse them, came from the sea attacking the inhabitants of Seville in year 230h. This was when the city remained without walls, so the attackers caught the victims unprepared after a long period of peace during the ruling of the marwani caliphs<sup>78</sup>, rulers of the Islamic community of Alandalus. They came out from their ships and attacked them with knives. The locals were unprotected and were defeated by the infidels except for a few that could escape with their families. The Northmen thus took over Seville in seven days. When the news reached the emir Abdarraḥman, in Cordova, he rushed to send governors to lead the armies that would fight the attackers by gathering the people that lived nearby and by recruiting other brave men among their subjects. They all parted immediately, the first being Abdallah b. Kulayb b. Talabah with cavalry squadrons from Cordova. There were also orders and instructions to recruit militias and infantry among the subjects of the districts in both the valleys and the mountains around Cordova, which resulted in many people joining. After the first one, the emir sent Abdalwahid b. Yazid Almundir, and afterwards Muhammad b. Said b. Rustum with a numerous army that was joined by Abdallah b. Almundir, son of Abdarraḥman b. Muawiyah, who was given by the emir the command of all the Koreichits, clients, rulers and people of his capital. Along him, governor Isa b. Suhayd was sent.

Afterwards they came together in Cordoba with all the troops from the fighting *coras* that had responded to the call. The emir Abdarraḥman put all these under the orders of his brave deputy, his favourite and one of the important men in the ruling of the state, the eunuch Nasr, who followed all the governors towards Carmona and then arriving at the gates of Seville, where they attacked the Northmen with courage and determination until they defeated them and expelled them with disgrace. After the defeat, the enemies took shelter in their anchored ships, after the Muslim ships brought for the attack burnt thirty of theirs. The rest of the infidels left with the remaining boats looking to leave the river of Seville and suffering a great defeat. This happened on Tuesday, when there were five nights left of the *safar* of year 230h.

Muawiyah says:

The one that returned with the heads of the infidel enemies, that among the governors that earned fame and was attributed the victory was the eunuch Nasr, who was the favourite of the emir Abdarraḥman. He praised him even higher than he was, and gave him a splendid present. For several days, people came in large numbers to congratulate him on his victory, and the poets recited the hymns that they had composed.

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<sup>78</sup> The title used here by Muawiyah b. Hisam is an anachronism that should not mislead us, as Abd Al Rahman II was never a caliph, nor was any of his predecessors in Spain. Assabnasi transferred the grandeur represented by Abd al Rahman III since 929 to the previous century – probably in order to exalt the figure of his ancestor.

(...)<sup>79</sup>

Muawiyah b. Hisam Assabinasi says:

The alfaqui Abdalmalik b. Habib wrote emir Abdarrahan after this episode against the Northmen, God curse them, in Seville, and he urged him to build a wall. This came at the time in which the emir had started with the extension of the Mosque aljama of Cordova, which involved high costs. Ibn Habib said in his letter that the building of the wall around Seville and the fortification of the city were more urgent than the extension of the Mosque. The emir only followed his advice in relation to the wall around Seville, but he did not abandon his plans to continue with the extension works that had already begun. He finished both works at the same time after a hard work and helped by God.<sup>80</sup>

This text is rich in details and characters, however the author's panegyric tone leaves out the role that Muza b. Muza played – it was the emir himself who required his involvement even if that meant a humiliation for him after the problems he had caused in the Superior March<sup>81</sup>. Given the nature of this information, it seems as though the sources used to write this episode in *History of the Dynasty of the Andalusian Umayyads* were not very different from those used by Ahmad Al Razi. This is not surprising as both were close in time and space, although later chroniclers would prefer the works of Ahmad Al Razi when it came to the Vikings' passages and the Andalusian history in general<sup>82</sup>.

Ibn Hayyan used yet another author, Al Qutiyya, as source to write the Viking chronicles in Seville, but such entry does not contain any new information. Also, as we do have the original source by the author, I consider it unnecessary to reproduce it here again. It is however worth pointing out that there is a great resemblance between the two passages – the half-original, and

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<sup>79</sup> I have removed the poems from this extract, as they are irrelevant for this study and occupy a whole page. See Ibn Hayyan's work to read them (translation by F. Corriente, *Crónica de los emires...*, 2001, pp. 320-321).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 321-322.

<sup>81</sup> The Superior March corresponded roughly with the lines of the Ebro valley, and had its capital in Saragossa. Isa b. Ahmad also ignored the intervention of Muza b. Muza, but his father Ahmad Al Razi did record it – although he did mistake his name with that of his son, Lubd b. Muza. Al Qutiyya dedicated to Muza many lines in the report of the victory against the Vikings. Such show of respect should not be surprising for us, as Muza proved to be extremely gifted in war matters. This was indeed a key quality to survive the conflict of the Ebro valley, which confronted the Franks, Pamplona, Asturias, and the various Muslim factions for its control. See pages above, and for more general information, C. Sánchez Albornoz, *Orígenes del reino de Pamplona...*, 1985.

<sup>82</sup> See C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 122-139.

that extracted by Ibn Hayyan –, which is yet another evidence of how faithful the 10<sup>th</sup>- century historian was to his sources.

Regarding Ibn Hayyan's version of the second expedition, in the volume II-2 of the *Al Muqtabis* by Ibn Hayyan, we have the oldest preserved entry which narrates the second arrival of the Vikings to Spain. It refers to the surprising case of the attack on Pamplona, at the end of the text. The present fragment is the only one translated in relation with this facts<sup>83</sup>:

Then, the ships of the *mayus* continued sailing until they reached Pamplona, committing raids among the Baskunis, killing a lot of them and taking prisoner their emir Garsiya ibn Wannaqo. The ransom was set on 70.000 [gold pieces]. Because of some defers of the payment, they took his sons as hostages, and he was released<sup>84</sup>.

E. Levi-Provençal, the translator of this text, offered exclusively the part of the entry related with Pamplona, so it is incomplete – he published only part of the text. Luckily, Al Atir offered us the full version of the journey, which can be seen in the pages below.

#### *Later sources – 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards*

From 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards contributions to this topic increased just as their historical value decreased. This is so because as there was no new source, the information given is taken from the works of the old masters and chroniclers that we have already mentioned above.

Later Christian texts about the Vikings are of little importance as they are very dependant on the version narrated the Asturian chronicles, although sometimes modifying the number of ships in the fleets. They will therefore only be treated superficially. Such is the case of the *Silense*<sup>85</sup> chronicle, a text that was written in León in early 12<sup>th</sup> century as praise to King

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<sup>83</sup> There is a piece of news in the *Al Muqtabis II-2* with not much interest for our study, but lightly related with the expedition of 858-859: *Under the reign of Mohammed, the Madjus, who landed in the western coast of Spain, took him prisoner [the Moslem rebel Sarabanki] and was ransomed by a merchant Jew who thought he was doing a nice business; but later, he [Sarabanki] fled and forgetting the Jew's loan, this one lost his money. Having taken shelter in the mountains between Coimbra and Santander [probably the correct translation is Santaver], that it is still carrying his name, he lived of banditry in Moslem and Christian lands: he survived to a lot of adventures, being, at last, killed by order of Alfonso III, lord of Galicia*, (in the work by P. Dozy, *Los vikingos en España*, 1987, pp. 37-38).

<sup>84</sup> See the article by E. Lévi-Provençal and E. García Gómez, 'Textos inéditos del Muqtabis de Ibn Hayyan sobre los orígenes del reino de Pamplona', in *Al Andalus*, v. XIX, 2, 1954, p. 309.

<sup>85</sup> There is a recent critical translation of this text (by S. Barton and R. Fletcher) in the compilation of 12<sup>th</sup> century chronicles *The World of El Cid* (2000). Unfortunately, given the limited space the authors omit the entries of the chronicle that they consider very similar to the Asturian chronicles and the chronicle of

Alfonso VI (1065-1109), and the *Iriense*<sup>86</sup> chronicle, which should be considered as being part of the passages written in Compostela under the framework of archbishop Diego Gelmírez's work, also in early 12<sup>th</sup> century. The *Chronicon Mundi*<sup>87</sup> by Lucas de Tuy (1249) and the *Historia Gothica*<sup>88</sup> by Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada (1175-1247), both dating from the first half of 13<sup>th</sup> century and written to be a general history of Spain, took from the Asturian chronicles the passages of the Viking expeditions in 9<sup>th</sup> century. The archbishop of Toledo, don Rodrigo, took an interesting approach in his *Historia Arabum*<sup>89</sup>, where he focuses on events related to the Spanish Muslims. The novelty of his approach is that he does not take the Asturian chronicles as source, as little have they to say about the Muslim Spain, but he turns to Ahmad Al Razi's work, whose entry about the Viking attack in Seville is reproduced by the prelate<sup>90</sup>. *Historia de España*, commissioned in the second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century by King Alfonso X does not offer new information either, aside from the Romance language in which it was written and its novelettish style that adorns the already known information.

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*Sampiro*, which covered the period going from the last Goth kings and year 1000. Although the version of the expedition is very similar to the account of the Asturian chronicles – in fact, it is almost a duplicate –, the *Silense* does contribute an important addition: the building of the castle of Gozón in the Asturian coast as a way of defense against the pirates. For a Spanish version of this entry (without the original in Latin), see J. E. Casariego, *Crónicas de los reinos de Asturias y León*, 1985, p. 135. Latin version in F. Santos Coco, *Historia Silense*, 1921; see references to Gozón in pp. 35-36.

<sup>86</sup> The *Iriense* chronicle only contains a single brief reference to the Viking attack of 858-859, and it merely points out that the pirates arrived in Asturias. The text was written in the first half of 12<sup>th</sup> century, during a time marked by a reformist church led by Diego Gelmírez (ca. 1068-ca. 1139), first archbishop of Compostela (1120-1139?). The historical value of this text is therefore very limited, although it is certainly useful to imagine the aspirations of the clergy in 12<sup>th</sup> century Compostela (see A. Isla Frez, 'Ensayo de historiografía medieval. El Cronicón Iriense', *La España Medieval*, 4, 1984, pp. 413-431).

<sup>87</sup> For a recent edition of the chronicle in Latin, see Emma Falque, *Lucae Tudensis Chronicon Mundi*, 2003.

<sup>88</sup> Also known as *De Rebus Hispaniae*. J. Fernández Valverde edited the first text in Latin under the title *Historia de Rebus Hispaniae sive Historia Gothica*, 1987. The most recent edition and translation is that of J. Fernández Valverde, *Historia de los hechos de España*, 1989 (in Spanish).

<sup>89</sup> Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada also studied the history of Spanish Muslims. The most recent critical edition of the Latin text is that of J. Lozano Sánchez, *Historia Arabum*, 1974.

<sup>90</sup> It goes without saying, but it is still worth it to point it out to avoid future mistakes, that Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada never copied the work of Ibn Idari or Al Nuwairi as suggested by A. Fabricius ('Normannertogene til den spanske halvø', *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, II, 12, 1897, p. 101). It is evident just by looking at the dates: the Egyptian compiler Al Nuwairi (1278-1332) was born thirty years after the death of don Rodrigo (1247+); and we know that Ibn Idari finished his work in 1306. The mistake arises from lack of knowledge of the sources of the different chroniclers – Ibn Idari had access to the works of Al Atir (1166-1233), and the use of Ahmad Al Razi's information in his work is evident. Al Nuwairi copied Al Atir and Ibn Idari, and it is possible that he had direct access to Ahmad Al Razi. If we consider that Al Atir extracted Ahmad Al Razi's texts meticulously to write the history of Al Andalus up to the ruling of Abd Allah (888-912), there is no mystery – all the texts, including that written by don Rodrigo, come from Ahmad Al Razi's work, and the use of a single shared source leads to related texts (see C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, p. 127).

The texts written by later Arab authors are of greater importance, especially *Kamil fi-l-Ta'rij*, by the Mesopotamian Ibn Al Atir (1166-1233)<sup>91</sup>, as with this chronicle, which is the closest to Ahmad Al Razi's original apart from *Al Muqtabis*, we can complete some details of the first expedition of 844. This is the case of the end of the passage about Seville, which was missing in Ibn Hayyan's version. Also in this chronicle we read about the second expedition in 858-859. These testimonies will be all we have until Ibn Hayyan's *Al Muqtabis* is translated from Arabic, as the oldest version of the mentioned episode is contained in this work. In his work *Kamil*, Al Atir put together a history of Islam since its origins to 13<sup>th</sup> century, and he dedicated a whole section to Al Andalus, where he focus his interest on the war episodes of the emirs since the ruling of Abd al Rahman I (756-788) to Muhammad I (852-886). The quality of his news about Al Andalus decreases from that point onwards, and he only offers scattered and inaccurate information, as the only source he took was the chronicle of Ahmad Al Razi<sup>92</sup> – we must remember that this chronicle ended with the start of the ruling of Abd Allah (888-912), which was contemporary to the author's work, who preferred not to write about him perhaps out of prudence<sup>93</sup>.

Over a century ago *Kamil* was translated into French by E. Fagnan<sup>94</sup>. Therein we find a version of the Viking attacks in 9<sup>th</sup> century taken directly from Ahmad Al Razi's work and not influenced by Ibn Hayyan, as Al Atir did not know about his work. The reading of this work is revealing, as it is only by comparing the lost chronicles – those written by the Al Razis – compiled in *Al Muqtabis*, and the news from the late chroniclers that followed Ahmad that we discover gaps and omissions in Ibn Hayyan. Plus it is here that the news of the 858-859 attack is reported – it was indeed included in *Al Muqtabis II-II*, but we are still missing a translation. This is the entry about the first expedition in *Kamil*:

In 230 (17<sup>th</sup> September 844), the Madjus, coming from the furthest regions from Spain, came to attack the Muslim regions from the sea. First they appeared in dhou'l-hiddja 229 (August-September 843) near Lisbon, where they fought several battles against the Muslims, from there they arrived in Cádiz, and then in Sidonia, where they had more battles. On 8 of

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<sup>91</sup> For information about the life and work of this author, see F. Pons Boigues, *Estudio bio-bibliográfico...*, 1898, p. 310; and C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 234-240.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235

<sup>93</sup> C. Sánchez Albornoz writes: *when Ahmad interrupts the narration of the passage to account for the arrival of the emir in his youth, he does this to abide by the imposed custom of prudence and fear, for it was dangerous to write about the princes and their ruling while they – or their immediate sucesors – were governing*, (*Ibid.*, p. 138).

<sup>94</sup> In *Annales du Maghreb & de l'Espagne*, 1898.



moharrem (24<sup>th</sup> September), they headed towards Seville. They set their camp twelve *parasangas* away<sup>95</sup>. Numerous soldiers came to attack them, but they were defeated and many laid dead on the battlefield. Then the enemy set their camp two miles from the city, whose inhabitants, who also came out to fight them, were defeated again on 14<sup>th</sup> moharrem (30<sup>th</sup> September) and lost many people who were either killed or imprisoned. The Madjus did not forgive neither men nor beasts; they stayed outside the city for twenty four hours and then they went back to their ships. Then Abd Al Rahman's army got ready with several officials on the lead, and resisted the attack of the Madjus, that lost seventy men and felt obliged to withdraw towards their ships but were not chased by the Muslims. After receiving these news, Abd Al Rahman sent another army that fought forcefully against the Madjus. These, obliged to retreat, were caught on 2<sup>nd</sup> of rebi (26<sup>th</sup> November) by the Muslims, who had received petitions of help from all over the region, and everyone gathered on the lines of those. Attacked by the Madjus, they started to withdraw, but soon the order was re-established and a great number of them set foot on the ground [they seem to be referring to horsemen]; the enemy had to run away leaving on the ground around five hundred corpses; our people captured four ships, which they set fire to after having taken what was inside. Many days passed without any battle, for the Madjus did not disembark. The infidels came after attacking Niebla, where they took many prisoners; then they disembarked in an island near K'ouris (Corias) to proceed to the booty sharing. This image caused the anger of the Muslims, who crossed the river to attack them and killed the men. Then, the mayus went to Sidonia, where they stayed for two days, gathered food and took prisoners. The ships of Abd Al Rahman, ruler of Spain, arrived in Seville, and with these news the Madjus arrived in Niebla, where they continued looking and taking prisoners; and they did the same in Ocsonoba, Badja and Lisbon successively. Afterwards, they retreated and our men did not hear about them again, and luckily people were left in peace<sup>96</sup>.

To conclude, here is the entry about the 858-859 incursion:

In that year – 245 of Hegira (8<sup>th</sup> April 859-27, March 860) – the “madjus” parted from Al-Andalus on their ships towards other lands occupied by Muslims. Then Muhammad Ibn Abd Al Rahman, prince of the Muslim lands, ordered the troops to part against them. The ships of the “madjus”, which were heading towards Isbiliya (Seville), berthed off Algeciras, looting the periphery and burning down the great mosque. Afterwards they parted towards the African coast and disembarked near Nekur; then they returned to Al Andalus, where the inhabitants of Tudmir

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<sup>95</sup> This is a unit of measurement of Persian origin equivalent to 5940 metres .

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 220-222.

(kingdom of Teodorimo, present day Murcia) run away, and they took the castle of Uriwala (Orihuela). Afterwards, they continued towards the border with Ifrang (France), where they also did pillage, got a good booty and took many prisoners. On their way back, they met with the squadron of Muhammad, who burned down the ships of the infidels and captured other two, whose cargo was taken as plunder. For all this, the infidels were furious and they battled with twice the energy, this is why many Muslims suffered martyrdom. The ships of the “madjus” proceeded towards Banbaluna (Pamplona). There they succeeded in taking the lord of the city, the Frankish Garsiya (García Íñiguez 851?-870?), who had to pay a rescue of ninety thousand dinars<sup>97</sup>.

Aside from the complex interpretation of the expedition towards Pamplona, which is inland and is impossible to reach by river, the rest of the information is fairly clear. It is worth pointing out that the second expedition is not as well documented, maybe because its impact on the emirate was not as big as that of the first expedition. In fact it seems as though there was no battle inland, and no important city was looted – apart from Pamplona, but it was not part of Al Andalus. Seeing as Al Atir had summarised the chronicle of Ahmad Al Razi in the case of the first expedition, it is possible that he did the same when it came to the second expedition, and we can arguably believe that the original information was richer in details. The compilation of Ibn Hayyan in *Al Muqtabis II-II* surely contains a more detailed account, but we depend on the Arab scholars to tackle the hard work of publishing a translation of the chronicle in a critical edition.

Following Ibn Al Atir, other Muslim chroniclers have reported on the Viking expeditions in Spain during 9<sup>th</sup> century, but they do not contribute any novelty to what has been transcribed up to this point. *Bayan Al Mugrib* by Moroccan author, Ibn Idari<sup>98</sup>, and finished in 1306, is a history of Maghreb and Al Andalus that extracted its news about the first centuries of the history of Spanish Islam mainly from Ibn Ziyad, but also from Ahmad Al Razi, Ibn Hayyan and Al Atir<sup>99</sup>. His description of the Viking attacks is almost identical to that of the latter, and it is therefore likely that he copied it without reserves. In the chronicle of universal wisdom, *Nihayat*, by the

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<sup>97</sup> Extracted from Al Atir’s work, and translated by E. Fagnan (*Annales du Maghreb...*, 1898, pp. 234-235).

<sup>98</sup> Of unknown chronology, he lived between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century. For a biography and information about his work, see F. Pons Boigues, *Ensayo bio-bibliográfico...*, 1898, p. 414; and specially, C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 255-263. There is a Danish translation of the pages about the Vikings in the work of A. Fabricius, *Normannertogene...*, 1897, pp. 96-99 and 112-113. Apart from the classic complete translation into French by E. Fagnan (*Al Bayan Al Mugrib*, 1901), there is also a recent version of the reign of Muhammad translated into Spanish by Juan A. Souto of *El emirato de Muhammad I en el Bayan al-Mugrib* by Ibn Idari (*Anaqueel de Estudios Árabes*, VI, 1995, pp. 209-247).

<sup>99</sup> See C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 260-261.

Egyptian historian and judge Al Nuwairi (1278-1332)<sup>100</sup>, we find a similar case: its main source for the reconstruction of the *andalusí* history is Ibn Al Atir, but it seems as though the author also knew about the works of Ibn Idari and Ahmad Al Razi<sup>101</sup>.

After the authors mentioned so far, Maghrebi traveller and historian Al Maqqari (16<sup>th</sup> c-1631)<sup>102</sup> wrote about the history of Muslims in Spain during 17<sup>th</sup> century. His work, known in the Western world as *Mohammedan Dynasties of Spain* after its translation into English by Pascual de Gayangos<sup>103</sup>, also drinks from the sources of Ibn Hayyan and surprisingly from both Al Razis. This evidences the fact that seven centuries after these works, there still existed in Maghreb copies of the renowned *andalusí* historians. In *Mohammedan Dynasties of Spain*, we find a shorter account of the Viking expeditions in Spain during 9<sup>th</sup> century, and it does not contribute any novelty with respect to the ones we have already seen.

### Conclusion

The general valuation of these chronicles as means to study the Viking incursions in Spain during 9<sup>th</sup> century is mixed. With them we can get a fair idea of what happened in Al Andalus: a very accurate idea – for 9<sup>th</sup> century standards – about the expedition that occurred in the summer of 844; and less accurate in the case of the second attack in Arab Spain in 859, on the one hand because of its reduced importance for the peninsula, and on the other hand because Ibn Hayyan's entry about this raid has not been translated yet. The Viking arrival to the north coasts of Spain is more uncertain for obvious reasons that I will discuss on the following pages. The main reason is the poor quality of the Christian chroniclers's work and their lack of interest in detailed descriptions – but despite the little information we get from them, we must consider their texts as being lengthy for their genre. In any case, the knowledge of the Viking movements in Spain during 9<sup>th</sup> century will have to be built upon several sources, including those outside Spain, for they can contribute to the information about the Viking movements towards Spain in

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<sup>100</sup> See pages about the author in F. Pons Boigues, *Ensayo bio-bibliográfico...*, 1898, p. 416; also C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 265-267. A. Fabricius included a translation into Danish of the pages about the Viking attacks in *Normannertogene...*, 1987, pp. 99-101 y 113-114.

<sup>101</sup> See C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 266-267.

<sup>102</sup> For information about his life and works, see Pascual de Gayangos, *History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, I, 1840; F. Pons Boigues, *Estudio bio-bibliográfico...*, 1898, pp. 417-419; and C. Sánchez Albornoz, *En torno a los orígenes...*, II, 1942, pp. 272-274.

<sup>103</sup> There are accounts about the Vikings in his work *History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, II, 1943, pp. 116 and 127. A. Fabricius also included a translation of Al Maqqari in *Normannertogene...*, 1897, p. 101.

greater details than the Hispanic chronicles – e.g. concerning origins, numbers, intentions, mishaps, etc.

It is also important to stress that although this is not an exhaustive list of the written material that has survived today, I am confident that I have made a representative selection of works that will be useful to understand and study these important events<sup>104</sup>. In addition to this, I have also referred to subsequent chronicles, of less interest than the older versions we previously saw, because they are derived from these. There are also brief references to this topic that are scattered among Muslim chroniclers and geographers from many places – Northern Africa, Spain, Egypt, etc – and many historical periods that often offer succulent details that any researcher would find of great interest.

#### *Contextualizing the sources*

To complete the study about the Vikings in Spain during the 9<sup>th</sup> century, this second part of the article will go into a closer analysis of the two expeditions, which appear in the chronicles. However, due to the lack of space, it is necessary to limit the geographical frame to the Christian and Atlantic Spain, which spans from the Pyrenees to Galicia, on the western border of Europe. There is an obvious problem related to this delimitation: the analysis will be incomplete, due to the fragmentation of a historical episode which had connections to what happened on the Muslim shores of the Iberian Peninsula. Anyway, as long as we can focus on the Christian side of the history the analysis can be exhaustive. Furthermore, we can help ourselves by including, if necessary, the Cordovan chronicles in support of our task, because these Arab chronicles contain essential information for understanding the two expeditions on the Christian Spain.

When the historian goes deeper into the study of the Viking expeditions in Spain, he discovers that the state of the investigation requires an urgent revision. That is because these expeditions are poorly known. There are two reasons for this situation: the first one is common to the Early Middle Ages in Europe, and it is the lack of written sources. In Spain, and related to the Viking issue, the problem is even bigger, because we don't have archeological evidence of their movements or settlements. Moreover, in the Christian Spain, the chronicles are extremely

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<sup>104</sup> For more information about references and other translations, see the collection of articles in the work *Vikingerne på Den Iberiske Halvø*, 2004, published by the Foundation Queen Elisabeth of Denmark.

short in their entries, so the most substantial part of the information comes from the Cordovan Arabic sources, and those favour the episodes which took part in their lands. In any case, a historian of the Middle Ages knows that his sources will be scarce, and that he will need to squeeze them to the maximum. So, especially for those working in the history of the Asturian Kingdom, this is not a rare situation. The second problem concerns the historians themselves. It seems the topic has not been attractive for the professional historians, but has been left to others with less scientific training<sup>105</sup>. The history of the Vikings in Spain was written by journalists, amateurs and enthusiasts, who have contributed to create confusion and to feed myths and legends deeply rooted to the present day. This fascination among everybody except the professional historians is due to the Romantic aura which surrounds the adventures of the Vikings, and the lack of knowledge of what they did in Spain. A striking example of this fascination is that every harbour on the Atlantic Spanish coast has its own Viking landing place in its imagined past, almost as a matter of prestige. The chronicles of the medieval past have, however, a very different version.

In order to get through these problems or to minimize their impact, I suggest a new and exhaustive investigation of the chronicles, because these have often been neglected, or the history writing has sometimes made them say what they actually do not say. On the other hand, there is dubious information – because it lacks credibility, because it is anachronistic or suspicious – gathered in late chronicles, that we must analyze carefully to assess their credibility. That is necessary to help clarifying the facts. Moreover, it is needed to contrast the information gathered by the chronicles and documents with an aspect of main importance, sometimes ignored by the historians in the works dedicated to our issue: the geography which acted as theatre of the events. We can't understand Viking's experience in Spain without attending to the geography and oceanography of the territory. Dense mountain ranges, covered by thick forests protected the Cantabrian strip, turning the land in a very problematic space to explore and to

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<sup>105</sup> We have two classical works, the one of P. A. Dozy, 'Les Normands en Espagne', in *Recherches sur l'histoire et la littérature d'Espagne*, vol. II, 1860; and the other from A. Fabricius, (in 'Normannertogene til den Spanske Halvø', in *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, II, 12, 1897, pp. 6-160). In Spain there were thorough analyses from J. Uría Riu (in 'Cuestiones histórico-arqueológicas relativas a la ciudad de Oviedo de los siglos VIII al X', in *El reino de Asturias y otros estudios altomedievales*, 2005, pp. 177-229), and from C. Sánchez Albornoz (in several works, for example 'Invasiones normandas a la España cristiana durante el siglo IX', in *I normanni e la loro espansione in Europa nell'alto medioevo*, 1969, pp. 367-408). More recent are V. Almazán (*Gallaecia Scandinavica*, 1986) and E. Morales Romero (*Historia de los vikingos en España*, 2004) who studied both expeditions. The amount of works, apart from these quoted, is huge. The largest part of those are of no great interest.

maintain communications, especially in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Still in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, lots of European travellers complained about how difficult it was to tour along the Cantabrian coast due to the complicated landscape. This geographical complexity had a strong influence in the population of the area during the Early Middle Ages. It was in fact scant and dispersed. If we add to all the previous problems the notorious difficulties that involved the navigation in the Gulf of Biscay and the Cantabrian Sea, we can conclude that it wasn't an attractive place for fast and profitable raids.

So, the aim of this work is to study in depth the activities of the Vikings in the Christian Spain during the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and to obtain conclusions in order to propose an hypothesis that could explain to a certain extent the short Viking presence in Spain.

### *Previous ideas*

The Northern shores of the Iberian Peninsula are very extraordinary in the overall landscape of Western Europe. The land is extremely rough as much in the coast as in the inland. In contrast to the great Aquitaine plains or Castilian flatlands, the Cantabrian region is formed by mountain ranges which rise close to the sea, and extend from Galice to the Basque Country, to connect them with the Pyrenees in almost one thousand kilometers of mountains, from sixty to one hundred and sixty kilometers of width, depending on the zone<sup>106</sup>. The altitudes are moderate in the Western and Oriental side of the Cantabrian strip, and then rise to high mountains in the central province of Asturias, with peaks over 2,500 meters. The inside of these mountain ranges is a forested land along countless valleys, interweaved by narrow gorges and difficult paths, which hinder fluid communications but at the same time give an extraordinary shelter against external enemies. This whole area has an oceanic climate and its temperatures are moderate. The ecology is typical of the Atlantic Europe, and the rainfall is high<sup>107</sup>.

Our research requires a closer look at the sea in front of the mountains, which was for two centuries the Northern border of the Kingdom of Asturias. To reach Spain sailing from Northern Europe meant crossing the Cantabrian Sea, the Southern strip of the Gulf of Biscay. Its reputation since antiquity make us realize that the seamen took a great risk moving along it, and of course

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<sup>106</sup> See the work by H. Lautensach, *Geografía de España y Portugal*, 1967, p. 329, (the original work in German is entitled *Die Iberische Halbinsel*, 1964).

<sup>107</sup> Galice is the rainiest province in Spain, however the Cantabrian strip has very similar estadistics, being the months of November and December the ones with more rainfall. See the pages by H. Lautensach, in *Ibid.*, pp. 36-73 (regarding to climate) and the pp. 329-393 (concerning the physical configuration of the Cantabrian strip).

this influenced the Vikings opinion of Spain. In the West, where the Atlantic Sea and the Cantabrian Sea join their waters, Galicia enjoys peaceful shores in some parts, and very dangerous in other ones.

Recent oceanographic studies inform us about the particular influence of the coast line and the climate on the sea<sup>108</sup>. The Northern winds are dominant – the Southern ones being less frequent – and can often cause heavy sea, depending on the season of the year<sup>109</sup>. During winter the sea threatens with intensive storms, making the Cantabrian sea in hardly navigable. Moreover, in the months of spring and in summer, there are unpredictable and strong sea storms called ‘galernas’ – ‘galerie’ in French –, which are especially feared by the local sailors with their sudden change in the wind from South to Northwest, creating hurricane-like tempests and still today causing some of the darkest pages of Spanish maritime history<sup>110</sup>. On the Atlantic coast of Galice there are places very apt for sailing, like the gulf of Artabro or the ‘Rías Bajas’, but also a very risky coastline, for example the ‘Costa de la Muerte’ –‘Coast of the Death’.

One of the main problems that a captain finds to navigate the Cantabrian sea is the lack of inlets and safe harbours to make landfall. Moreover, the few ones he may find are very dangerous to win with bad weather, because of the winds and sea breakings, which in practice block the harbors in those conditions. Besides, the rivers are short, born in the mountains and flow to the sea. But to reach these rivers is risky because of the sand or stone bars, the winds, the tides, and the reefs. In most cases, the rivers are very low so its navigation is impossible. The Galician coast provides a very different picture, especially along the Gulf of Artabro and the ‘Rías Bajas’: the rivers have a high flow and are perfectly navigable, there are generous beaches to make landfall which make easier to access the province inland.

To finish this geographical overview, it should be pointed out that the Cantabrian coast has not got any island near the coast that can be used as coves. The few islets are big rocks, without space to make landfall and very close to the cliffs. In contrast, out the western Atlantic coast we can find bigger islands, especially in the area of the ‘Rías Bajas’, sometimes linked to land with marshes<sup>111</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> The most recent work was written by J. Hellín Medina, *Análisis climatológico del mar Cantábrico y su influencia en la navegación*, 2009, published by the Universidad Politécnica de Barcelona.

<sup>109</sup> It happens when the winds blow from the North, reaching the sea levels of 4 to 6 in the Beaufort scale, which means surge to rough seas. Northern winds are dominant in summer, (see *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48).

<sup>110</sup> J. Hellín Medina offers a complete description of this amazing phenomenon, the biggest complication for a sailor in the Gulf of Biscay, (in *Ibid.*, pp. 57-61).

<sup>111</sup> See the work by H. Lautensach, *Geografía de España y Portugal*, 1967, pp. 334.

The second problem is that of demography. The coasts that the Vikings found after leaving Frankish shores had a very tiny population. From Galice to the Basque lands, the Romans established *portus* that worked as base to support the coasting trade, over older pre-Roman villages. The naval was flourishing since the Flavian period – the ending of the 1<sup>st</sup> century –, probably coordinated from *Flavium Brecantium*, between the Atlantic shores to the Gulf of Biscay<sup>112</sup>. Archeologists have found evidences of Roman port towns in La Coruña, – *Flavium Brecantium* – Gijón, – *Gegio* – Santander, – *Portus Victoriae* – Castro Urdiales, – *Flaviobriga* – and Oyarzun – *Oiasso*<sup>113</sup>–, to mention only the main ones. We must assume that the coast in the North of Spain had some humble economic and demographical development during the first half of the millenium. But this changed radically from the 5<sup>th</sup> century and onwards, to the worse. The Scandinavian seamen arriving from Aquitaine had very limited contact with the land, because most of the ancient roman towns were ruined and probably covered by the marshes which filled the coasts in the past. It is a proven fact that since the raids of the Vandals, Swabians and Alans<sup>114</sup>, the territories from the Atlantic coastline of Spain were definitely separated from Rome, without any support from Roman defense, and exposed to the incursions of the invaders, by land and by sea<sup>115</sup>. The lack of safety forced the inhabitants, since the 5<sup>th</sup> century to abandon their villages and to install themselves inland<sup>116</sup>. Information about human activity during the

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<sup>112</sup> See the article by C. Fernández Ochoa and A. Morillo Cerdan, *La ruta marítima...*, 1994, p. 227.

<sup>113</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231, where there is a wide list of bibliography gathered by the authors about these ports, recently object of several archaeological interventions.

<sup>114</sup> The barbarians crossed the Pyrenees in 409, taking advantage of disorders provoked by the usurper Constantine III in Britain, (in the work by E. Flórez, *España Sagrada*, IV, 2002, p. 392).

<sup>115</sup> The Galician Bishop Hidacio left us in his *Chronicon* information about the destructions committed by pirates in the Cantabrian coasts during the year 456: *De Erulorum gente septem navibus in Lucensi littore aliquanti advecti, viri ferme CCCC expediti, superventu multitudinis congregatae duobus tantum ex suo numero effugantur occisis, qui ad sedes proprias redeuntes, Cantabriorum et Vardulliarum loca maritima crudelissime depraedati sunt*, (taken from the work by J. M. Iglesias Gil and J. A. Muñiz Castro, *Las comunicaciones en la Cantabria romana*, 1992, p. 64, q. 85).

<sup>116</sup> The historian B. Arizaga, in an article about the foundation of the town of San Sebastian in the Basque Coast, assumes that the shores were unpopulated since 5<sup>th</sup> century, and as a proof of her statements uses the writings of the prestigious historian G. Duby: *the coastal zone [of Western Europe], populated around 400, seems to get completely empty afterwards*, and also quotes the historian of Castile, J. Pérez de Urbel, who when referring to Biscay says: *there are evidence to state that the coast was barely populated (...) the live was probably primitive and scant. There were reasons for those peoples to flee from the coasts, where there was no safety since Rome had abandoned it*, (in 'El litoral vasco peninsular en la época pre-urbana y el nacimiento de San Sebastián', in the journal *Lurralde*, 13, 1990, p. 279). Recently, the young researcher Javier Añibarro has published a really interesting work on this matter, entitled *La implantación urbana medieval en la Costa de Cantabria ¿Creación original o herencia del pasado?*, 2010. Although his investigation adheres just to the present day province of Cantabria – and not the whole Cantabrian coast – his conclusions about the depopulation of these shores is similar to all the previous statements.



centuries of the Visigothic Kingdom in the Cantabrian strip –from the 6th century to the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century– are almost nonexistent.

Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries we find new changes in the demographic pattern, stimulated by the new situation after the Muslim invasion of the Iberian Peninsula of 711. The inhabitants of the Cantabrian strip were fragmented in valley communities<sup>117</sup>, with a sparse density of population, and an economy based on herding. In Galicia and Asturias there were also *villae*<sup>118</sup>, slave farms typical of late Roman times and Visigoth period. These models of exploitation were disappearing in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, due to the action of the monarchy installed in Asturias after the Muslim invasion. This kingdom had a Gothic-Roman profile and a Mediterranean culture, which slowly created village communities<sup>119</sup>, capable of creating a surplus exploited by the monarch and the aristocracy. This process experienced a different evolution depending on the zone, however it was highly developed in Asturias and in Liebana – the Western province of Cantabria. We can see its results in the use of the surplus in the works of the monarchy, but it gets weaker as we move away from the core of the monarchy in Oviedo. The exception to this is Galicia, where agriculture had gotten more weight in the economy than in other parts of the Asturian Kingdom<sup>120</sup>.

As a conclusion of all the previous considerations, we can assert that during the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the Vikings arrived to the Cantabrian shores, the conditions of the land were very poor, especially in comparison with the captures the Vikings could make in the Frankish towns of Nantes, Bordeaux or Toulouse<sup>121</sup>. The Spanish Northern coast was with very few exceptions formed by masses of forests and mountains, with rare farmhouses and ruins from ancient Roman harbours. It is important to keep this fact in mind throughout this exposition of the Viking raids in northern Spain and in the conclusions.

#### *First expedition to Spain*

The raid, which arrived at the Iberian Peninsula in the year 844 was a continuation to the South of the assaults on the Aquitainian shores in 843-844. The Viking fleets had achieved their first

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<sup>117</sup> See the work by J. A. García de Cortázar, *Sociedad y organización en la España Medieval*, 2004, pp. 104-108. I would like to thank professor García de Cortázar for his bibliographical council on this issue.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103-104 and 118.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-119.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>121</sup> See the entries of the *Annales Bertiniani* for the first half of the 840s (in the work by Janet L. Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 1991).

successes in the continent during the reign of Louis the Pious, especially in Frisia<sup>122</sup>, and from there they moved South at the beginning of the 840s, which does not mean that the attacks in the North came to an end. There seems to have existed a correlation between the outbreak of civil war between Charles the Bald and his relatives, and the success of the Viking raids in the Atlantic France. When they arrived in the Asturian kingdom, the Scandinavian sailors similarly found a land in disarray: two factions were fighting for the throne. However, this may be just a coincidence, as the sources do not show any sign of a plan behind the attacks upon lands divided in civil wars<sup>123</sup>.

### *Analysis*

The information given by the chronicles allows us to make an approximated reconstruction of the facts, that offers a coherent picture of chronology and development: During the summer the Viking fleet abandons the French coast, sails the sea from East to West landing in Gijón and La Coruña, and it is repelled by the troops of the Asturian king. The Vikings embark again heading South, towards Al Andalus. We will analyze these events in order to achieve a deeper knowledge of the expedition.

First, we must focus on the chronology of the first Viking expedition to Spain. Thanks to the research of several historians, the date of the raid is no longer a problem<sup>124</sup>. The *Annales Bertiniani* states with precision the year 844, a date that fits well with the version of the *Prophetic Chronicle*, which also provides us with the concrete month and day of the event: the first of August<sup>125</sup>. The *Albeldense*, *Rotense* and *A Sebastian* chronicles do not offer any date, but the three texts include the arrival of the Vikings in the reign of Ramiro, from 843 to 850, a period that matches perfectly with the more precise information provided by the previous texts. If we

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<sup>122</sup> See the work by F. Donald Logan, *The Vikings in History*, 1991, pp. 114-117.

<sup>123</sup> In fact, we don't know how long the civil war lasted in Asturias, or if there was still fighting when the Vikings came, which is not improbable. What we know is that different conflicts went on during the whole reign of Ramiro (843-850). For the political unrest in Asturias during this time, see the works by J. Uría Riu, *El reino de Asturias...*, 2005, pp. 149-288; and A. Besga, in 'El rey Nepociano de Asturias, monarca legítimo y vasco', in *Letras de Deusto*, 101, vol. XXXIII, 2003, pp. 9-41.

<sup>124</sup> See the articles by A. Fabricius ('Normannertogene...', 1897, p. 88), C. Sánchez Albornoz ('Invasiones normandas...', 1967, pp. 370-372), and J. Uría Riu, (*El reino de Asturias...*, 2005, pp. 193-199).

<sup>125</sup> There is a mistake in the chronology of this event in the *Prophetic Chronicle*, in which the monk notes the Viking arrival in the year *DCCCLXXX II kalendas Augustas*, July 31 of 842, Christian Era; but J. Uría suggested that the chronicler had committed an error separating the II from the rest of the date. If II belong to the Roman number, it means the date should be the first of August, 844. This date fits perfectly with the other Christian and Arab testimonies and have been accepted by all historians (see *ibidem*).

go deeper into the chronicles, we can date Viking presence in Northern Spain with even more accuracy. We know that the Vikings sacked Toulouse and the riverside villages of the Garonne, taking advantage of the civil war between Charles the Bald and his nephew Peppin II<sup>126</sup>. With the hope of regaining Toulouse, the capital of the Southern Aquitaine, Charles began the siege of it in springtime, but was forced to lift it after the disastrous defeat in Anguleme of the reinforcement army he was waiting for, slain by Peppin and his partisans. Maybe in the second half of July, Charles returned to the North without conquering Toulouse. The Vikings were established in Noirmoutier not far from there, and were aware of the hard situation of the place, so they fell on the city, as the *Annales Bertiniani* states<sup>127</sup>. After the sack of Toulouse, part of the fleet continued sailing southwest. We can link this account to that of the *Asturian Chronicles*, where we are told about the arrival of the 'Northmen' in August. The dates of Frankish and Spanish texts match quite well, and if there is any time lag, it is reduced to a few days. This is an unusually precise dating, considering we are talking about the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the chronology of the arrival of the Vikings to Muslim Spain fits almost perfectly with all the Christian chronicles. Muslim historians settled the apparition of the fleet at Lisbon at the end of the year 229<sup>128</sup> hijra, corresponding to the last month of summer in the year 844 of the Christian Era. This means that the Vikings stayed in Christian Spain from 15 to 20 days. This is, indeed, a very limited period for the visit.

We can consider the splitting of the fleet in Toulouse as the beginning of the expedition to Spain, where a portion of the fleet's members decided to sail south. This division could be due to discord among the Viking chiefs or just because several bands were acting independently, gathering only occasionally. The origin of these Vikings is not clear. The *Annales Bertiniani* consider them *Nordmanni*, and not *Danorum*, as they do in the second expedition to Spain. This moved some historians to think they were Norwegians<sup>129</sup>. P. H. Sawyer and F. Donald Logan, however, assumed that the Vikings who raided the continental shores since the 830s were Danish<sup>130</sup>. E. Roesdahl, when she analyzed the sack of Nantes in 843, wrote that it was an

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<sup>126</sup> These events are described in detail in the work by L. Auzias, *L'Aquitaine carolingienne (778-987)*, 1937, and also in F. Lot and L. Halphen, *Le règne de Charles le Chauve*, 1975, pp. 112-121.

<sup>127</sup> Janet L. Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 1991, p. 60.

<sup>128</sup> For the version by Ahmad Al Razi in *Al Muqtabis*, see note 61. The chronicle ascribed to Ibn al Qutiyya is independent to this of Ahmad al Razi, and states that the Vikings arrived in Seville in 230, which fits to perfection with the testimony of Ahmad. See note 51.

<sup>129</sup> For example, P. Griffith, in *The Viking Art of War*, 1995, p. 54.

<sup>130</sup> Connected to this, F. Donald Logan wrote: *The attacks upon Western Europe were predominantly Danish. Although occasional raids might have come from Norway or from Norwegians living in Ireland and*

international expedition, because Danes, as well as Norwegians and Swedes were taking part in it. This fleet is the same which next year navigated south to sail up the River Garonne. Later in the same year, part of it moved to the Iberian Peninsula with the ambition of searching for new lands and booty<sup>131</sup>. The fact that the *Annales Bertinianni* states they were *Nordmanni* – Northmen – does not mean they were necessarily Norwegians, because the term is used for Danes, Norwegians and Swedes alike.

Which motifs drove the Vikings towards Spain? According to the hypothesis by C. Sánchez Albornoz<sup>132</sup>, the Vikings had heard news about a rich Moorish kingdom, and they therefore followed the shores of Aquitania to the Southern mountainous coast. The Franks had frequently fought the Cordovan emirs on their borders. At the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslim raids were still reaching the inland parts of the Aquitanian kingdom<sup>133</sup>. The counts of the Spanish March and Gascony fought with Muslim chiefs at the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>134</sup>. Toulouse was a main base in the war against the emirate. We can see the military assemblies taking place there, in the time of Louis the Pious<sup>135</sup>. In any case, also if this hypothesis is not sufficient in itself to explain the Viking expansion, it is nevertheless obvious that the Vikings would not stop in their explorations to the south after having ravaged Aquitaine. After all, they didn't have any awareness of political borders, they simply went on with their reconnaissance voyage, in seeking for gold and glory. This is a far more plausible argument than the old suggestion which explained the arrival of the Vikings to Spain with a sea storm that pushed the Scandinavian fleet to the

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*although, given the mobility of the northern peoples, some non-Danish Vikings were in Danish raiding bands, the unalterable fact is that it was the Danes who constituted the principal threat to the West (...) the Danish raids on England were part of the same tapestry which included the Danish attacks on the Low Countries, France, Spain, the Balearic Islands, Morocco and Italy, (in The Vikings in history, 1991, pp. 113-114). See also P. H. Sawyer, The Age of the Vikings, 1962, pp. 1-3.*

<sup>131</sup> See her work *The Vikings*, 1998, p. 198.

<sup>132</sup> *The Scandinavian pirates would know soon the existence of faraway lands to the South with its riches. From there, they hear frequent news when they were sailing up the Garonne, from Bordeaux to Toulouse, in this neighboring territory to Spain. Their spirit of adventure pushed them more and more South every year, searching for new countries to ravage, (in 'Invasiones normandas...', 1969, pp. 373-374).*

<sup>133</sup> See the work by A. Pérez de Laborda, *Guía para la historia...*, 1996, p. 357).

<sup>134</sup> The *Asturian Chronicles* gather an entry about the capture of two Frankish counts by Musa ben Qasi in combat, in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century: *Postea in Francos et Gallos arma conuertit. Multos ibi strages et predas fecit. Duos uero Francorum magnos duces, unum nomine Sanctionem, alium Epulonem, per fraude cepit et eos uinctos in carcerem misit* (in the work by J. Gil, *Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, p. 147).

<sup>135</sup> An embassy sent by Alfonso II was received in Toulouse during the assembly of the autumn, 795: *Sequente porro tempore Tholosam venit rex et conuentum generalem ibidem habuit. Adefonsi Galleciarum Principis missos quos pro amicitia firmanda miserat cum donis, suscepit et pacifice remisit*, following the Astronomer, (in his chronicle, *Vita Hludowici*, quoted by C. Sánchez Albornoz, in *Orígenes...*, II, p. 532, n. 6).

West. Neither the chronicles nor the facts support it: they suffered a storm at sea, as it is stated in the *Annales Bertiniani*, but then they were already coming and were, in fact, not far from Gijón<sup>136</sup>.

The primary sources point to Asturias as the first landing place of the fleet. But we have to consider that the *Asturian Chronicles* have a biased perspective and a specific interest in the regions close to Oviedo and other parts of the kingdom such as Galicia, Castile and León, while the coasts are not within its main area of interest. However, it is obvious that the Vikings came by following the southern shores of the Gulf of Biscay, exploring and supplying for themselves.

The chronicle *A Sebastian* informs us about their arriving in the Asturian port of Gijón, probably at the beginning of August, 844. What did the Scandinavian sailors find there? The information we have about the ancient Roman *civitas* is minimal, but enough to confirm that there still was a town in the Early Middle Ages. Archaeology has confirmed the existence of a settlement on the peninsula of Santa Catalina – a small space, difficult to access and with excellent defense – and that it had walls from Late Roman times, which in part can explain why Gijón survived the invasions of the Heruls and Swabians<sup>137</sup>. It had some importance in the province at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the Arabs established a governor here, Munuza<sup>138</sup>. After the revolt of the Asturians, Munuza tried to escape, but he was killed on his way South<sup>139</sup>. From this point to the arrival of the Vikings – with the entry in the chronicle *A Sebastian*<sup>140</sup> – the silence is absolute. There were serious doubts about whether the place was populated in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, but C. Fernández Ochoa, an expert in the history of Gijón, thinks it

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<sup>136</sup> Concerning the first expedition, P. Dozy imagined that the Vikings were pushed to the port of Gijón by a storm on the sea, when they were sailing along the French coast. This hypothesis was rejected by J. Uría Rúa (in *El reino de Asturias...*, 2005, pp. 207-210). In spite of this, the proposal was restated by V. Almazán (in *Gallaecia Scandinavica*, 1986, p. 86) and E. Morales Romero, (in *Os viquingos en Galicia*, 1997, p. 89). The only proof we can find to imagine where the idea came from is an erroneous interpretation of the *Annales Bertiniani*. This chronicle states that the fleet suffered a storm in the sea when they were coming to the peninsula, but not that they arrived to Spain because of that storm. Besides, it is the *Annales Bertiniani* that explains how the fleet split up voluntarily, and afterwards moved to South (see note 11). The episode of the storm at the Cantabrian sea was repeated three centuries later in similar conditions, when the Northern Crusaders were sailing to the Holy Land around the Iberian Peninsula, in 1147 AD. They took shelter in Gijón again, but part of the fleet was already lost, (see the article by J. Uría Rúa, 'Los cruzados del norte en la costa de Asturias en 1147', in *El reino de Asturias...*, 2005, pp. 941-958).

<sup>137</sup> C. Fernández Ochoa and B. Martínez Díaz considered that the wall was built at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and that it was in use until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in their article 'Gijón, fortaleza romana en el Cantábrico', in *Cuadernos de Prehistoria y arqueología*, 13-14, 1986-87, pp. 185-204.

<sup>138</sup> See note 10.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122 y 124.

<sup>140</sup> See the 43.

was<sup>141</sup>. In any case, it makes no sense to imagine the chronicle mentioning the arrival of the Vikings to a deserted place.

Gijón was a strategic point for sailors, and the Scandinavians were perfectly conscious of this. Its inlet is wide and offers the only safe harbour in Asturias when the Cantabrian Sea is rough, with several beaches and a bay, and it can be reached without much danger during a sea storm. It is sheltered by a rocky quay with the shape of a half moon, which protects the harbored ships from the Northwest winds. It was the perfect port to land and replenish supplies after several days in the sea, probably during a strong storm that decimated part of the fleet, but we don't know exactly where. However, it is implausible that the Vikings should have passed by without resting or exploring the region, only because of the strength of the city walls<sup>142</sup>. We can't imagine that the same pirates who raided Toulouse and fought the king's armies in Galicia and the emir's hosts in Seville, would feel intimidated by the old defenses of a small port. Furthermore, the reticence of the chronicler when relating the episode, makes us think that it wasn't a pleasant event from the Asturian point of view. In any case, it seems the Viking landing was short in time: the chronology previously analyzed would not have allowed for a long stay, but just enough time to explore, raid some farms and to gather supplies.

On their way to Galicia, soon after leaving Gijon, the Vikings may had made some attempt to explore the river of Aviles, one of the few ones with enough flow to be navigable from the Cantabrian Sea. Earlier, Spanish historians were surprised that the Vikings did not sail up the course of the river in order finally to reach Oviedo over land<sup>143</sup>. In all the Asturian Kingdom, the king's seat at Oviedo was the most attractive of all bounties: the Vikings could have taken hostages and relics and demanded high ransoms. Based on the surviving

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<sup>141</sup> She wrote: *the city, no matter it had very little life – maybe because of the piracy of its time – shouldn't be deserted*, (in 'Gijón, fortaleza romana...', 1986-87, p. 187).

<sup>142</sup> For example, the Augustinean M. Risco, quoted by E. Morales Romero, thought that the walls of the village discouraged the Vikings from their intentions (see the work by E. Morales Romero, *Los vikingos en España*, 2004, p. 140). J. Uría Rúa, on the other hand, disallows this theory, very popular among the historians from Gijón, (in *El reino de Asturias...*, 2005, pp. 215-216).

<sup>143</sup> Fidel Fita suggested this possibility in his article entitled 'La insigne lápida de Oviedo', in *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, vol. XXXVIII, 1899, pp. 35-48. The distinguished Jesuit pointed to an attack on Oviedo because of the epigraph inscribed over the door of the old castle in the Asturian capitol, from the time of Alfonso III. In it, the king ordered to inscribe a text which among other things says: *Tensauri avlae huivs sanctae aecclesiae residendum indemnem caventes quod / absit dum navali gentilitas pirato solent exercitu properare ne videatur* (Ibid., p. 36; see also J. Uría, *El reino de Asturias...*, 2005, pp. 555-581, where this author transcribes all the stone plaque and outlines its history). But the inscription says nothing about the pirates arriving in Oviedo, it just expresses that the kings took serious the defense of the city, which was threatened in these years both by Vikings and Moslems.

documentation, however, we can argue that the Vikings did not attempt to move against Oviedo, or were incapable of it. First of all, there are no information about such attacks in the chronicles or charters describing the rebuilding of churches or pious donations, at least not from the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. And we know that the kings supported with determination the monasteries and churches damaged by the war<sup>144</sup>. It could perhaps be argued that the Christian chroniclers again were hiding information – which would not be applicable to diplomas – but then, what about the *Annales Bertiniani*? Its author Prudentius had access to good sources of information, to the point of that he could give details about the attacks in Galicia, but he relates nothing about Oviedo. And what happened to the Muslim chroniclers? They were well informed about the attack on Pamplona in 859, they were right with the date, and were not hesitant to give other details. If the Vikings had succeeded in occupying the capitol of their hated enemies, wouldn't they say have remarked it with joy in their chronicles? The sack of Oviedo would have had huge repercussions in the history of the Asturian Kingdom: all the administration of the state and the church was here, the tombs of the kings, the relics of several saints and the residence of the aristocratic magnates<sup>145</sup>. But without any sign in the documents and chronicles of an attack on Oviedo, without any other proof, we have to assume it did not take place.

Leaving apart more or less probable hypotheses about the Vikings' activity in the Cantabrian Sea, it is certain that they soon left Asturias to reach the coast of Galicia. This province offered the best conditions for invaders arriving from the sea, as is proved by the predilection the Vikings had for it. The conditions for navigation and landing are very suitable, especially in the area of the Gulf of Artabro and the 'Rías Bajas', and maybe the possibilities of gather booty were better than in others lands. The Vikings sailed along the North of Galicia without leaving any news of their activities or captures there, and then they moved to the gulf in the Northwestern side of the province, the ancient site of the tribe of the 'Artabros' in the

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<sup>144</sup> This is what happened after the sack of Oviedo in 795, when churches were destroyed and defiled. The king paid serious attention, some years later – when the great Muslim offensive of the late 8<sup>th</sup> century finally disappeared – and restored the church of San Salvador de Oviedo, which is testified in one of the most enigmatic documents of the Spanish Middle Ages, the *Testamentum Regis Adefonsi* (see the work in diplomacy by A. Floriano, *Diplomática española del período astur*, I, 1949, pp. 119-131). In 840, when Alfonso was still king, a Berber rebel against Cordova, called Mahmud, took shelter in the Asturias' Kingdom, and some years later he challenged Alfonso in his own kingdom, ravaging all the land around Lugo, in Galice. In a document from the year 841, given to the church of Lugo, the rebellion of Mahmud is mentioned, and the motifs of the reconstruction of the temple (A. Floriano considers it counterfeit in *ibid.*, pp. 204-210; after it was condemned by Floriano, C. Sánchez Albornoz vindicated it with strong arguments in *Galicia histórica. Estudios sobre Galicia en la temprana Edad Media*, 1981, p. 22, n. 3).

<sup>145</sup> See the pages dedicated by J. Uría Rúa to Oviedo in his work, *El reino de Asturias...*, 2005, pp. 423-613.

Antiquity. A huge lighthouse built by the Romans was located just on the seaside, with a height of more than a hundred meters. It shows the importance of the commerce in this area during the first centuries of the Christian Era<sup>146</sup>. C. Sánchez Albornoz thought that the colossal lighthouse attracted the Vikings, who were sailing close to the land<sup>147</sup>. In this case, there was a village, an old Roman *portus* called by geographer Ptolemy *Flavium Brigantium*<sup>148</sup> – *Farum Breccantium* in the *Asturian Chronicles*–, a populated place wasted by the Vikings<sup>149</sup>. The chronicles tell us about some Asturian counts and dukes who faced the Scandinavian seamen, so there was probably men in the area with delegated royal authority, responsible for the safety of the region. It is not certain whether King Ramiro took part in the military operations, because the *Asturian Chronicles* contradict each other on this point. However, he was an old or very old king, so we can hardly think of him in the scene of battle.

We don't know if the Vikings took control of the region and the village of *Flavium Brigantium* and later were expelled, or if they were defeated on the first days of their landing. We know, thanks to the chronicles, that some combats took place, resulting in the withdrawal of the Viking forces and the seizure by the locals of several ships, which were sunk or burned. The late *Silense* chronicle exaggerates the number of destroyed boats: sixty<sup>150</sup>. Moreover, it is curious that the *Silense* follows the *Rotense* text in all related to the Asturian kings, and the latter chronicle says nothing about numbers, so we can deduce that the Leonese monk imagined the number or took it from doubtful traditions.

In any case, this detail about numbers awakens our curiosity about the magnitude of the Viking fleet. Contemporary authors give us very different information, and historians tend to

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<sup>146</sup> Professors C. Fernández Ochoa and A. Morillo Cerdan do not mention anything about the antiquity of the lighthouse, but confirm that the peak of commercial trade in the Gulf of Artabro was between the ending of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD (in 'La ruta marítima...', 1994, p. 227). The lighthouse is no older than the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century or the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

<sup>147</sup> In 'Invasiones normandas...', 1968, p. 375.

<sup>148</sup> It is not certain where the Roman colony of *Flavium Breccantium* was established. Ptolemy located it during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in the Gulf of Artabro. In the present article, I am following the judgement of C. Fernández Ochoa and A. Morillo Cerdan, in their article 'La ruta marítima...', 1994, p. 227, where they identify the place with the present day city of La Coruña, in the peninsula where the lighthouse is located. J. Uría Ríu thought similarly (in 'El reino de Asturias...', 2005, p. 221); on the other hand, C. Sánchez Albornoz (in 'Invasiones normandas...', 1968, p. 375) argued that it was Betanzos, not far from La Coruña, but according to C. Fernández Ochoa y A. Morillo Cerdan, archeological excavations are not supporting him.

<sup>149</sup> The Vikings probably found a population there, no matter that it was small, and maybe a royal agent, the count of Faro, as it was suggested by J. Uría Ríu (see the following lines).

<sup>150</sup> *Traditisque igni navibus numero LX, onustus preda ad propria incolumis reducitur*, in the *Historia Silense*, edited by F. Santos Coco, 1921, p. 29.



increase or decrease the size of the navies proposing shifting new interpretations<sup>151</sup>. To estimate the number of an army in the Middle Ages is not an easy task, because data are extremely scarce, or rather nonexistent for the Christian Spain during the 9<sup>th</sup> century. However, the same Viking army that landed in Northern Spain moved on to the Southern part of the peninsula, where the Cordovan emirate had its seat. The Moslem chroniclers left generous descriptions of the Viking fleets, with frequent references to the number of foes faced. But we have to be cautious, because the numbers in the chronicles weren't an objective measure, with statistical or administrative value, but most of the time a 'symbolic tool' on the Moslem side as well as on the Christian one. In the chronicles, it was used to show impressions, ideas, feelings or propaganda<sup>152</sup>. Because of this, every effort to calculate the size of the fleet will be fragile. On the one hand, all we can say is that the conditions for supplying a fleet in the North of Spain were so complicated, that a huge army would have been defeated by hunger before facing any foe. That's the reason why probably no more than a thousand men could have taken part in this adventure<sup>153</sup>. This conclusion is extensible also to the fleet of the second expedition to Spain.

On the other hand, we have to consider that there seems to have been a different number of Vikings in the events in Galicia and in Seville. It was relatively easy to dispatch them in the North in contrast to the serious problems they caused in the emirate of Cordova. There is an entry in the chronicle by Ahmad al Razi relating the arrival of the '*Mayus*' to Al Andalus, which shows clearly that there was not a case of a compact and collected fleet, but of groups moving at different moments<sup>154</sup>. We don't know whether these groups were autonomous – we can remember the group splitting from the main fleet in Toulouse – or whatever they were commanded by a recognized leader, but it seems they all reunited in Seville encouraged by a plentiful booty. Supposing this is true, it is logical that the emir called to arms in order to stop

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<sup>151</sup> The debate about the size of the fleets is gathered in an article by Gareth Williams, in the work *The Viking World*, 2009, pp. 193-203, with copious bibliography.

<sup>152</sup> M. P. Zaldívar Bouthelier, professor from the university of Zaragoza, wrote the following lines in her article about the fiction in the Hispanic-Arab chronicles: *We should not trust the numbers given by the chronicles because these are usually inaccurate, when not made up, but the fact that the author does relate a battle in which 'more than four thousand men' died, it's a signal of his wishes to praise the event as a great deed.* From the three chronicles she studied in her article, the common points are: *the increase of the enemy force, the manipulation of the numbers...* (in '*La ficción en las crónicas andalusíes*', in *Aragón en la Edad Media*, 18, 2004, pp. 38 y 42).

<sup>153</sup> The problem in the Early Middle Ages was not to gather more or less men, but to keep them supplied and disciplined, a true challenge for any warlord of these ages, (see the work by P. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 1971, pp. 128-130).

<sup>154</sup> Ahmad al Razi described how a fleet of Northmen entered in Seville by surprise, see note 61.

the invaders. It is important to remember that Cordova, the capital of the emirate, was very close to Seville and easy to reach by sailing up the Guadalquivir river. If the fleets were divided, it may be because they were commanded by several leaders, or maybe because a storm in the sea scattered the ships, or as a strategy to simplify the supply of the fleet. This doesn't mean they didn't gather to elaborate on plans or share information, as they probably did in Lisbon, where they were attracted by its spacious bay and peaceful waters, in the estuary of the Tagus river. The big fleet which caused alarm to the governor of Lisbon was probably the main body of the whole Viking navy, completing its plans and reorganizing because of the proximity of the big and opulent cities of Al Andalus.

This naval force would have been a serious threat to the Asturian kingdom. But it wasn't so problematic for the kings of Oviedo as it was for the emirs of Cordova. The quickness taken to repel the attack invites us to think it was staged by an advance party or a small fleet. A group with the capacity to terrorize a region, assault a defenseless city and provoke a shock in the population. It is interesting to remember that, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Idatius didn't find it strange that four hundred Heruls could devastate the Cantabrian coasts from West to East, at a time when these were by far more populated<sup>155</sup>. Others bands of Vikings could have been confronted with or without success in different places of the Northern Spain, but if it happened, the monastic chroniclers avoided to mention it.

After their activities in the Galician lands, the Vikings boarded again to march south. It is not difficult to imagine them making other assaults in the Southern coasts of Galicia, especially in the 'Rías Bajas'. But the alarm they caused in the province and the date of their arrival in Al Andalus, do not allow us to think of prolonged or crucial events<sup>156</sup>.

We know nothing about the return. If we count that the Vikings were more than a month in Al Andalus, and that they did reach its coasts in the second half of August, we may think it happened when September was finishing or at the beginning of October. Reading the

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<sup>155</sup> It's obvious that a small army can be very harmful when the opposite forces are far away and the fortifications are few and weak, and it isn't easy to get rid of it without a stronger host, which is expensive and slow to gather and move. We don't know if they were exactly four hundred Heruls – the number is not improbable – but it is remarkable that Idatius did not find strange that such a limited force could have been so damaging (see note 115).

<sup>156</sup> The later traditions that the Vikings arrived at Chantada, in the core of Galicia, during this expedition lack historical foundation. E. Morales Romero (in *Historia de los vikingos en España*, 2004, pp. 142-144) gave credit to very late chronicles that referred an attack on this village, but they contain a number of anachronisms and can't hold against historical criticism. These chronicles were written to elevate an aristocratic family, supposedly related to a hero in the fighting against the Vikings. No contemporary chronicles or documents proves the existence of such a character.

Arab chronicles, we must conclude that the status of the fleet at this point was disastrous: we have to take into consideration a high mortality, loss of part of the ships and in addition horrid human conditions. We can still follow them in a few assaults in the Gulf of Cadiz and the Atlantic coast, with Lisbon as the last point of reference<sup>157</sup>. Only one source relates their returning trip along the Christian Spain there, and it is so unclear and contradictory that it does not deserve too much credibility<sup>158</sup>.

### *Second expedition to Spain*

While the kingdom of Charles the Bald was facing harsh wars against Bretons, Aquitanians, Germans and Vikings<sup>159</sup>, the situation in Spain was not better. Family quarrels and tribal hatred were the cause of instability and weakness of the emirate of Al Andalus since the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>160</sup>. In the North, wars of succession and territorial conflicts were on the stage, a situation that benefited the Vikings. In this expedition, which lasted at least two years (858-859), the Vikings went along the Spanish coasts, from where they arrived at the south of France and finally established themselves in an island called Camargue, in the mouth of the Rhône. The following year, in 859, the Viking fleet split: part of it returned to Noirmoutier, while another group stayed in the Mediterranean, sacking French and Italian coasts<sup>161</sup>.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibn Hayyan ignores this information in his chronicle, although Ahmad Al Razi did record it in his, as it is contained in Al Atir, who wrote in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and followed Al Razi (see note 96).

<sup>158</sup> In the *History of Seville* by Alfihri, the author wrote a paragraph about the return of the Vikings, based on Isa b. Ahmad Al Razi, (see note 78).

<sup>159</sup> See the *Annales Bertiniani*, where the entries year after year refer to all these conflicts (in Janet L. Nelson, *The annals of St-Bertin*, 1991).

<sup>160</sup> By reading the Moslem chronicles, one can gain an impression of how far advanced the internal disintegration was in the Andalusian emirate. Most of their pages are dedicated to the continuous wars, vengeance, betrayals and assassinations, that the emirs were not capable of controlling, (see the work by Ibn Hayyan, *Crónica de los emires...*, 2001, translated by F. Corriente and M. J. Viguera).

<sup>161</sup> In the entry referring to the year 860, the *Annales Bertiniani* tell about the presence of Danish pirates along the French and Italian coasts: *Hi vero Dani qui in Rodano morabantur usque ad Valentiam civitatem vastando perveniunt. Unde, direptis quae circa erant omnibus, revertentes, ad insulam in qua sedes posuerant redeunt (...) Dani qui in Rodano fuerant Italiam petunt et Pisas civitatem aliasque capiunt depraedantur atque devastant*, (G. Waitz, *Quellen zum Karolingischen...*, 1883, p. 102). In fact, the *Asturian Chronicles* inform us about the arrival of the Vikings to Greece, and in the work by Ibn al Qutiyah the compiler affirms that they attacked Alexandria.

## Analysis

This expedition was an audacious enterprise which looked for new shores to sack in the south of Europe. Their journey through Spain left few traces in the sources; the Vikings raided the coasts of the Iberian Peninsula only as a means to reach the Mediterranean France.

The chronology of the second expedition which affected Spain presents a number of unsolved problems. There are, however, ways of reconciling the apparently contradictory testimonies of the sources.<sup>162</sup> The most ancient source presenting a precise chronology is the *Prophetic Chronicle*, which points to July 858 as the date of the Vikings' second arrival to Asturias. This is corroborated by Al Bakri, writing that the *Mayus* landed in Nekor – present day Nador, in Morocco – after leaving the coasts of Spain in 244 H., which corresponds to 858 in the Christian Era. The two chronicles have no signs of being mutually dependent. The first is Christian and was written two centuries before the Arab, probably in Asturias. By comparing the texts, it is obvious these are not related. Taken together, the two sources are strong evidences in favour of the year 858 as the date of arrival of the second expedition. But a similar case could be argued for the year 859, because one Christian chronicle from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and several interrelated Moslem chronicles originating in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, point to this it as the year of the expedition. They are the *Annales Bertiniani*, and the court-chronicler of the caliphs, Ahmad al Razi. The original version of Al Razi is not conserved, but we have several texts which are indebted to this author: the *Al Muqtabis II-II* by Ibn Hayyan, the chronicle of Al Atir, the *Bayan Al Mugrib* by Ibn Idari, and the work by Ibn Jaldun, all of which place the attack to Nekor and others places in 859 AD. We can't expect any dependency between the Frankish annals and the Andalusian historiography, so the reliability of this date should be seriously considered. Is there a way to reconcile both groups of sources? Yes, it is actually possible to do it without forcing against the sources, and we will see how.

All the texts, both those pointing to the year 858 and those to 859, must describe the same expedition. To imagine two equal attacks in the same scenarios two consecutive years is implausible. Al Bakri – in the 11<sup>th</sup> century – got his information about the Vikings' landing in

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<sup>162</sup> A. Fabricius considered that the expedition lasted from 859 to 861, thesis which ignores the information offered by the *Prophetic Chronicle* and Al Bakri. Both texts point the year 858 (see his work 'Normannertogene...', 1897, pp. 114-115). C. Sánchez Albornoz could not conclude any explanation for this contradiction, and believed that they attacked the North of Spain in 858 and the South in 859, but this is not a solution – what about the landing in Nekor in 858?–, (see *Orígenes del reino de Pamplona*, 1985, pp. 75-77). E. Morales Romero did not analyze the chronologic problem for the second expedition, (see his work *Historia de los vikingos en España*, 2004, pp. 139-140 y 159-174).

Nekor from a source independent from Ahmad al Razi – from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. He probably took it from an African text not connected to the court-chronicler<sup>163</sup>. This is obvious, because the chroniclers depending on Al Razi ignored most of the details given by Al Bakri. The richness of the entry by the geographer induces us to consider him as a greater authority in this case. Moreover, the aim showed by the *Prophetic Chronicle* in dating the previous expedition of 844 AD, is a fact to consider when situating in time the second one.

The reliability showed by the *Prophetic Chronicle* and the work by Al Bakri don't disrupt the version of the texts linked to Ahmad al Razi and the *Annales Bertiniani*. But the account by Prudentius in the quoted Frankish annals focused its reference to what happened in France. His description of the journey through the strait of Gibraltar is just incidental. The main events of this year 858 took part in Spain and Northern Africa; the arrival to France happened at the end of the year, the Vikings just established there the winter-quarters. But the activity along the Rhône was developed in the following year, so Prudentius pointed to 859 as the date of the expedition. How, then, can we explain the indications given by the Arab chronicles, indebted to Ahmad al Razi? They all pointed to 859 as the date of the second expedition to Spain, and there is no doubt: they did so because Al Razi had chosen this year. If we read again the entries given by the Arab chroniclers when writing the history of this second arrival, we note that they are describing events that happened during two years, the arrival of the Vikings in 858, and their departure in 859. Ibn Idari specifies that the Vikings spent the wintertime in a city, identified by Prudentius as Camargue. There is an anomaly in the annals, when they try to fit the events of two years in one entry, where they normally are arranged year by year. Did Al Razi write the entry as a whole, and have the others just copied his mistake? Or have Al Razi decided to present the Vikings' two years trip as one event, to make it more easily understood? We don't know. But there is only one conclusion: the expedition was dated in the returning year, instead of the arriving one, in 245H or 859 AD.

A cunning reader could object, however, that Ahmad al Razi may have dated the arrival, not the departure. In this case, the expedition would have had place during the years 859 and 860. In fact, there are some sources describing Viking presence in the South of France and Italy

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<sup>163</sup> He gives us more information than any other chronicle about the Viking arrival at Mauretania: *The Madjus –god curses them!– landed close to Necur in the year 244, then they took the city, sacked it and enslaved its population, except from two inhabitants who fled. Among the prisoners, there was Ama-ar-Rahman and Janula, daughters of Wâkif Ibn-Motacim Ibn Sâlih, ransomed by the imam Mohammed Ibn Abderraman. The Mayus stayed for eight days in Necur*, (extracted from the work by P. Dozy, *Los vikingos en España*, 1987, p. 32).

during the year 860<sup>164</sup>. There is only one manner to explain this. The fleet probably split, part of it returned to the North of Europe, and the rest stayed in the Mediterranean for three years, as some chronicles stated<sup>165</sup>. There are several texts pointing the activities of the fleet in the African and Spanish coasts during 858, so we have to take this date as our starting point for the chronology. Furthermore, when the battle of Albelda was fought in summer 859, García, lord of Pamplona, was already ransomed from the Vikings<sup>166</sup>. If they took him prisoner on their return we would deduce that they were in Cantabrian waters in the springtime of 859.

After all this discussion of the chronology of the expedition, it can be concluded that the journey began in the Atlantic French coast in spring-summer of 858 and that at least part of the fleet returned back from Camargue in 859<sup>167</sup>.

What can we say about the motives that moved the Vikings – it seems they were mainly Danes<sup>168</sup> – to return to Spain, fifteen years after their first trip? We know that they were very active along the big French rivers, raiding cities without much opposition from the Frankish authorities. Charles the Bald bought an expensive peace from the Vikings in 858, and these Scandinavian chiefs probably felt engaged by their word to depart<sup>169</sup>. If that happened, it is not

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<sup>164</sup> See the *Annales Bertiniani* in its entry about 860, (note 12).

<sup>165</sup> See the note 44.

<sup>166</sup> The chronicle of Ibn Al Atir, *The same year* [as the Viking attack on Pamplona, 245H., 859d.C.] *the governor of Tarazona* [Musa b. Musa] *led an expedition against Pamplona, and conquered the castle of Ichan (?), taking its inhabitants as hostages; the following day there was a battle where lots of Moslems died defending their faith*, (in the work by A. Pérez de Laborda, *Guía para la historia...*, 1996, p. 345), and the *Anales Castellanos I* (*In era DCCCLXVIII populavit domnus Ordonius Legione et in tertio anno sic fregit...*, in the work by C. Sánchez Albornoz, *Orígenes del reino de Pamplona...*, 1985, p. 150). There is a third testimony, because the *Asturian Chronicles* referred to a battle which took place the same year in which Lope ben Musa – son of Musa ben Musa – gained the prefecture of Toledo (*Musa... multas ciuitates partim gladio partium fraude inuasit... Postremo uero Toletum ubi filium suum Lupum posuit prefectum*, in the work by J. Gil, *Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, p. 146). C. Sánchez Albornoz defended with good arguments that Lope was elected by the people of Toledo in 859 (see his work *Orígenes del reino de Pamplona...*, 1985, p. 143, n. 107). We will analyze this problem more thoroughly in the following pages.

<sup>167</sup> C. Sánchez Albornoz did not imagine that the Muslim chroniclers could not fit a two years entry into some annals arranged year by year: *Some authors refer, too, that the Northman attack on Al Andalus was after the rendition of Toledo to [emir] Mohammed in 859*. It is obvious that the information on the Vikings breaks the chronological order of other information pertaining to previous or coming years. Ibn Idari, Ibn Jaldun and Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada set the rendition of Toledo before the Northmen expedition. However, if the return of the *mayus* took place after the surrender of Toledo, the text location of this new, which covered from summer of 858 to a subsequent moment of Toledo's subjugation – in 859 – it would had been an insurmountable problem in any case, (see the work *Orígenes del Reino de Pamplona...*, 1985, pp. 76-77).

<sup>168</sup> The *Annales Bertiniani* called them *Pyratae Danorum*, (in the work by G. Waitz, *Quellen zum karolingischen...*, 1883, p. 100).

<sup>169</sup> Moreover – says S. Coupland – *on every occasion when the King paid tribute, the Northmen kept their word and left the kingdom soon afterwards, never to return. Those historians who have written about the*

rare that they looked for other countries to waste, leading their fleets south. Their new movements through Spain did not mean they discovered new attractions in the Peninsula, but it was the only way to reach the Mediterranean.

We know almost nothing in relation with the second arrival of the Vikings to the Asturian Kingdom, in 858, except that it was brief. Their travel along the Cantabrian Sea didn't leave any new, and the *Asturian Chronicles* focused its lines on what happened in Galicia. In the previous pages, I argued for the logistic importance of the Galician coast for any sailor who was crossing the Cantabrian Sea: its waters are more placid, there are quite big islands close to the shore, and the rivers that flow into the Atlantic in the Southern part of the province are wide and pleasant, and advance deep into the land, like fjords. It is difficult to imagine a place where Vikings could have felt more comfortable as navigators in all the Northern Spain.

Their landing in Galicia during 858, in any case, is very badly known. The *Asturian Chronicles*, against its interest, took the liberty to explain us what the Vikings did in Al Andalus and Greece!, but nothing in relation to the Christian Kingdom they belonged to. With the exception of the *Albeldense Chronicle*, with its usual scarcity, they all narrate a landing and a battle between the Vikings and a count called Petro, favourable to the Christian arms. This count is an enigmatic character and not mentioned in any other chronicles or documents. Nothing can be said with any historical accuracy about the location where the combat took place, or anything else about this mysterious episode.

The tradition about the Viking attack on Santiago de Compostela during this expedition deserves special attention, because it can not be substantiated from any known sources<sup>170</sup>. Earlier historians were eager to collect information on this issue, and were very receptive to doubtful information from later texts, supported by obvious anachronisms. According to these

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*tributes in largely negative terms have undoubtedly been coloured by the criticism of the clerical writers of the day*, (in his article 'The Frankish tribute payments to the Vikings and their consequences', in the digital journal *Francia*, vol. XXVI, 1, 1999, p. 11). A. Fabricius mentions several Frankish chroniclers who gives names of Viking chiefs of this expedition, such as Bjørn Ironside and Hasting. This possibility is acceptable: we know Bjørn earned a ransom from Charles the Bald in 858 (see *Ibidem*), and obliged by his word, he probably looked for new lands to send his expeditions (in 'Normannertogene...', 1897, p. 117).

<sup>170</sup> This myth is presented as a fact in the works by V. Almazán, *Gallaecia Scandinavica*, 1986, pp. 93-94; E. Morales, *Historia de los vikingos en España*, 2004, p. 160; N. Price, *The Viking world*, 2008, pp. 462-469. This tradition is presented as a historical fact in the popular culture of Spain, and it reemerges as a true event in a number of works by specialists. Its lack of rigor was long ago denounced by C. Sánchez Albornoz: *This one [Santiago de Compostela] was too unknown and small to attract unquestionably the Norman greediness. Truly, we ignore which beaches they visited and the radius of their raids*, in 'IncurSIONes normandas...', 1968, p. 380).

sources, during the summer of the year 858, the Vikings sailed up the Arosa river after the sack of *Iria Flavia*, and arrived at Santiago, where they laid siege to the city. To save the holy site from destruction, the inhabitants paid a ransom to the Vikings, who, contrary to what everybody thought, stayed and upheld the siege. At this moment, the count Petro and his troops arrived and fought the Vikings and forced them to lift the siege. Conscious of the vulnerability of *Iria* in the coast of Galicia – it was, in fact, the see of the bishopric – king Ordoño I wrote to the Pope Nicholas II requesting the transfer of the see to Santiago, which the Pontiff granted<sup>171</sup>.

First of all, in 858 Santiago was neither a city nor a village, but a rural *locus*<sup>172</sup>, established during the twenties of the 9<sup>th</sup> century by Alfonso II. The idea was to consecrate a site for the Apostolic worship, in the place identified as the tomb of the son of Zebedeus. The sacred *locus* was occupied by a church dedicated to Saint James, the baptistry of Saint John, a residence for the bishop and a monastic complex where there was another, smaller church, Saint Salvador<sup>173</sup>. F. López Alsina, the main researcher of the origin of the city of Santiago, proposed that the ecclesiastical *locus* extended for two centuries, between 850-1050, from the original humble religious site, to a walled city. On this background, it is difficult to imagine Santiago as a populated and rich town in 858.

Secondly, there were no walls around the *locus sanctum* in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Without walls, the sack of the place wouldn't have required any siege. The building of the fortifications in Santiago happened in several stages. The first of these phases was carried out by the bishop Sisnando II (died in 968), due to the demographic expansion and fame the city was acquiring internationally. Thus it really became the objective of pirates, Vikings as well as Moslems<sup>174</sup>. F.

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<sup>171</sup> The tale is extracted from a document given by Diego Gelmírez to the chapter of Iria in 1134, (in the work by E. López Ferreiro, *Monumentos Antiguos de la Iglesia Compostelana*, 1882, pp. 8-11). The charter contains obvious anachronisms, for example, the reference of Ordoño as king of León, which was not the see of the monarchy until half a century later.

<sup>172</sup> *The new territorial delimitation (...) is qualified in the documentation as a locus sanctus, term with a high technic sense in the writings of the period. In general, the word locus refers to a geographical area close to the church, attributed to the ecclesiastical community that pays attention to it. And thus, it is applied also to the ecclesiastical centre,* (in the work by F. López Alsina, *La ciudad de Santiago de Compostela en la Alta Edad Media*, 1988, p. 130).

<sup>173</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 137-145.

<sup>174</sup> The information is offered by the *Iriense* chronicle, and attributes the construction to he previously quoted bishop: *Ne forte beatissimi apostoli Iacobi venerabile corpus an illorum hostium occupatione subito tolleretur, largita architectis munificentia, ac plebibus laborum implicitis, circumquaque eundem Locum Sanctum menium, turriumque ac profundis vallorum fossis aqua circumfusa, ut Locus Sanctus totus esset, summopere cingi precepit,* (in *Ibid.*, p. 144). Historians have not given much credit to the *Chronicon Iriense*, a manipulated text forged by the Galician reformist clergy of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but this paragraph is usually



López Alsina did not reject that there could have been some kind of defense in the original foundation – maybe a wooden palisade – but it remains just a hypothesis without archeological evidence.

In addition to the Vikings' unusual breaking of their word after receiving the ransom<sup>175</sup>, we can as the third argument point to the transfer of the episcopal see from Iria to Santiago, which is an idea conforming to the Gregorian reformist thought of the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>176</sup>. Ordoño's letter to the Pope Nicholas I does not exist in any cartulary: neither in those charts analyzed by L. Barrau-Dihigo in his revolutionary history of the Asturian Kingdom<sup>177</sup>, nor in the diplomatic study by A. Floriano Cumbreño<sup>178</sup>, or in the more recent work by professor M. Lucas Álvarez<sup>179</sup>. The letter does not exist. It could of course have been lost, but we know, thanks to the research of F. López Alsina on Santiago, that the bishop of *Iria* had installed himself in Santiago since the discovery of the sepulchre – during the twenties-thirties of the 9<sup>th</sup> century – and not after the Viking attack. But in accordance with canonical law, the see was not transferred to Santiago until 1095.<sup>180</sup>

If we add to all these evidences the fact that no document of those years refer to any reconstruction of the churches in the years after 858 – there are, however, donations to Santiago without mentioning any attack or destruction<sup>181</sup> – we can induce that the tale was probably elaborated on in the 12<sup>th</sup> century or later, and that it has no validity for our study.

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accepted as reliable. In any case, the prestige Santiago was gaining during the 10<sup>th</sup> century makes the effort to raise strong walls against unwanted visitors logical.

<sup>175</sup> See the note 169.

<sup>176</sup> The Asturian kings dealt with the restauration of the church in their domains as they conquered new lands in detriment of the Moslem authorities, recovering Visigothic bishoprics that had either been ruined or preserved during the Islamic rule. When they wanted, the kings founded new bishoprics to satisfy the needs of the kingdom. No Popes were involved in this process. The kingdom of Asturias existed for two centuries with no link with the Papacy, (see the work by F. J. Fernández Conde, *La religiosidad medieval en España*, I, 2000, pp. 451-460; see also T. Deswarte work, *Une Chretienté romaine sans pape: l'Espagne et Rome (586-1085)*, Paris, 2010).

<sup>177</sup> He carried out an exhaustive analysis of the documentation conserved about the Asturian Kingdom, (in *Historia política del reino asturiano (718-910)*, 1989; the original work in French was published as a long article in *Revue Hispanique*, 52, 'Recherches sur l'histoire du Royaume Asturien (718-910)', 1921).

<sup>178</sup> *Diplomática española del período astur...*, I and II, 1949.

<sup>179</sup> *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media...*, 1995.

<sup>180</sup> See the work by F. López Alsina, *La ciudad de Santiago...*, 1988, pp. 154-155. The letter from the Pope Nicholas I could have existed, I'm not going to deny that. But in this case, it would have been another creation of the clergy from the 12<sup>th</sup> to insist in Compostela's antiquity, aimed to legitimize and empower their claims in the Spanish national ecclesiastical primacy over the restablished see of Toledo – conquered back to Christianity in 1085.

<sup>181</sup> A document dated in 858 –it does not mention whether it was given before or after the summer – grants a donation to the church of Santiago. To this one, we have to add the previous donation made by

Similarly the research on the Viking attack against the Christian city of Pamplona is highly problematic. Our knowledge of the episode is poor, because the Basque capitol, sited in the Arga valley, South of the Pyrenees, is even more obscure in sources than the Cantabrian region. It was established in the middle of a crossroad of belligerent neighbors – Franks to the North, Asturians to the West, and Moslems all along in the Ebro valley. Its sovereigns managed to preserve their independence, dealing diplomatically with the surrounding powers, and arranging marriages with the strongest families of the area. Because of this, during the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the ruling family of Pamplona – the Aristas – was closely related to the powerful lineage of the Banu Qasi, a Moslem clan rooted in the Ebro Valley. The patriarch of these Banu Qasi was Musa ben Musa, brother by mother of Iñigo Arista, lord of Pamplona. But Iñigo died in 852, and the relations between the Aristas and the Banu Qasi cooled down. During this decade, the feelings between them worsened, and Iñigo's son, García of Pamplona, looked for the support of Ordoño, the Asturian king, to secure his independence<sup>182</sup>.

The attack on Pamplona is unquestionable, because the Arabs chroniclers and the subsequent events endorse it<sup>183</sup>. However, it is a problematic matter to fix a date or to plot the route the Vikings followed. These points have been cause of controversy. A. Fabricius studied the attack without any discussion of date or itinerary<sup>184</sup>. C. Sánchez Albornoz pleaded to establish the raid in the year 858, and considered the battle for Pamplona the first event in the second Spanish expedition<sup>185</sup>. J. M. Lacarra, in his work about politic history of the kingdom of Navarra, offered the date of 859 – during the return – but without going deeper into the issue<sup>186</sup>. He

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Alfonso II in 834. There is no mention to any violence against the sepulcher, (see the work by A. Floriano, *Diplomática española...*, I, 1949, pp. 259-260; not all the scholars accept the authenticity of the diploma). From the times of Ordoño (850-866) there is another donation charter given to Santiago by Alfonso, the son of the king, when he was just a child and of course not the ruler of the kingdom, which makes the diploma controversial. In any case, this document does not mention any attack against Santiago or church rebuilt, (M. Lucas Álvarez thinks the chart is authentic, in *El reino de León en la Alta Edad Media...*, VIII, 1995, pp. 117-118).

<sup>182</sup> The origins of the kingdom of Pamplona were studied by J. M. Lacarra in several works, for example *Historia política del reino de Navarra desde sus orígenes hasta su incorporación a Castilla*, I, 1972; C. Sánchez Albornoz also wrote on this issue, in *Orígenes del reino de Pamplona...*, 1985; see also A. Martín Duque in *Historia de España* by R. Menéndez Pidal, *Los núcleos pirenaicos (718-1035)*, vol. VII-2, 1999, pp. 39-266.

<sup>183</sup> See the following pages. There isn't doubt that something serious happened in the Ebro valley during these times, which tipped the balance in favor of the Asturian kingdom, and everything points that the change of alliances in Pamplona was rushed by the Viking attack.

<sup>184</sup> In his work 'Normannertogene...', 1897, pp. 119-120.

<sup>185</sup> In *Orígenes del reino de Pamplona...*, 1985, pp. 73-85

<sup>186</sup> See the work *Historia política del reino de Navarra...*, vol. I, 1972, pp. 68-69.

shared the opinion of his master Sánchez Albornoz that the incursion of the pirates took place through the Basque lands. V. Almazán, in his work *Gallaecia Scandinavica*<sup>187</sup>, suggested that the Vikings sailed up the Ebro river in 859, influenced by an old hypothesis by E. Levi-Provençal<sup>188</sup>. Recently, E. Morales argued that the assault on the Arga valley and its capitol happened in the journey of return, but he expresses his doubts about the route – along the Ebro river or through the Basquelands from the Cantabric Sea – stating that *any opinion can be as feasible as the others*<sup>189</sup>. We will see that by consulting the Arab sources we can conclude a precise way of penetration and an accurate date.

First, all the chronicles agree in situating the plunder of Pamplona on the returning journey of the Vikings in 859. It goes for the works by Ibn Hayyan, Al Atir, Al Nuwairi and Ibn Jaldun, previously quoted. C. Sánchez Albornoz offered only fragile arguments against the unanimity of the chroniclers: he considered that the Arab historians, when writing about the Vikings raids, postponed the Pamplonese venture because it lacked interest for them<sup>190</sup>. But this isn't true, because all these chroniclers followed a linear tale that linked coherently the facts which happened in Al Andalus with the events in Pamplona. Additionally, he considered that the pirates were too weak and tired on their return for such a deed. We can't assess the Vikings tiredness or feebleness on the basis of such poor sources. The 858 defense of C. Sánchez Albornoz must be dismissed, because is unsustainable from the sources, which point undoubtedly to the year 859.

When we speak about the place in which the Vikings landed, we can state that it happened in the Cantabric Sea, either after sailing up a river, or on the coast and continuing to Pamplona by feet. To imagine the Vikings going along the Ebro river is contradicted both by the version of the chronicles and by logic<sup>191</sup>. Ibn Al Atir declares that in the year 245H. (859 AD.), after having lost two ships fighting against Muhammad's fleet, the Vikings advanced to

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<sup>187</sup> See his work *Gallaecia Scandinavica*, 1986, p. 95.

<sup>188</sup> In *España musulmana. 711-1031*, in *Historia de España* by R. Menéndez Pidal, IV, 1950, p 203.

<sup>189</sup> In the work *Historia de los vikingos...*, 2004, p. 172.

<sup>190</sup> *The Arab chroniclers* – he wrote – *interested in showing the events related with the Muslim Spain, would have referred the attack on the Basque country after their tale of those raids happened in Al Andalus, not because those were late in time, but because it had only a secondary interest, (in Orígenes del reino de Pamplona...*, 1985, p. 77).

<sup>191</sup> In the case the they would have sailed up the Ebro river, there would certainly have been some traces of it in the Arab chronicles. Along the flow of Ebro, there were big and populated cities, important politically as well as economically, for example Zaragoza, Tudela or Tarazona. In fact, Musa b. Musa was the governor of the March, and his reaction would have been very outstanding – the chronicles gave him a lot of prominence – to the point of filling a lot of lines in every Arab text.

Pamplona, where they captured García. This testimony doesn't allow us to reach any firm conclusion, because Al Atir doesn't specify where the naval combat took place. But if we combine his chronicle with that of Ibn Idari the situation is different. The latter doesn't mention the capture of García by the Vikings, but does describe the itinerary followed by them, and asserts that the fight between Muhammad's ships and the Scandinavian fleet was held in the coast of Sidonia, which is the Gulf of Cádiz. This information is perfectly reliable, because we can easily imagine the Moslem fleet protecting the most populated and rich regions of the Emirate – the mouths of the Guadiana and Guadalquivir rivers, which give access to all Andalusia. Those areas had been hardly hit during the first arrival of the Vikings, and maybe also in 858. With these two testimonies we can reach a conclusion: after being defeated in the Andalusian Atlantic coast, the Vikings fled to the Atlantic Ocean. It is obvious they were trying to return to the Northern Europe. What else were they doing on the western side of the Gibraltar's strait? Following the Portuguese and Galician coasts they got back to the Cantabrian Sea and logically to the Basque's shores.

The attack to Pamplona surely took place when the fleet was returning in the year 859. The Vikings found here an ancient Visigoth bishopric and the see of an incipient monarchy<sup>192</sup>, although the humble tributes Pamplona paid to the emir demonstrate it was not an affluent place<sup>193</sup>, so we can affirm that the Moslem chronicles exaggerated the amount of the ransom. In any case, it seems that Garcia was only kidnapped for a short time, as C. Sánchez Albornoz wrote. The Pamplonese ruler gave his captors a small part of the ransom – the amount he was able to gather in a short time – and had to hand over some of his sons as hostages. The Vikings knew they couldn't stay in Pamplona for a long time, because the city was a crossroads in the violent politics of Northern Spain, and it was dangerous to spend too much time there. This is demonstrated by the fact that only a few months after the Viking raid, Musa b. Musa moved his

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<sup>192</sup> See the article by A. Martín Duque, 'El señorío episcopal de Pamplona hasta 1276', en *Príncipe de Viana*, LXIII, 227, 2002, pp. 791-806.

<sup>193</sup> Al Udri informs us about the tribute paid by Iñigo Arista to the emir after having been forgiven for his rebellion: *He was also pardoned* [the chronicler uses the arab word *aman*, to receive *aman*] *Yannaqo ibn Wanniqo* [Iñigo Arista], *Musa's brother by his mother, recognized in his lands with the condition of sending a payment of seven hundred denars yearly to the governors [Ummal] of the March...* (quoted by C. Sánchez Albornoz, in *Orígenes del reino de Pamplona...*, 1985, p. 110, n. 34). Previously I argued against the credit given to numbers in the chronicles. The quantity offered by Al Udri – hardly precise – shows clearly that the tribute paid by Pamplona was small, as well as the amount of the ransom of García expresses how expensive was to rescue him. In any case, 70,000 or 90,000 are just exaggerated figures, considering the resources of the country.

armies against García Íñiguez with a tragic outcome for the *muladi*<sup>194</sup>: taking advantage of the presence of Musa in the Navarrese lands, Ordoño I of Asturias raised an army and laid siege to Albelda, a stronghold in the border of Musa's domain, southeast of Pamplona. Musa headed towards him and was decisively defeated, after having been seriously wounded<sup>195</sup>.

In an overall perspective, we can conclude that the Vikings decided to attack Pamplona on their returning journey. Probably they knew this city during their raids in Aquitaine<sup>196</sup>. They couldn't stay too long time on Navarrese soil because, soon afterwards, the belligerent powers of the area took advantage of the weakness of García Íñiguez and the confusion generated by the Scandinavian party to resolve their differences. The winner, apart from the Vikings, was Ordoño I of Asturias, who succeeded to get closer to the Pamplonese ruler<sup>197</sup>, apart from defeating Musa ben Musa –the battle of Albelda was the beginning of the Banu Qasi family decline.

### Conclusions

After the analysis on the previous pages, we can conclude that the Viking expeditions which aimed south of Aquitaine during the 9<sup>th</sup> century were peripheral ventures, even though these adventures were big and ambitious journeys<sup>198</sup>. How can we explain the limited Viking presence in Spain during the 9<sup>th</sup> century? It's obvious that we won't obtain any precise answers to a

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<sup>194</sup> We use this word to refer to the Christian Spaniard who accepted Islam and stayed with the Moslems, during the Arab conquest of Spain (711-714). Musa b. Musa was the grandson of Visigoth count Casio, who embraced Islam and collaborated with the invader.

<sup>195</sup> The *Asturian Chronicles* are generous in the explanation of this episode, and show us how Musa, wounded three times by the sword, was able to save his life because of the treason of a Christian who gave him his horse, (see the work by J. Gil, *Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, pp. 147 y 149).

<sup>196</sup> We shouldn't forget that Pamplona was connected to Bordeaux by the important Roman paved road that crossed the North of Spain, the one which linked Bordeaux with Astorga – *Asturica-Burdigala*; Pamplona was the main strategic site in the Western Pyrenees in ancient times, and it continued being a crucial crossroad to coordinate connections in Northern Spain, during the Middle Ages. This explains why it was a battlefield among the Asturians, Franks and Moslems, all of whom tried to establish dominion, but without success, (see the work by J. M. Lacarra, *Historia política del reino de Navarra...*, vol. I, 1972, especially the first chapter).

<sup>197</sup> The year after the Viking attack, Ibn Hayyan makes reference to the alliance between Ordoño and García: *In this year (246H/860AD) emir Muhammad started a campaign against Garsiya ibn Wannaqo, lord of Pamplona, after being rescued from his prison among the Mayus, due to the alliance he established with Urdun Ibn Idfuns* – the chronicler commits a mistake considering Ordoño Alfonso's son, because he was Ramiro's son – *king of Yilliqiya, to threaten the lands of Islam*, (in the work by C. Sánchez Albornoz, *Orígenes del reino de Pamplona...*, 1987, p. 82, note 46).

<sup>198</sup> To seize Seville and threaten the capital of the emirate couldn't be done by a bunch of men, but must have required several hundred. The Mediterranean expedition of 858-859 was not less ambitious –they reached indeed the French and Italian coasts – and maybe the eastern shores of the same sea.

complex historical problem – especially on a period like the Early Middle Ages. However, we can come closer to some of the answers we are looking for. On this background, we can propound a hypothesis based on this study of the events and sources of the two Viking attacks on Spain, during the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Traditionally, historiography has considered the Iberian Peninsula a far goal for the Vikings and their bases<sup>199</sup>. Nowadays, it is undisputed that Spain was in the peripheral area of Viking activity, but this does not explain the problem, but is rather a consequence of it. Remoteness can't be used as an argument<sup>200</sup>, as long as we know that, in the first big raid along the continental shores of France<sup>201</sup> during 843-844, the Vikings continued their way south to the Spanish coasts as if it were the most natural thing in the world to do. It was, indeed, because they didn't have any notion of border between France and Spain, something we historians project on the past unfounded. Remoteness we said? Distance would have been welcomed if it had been rewarded with opportunities to gain riches. As we have seen, the trip to Al Andalus lasted a month, and maybe another one for the return. Any Frankish, Asturian or Andalusian land campaign of that century could last two, three, four or five months. The Vikings probably did not measure their expeditions in time but in profits. However, in 844 the results of their journey seemed to be negative: they had had bad experiences in battle and, moreover, the landscape was hostile for their *modus operandi*. In fact, the Spanish Atlantic coast was a negative version of the French Atlantic shores: the geography of the country was the real border<sup>202</sup>.

To overcome the difficulties of a hostile environment involved the establishment of outposts to gather supplies and to provide shelter, especially if the land is rocky and poor, the population scarce and the sea unpredictable. In 844 the Scandinavian sailors had experienced the roughness of the Cantabric Sea and, after that, when they were preparing themselves to

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<sup>199</sup> E. Morales considers the distance *relative*, but he shares the same way of thinking as Arbman, in relation with the distance from Spain. However, I think he is right in pointing out as one of the problems *the lack of pirates' outposts in Spanish lands*, (in *Historia de los vikingos...*, 2004, pp. 15-16).

<sup>200</sup> Should we consider from 4 to 8 days of travel to Galicia from Noirmoutier, and from 10 to 15 days of journey to the mouth of the Guadalquivir river, an abyss so big to persuade the Vikings not to come to sack the succulent riches which were awaiting for their arrival?

<sup>201</sup> Both events are mentioned in the *Annales Bertiniani*, (see the work by Janet L. Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 1991, pp. 55-56 and 60).

<sup>202</sup> Mountain ranges made every attempt to invade the country risky. For example, García of Pamplona was caught in springtime of 859, and he was already free when Muza b. Muza attacked his lands in summer: the Vikings were perfectly conscious that staying in these rugged parts was too dangerous, they accepted part of the ransom and took the sons of García – we have not got further informations about them – as hostages, because staying in Pamplona was extremely risky.

abandon Seville, the state of the fleet was pitiful: instead of asking for gold or riches in exchange for hostages, they demanded food and clothes<sup>203</sup>. As soon as the supply turns into a problem for the expedition, the regions included in this setback turned into periphery. We know that the Vikings were able to reach destinations further away than Spain, in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, Byzanz and Baghdad, for example, but this was because they were skillful enough to set outposts and create safe routes, with the foundation of commercial enclaves which were prosperous and grew. Because of this, Scandinavia was filled with gold and silver due to trade and fighting<sup>204</sup>. Did they in a similar fashion have the opportunity to set platforms along the Spanish coast to connect the northern European coasts with the markets of the Ummayyads of Occident? Business weren't less profitable in the Western Andalusian emirate – the later Caliphate – than in the Eastern Abbasid see. Cordova was the biggest city of Western Europe at this time, and its market was filled with the silks and spices of Orient, the Sudanese slaves and gold, the Frankish swords and armours<sup>205</sup>. With only a bunch of place names referring to Vikings – but not Germanic names – and no archaeological site at all, we can't suppose there were any durable Viking establishment in the Iberian coasts. How can we explain this? In my opinion, the most plausible answer is that the Vikings were unable to establish a network to connect the Frankish shores with the Atlantic Andalusia. The setbacks were too big to make the trip profitable and safe, and this is due to a large extent to the inconvenient conditions – warlike local population, hostile land and sea conditions – of most of the Northern coast of Spain.

However, there was a place in Spain in which the Vikings felt safer: the coastal provinces of Galicia. The climate conditions and landscape are very similar to those of the northern Europe, but with temperate winters. The sea is, in most of the province, easily navigable –

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<sup>203</sup> It is obvious that one single piece of information can't be enough proof to set a theory, but this entry has big significance as long as we had various reasons for assuming that supplying the fleet was quite a problem for the Vikings in these shores. See the chronicle of Ibn Al Qutiyya in the note 51.

<sup>204</sup> See E. Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, 1998, pp. 283-284; see also her article, together with Anne Kromann, 'The Vikings and the Islamic lands', in *The Arabian Journey: Danish connections with the Islamic world over a thousand years*, Prehistoric Museum Moesgaard, Aarhus, 1996, pp. 15-16. I would like to thank Else Roesdahl for her kind recommendations and help during my stay in Moesgaard.

<sup>205</sup> Apart from the commercial enterprises that could be made there, the richness of Al Andalus in the times of Abd al Rahman II (822-852) and his successors was extraordinary. Arabist E. Levi-Provençal described the wealth of the emirate in the following terms: *Andalusian emir Abd al Rahman II was, in fact, one of the most opulent rulers of the Mediterranean (...) The royal treasury was full of gold. As geographer Al Bakri wrote, only the ordinary tax income –chibaya– of the Cordovan dependant districts gathered under Al Hakam I (796-822) the yearly sum of 142.000 denars (...) The chronicle by Ibn Hayyan records the yearly tax income of the State under Al Hakam, over 600.000 denars, which reached the million during Abd al Rahman II reign, (in España musulmana..., IV, 1950, p. 163).*

without the unpleasant surprises of the Cantabrian Sea – and the rivers are wide, placid, and go deep inland, giving an easy access to the core of the country. Its economy was focused in agriculture to a large extent – more than any other region in the Asturian Kingdom – forcing the populations to be set on their lands, without the chance to be moveable like these economies based on herding. The surplus of this agriculture, channeled through the long-established Galician aristocracies, could have been easily directed to pay ransoms or to feed the invaders. But it seems the Vikings were unable to find the fissure to make their way into the province, through fighting or coercion. Knowing that, it is possible that the Spanish option was shrouded in a bad reputation among the Viking chiefs.

As an overall conclusion, we summarize that the logistic complications, derived from a hostile environment and a scarce and warlike population, together with the bad or maybe even catastrophic results in 844 related to casualties – that all this persuaded the Vikings to look for more defenseless objectives and closer to their bases. This should not be understood as that the Iberian Peninsula in the Early Middle Ages was completely alien to the Viking menace, only due to its hard accessibility. The Asturian Kingdom fortified its shores, especially those areas that connected with weak enclaves of the country<sup>206</sup>. The Asturian kings were really conscious of the Viking and piratical threat<sup>207</sup>, and we can't reject that the rulers of Oviedo had had a small fleet at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>208</sup>. Ummayyad emirate, far-off from the Cantabrian Sea,

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206 Thanks to archaeology, we know nowadays several fortifications of the 9<sup>th</sup> century focused on coastal defense. The main author on this issue is J. Luís Avello, (see 'Fortificaciones altomedievales de la costa asturiana', in *Arqueología Española: II Congreso*, 1987, pp. 94-102). These defenses protected the coves and inlets where the landing was easier, or rivers with wide mouths and generous flows that linked with important places of the kingdom. J. Camino Mayor and V. Rodríguez Otero wrote another article, 'La Peña Castiello (Villaviciosa): ¿Una fortificación del reino astur para la defensa costera?', in *III Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española*, 1989, pp. 193-197, where they relate its building with the Viking expeditions. The most popular coastal fortress in Asturias was the castle of Gozón (see J. Uría, *El reino de Asturias...*, 2005, pp. 671-755). In Galicia, protecting the river of Arosa, the Torres del Oeste – Towers of the West – were built, probably in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, (see the work by C. Sánchez Albornoz, *Orígenes...*, III, 1975, pp. 845-846).

<sup>207</sup> We should not forget Muslim piracy, which was also recorded in the chronistic texts. *Albeldense* chronicle states: *Mauri in nauibus uenientes in freto Gallicano deuicti sunt*, (in the work by J. Gil, *Crónicas Asturianas*, 1985, p. 176).

<sup>208</sup> On the controversial letter of Alfonso III to the clergy of Tours, it is mentioned a fleet of oar-ships, with the task to take the Asturian pilgrims to Bordeaux so they can continue their journey to Saint Martin of Tours: *Quamobrem pernoscite naualem remigationem inter vos et amicum nostrum Amalvinum ducem Burdelensem inesse et opitulante alti Poli potentia in hoc anno qui est Incarnatione Domini DCCCCVI, indictione VIII inter cetera maxime disposuimus, ut mense madio nostrae naves, cum pueris Palacci nostri usque burdelensem civitatem remigent*, (in the work by A. Floriano, *Diplomática española...*, II, pp. 340-341). This charter was contested and it seems that part of its text was manipulated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. However, the suspicion is specially linked with the second part of the letter, in which the king answers



built coastal defenses and a war-fleet specifically oriented to repel new Viking attacks<sup>209</sup>. In spite of being a complicated destiny, the Iberian Peninsula, scenario of the long struggle between kingdoms and factions, Christians and Muslims, was also suspicious of what might come across the seas.

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some questions asked by the clergy of Tours. We are more concerned about the first part, where the news about the fleet appears, and it seems to be reliable: [apart from the second part] *it seems to be a completely normal epistle*, as Floriano thought (Ibid., p. 345).

<sup>209</sup> So says Al Qutiyya after informing of the Viking attack on Seville in 844, see note 54.