

= Harald Hardrada =

Harald Sigurdsson ( Old Norse : Haraldr Sigurðarson ; c . 1015 ? 25 September 1066 ) , given the epithet Hardrada ( harðráði , roughly translated as " stern counsel " or " hard ruler " ) in the sagas , was King of Norway ( as Harald III ) from 1046 to 1066 . In addition , he unsuccessfully claimed the Danish throne until 1064 and the English throne in 1066 . Prior to becoming king , Harald had spent around fifteen years in exile as a mercenary and military commander in Kievan Rus ' and of the Varangian Guard in the Byzantine Empire .

When he was fifteen years old , in 1030 , Harald fought in the Battle of Stiklestad together with his half @-@ brother Olaf Haraldsson ( later Saint Olaf ) . Olaf sought to reclaim the Norwegian throne , which he had lost to the Danish king Cnut the Great two years prior . In the battle , Olaf and Harald were defeated by forces loyal to Cnut , and Harald was forced into exile to Kievan Rus ' ( the sagas ' Garðaríki ) . He thereafter spent some time in the army of Grand Prince Yaroslav the Wise , eventually obtaining rank as a captain , until he moved on to Constantinople with his companions around 1034 . In Constantinople , he soon rose to become the commander of the Byzantine Varangian Guard , and saw action on the Mediterranean Sea , in Asia Minor , Sicily , possibly in the Holy Land , Bulgaria and in Constantinople itself , where he became involved in the imperial dynastic disputes . Harald amassed considerable wealth during his time in the Byzantine Empire , which he shipped to Yaroslav in Kievan Rus ' for safekeeping . He finally left the Byzantines in 1042 , and arrived back in Kievan Rus ' in order to prepare his campaign of reclaiming the Norwegian throne . Possibly to Harald 's knowledge , in his absence the Norwegian throne had been restored from the Danes to Olaf 's illegitimate son Magnus the Good .

In 1046 , Harald joined forces with Magnus 's rival in Denmark ( Magnus had also become king of Denmark ) , the pretender Sweyn II of Denmark , and started raiding the Danish coast . Magnus , unwilling to fight his uncle , agreed to share the kingship with Harald , since Harald in turn would share his wealth with him . The co @-@ rule ended abruptly the next year as Magnus died , and Harald thus became the sole ruler of Norway . Domestically , Harald crushed all local and regional opposition , and outlined the territorial unification of Norway under a national governance . Harald 's reign was probably one of relative peace and stability , and he instituted a viable coin economy and foreign trade . Probably seeking to restore Cnut 's " North Sea Empire " , Harald also claimed the Danish throne , and spent nearly every year until 1064 raiding the Danish coast and fighting his former ally , Sweyn . Although the campaigns were successful , he was never able to conquer Denmark . Not long after renouncing his claim to Denmark , the former Earl of Northumbria , Tostig Godwinson , brother of the newly chosen English king Harold Godwinson , pledged his allegiance to Harald and invited him to claim the English throne . Harald went along and entered Northern England in September 1066 , raided the coast and defeated English regional forces in the Battle of Fulford near York . Although initially successful , Harald was defeated and killed in an attack by Harold Godwinson 's forces in the Battle of Stamford Bridge .

Modern historians have often considered Harald 's death at Stamford Bridge , which brought an end to his invasion , as the end of the Viking Age . Harald is also commonly held to have been the last great Viking king , or even the last great Viking .

= = Early life = =

Harald was born in Ringerike , Norway in 1015 ( or possibly 1016 ) to Åsta Gudbrandsdatter and her second husband Sigurd Syr . Sigurd was a petty king of Ringerike , and among the strongest and wealthiest chieftains in the Uplands . Through his mother Åsta , Harald was the youngest of King Olaf Haraldsson 's ( later Saint Olaf ) three half @-@ brothers . In his youth , Harald displayed traits of a typical rebel with big ambitions , and admired Olaf as his role model . He thus differed from his two older brothers , who were more similar to their father , down @-@ to @-@ earth and mostly concerned with maintaining the farm .

The Icelandic sagas , in particular Snorri Sturluson in Heimskringla , claim that Sigurd , like Olaf 's father , was a great @-@ grandson of King Harald Fairhair in the male line . Most modern scholars

believe that the ancestors attributed to Harald Hardrada 's father , along with other parts of the Fairhair genealogy , are inventions reflecting the political and social expectations of the time of the authors ( around two centuries after Harald Hardrada 's lifetime ) rather than historical reality . Harald Hardrada 's alleged descent from Harald Fairhair is not mentioned and played no part during Harald Hardrada 's own time , which seems odd considering that it would have provided significant legitimacy in connection with his claim to the Norwegian throne .

Following a revolt in 1028 , Harald 's brother Olaf was forced into exile until he returned to Norway in early 1030 . On hearing news of Olaf 's planned return , Harald gathered 600 men from the Uplands to meet Olaf and his men upon their arrival in the east of Norway . After a friendly welcome , Olaf went on to gather an army and eventually fight in the Battle of Stiklestad on 29 July 1030 , in which Harald took part on his brother 's side . The battle was part of an attempt to restore Olaf to the Norwegian throne , which had been captured by the Danish king Cnut the Great . The battle resulted in defeat for the brothers at the hands of those Norwegians who were loyal to Cnut , and Olaf was killed while Harald was badly wounded . Harald was nonetheless remarked to have shown considerable military talent during the battle .

= = Exile in the East = =

= = = To Kievan Rus ' = = =

After the defeat at the Battle of Stiklestad , Harald managed to escape with the aid of Rögnvald Brusason ( later Earl of Orkney ) to a remote farm in Eastern Norway . He stayed there for some time to heal his wounds , and thereafter ( possibly up to a month later ) journeyed north over the mountains to Sweden . A year after the Battle of Stiklestad , Harald arrived in Kievan Rus ' ( referred to in the sagas as Garðaríki or Svíþjóð hin mikla ) . He likely spent at least part of his time in the town of Staraya Ladoga ( Aldeigjuborg ) , arriving there in the first half of 1031 . Harald and his men were welcomed by Grand Prince Yaroslav the Wise , whose wife Ingegerd was a distant relative of Harald . Badly in need of military leaders , Yaroslav recognised a military potential in Harald and made him a captain of his forces . Harald 's brother Olaf Haraldsson had previously been in exile to Yaroslav following the revolt in 1028 , and Morkinskinna says that Yaroslav embraced Harald first and foremost because he was the brother of Olaf . Harald took part in Yaroslav 's campaign against the Poles in 1031 , and possibly also fought against other 1030s Kievan enemies and rivals such as the Chudes in Estonia , the Byzantines , as well as the Pechenegs and other steppe nomad people .

= = = In Byzantine service = = =

After a few years in Kievan Rus ' , Harald and his force of around 500 men moved on south to Constantinople ( Miklagard ) , the capital of the Byzantine Empire , probably in 1033 or 1034 , where they joined the Varangian Guard . Although the Flateyjarbók maintains that Harald at first sought to keep his royal identity a secret , most sources agree that Harald and his men 's reputation was well known in the east at the time . While the Varangian Guard was primarily meant to function as the emperor 's bodyguard , Harald was found fighting on " nearly every frontier " of the empire . He first saw action in campaigns against Arab pirates in the Mediterranean , and then in inland towns in Asia Minor that had supported the pirates . By this time , he had according to Snorri Sturluson become the " leader over all the Varangians " . By 1035 , the Byzantines had pushed the Arabs out of Asia Minor , and Harald took part in campaigns that went as far east as the Euphrates , where according to his skald Þjóðólfr Arnórsson ( recounted in the sagas ) he participated in the capture of eighty Arab strongholds , a number which historians Sigfus Blöndal and Benedikt Benediktz see no particular reason to question . Although not holding independent command of an army as the sagas imply , it is not unlikely that Harald and the Varangians at times could have been sent off to capture a castle or town . During the first four years of the reign of Byzantine Emperor Michael IV , Harald

probably also fought in campaigns against the Pechenegs .

Thereafter , Harald is reported in the sagas to have gone to Jerusalem and fought in battles in the area . Although the sagas place this after his expedition to Sicily , historian Kelly DeVries has questioned that chronology . Whether his trip was of a military or peaceful nature would depend on whether it took place before or after the 1036 peace treaty between Michael IV and the Fatimid Caliph Ma 'ad al @-@ Mustansir Billah ( in reality the Caliph 's mother , originally a Byzantine Christian , since the Caliph was a minor ) , although it is considered unlikely to have been made before . Modern historians have speculated that Harald may have been in a party sent to escort pilgrims to Jerusalem ( possibly including members of the Imperial family ) following the peace agreement , as it was also agreed that the Byzantines were allowed to repair the Church of the Holy Sepulchre . Furthermore , this may in turn have presented Harald with opportunities to fight against bandits who preyed on Christian pilgrims .

In 1038 , Harald joined the Byzantines in their expedition to Sicily , in George Maniakes 's ( the sagas ' " Gyrga " ) attempt to reconquer the island from the Saracens , who had established the Emirate of Sicily on the island . During the campaign , Harald fought alongside Norman mercenaries such as William Iron Arm . According to Snorri Sturluson , Harald captured four towns on Sicily . In 1041 , when the Byzantine expedition to Sicily was over , a Lombard @-@ Norman revolt erupted in southern Italy , and Harald led the Varangian Guard in multiple battles . Harald fought with the Catepan of Italy , Michael Dokeianos with initial success , but the Normans , led by their former ally William Iron Arm , defeated the Byzantines in the Battle of Olivento in March , and in the Battle of Montemaggiore in May . After the defeat , Harald and the Varangian Guard were called back to Constantinople , following Maniakes ' imprisonment by the emperor and the onset of other more pressing issues . Harald and the Varangians were thereafter sent to fight in Bulgaria , where they arrived in late 1041 . There , he fought in the army of Michael IV in the 1041 campaign against the Bulgarian uprising led by Peter Delyan , which later gained Harald the nickname the " Bulgar @-@ burner " ( Bolgara brennir ) by his skald .

Harald was not affected by Maniakes ' conflict with Michael IV , and received honours and respect upon his return to Constantinople . In a Greek book written in the 1070s , the Strategikon of Kekaumenos , Araltes ( i.e. Harald ) is said to have won the favour of the emperor . The book says that the Byzantine emperor first appointed him manglabites ( possibly identified with the title protospatharios ) , a soldier of the imperial guard , after the Sicilian campaign . Following the campaign against the Bulgarians , in which Harald again served with distinction , he received the rank while at Mosynopolis of spatharokandidatos , identified by DeVries as a promotion to the possibly third highest Byzantine rank , but by Mikhail Bibikov as a lesser rank than protospatharios that was ordinarily awarded to foreign allies to the emperor . The Strategikon indicates that the ranks awarded to Harald were rather low , since Harald reportedly was " not angry for just having been appointed to manglabites or spatharokandidatos " . According to his skald Tjodolv Arnorsson , Harald had participated in eighteen greater battles during his Byzantine service . Harald 's favour at the imperial court quickly declined after the death of Michael IV in December 1041 , which was followed by conflicts between the new emperor Michael V and the powerful empress Zoe .

During the turmoil , Harald was arrested and imprisoned , but the sources disagree on the grounds . The sagas state that Harald was arrested for defrauding the emperor of his treasure , as well as for requesting marriage with an apparently fictional niece or granddaughter of Zoe , called Maria ( his suit supposedly being turned down by the empress because she wanted to marry Harald herself ) . William of Malmesbury states that Harald was arrested for defiling a noble woman , while according to Saxo Grammaticus he was imprisoned for murder . DeVries suggests that the new emperor may have feared Harald because of his loyalty to the previous emperor . The sources also disagree on how Harald got out of prison , but he may have been helped by someone outside to escape in the midst of the revolt that had begun against the new emperor . While some of the Varangians helped guard the emperor , Harald became the leader of the Varangians who supported the revolt . The emperor was in the end dragged out of his sanctuary , blinded and exiled to a monastery , and the sagas claim that it was Harald himself who blinded Michael V ( or at least claimed to have done so ) .

= = = Back to Kievan Rus ' = = =

Harald became extremely rich during his time in the east , and secured the wealth collected in Constantinople by shipments to Kievan Rus ' for safekeeping ( with Yaroslav the Wise acting as safekeeper for his fortune ) . The sagas note that aside from the significant spoils of battle he had retained , he had participated three times in polutasvarf ( loosely translated as " palace @-@ plunder " ) , a term which implies either the pillaging of the palace exchequer on the death of the emperor , or perhaps the disbursement of funds to the Varangians by the new emperor in order to ensure their loyalty . It is likely that the money Harald made while serving in Constantinople allowed him to fund his claim for the crown of Norway . If he participated in polutasvarf three times , these occasions must have been the deaths of Romanos III , Michael IV , and Michael V , in which Harald would have opportunities , beyond his legitimate revenues , to carry off immense wealth .

After Zoe had been restored to the throne in June 1042 together with Constantine IX , Harald requested to be allowed to return to Norway . Although Zoe refused to allow this , Harald managed to escape into the Bosphorus with two ships and some loyal followers . Although the second ship was destroyed by the Byzantine cross @-@ strait iron chains , Harald 's ship sailed safely into the Black Sea after successfully manoeuvring over the barrier . Despite this , Kekaumenos lauds the " loyalty and love " Harald had for the empire , which he reportedly maintained even after he returned to Norway and became king . Following his escape from Constantinople , Harald arrived back in Kievan Rus ' later in 1042 . During his second stay there , he married Elisabeth ( referred to in Scandinavian sources as Ellisif ) , daughter of Yaroslav the Wise and granddaughter of the Swedish king Olof Skötkonung . Shortly after Harald 's arrival in Kiev , Yaroslav attacked Constantinople , and it is considered likely that Harald provided him with valuable information about the state of the empire .

It is possible that the marriage with Elisiv had been agreed to already during Harald 's first time in Rus ' , or that they at least had been acquainted . During his service in the Byzantine Empire , Harald composed a love poem which included the verse " Yet the goddess in Russia / will not accept my gold rings " ( whom Snorri Sturluson identifies with Elisiv ) , although Morkinskinna claims that Harald had to remind Yaroslav of the promised marriage when he returned to Kiev . According to the same source , Harald had spoken with Yaroslav during his first time in Rus ' , requesting to marry Elisiv , only to be rejected because he was not yet wealthy enough . It is in any case significant that Harald was allowed to marry the daughter of Yaroslav , since his other children were married to figures such as Henry I of France , Andrew I of Hungary and the daughter of Constantine IX .

= = King of Norway = =

= = = Return to Scandinavia = = =

Seeking to regain for himself the kingdom lost by his half @-@ brother Olaf Haraldsson , Harald began his journey westwards in early 1045 , departing from Novgorod ( Holmgard ) to Staraya Ladoga ( Aldeigjuborg ) where he obtained a ship . His journey went through Lake Ladoga , down the Neva River , and then into the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea . He arrived in Sigtuna in Sweden , probably at the end of 1045 or in early 1046 . When he arrived in Sweden , according to the skald Tjodolv Arnorsson , his ship was unbalanced by its heavy load of gold . In Harald 's absence , the throne of Norway had been restored to Magnus the Good , an illegitimate son of Olaf . Harald may actually have known this , and it could have been the reason why Harald wanted to return to Norway in the first place . Since Cnut the Great 's sons had chosen to abandon Norway and instead fight over England , and his sons and successors Harold Harefoot and Harthacnut had died young , Magnus 's position as king had been secured . No domestic threats or insurrections are recorded to have occurred during his eleven @-@ year reign . After the death of Harthacnut , which

had left the Danish throne vacant , Magnus had in addition been selected to be the king of Denmark , and managed to defeat the Danish royal pretender Sweyn Estridsson .

Having heard of Sweyn 's defeat by Magnus , Harald met up with his fellow exile in Sweden ( who was also his nephew ) , as well as with the Swedish king Anund Jacob , and the three joined forces against Magnus . Their first military exploit consisted of raiding the Danish coast , in an effort to impress the natives by demonstrating that Magnus offered them no protection , and thus leading them to submit to Harald and Sweyn . Learning about their actions , Magnus knew that their next target would be Norway . Harald may have planned to be taken as king of his father 's petty kingdom , and thereafter claim the rest of the country . In any case , the people were unwilling to turn against Magnus , and on hearing news of Harald 's schemes , Magnus ( abroad at the time ) went home to Norway with his entire army . Instead of going to war , Magnus 's advisors recommended the young king not fight his uncle , and a compromise was reached in 1046 in which Harald would rule Norway ( not Denmark ) jointly with Magnus ( although Magnus would have precedence ) . Notably , Harald also had to agree to share half of his wealth with Magnus , who at the time was effectively bankrupt and badly in need of funds . During their short co @-@ rule , Harald and Magnus had separate courts and kept to themselves , and their only recorded meetings nearly ended in physical clashes .

In 1047 , Magnus and Harald went to Denmark with their *leidang* forces . Later that year in Jylland , less than a year into their co @-@ rule , Magnus died without an heir . Before his death , he had decided that Sweyn was to inherit Denmark and Harald to inherit Norway . On hearing the news of Magnus 's death , Harald quickly gathered the local leaders in Norway and declared himself king of Norway as well as of Denmark . Although Magnus had appointed Sweyn his successor as king of Denmark , Harald immediately announced his plans to gather an army and oust his former ally from the country . In response , the army and the chieftains , headed by Einar Thambarskelfir , opposed any plans of invading Denmark . Although Harald himself objected to bringing the body of Magnus back to Norway , the Norwegian army prepared to transport his body to Nidaros ( now Trondheim ) , where they buried him next to Saint Olaf in late 1047 . Einar , an opponent of Harald , claimed that " to follow Magnus dead was better than to follow any other king alive " .

= = = Invasions of Denmark = = =

Harald also wanted to re @-@ establish Magnus 's rule over Denmark , and in the long term probably sought to restore Cnut the Great 's " North Sea Empire " in its entirety . While his first proposal to invade Denmark fell through , the next year Harald embarked on what would turn into constant warfare against Sweyn , from 1048 almost yearly until 1064 . Similar to his campaigns ( then together with Sweyn ) against Magnus 's rule in Denmark , most of his campaigns against Sweyn consisted of swift and violent raids on the Danish coasts . In 1048 , he plundered Jutland , and in 1049 he pillaged and burned Hedeby , at the time the most important Danish trade center , and one of the best protected and most populous towns in Scandinavia . Hedeby as a civil town never recovered from Harald 's destruction , and was left completely desolate when what remained was looted by Slavic tribes in 1066 . One of two conventional battles was set to be fought between the two kings later the same year , but according to Saxo Grammaticus , Sweyn 's smaller army was so frightened when approached by the Norwegians that they chose to jump in the water trying to escape ; most drowned . Although Harald was victorious in most of the engagements , he was never successful in occupying Denmark .

The second , more significant battle , a naval encounter , was the Battle of Niså on 9 August 1062 . As Harald had not been able to conquer Denmark despite his raids , he wanted to win a decisive victory over Sweyn . He eventually set out from Norway with a great army and a fleet of around 300 ships . Sweyn had also prepared for the battle , which had been preassigned a time and place . Sweyn , did not appear at the agreed time , and Harald thus sent home his non @-@ professional soldiers ( *bóndaherrin* ) , which had made up half of his forces . When the dismissed ships were out of reach , Sweyn 's fleet finally appeared , possibly also with 300 ships . The battle resulted in great bloodshed as Harald defeated the Danes ( 70 Danish ships were reportedly left " empty " ) , but many ships and men managed to escape , including Sweyn . During the battle , Harald actively used

his bow as an archer , like most others in the early phase of the battle .

Fatigue and the huge cost of the indecisive battles eventually led Harald to seek peace with Sweyn , and in 1064 ( or 1065 according to Morkinskinna ) the two kings agreed on an unconditional peace agreement . By the agreement , they retained their respective kingdoms with the former boundaries , and there would be no payments of reparations . In the subsequent winter of 1065 , Harald travelled through his realm and accused the farmers of withholding taxes from him . In response , he acted with brutality , and had people maimed and killed as a warning to those who disobeyed him . Harald maintained control of his nation through the use of his hird , a private standing army maintained by Norwegian lords . Harald 's contribution to the strengthening of Norway 's monarchy was the enforcement of a policy that only the king could retain a hird , thus centralising power away from local warlords .

= = = Domestic opposition = = =

According to historian Knut Helle , Harald completed the first phase of what he has termed the " national territorial unification of Norway " . Having forced his way to the kingship , Harald would have to convince the aristocracy that he was the right person to rule Norway alone . To establish domestic alliances , he married Tora Torbergsdatter of one of the most powerful Norwegian families . The primary opposition to Harald 's rule would be the descendants of Haakon Sigurdsson , from the powerful dynasty of Earls of Lade who had controlled Northern Norway and Trøndelag with much autonomy under the Norwegian king . Haakon had even ruled the whole of Norway ( nominally under the Danish king ) from 975 until 995 , when he was killed during the takeover by Olaf Tryggvasson . Even after Haakon 's death , his offspring held a certain degree of sovereignty in the north , and by Harald 's early reign the family was headed by Einar Thambarskelfir , who was married to Haakon 's daughter . While the family had maintained good relations with Magnus , Harald 's absolutism and consolidation of the kingship soon led to conflict with Einar .

It was from his power @-@ struggle with the Norwegian aristocracy that Harald got himself the reputation that gave him the nickname " Hardrada " , or " the hard ruler " . Although the relationship between Harald and Einar was poor from the start , confrontation did not occur before Harald went north to his court in Nidaros . One time in Nidaros , Einar arrived at Harald 's court , and in a display of power was accompanied by " eight or nine longships and almost five hundred men " , obviously seeking confrontation . Harald was not provoked by the incident . Although the sources differ on the circumstances , the next event nonetheless led to the murder of Einar by Harald 's men , which threatened to throw Norway into a state of civil war . Although the remaining descendants of Haakon Sigurdsson considered rebellion against the king , Harald eventually managed to negotiate peace with them , and secured the family 's submission for the remainder of his reign . By the death of Einar and his son around 1050 , the Earls of Lade had outplayed their role as a base of opposition , and Trøndelag was definitely subordinated to Harald 's national kingdom .

Before the Battle of Niså , Harald had been joined by Haakon Ivarsson , who distinguished himself in the battle and gained Harald 's favour . Reportedly even considering to give him the title of Earl , Haakon was greatly upset when Harald later backed down from his promise . With a strong hold over the Uplands , Haakon was additionally given the earldom of Värmland by the Swedish king Stenkil . In early 1064 , Haakon entered the Uplands and collected their taxes , the region thus effectively threatening to renounce their loyalty to Harald . The revolt of Haakon and the farmers in the Uplands may have been the main reason why Harald finally had been willing to enter a peace agreement with Sweyn Estridsson . After the agreement , Harald went to Oslo and sent tax collectors to the Uplands , only to find that the farmers would withhold their taxes until Haakon arrived . In response , Harald entered Sweden with an army and quickly defeated Haakon . Still facing opposition from the farmers , Harald embarked on a campaign to crush the areas that had withheld their taxes . Due to the remote location of the region in the interior of the country , the Uplands had never been an integrated part of the Norwegian king 's realm . Using harsh measures , Harald burned down farms and small villages , and had people maimed and killed . Starting in Romerike , his campaign continued into Hedmark , Hadeland and Ringerike . Since the regions

contained several rich rural communities , Harald strengthened his economic position by confiscating farming estates . By the end of 1065 there was probably peace in Norway , as any opposition had either been killed , chased into exile or silenced .

### == Policies ==

Harald 's reign was marked by his background as a military commander , as he often solved disputes with harsh force . One of his skalds even boasted about how Harald broke settlements he had made , in his battles in the Mediterranean . While the sagas largely focus on Harald 's war with Sweyn and the invasion of England , little is said about his domestic policies . Modern historians have taken this as a sign that , despite his absolutism , his reign was one of peace and progress for Norway . Harald is considered to have instituted good economic policies , as he developed a Norwegian currency and a viable coin economy , which in turn allowed Norway to participate in international trade . He initiated trade with Kievan Rus ' and the Byzantine Empire through his connections , as well as with Scotland and Ireland . According to the later sagas , Harald founded Oslo , where he spent much time .

Harald also continued to advance Christianity in Norway , and archaeological excavations show that churches were built and improved during his reign . He also imported bishops , priests and monks from abroad , especially from Kievan Rus ' and the Byzantine Empire . A slightly different form of Christianity was thus introduced in Norway from the rest of northern Europe , although it should be noted that the East ? West Schism had not yet taken place . Since the clergy was not ordained in England or France , it nonetheless caused controversy when Harald was visited by papal legates . The protests by the legates led Harald to throw the Catholic clergy out of his court , and he reportedly stated to the legates that " he did not know of any other archbishop or lord of Norway than the king himself " . Norwegian historian Halvdan Koht has remarked that the " words seemed as if spoken by a Byzantine despot " . It is possible that Harald maintained contacts with Byzantine emperors after he became king , which could suggest a background for his church policies .

### == Northern explorations ==

Once he had returned to Norway , Harald seems to have displayed an interest in exploring his own realm , as for instance the Morkinskinna recounts Harald 's trip into the Uplands . Harald is also said to have explored the seas beyond his kingdom , as the contemporary Adam of Bremen reports of such naval expeditions conducted by Harald :

Kelly DeVries has suggested that Harald " may even have known of and sought out the legendary land called Vinland , which Viking sailors had discovered only a short time before " , which Adam mentions earlier in the same passage to have been widely reported in Denmark and Norway . H. H. Lamb has on the other hand proposed that the land he reached may have been either Spitsbergen or Novaya Zemlya .

### == Invasion of England ==

### == Background and preparations ==

With the truce and the recognition that he would not conquer Denmark , Harald turned his attention to England . England had belonged to Harthacnut , the son of Cnut the Great , until he died childless in 1042 . Harald based his claim to the throne of England on an agreement made between Magnus and Harthacnut in 1038 , which stated that if either died , the other would inherit the throne and lands of the deceased . When Harthacnut died , Magnus assumed the crown of Denmark and considered himself the lawful heir to Harthacnut . While Edward the Confessor had himself crowned English king in his absence , Magnus had planned to invade England in 1045 , only to be forced to turn his fleet towards Denmark due to an uprising by Sweyn Estridsson . Although the threat was

temporarily averted by Magnus 's death in 1047 , Edward 's negotiations with his enemies throughout the 1050s gave Harald ( as well as Sweyn Estridsson and William of Normandy ) an impression that he was a possible heir to Edward . When Edward died in January 1066 , he was to Harald 's dismay succeeded by Harold Godwinson , a son of one of Edward 's advisors .

Harald 's son Magnus had previously been involved in Gruffydd ap Llywelyn 's 1058 war against the English king with a Norwegian fleet , possibly indicating that Harald had tested the situation in England long before his 1066 invasion , only to find that he could not simultaneously be at war with Denmark and England . After Edward 's death , Harald allied himself with Tostig Godwinson , Harold 's brother , who had been deprived of the earldom of Northumbria by Edward in 1065 . According to various sources , Tostig may have asked both or either of William of Normandy and Sweyn Estridsson to assist him in invading England before turning to Harald . According to the sagas , Tostig finally pledged his support for Harald , including that of the " majority of the chieftains " , at a meeting in Norway . Some historians doubt that this meeting took place , as William of Malmesbury claims that Tostig did not pledge his support for Harald until they met at the Humber . This would indicate that the invasion originally was Harald 's plan alone , and that his joining of forces with Tostig was merely a later agreement when the two met for the first time in Scotland or Northumbria . Another proposal by historians is that a meeting did indeed take place in Norway , but instead with Copsig , one of Tostig 's early supporters and a fellow exile , as Tostig 's mediator . If this is correct , it would both allow an agreement to have been made in Norway , and the first personal meeting between Harald and Tostig to have taken place in Britain . Indeed , Morkinskinna mentions that " some men " claimed that Tostig only had sent an emissary to Norway , while he still remained in France .

The plans for the invasion were in any case completed by the start of September 1066 , and had possibly begun already in March or April . While he brought with him Elisiv , his daughters , and his son Olaf , he left behind Tora and made sure to have his oldest son Magnus hailed as king . Gathering his fleet at Solund in the Sognefjord , Harald departed Norway in August , and landed first in Shetland and thereafter in Orkney ( both under Norwegian control ) . In both places he was joined by several important lords , chieftains , and soldiers , including the Earls of Orkney , Paul and Erlend Thorfinnsson . He next went to Dunfermline , where he met with Tostig 's ally Malcolm III of Scotland ( and according to some sources , with Tostig ) who allocated him a couple thousand Scottish soldiers . According to most contemporary sources , Harald and Tostig met at Tynemouth on 8 September , Harald with a total force of , at the most , around 10 ? 15 @, @ 000 men on 240 ? 300 longships , and Tostig with a mere 12 ships with soldiers . Not mentioned in the sagas , but accounted for by John of Worcester , Tostig had departed from his exile in Flanders already in May or June . He had then raided villages along the southern coast of Britain from the Isle of Wight to Sandwich . As Harold Godwinson gathered a large army in response , Tostig sailed north to meet with Harald , while Harold Godwinson remained in the south in expectation of invasion by William of Normandy , who for a long time had openly claimed the English throne .

= = = Invasion and the Battle of Stamford Bridge = = =

After embarking from Tynemouth , Harald and Tostig probably landed at the River Tees . They then entered Cleveland , and started plundering the coast . They encountered the first resistance at Scarborough , where Harald 's demand for surrender was opposed . In the end , Harald resorted to burning down the town and this action led to other Northumbrian towns surrendering to him . After further raiding , Harald and Tostig sailed down the Humber , disembarking at Riccall . News of the invasion soon reached the earls Morcar of Northumbria and Edwin of Mercia , and they fought against Harald 's invading army two miles ( 3 km ) south of York at the Battle of Fulford on 20 September . The battle was a decisive victory for Harald and Tostig , and led York to surrender to their forces on 24 September . This would be the last time a Scandinavian army defeated English forces . The same day as York surrendered to Harald and Tostig , Harold Godwinson arrived with his army in Tadcaster , just seven miles from the anchored Norwegian fleet at Riccall . From there , he probably scouted the Norwegian fleet , preparing a surprise attack . As Harald had left no forces



in York , Harold Godwinson marched right through the town to Stamford Bridge .

Early on 25 September , Harald and Tostig departed their landing place at Riccall with most of their forces , but left a third of their forces behind . They brought only light armour , as they expected to just meet the citizens of York , as they had agreed the day before , at Stamford Bridge to decide on who should manage the town under Harald . Once there Harald saw Godwinson 's forces approaching , heavily armed and armoured , and greatly outnumbering Harald 's . Although ( according to non @-@ saga sources ) the English forces were held up at the bridge for some time by a single Norwegian , allowing Harald and Tostig to regroup into a shield @-@ wall formation , Harald 's army was in the end heavily beaten . Harald was struck in the throat by an arrow and killed early in the battle in a state of berserkerang , having worn no body armour and fought aggressively with both hands around his sword .

When the battle was almost over , some reserve forces from Riccall led by Eystein Orre finally appeared , but they were exhausted as they had run all the way . Eystein picked up Harald 's fallen banner , the " Landwaster " ( Landþýðan ) , and initiated a final counter @-@ attack . Although they for a moment appeared to almost breach the English line , Eystein was suddenly killed , which left the rest of the men to flee from the battlefield . Among those left at Riccall after the battle , who were allowed to return home peacefully by the English forces , was Harald 's son Olaf . Although sources state that Harald 's remaining army only filled 20 ? 25 ships on the return to Norway , it is likely that this number only accounts for the Norwegian forces . Most of the forces from Scotland and Orkney probably remained at Riccall throughout the battle ( the earls Paul and Erlend Thorfinnsson are certainly known to have been stationed there the entire time ) , and has not been counted in the traditional figure .

Harold Godwinson 's victory was short @-@ lived , as only a few weeks later he was defeated by William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings . The fact that Harold had to make a forced march to fight Hardrada at Stamford Bridge and then move at utmost speed south to meet the Norman invasion , all in less than three weeks , is widely seen as a primary factor in William 's victory at Hastings .

= = Personal life = =

Harald is described by Snorri Sturluson to have been physically " larger than other men and stronger " . He is said to have had light hair and beard , a long " upper beard " ( moustache ) , and that one of his eyebrows was somewhat higher situated than the other . He also reportedly had big hands and feet , and could measure five ells in height . It is not known whether Snorri 's description of Harald 's physical appearance actually represents historical facts . The tall stature of Harald is also substantiated by a story that relates that before the Battle of Stamford Bridge , Harold Godwinson offered Tostig back the earldom of Northumbria , and Harald " six feet of the ground of England , or perhaps more seeing that he is taller than most men " ( according to Henry of Huntingdon ) or " six feet of English ground , or seven feet as he was taller than other men " ( according to Snorri Sturluson ) .

Harald himself composed skaldic poetry . According to Lee M. Hollander , composing poetry was normal for Norwegian kings , but Harald was the only one who " showed a decided talent . " According to one poem , Harald had mastered a number of activities that were considered sports in the Viking Age , including in addition to poetry , brewing , horse riding , swimming , skiing , shooting , rowing and playing the harp . The sagas state that Harald and his Varangians at least once took a break during the siege of a town to enjoy sports .

With regards to religion , Harald had , according to DeVries , a " religious inclination towards Christianity " and was " publicly close to the Christian Church " , although he was influenced by the Eastern Christian culture of Russia and the Byzantine Empire , having spent most of his life there . He was clearly interested in advancing Christianity in Norway , which can be seen by the continued building and improvement of churches throughout his reign . Despite this , DeVries notes that Harald 's " personal morality appears not to have matched the Christian ideal " , citing his marriage arrangements .

= = Issue = =

Harald married Elisiv of Kiev ( c . 1025 ? after 1066 ) around 1044 / 45 , and they had an unknown number , possibly several children . According to Snorri Sturluson , they had two daughters :

Ingegerd ( c . 1050 ? 1120 ) . Married first to the future Olaf I of Denmark , and after his death , to the future Philip of Sweden .

Maria ( died 25 September 1066 ) . Promised away for marriage to Eystein Orre ( brother of Tora Torbergsdatter ) , but reportedly died on Orkney the same day that Harald ( and Eystein ) died at Stamford Bridge .

According to the sagas , Harald married Tora Torbergsdatter ( c . 1025 ? after 1066 ) around 1048 . Some modern historians have disputed this , since Harald in that case would be in a bigamous marriage , as he was still married to Elisiv . It is nonetheless possible that such a marriage could take place in Norway in the 11th century , and although Harald had two wives , only Elisiv is noted to have held the title of Queen . Harald and Tora had at least two children :

Magnus II ( c . 1049 ? 1069 ) . Reigns as king of Norway from 1066 to 1069 .

Olaf III ( c . 1050 ? 1093 ) . Reigns as king of Norway from 1067 to 1093 .

= = Legacy = =

= = = Burial = = =

A year after his death at Stamford Bridge , Harald 's body was moved to Norway and buried at the Mary Church in Nidaros ( Trondheim ) . About a hundred years after his burial , his body was reinterred at the Helgeseter Priory , which was demolished in the 17th century . On 25 September 2006 , the 940th anniversary of Harald 's death , the newspaper Aftenposten published an article on the poor state of Norway 's ancient royal burial sites , including that of Harald , which is reportedly located underneath a road built across the monastery site . In a follow @-@ up article on 26 September , the Municipality of Trondheim revealed they would be examining the possibility of exhuming the king and reintering him in Nidaros Cathedral , currently the burial place of nine Norwegian kings , among them Magnus the Good and Magnus Haraldsson , Harald 's predecessor and successor respectively . A month later it was reported that the proposal to exhume the king had been scrapped .

= = = Modern memorials = = =

Two monuments have been raised in honour of Harald in Oslo , the city which he is traditionally held to have founded . A bronze relief on granite by Lars Utne depicting Harald on horseback was raised on the eponymously named square Harald Hardrådes plass in 1905 . In 1950 , a large relief by Anne Grimdalen , also of Harald on horseback , was unveiled on the western façade of the Oslo City Hall .

= = = In fiction = = =

Harald appears in a number of historical fiction books . Justin Hill 's Viking Fire is the second in his Conquest Trilogy , and tells the life of Harald in his own voice . He serves as the protagonist in two children 's books by Henry Treece , The Last of the Vikings / The Last Viking ( 1964 ) and Swords from the North / The Northern Brothers ( 1967 ) . He also appears as the protagonist in the trilogy The Last Viking ( 1980 ) by Poul Anderson , and in Byzantium ( 1989 ) by Michael Ennis , which chronicles Harald 's career in the Byzantine Empire .

The alternative history book Crusader Gold ( 2007 ) by marine archeologist David Gibbins features Harald as a key figure , as it follows him in acquiring the lost Menorah among his treasures during

his service in the Byzantine Varangian Guard . Harald also makes an appearances in Meadowland ( 2005 ) by Tom Holt .

In film , Harald was portrayed by Richard Long in the first episode of the BBC series Historyonics ( 2004 ) , titled " 1066 " , which explores the background of the Battle of Hastings .

Harald 's unorthodox departure from Constantinople is featured in music by the Finnish folk metal band Turisas in the song " The Great Escape " ; in addition , he is followed loosely throughout the story of the albums The Varangian Way ( 2007 ) and Stand Up and Fight ( 2011 ) .