



The pilgrimage trip of the Icelander Nikolas Pergsson to Palestine in the mid-12th century A.D

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Abstract

Nicholas Perysson (d. 1159 or of the 1160 AD.) was one Icelandic pilgrims during epoch of the crusades. He visited Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in The first half of Twelfth century, to watch Christian Holy places. the religious Character Predominated the account of that trip, as Nicholas pergesson wrote about holy Christian sites and neglected the other social and economic aspects of the regions. On other hand, his trip shows Important indications about the wish of Icelandic pilgrims to travel specially after the crusaders could wish of Falandic pilgrims to trave establish their own Settlements in the regions. no doubt, the Danish felt That they are small minority comparing with the French whose population rose there, and consequently, Nicholas pergresion's trip done to confirm the Danish did not separate Themselves from the general aspiration pilgrim to Palestine in that era.

Keywords: Crusades, The pilgrimage trip, Nikolas pergsson

Introduction

In order to explore Palestine's Christian holy sites in the middle of the 12th century, the Icelander pilgrim Nikolas Pergsson (d. 1159 or 1160 A.D.) travelled there (E.C.Werlaff, 1821) (C.C.Raffin, 1850) (Kedar, Westeryard , 1978) . This paper discusses his personal biography, the itinerary, and the key points of his journey. Additionally, it makes a comparison between the information documented in its contents and the accounts of European pilgrims who travelled to Palestine during the Crusades, especially during the first century of the Crusader invasion and settlement in Palestine.

Pope Urban II (1089–1094) first called for the Crusades at the Council of Clermont in France on November 27, 1095. He then launched the public Crusades, which were followed by the princes. This led to the founding of the Principality of Edessa in 1097, Up the Euphrates, the Principality of Antioch in 1098 in Northern Syria, the Principality of Tripolis in 1109, and ultimately the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem in Palestine.

Without a doubt, many Westerners had a strong desire to visit those communities when the crusaders

were successful in creating their own municipalities in the Levant.

In instance, the phenomenon of European pilgrims traveling to Christian holy sites in Palestine after being seized by the crusaders was documented in the 12th century A.D. The Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society narrated the accounts of those journeys (Awad, 1996) . Of These journeys , for instance : The English Seawulf (1102-1103) (E.C.Werlaff, 1821) , the Russian Abbot Daniel (1106 -1107) (Daniel, 1895) The Germans John of Wurzburg (1160–1170) (Wurzburg, 1896) and Theoderich (1171–1173) (Wurzburg, 1896), the Russian princess Euphrosine (1151–1162) (Euphrosine,1899) , Joannes Phocas (1185) (Phocas, 1896), and other numerous unidentified travellers who documented their journeys without including their own names within them (Salamah, 2013).

There were several Jewish pilgrims in addition to the ones stated above, including Benjamin of Tudela (1163–1170) (Tudela, 1848) and Benjamin of Ratisbon (1174–1178) (Ratisbon, 1881).

First: Outlining Nikolas Pergsson and the period of his pilgrimage to Palestine

In the 12th century, a large number of Icelanders, who lived in the far northwest of Europe, joined the Crusades with the intention of visiting the Holy Places in Palestine. Among these was Nikolas Pergsson. Lived He was a poet and a monk of the Penductus Covenant of Munkopvera in Northern Iceland. As far as we know, he died between 1159 and 1160 A.D.

There are some ones who affirm that another person, who was named Nikolas Saemundsson, and worked as the Chief of Monks in the penductus Covenant in Pingeyrar, in Northern Iceland. A debate between the scholars and researchers raised already about the identity of the aforementioned traveller, though the strongest plea goes to the advantage of Nikolas pergsson (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978).

According to the Icelandic Annals, the Icelandic version of the trip tale stated above is about a man who left Jerusalem in 1292 A.D., according to C. C. Rafin, one of the two translators of the trip narrative in the 19th century. This notion is difficult to believe, though, because the Icelandic Annals itself made no mention of the Icelanders' departure from the Holy Lands in 1292 following Acre's surrender at the hands of the Mamluks, led by al-Ashraf Khalil Ibn Qalawoon in 1291 A.D. (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978).

In addition, his description of Jerusalem contradicts the notion that he visited the holy sites in Jerusalem in the late 13th century as many had been led to believe (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978). Plus, his account of the interior of the Dome of the Rock indicates that he visited it during the Crusader Occupation Era (1099–1187 A.D.) (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978). Furthermore, the pilgrim's description of the church of the Holy Sepulchre and the religious Feast of the Holy Fire confirms that his pilgrimage took place during the Crusaders' occupation of that Holy City (1099–1187 A.D.). In particular, such feasts were not celebrated during the Islamic hegemony following the decisive battle of Hattin in 1187 (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978).

Along with the previously stated, he also discussed the Nuns' Covenant in Bethany, which was founded in 1143 A.D. by Melisende, the Crusader Queen (1131–1153) (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978) (Awad, 2015).

In actuality, we are unable to pinpoint the exact time of that pilgrim's journey. Nonetheless, we can learn a

few things about the period of his travel to Palestine from the account of his journey. He claimed that the city of Escalon was ruled by Muslims, which suggests that he arrived before 1153 A.D., the year that King Baldwin III took control of the city (1143–1162). It is known that the crusaders besieged Escalon on January 25, 1153, and that the city ultimately submitted on August 12 of that year. Therefore, Nikolas is thought to have travelled to Palestine prior to that August, which lends credence to the idea that he made his trip in the Mid-12th Century A.D (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978).

Furthermore, we cannot deny that his own depictions of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre indeed mirror those seen in literature from the middle of the 12th century A.D. (Salamah, 2013) (Awad, 1992)

As discussed in the following sections, Nikolas Pergsson's pilgrimage journey really included a number of elements that benefited the researchers' investigation of the Crusades' Era.

Second: Pergsson's description of Palestine's Christian holy sites:

This traveler focused, briefly, on a number of areas and locations that were closely related to the early Christian past. He brought up the Virgin Mary's tomb, which is east of Jerusalem in the Josephat Valley (Pergsson, 1978). It was well-known since so many Christian pilgrims went there frequently.

In addition, he discussed the Holy Sepulchre Church and pointed out that on June 24, John the Baptist's birthday (Pergsson, 1978), the sun falls on John's Mass. plus, he mentioned the presence of St. Anastasia's hand (Pergsson, 1978) at the church's altar, which no other source mentioned. Naturally, it is evident that Nikolas blended fact and fiction and told stories that were out of context, demonstrating that he lacked the requisite and sufficient education for that era. Since the presence of Jews in that very holy Christian church is illogical, especially since the crusaders forbade Jews from entering Jerusalem, the traveler also stated in his work that on the eve of every day, some people in that church perform the Jewish service and praise their God (Pergsson, 1978). In this way, he confuses Jews with Assyrians.

Pergsson makes an absurd reference to the Tabor

Mount, which is located in Northern Palestine and is visible from Haifa, in the same course. He said that the apostles of Christ saw Moses and Elias there (Pergsson,1978). This narrative, which is of the folklore religious type, may be passed down among Icelanders in their own country.

He claimed that Mary in Nazareth, where Jesus Christ lived for 23 years according to his own account, was visited by the angel Gabriel (Pergsson,1978).

He also mentioned Castle Betania, the site of the well-known biblical story of Christ raising Lazar from the grave (Pergsson,1978). This suggests that the traveller was eager to include references to Christ's miracles in his own travelogue.

When Nikolas Pergsson arrived at the Dead Sea (Pergsson,1978), he claimed that two sinful cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, were drowned by the sea. Additionally, he stated that the Jordan River (Pergsson,1978) floods the Dead Sea and that the water is revered since Jesus Christ baptized the Apostles in it. Its water does not mingle with the Dead Sea's, he added.

In addition to the aforementioned, he brought up the Christian Creed's reference to the Mountain of Olives (Pergsson,1978) which Christ ascended to heaven.

He characterized Bethlehem as a modest, lovely city that is the birthplace of Jesus Christ (Pergsson,1978). It is seen as a major draw for all Christian visitors visiting Palestine. Additionally, he brought up the Bethlehem Nuns Covenant (Pergsson,1978), which Queen Melisende formed in 1143 A.D. (1131–1153). During the warlike actions that followed the decisive Battle of Hattin in 1187 A.D., when those lands were under the whole control and power of the Muslims, some did report that this Covenant was utterly destroyed. However, We advise readers not to adopt such opinions, as the Muslims' good and considerate treatment of the Christian holy sites in Jerusalem is verified in history.

It is well known that Queen Melisende attempted to create this kind of agreement in order to look as the guardian of the Holy Sepulchre Church. She thus followed the Crusader kings' and queens' stance regarding Christian religious structures, including churches and covenants, in the kingdom of Jerusalem.

However, Nikolas Pergsson brought up the Crusader King Baldwin I's invasion of Jaffa (1100-1118 A.D.). The function of Norwegian ruler Sigurd Magnusson (1103–1130 A.D.) (Wright, 1848) (Awad, 1999) was another topic he wrote about. He also mentioned their collaboration in the conquest of Sidon, on the Lebanese coast, in 1110 A.D (Ibn al-Qalanisi, 1908) (Chartres, 1969).

He included a passage from the historian Ari the Learned, regarded as the Father of Icelandic Historiography, who claimed in his annals that Pope Pascal II had died in 1118 A.D. before all of the following: Bishop Gizur, King Baldwin of Jerusalem, King Arnold of Jerusalem, and King Philipp of Sweden. He added that King Alexius ascended to the throne that same summer. He was referred to be the King of the Greeks and ruled for 38 years (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978). In actuality, that king was an emperor who ruled the ancient Byzantine Empire rather than just a monarch like the kings of Denmark, Norway, France, England, and Germany in Western Europe. As the abbreviated writing style predominated in his travelogue, we observe that his reference of such a king was written in brief.¹⁷

We also don't overlook his disregard for the inscriptions of Saint Olav of Norway and Saint Canute of Denmark, who was King Erik's brother and whose work adorned the Bethlehem Church of the Nativity (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978)

This suggests that the inscriptions were written following Nikolas' journey. It should be mentioned here that the researcher Vincent Abel believed the inscriptions were created between 1155 and 1174, during the rule of Raoul, Bishop of Bethlehem (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978); that is, during the years of both Crusader monarchs, Baldwin III (1145–1163) and Amalric I (1163–1174).

It should be emphasized that the majority of pilgrims from Europe also visited the same locations as this Icelandic traveler, and that these locations were first referenced in the Bible, either in the Old or New Testament. Before departing for Palestine, their minds and spirits came together to see and visit these locations.

Nikolas Pergsson gave us no further details regarding the stories told by his earlier travelers. His brief

phrases and expressions showed us that he was unable to give a perfect description and that he was not eager to highlight the most appealing aspects of the places he saw, as well as their humanitarian and archaeological significance.

Third : kings of Denmark and their affiliation with the Holy Lands

Nikols pergsson wrote important information in this respect, including his focus on the Danish king Erik the Good (1095-1103) (Jensen, 2006). He mentioned that King Erik established the Hostel of the Pilgrims in southern Piacenza, Italy, during his own pilgrimage trip to Rome in 1098 (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978) . There is no doubt that Erik's wish was to follow what the kings and emperors of Europe have done before regarding such good deeds.

We need here to shed the lights on the Danish king Erik the Good, who was mentioned by the pilgrim Nikolas Pergsson.

Erik the Good was born approximately in 1056. He was the fourth son of King Seven Esridsev (d. 1076 A.D.), surnamed "the Good" , or "Ejegod" in Danish. When King Seven died in 1095, Erik was summoned from his place in Exile , Sweden. He travelled to Rome and Bari and did his best to fight groups of Wends, whom the church considered infidels and were Slavs who inhabited northeast Germany, particularly Rugen.

It is known that Wendish regions, especially Rugen, became a field of Danish missionary works, which were supported by Erik the Good to ingratiate himself with the papacy in Rome (Jensen, 2006). King Erik left his homeland in 1108, accompanied by his wife, Bodil, as well as many of his own knights, as mentioned in a contemporary Icelandic ode. He set off via Eastern Europe until he reached Constantinople, where he was luxuriously received and welcomed by Emperor Alexius Gouanne (1081-1118 D.).

However, he never reached the Holy Land, as he died in Paphos in Cyprus, the location of his own tomb there is still unknown. His wife proceeded, after his death, her trip to Jerusalem (Jensen, 2006).

Additionally, Nikolas said that King Erik supplied wine to the region of Lucca. Therefore, as he stated, it

was simple for everyone who speaks Danish to consume enough of it (Kedar, Westeryard , 1978).

Pergsson also reported that this Danish king sought consent from the papacy of Rome to establish a Danish bishopric in Denmark, freeing the Danish church from servitude to the Heads of Bishops of Hamburg – Bremen (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978). He also alluded to the tensions between the German churches, as well as the Danish Church's desire to become independent of the German ones.

In that respect, Pergsson pointed out that Pope Pascal II accepted King Erik's request to relocate the Episcopal chair from Saxland to Denmark. B. Kedar stated that this proposition had already been accepted by Pope Urban II. In 1104 A.D., a year after Erik died during his pilgrimage to Palestine (Kedar, Westeryard, 1978), pope Pascal II promoted the priest Lund to the office of Head of Bishops of the North.

The tomb of Queen Botild, the widow of Erik the Good, who travelled from Povos to Jerusalem and died on the Mount of Olive before being buried in the Valley of Josephat in eastern Jerusalem, was not mentioned by Pergsson in his account of his own pilgrimage trip, though. When Nikolas visited Jerusalem, he probably didn't know where her own tomb was (Jensen, 2006).

Fourth: The Assessment of the Pilgrimage Trip of Nikolas Pergsson

After reviewing and analyzing the trip account, we draw the following conclusions:

1) There are many conclusions about that pilgrim could be perceived via text of his own travelogue; he is in his middle age, and has strength in his body enabled him to plunge into that exhausted trip, through which he could go across vast distances from Denmark to Palestine via land and sea, specially that was in an age of disturbance, I.e. The Crusader Era. It is supposed that this trip is his first one to leave his own homeland, as he did not any comparisons that make us think of perceiving opposite view . However, we cannot confirming so , due to absence of the sources , and it remains just a mere suppose . Pergsson, also, did not have an adequate education, because he believed in myths and legends, which

were adjacent to the folk religious spirit at that era .

2) Pergsson had religious info about the holy Christian sites in Palestine , about which he wrote in an overwhelming religious spirit. In that respect, he assimilates with other European pilgrims who visited Palestine in the 12th century. It is noted that the bible was his most source, as well as his own observation and viewing, plus some persons whom he asked throughout his travelling in those places .

We don't conceive here that information made available to him included some myths which circulated in the public milieu in northern -west of Europe , and linked with saints and the public believe in their power of healing .

3) Nikolas pergsson's trip lacked of economic and social aspects, and limited to the religious side, as his own passion with the churches and covenants and the sites linked with the early history of Christianity , appeared clearly in the text of his trip account . When we compare his notes with the German pilgrims' , like John of Wurzburg and Theoderich , we find that pergsson excelled them in that side .

4)His trip is considered as important because of his mentioning of kings of Denmark and their relation with papacy and their own adherence to sponsor the European pilgrims travels to the Holy Christian sites in Palestine , just like others of European kings .

5) His trip shows important indications about the wish of Icelandic pilgrims to travel to Palestine , especially after the crusaders could establish their own settlements in the region. There is no doubt that the Danish felt that they are small minority comparing to the French and Germans whose population rose there, and consequently pergsson's trip done to confirm the Danish did not separate themselves from the general aspiration to pilgrim to Palestine in that era.

6) Nikolas pergsson's trip lacked of any reference to the Muslims, that leads to conclude that he did not stay long in Palestine to deal with them , and that his own activities were limited within the Crusader community and the Christian holy sites only . This could be ascribed to his being as a foreign visitor which led him to deal with his Christian counterparts only, specially his time of trip was an era of mutual

enmity between the crusaders invaders and the lands original Muslim natives.

7) That Icelandic pilgrim kept to mention the distances between the cities and the sites he visited, to guide any other Icelandic who would set off to Palestine to visit the Holy Sites. Supposedly, pergsson knew those distances by his frequent inquiries from the natives of the regions he crossed.

8)the feature of briefing and abridgement predominated his narrative of the trip , as he set himself to mention the names of the sites and their own links to the early history of Christianity , and he didn't mention anything about the humanitarian aspects of those sites , in particular the social and economic ones . Consequently, that had the character of neglecting sufficient information about the conditions of the crusaders in the time of his visit to Palestine.

9) It is noted the scarcity of the Icelandic pilgrims' accounts in the era of crusades, comparatively to the pilgrims who wrote accounts of their own pilgrimage trips from Germany and Russia for instance. Thus, pergsson's trip has its own special importance as it expressed the Icelandic peoples and the desire of their citizens to visit the Holy Christian sites in Palestine at that time.

Conclusions

This research paper concluded many results that can be briefed in the following points :

- 1) The pilgrim Nikolas pergsson made a trip from Iceland to Palestine in the mid-12th century. It is one of the trips that were narrated in books in that era .
- 2) The religious character predominated the account of that trip , as pergsson wrote about the holy Christians sites, and neglected the other social and economic aspects of these regions .
- 3) Pergsson's trip shed the light on the situation of the Danish kings towards the Holy places in Palestine and their own wish to support the activities of Christian pilgrimage to it.

That paper was a review about the pilgrimage trip of the Icelandic pilgrim Nikolas pergsson.

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