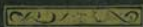
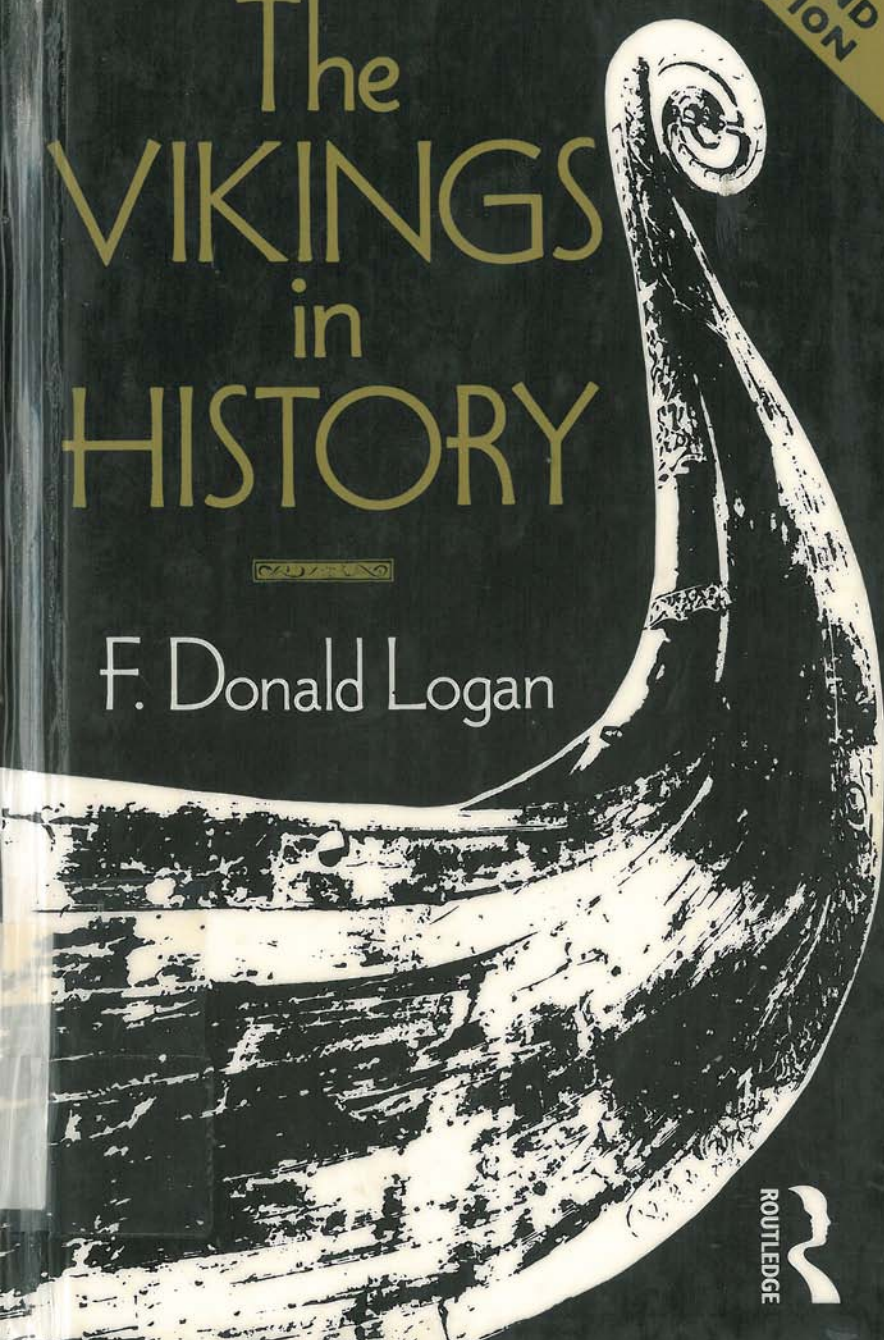


SECOND  
EDITION

# The VIKINGS in HISTORY



F. Donald Logan



ROUTLEDGE



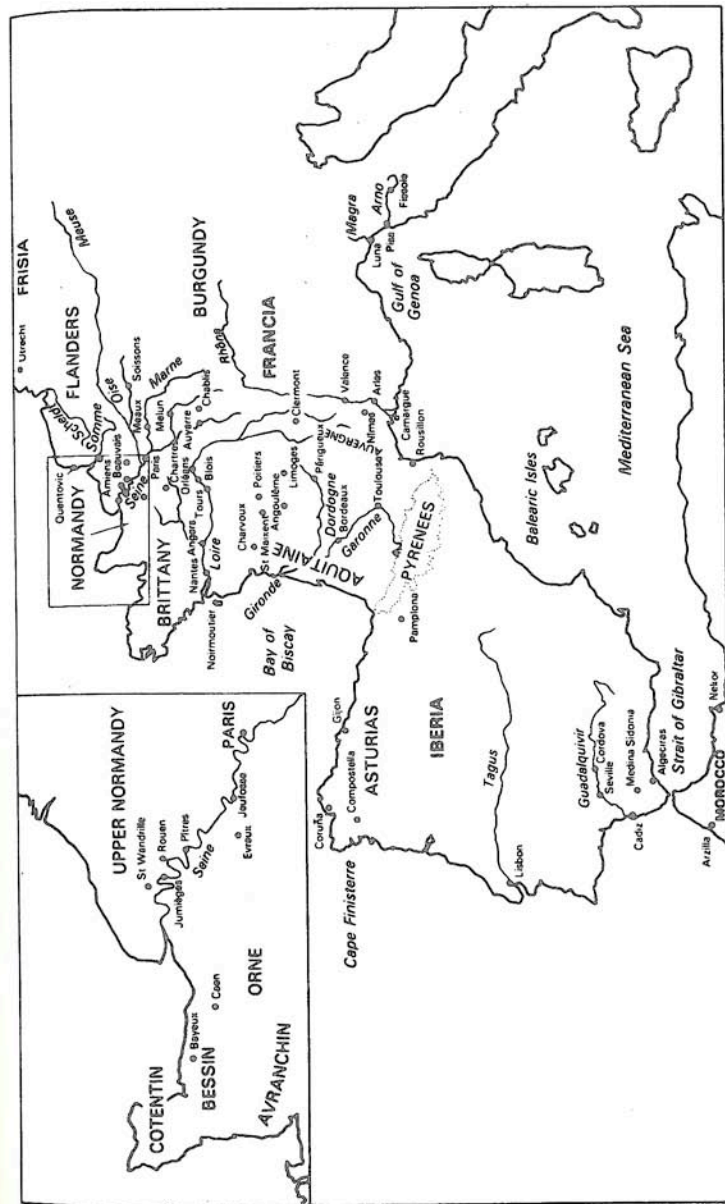
## 5 The Danes in the south

Pagan ships attacked the coast of Aquitaine in 799. They were repelled, many of the attackers being slain on the shore.

This first reported attack on Frankish lands by the Vikings was noted by Alcuin, the English adviser to Charlemagne. He lamented this attack not with the same passion but with similar perception – God was punishing Christians for their sinfulness – as he had lamented the Viking attack upon Lindisfarne in his native Northumbria six years earlier. With this attack – fleeting, scarcely significant in itself, the subject of a passing moralizing reflection, and then quickly forgotten – a new chapter in Viking history begins. The target of Viking attacks were now the lands to the south, principally the lands controlled by the Franks, which, from the year 800, had been called an ‘empire’, lands stretching from Saxony to the Pyrenees and central Italy. But some attackers went beyond these lands to others, whose cultural ties were with the Moslem world of Baghdad.

Alcuin died in 804 and his ‘David’, Charlemagne, in 814. Suspicion about the looming menace of the men from the north may have clouded their dying thoughts. Charlemagne, at least, is said to have been horror-stricken by the harm they might inflict on his descendants and their subjects. One might wonder what judgements they would have made from their graves about the impact of the Vikings on the Frankish empire. Would they have seen the Vikings solely as a destructive force in their national history, as the traditionalists among us do, or would they have taken a longer-term view and stressed the positive effects of these raids on national development? Probably neither. Alcuin would probably have stressed divine retribution, and Charlemagne the primacy of the Frankish state. Mercifully, their judgements have not been disinterred.

The attacks upon western Europe were predominantly Danish. Although occasional raids might have come from Norway or from



Norwegians living in Ireland and 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. Contextually, these attacks belong to Danish history and should be viewed as part of the wider movement of people from Jutland and the neighbouring islands, a movement which also took Danish adventurers to England and, in one episode, to Ireland. Indeed, many of the same warriors engaged in attacks on England and on the continent. If the sons and, more especially, the grandsons of Charlemagne were bothered by Danish raiders, so too were the sons and grandsons of kings of Mercia and Wessex. Although they are discussed separately here, 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. Let us examine the tapestry.

The early raids – possibly only some of them are recorded in surviving sources – were minor events and included the attack upon Aquitaine in 799, a raid against Frisia in 810 and others against Flanders and in the Seine in 820. These were casual affairs, merely brief encounters. Even the attack by King Godefred of Denmark upon neighbouring Frisia in 810 was not a Viking raid *per se* but part of his defensive strategy against Charlemagne, as was the construction work done on an earthwork (the Danevirke) across the neck of the Jutland peninsula. No one really knows what was going on politically behind the Danevirke. A struggle for the kingship after the death of Godefred should not obscure what is known: the kings were not able to exercise control over all of Denmark; they might have been *primi inter pares*, but they could not always control rival chiefs and free-wheeling adventurers.

#### The first decades of attacks

The significant Viking attacks started in 834. The raiders came in large numbers into Frisia and the Loire valley. The timing could not have been better for their purpose. News of the troubled state of the Frankish empire must surely have reached Denmark. Louis the Pious (814–40), a loyal son to Charlemagne, witnessed the disloyalty of his three oldest sons. They rose against him in 829, and four years later humiliated their father-emperor by holding him captive at Soissons. They had him stripped of his sword, clad in a hair shirt, and sentenced to spend the rest of his days in a monastery.

However, the sons argued and in 834 Louis the Pious was restored in a ceremony at the monastery of Saint Denis, where, to the applause of the people, the very bishops who had desecrated his imperial person at Soissons were forced to regird him with his sword and clothe him in his purple mantle. With the Frankish royal family in obvious disarray the major Viking attacks began. The inability of the Franks to deal with these attacks owes much to the unseemly civil strife which bedevilled the empire throughout the rest of the ninth century. The moment could scarcely have been more propitious for the Danes. It has been suggested that Louis's son Lothair invited the Danish attack on Frisia in 834. Whatever the circumstances, the large-scale Viking attacks began in 834 with their raids on Frisia. The contemporary entry in the *Annals of Saint Bertin* observes:

A Danish fleet came to Frisia and laid waste a part of it. They then passed through Utrecht to the *emporium* at Dorestad, where they caused widespread destruction. They slew some people, took others away as captives, and scorched the surrounding area.

This entry would be echoed and re-echoed by other chroniclers and about other places for almost a hundred years, for soon, and not only in Frisia, the Franks would feel the sting of the northmen.

The Viking attacks on the continent followed a simple pattern. At first, there were raids such as the one at Dorestad in 834: their ships would arrive by surprise; they would attack and take away what they could in precious metals, slaves (for sale), and captives (for ransom). It is only with difficulty that one can see any positive element in these cruel, destructive raids whose aim was simply pillage and plunder. These raids were followed by larger, more co-ordinated raids, not *pele-mele*, hit-or-miss actions, but planned attacks: wintering in Francia, the Vikings would systematically attack, conduct campaigns, besiege towns, realize profit from tribute, and become a dreaded factor in the unsettled life of those lands and times. Finally, some Vikings would settle: they would take land, adapt to the feudal structure, intermarry and become absorbed. These phases cannot easily be dated with the precision that would be necessary if they were to be applicable to all of the Frankish empire. Different regions experienced these phases at different times, and there was always the inevitable overlap between one phase and another. Still, allowing for regional variations and twilight zones, four periods do appear in the history

of the Viking expeditions to the south. From 834 to about 850 the Vikings attacked, during the raiding season (i.e., spring to autumn), northern Francia as well as along the Loire and Seine Rivers and the coast of Aquitaine. From the mid ninth century, for twenty-five years, they wintered and were frequently seen (and felt) in the river systems of modern France and, on one extended expedition, in the Mediterranean. Intense attacks began in 879 and lasted for thirteen years, in what was, no doubt, the most intense period of Viking onslaught against continental western Europe. When they came again in about 900, it was to settle, and the general lines of their settlements were clearly visible by 940. In all the Viking years in Francia and her neighbours, from the initial attack on Frisia in 834 to the establishment of a principality bearing their name in the western part of the Frankish lands, lasted for about a century.

Frisia, the modern Low Countries, was easily accessible to these Danish raiders. Dorestad, the great entrepôt, was well known to Danish traders. In 836 and again in 838, King Horik of Denmark disclaimed any responsibility for the raids on Frisia. But raids there were, and they were Danish in origin: Horik's ambassadors were slain at Cologne in obvious retaliation. Were the leaders of these raids rival chieftains? independent adventurers? Whoever they were, the raids continued year after year. Dorestad, raided in 834, was attacked again in 835, 836 and 837. Virtually defenceless, this trading centre was easy prey to the surprise attacks of the Vikings, who were to return frequently until, in 864, the shifting waters of the Rhine system, and not the Vikings, destroyed Dorestad by leaving it dry and useless. In 836 Viking ships were in the Scheldt where Antwerp and Witla were fired. The attackers seemed to be everywhere in Frisia. In 842 a raiding band left London and sacked the other great northern emporium, Quentovic (near modern Boulogne), and returned to England. In another campaign a large fleet – are we to believe the report that 600 ships sailed against a town of a few hundred inhabitants? – sailed up the Elbe and violently attacked Hamburg.

At almost the same time as the attacks in the north, other Vikings were striking further down the west coast of France. The monastic island of Noirmoutier near the mouth of the Loire River was first attacked in 834. This centre of the salt trade, like its northern counterparts Dorestad and Quentovic, experienced frequent Viking attacks: it suited the raiders to have an island base for raids up the Loire valley. In 843 Vikings sailed up to Nantes, which they

attacked on the feast of Saint John the Baptist (24 June). They seized the bishop and slaughtered him at the altar of his cathedral, and, if we can believe later chronicles, a scene of utter barbarity ensued: the Vikings killed whom they wished in a butchery of epic proportions, which ended only when, dripping with blood and laden with bloodied jewels, they returned to Noirmoutier. There they wintered with their families, who had been brought there with the purpose of establishing a quasi-permanent settlement. This is the first recorded wintering of the Vikings in the land of the Franks. In due course, other parties of Vikings would stay in island bases, and the pattern was set.

Meanwhile, Viking raiders had begun the first of countless raids up the Seine. In 841, while the three surviving sons of Louis the Pious were involved in civil war, a Viking fleet under Asgeir attacked Rouen and, a few weeks later, the monastery of Jumièges, and then held Saint Wandrille to ransom. The *Annals of Fontanelle* (Saint Wandrille) report these raids:

In 841 AD the northmen arrived on the 12th of May with their chief, Asgeir. Two days later they burned the town of Rouen and stayed there two days. On the 24th of May they burned the monastery at Jumièges. On the following day the monastery of Fontanelle was saved from pillage by paying six pounds, and on the 28th of May the monks of Saint Denis came and ransomed 68 captives at the price of twenty-six pounds. On the last day of May the pagans returned to the sea.

Four years later Ragnar entered the Seine in March and headed for Paris. Charles the Bald attempted to thwart this attack, and he arrayed his army on both banks of the river. The Viking leader with his whole force attacked the smaller band of the Frankish defenders on one side of the river and, before the eyes of the Franks across the river, he hanged his prisoners. Paris lay before him, and the halleluiahs of Easter turned into lamentations as Ragnar attacked and plundered the town. Most of the western part of the Frankish empire faced Viking assaults during these decades: not only in the Seine, but also in the Somme, Gironde, Garonne, Scheldt, Dordogne and Meuse. The northmen were attacking Chartres, Amiens, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Tours, Angers, Orléans, Poitiers, Blois and Paris. Year after year they came, relentless, against a land seemingly unable to defend itself.

Charles the Bald, King of the West Franks since 843, did not take these attacks seriously at first, and he was otherwise preoccupied

with the ambitions of his brothers. His defence of Paris in 845 was well intended but extraordinarily inept: not only did he offend sound military tactics by splitting his army in two, but he was unable to motivate his army and had to allow Ragnar to escape downriver after paying the Viking leader 7000 pounds of silver. There was virtually no defence against the Vikings of this period: the only defence was self-defence; every man for himself; in a word, flight. The crude roads of France and the Low Countries knew then, as often again, the bands of refugees fleeing the feared savagery of Viking invaders. Monks from cloisters unprepared for hostile attacks fled from such holy places as Saint Maixent, Charvoux, Saint Maur-sur-Loire, Saint Wandrille, Jumièges, and Saint Martin of Tours, and sought refuge in areas isolated from Viking raiders. For two generations these fleeing monks were to be seen on the roads leading to Burgundy, the Auvergne and Flanders. Even bishops left their sees and their flocks, and for this they are still vilified to this day. (Who knows the rightness or wrongness of this? If Saint Cyprian would not judge such shepherds, then surely a humble historian should not.) As the immediate Viking threat passed – temporarily, as we from our vantage point know – the monks returned, monasteries were rebuilt, relics and other treasures brought back, the archives restored. And under fresh attacks the process would begin again. In all their wanderings the refugees took with them their ‘saints’, as they called their holy relics. The Canons of Tours took the body of their holy father, Martin, first to Cormery in 853; they returned it to Tours in 854 but seem to have taken it away again in 862 and 869; in the attack of 877 they carried their saint to Chablis, then to Auxerre, and finally back to Tours where Saint Martin rested at last. Likewise, the monks of Saint Philibert from the island of Noirmoutier, a very early object of Viking attacks, moved with their relics progressively further and further away from the sea: to the Déas in 836, Cunauld in 858, Messay in Poitou in 862, Saint Pourcain-sur-Sioule across the Massif Central in 872, and Tournus on the Saône in 875, finding only at this last place security from the almost ubiquitous northmen.

From the mid 850s a new phase in these attacks can be seen. Their purpose was now changing. Seldom were individuals held for ransom, seldom now the haphazard devastation of places. The new attacks resembled campaigns in their planning, strategy and designs. The attackers no longer kept to the waterways: the Vikings had become more mobile by seizing and using horses for attacks on

the countryside. For example, in 864 they secured their ships on the Charente and travelled cross-country by horse as far as Clermont in the Auvergne. For long periods Viking bands now remained in the same region. For six years (856–62) the same Vikings were present on the Seine, in 856 lodging themselves on the island of Oscelle, opposite Jeufosse, northwest of Paris, where they remained for four years. The contemporary theologian Paschasius Radbertus, reflecting on the Lamentations of Jeremiah and on an immediate Viking threat to Paris, probably in 856 (but possibly in 845), woefully asked:

Who among us would ever have believed or even imagined that in so short a time we would be overwhelmed with such fearful misfortunes? Today we tremble as we think of these pirates arrayed in raiding bands in the very vicinity of Paris and burning churches along the sides of the Seine. Who would ever have believed, I ask, that thieving gangs would perpetrate such outrages? Who could have thought that a kingdom so glorious, so fortified, so large, so populous, so vigorous would be so humiliated and defiled by such a base and filthy race?

Even a moralizing theologian such as Paschasius must have been preaching within a context of fact and, here, of fear. Attacks were made not only on Paris and laments not only by Paschasius. The increased tempo of Viking attacks – again, even allowing for some licence – appears vividly in the oft quoted but still relevant words of Ermentarius of Noirmoutier:

The fleets grow larger and the Vikings themselves grow and grow in number. On all sides Christian people suffer massacre and burning and plunder. . . . The Vikings crush everything in their path; there is no defence. They capture Bordeaux, Périgueux, Limoges, Angouleme, and Toulouse; they destroy Angers, Tours, and Orléans. . . . Ships beyond counting sail up the Seine, where evil pervades. Rouen is attacked, pillaged, and burnt; Paris, Beauvais, and Meaux are seized; the stronghold of Melun is razed; Chartres is occupied; Evreux and Bayeux are pillaged; and all the other towns are attacked.

Something clearly had to be done. Slowly, if not reluctantly, authorities realized that the Viking menace was not a passing phenomenon: the problem had to be faced.

## Defence

The Frankish military set up was not geared to defence. Charles Martel and Charlemagne, its principal architects, constructed an offensive military arm; their need for defence was limited to marcher lands. In the face of Viking attacks this army, no longer unified because it was being used in the civil wars, proved incapable of defeating the northmen, who had the advantages of surprise, speed and offence. After the initial attacks Louis the Pious strengthened his coastal defences. Further defence provisions lay in the hands of Charles the Bald. The fact that he delayed taking serious action until 862 is some measure of his other preoccupations, particularly with the Frankish nobility, and of the underestimating of the Viking menace. He met his advisers at Pitres in that year and devised some defensive strategy. Fortified bridges were to be built blocking most of the major rivers (Seine, Marne, Oise, and perhaps the Loire). Little is known about the nature of these fortified bridges except that they were to be placed at strategically useful bends in rivers and that they required stone and wood in their construction. No doubt, stone forts stood on the banks on each end of the bridge, and the bridge itself, apparently built like a modern pontoon bridge at river level, created an obstacle to river traffic; attackers would be forced to the banks where the defenders in their forts would have the advantage. Problems arose not merely in the manning of these fortified bridges but also in the slowness of construction.

An excellent example of this is the bridge at Pitres. Situated on the lower Seine about ten miles above Rouen at a place where the Seine could be easily forded, Pitres was apparently destined to constitute the first line of defence for the upper Seine and its attendant river systems. Below it lay the town of Rouen, the countryside of the lower Seine valley, and also the islands of Oscelle, a frequent base of the northmen. Were the lands below Pitres simply abandoned and left defenceless except for whatever a much harried local population could do to protect itself? Who knows? Work began in June 862, but, for whatever reasons, it languished. In 864 Charles the Bald once again ordered its construction. The following year the Vikings had control of Pitres and were making forays as far as Paris and its suburb, Saint Denis (for this the Vikings were punished by severe dysentery), and even up the Oise and Marne. Work was taken up again on the fortified

bridge at Pitres in June 866. A work-force was clearly a problem for in 869 Charles had to draft labourers from throughout his realm – one able-bodied man per 100 *mansi* and one cart and two oxen per 1000 *mansi* – for its construction. It was completed by autumn 873, over eleven years after its beginning. Hardly the dispatch necessary against the swift-moving Vikings. The Eure and, slightly upstream, the Andelle flow into the Seine at Pitres. The bridge in question was probably built at the site of the modern Pont de l'Arche. The bridge would have spanned the Seine immediately below the Eure. It is a testimony to the regrettably inadequate state of archaeological research on Viking Francia that this site has not yet been fully examined with professional controls. Fortified areas existed at either end of the bridge; one fort remained on the north bank for centuries, and featured in the Canadian military campaign in 1944. Similar manpower problems arose on the Oise and Marne, tributaries of the upper Seine, where bridges constructed at Auvers and Charenton were falling into disrepair and the local people, who had built them, could not effect their repair because of Viking attacks; in 865 Charles, in order to remedy this situation, drafted workers from other parts of his kingdom on the condition that they would never be so called upon again. These were clearly not sought-after jobs. Fortified bridges were not the answer, at least in the 860s and early 870s, to the Frankish problem of defence. Towns did shore up their defences and rebuild their walls as did some monasteries and new *burhs*. Yet Charles the Bald, ever the Carolingian monarch, insisted that there be no new military construction without his permission. In 864, while the Vikings were traversing his kingdom virtually without obstacle, he condemned fortifications which were built without his permission and, incredible as it must seem to us, ordered them to be taken down by the first of August. Later, in the 880s, as we shall see, local people did what they had to do: they fortified bridges and rebuilt town defences.

To consider tribute a defensive weapon is like considering a ransom payment to be a life insurance premium. The excessive payment of tribute to Viking attackers within the Frankish empire underscores the poor defensive posture of the Carolingians. The term Danegeld was used in the eleventh century in England to refer to the tribute paid to the Vikings, and there is no reason why the same term cannot be appropriately used for an earlier time and another place. Danegeld quite simply was money paid to the Danes

to go away. In early raids the Danes would attack towns and bear away loot and captives who were held for ransom. By the mid ninth century they found it more profitable to extend the ransom principle: instead of holding individuals for ransom, they would hold an entire community (a town, a monastery, a *burh*, or even an entire region) for ransom. At least fifteen general Danegelds (i.e., payments made over a wide area) were paid by the Franks. The precise amount paid is not known, but the total for seven of these general Danegelds is 39,700 pounds, as can be seen in Table 2 which lists the general Danegelds from the ninth and tenth centuries.

Table 1 *General Danegelds paid in the ninth and tenth centuries*

| Year        | Amount in pounds |
|-------------|------------------|
| 845         | 7000             |
| 853         |                  |
| 860-1       | 5000             |
| 862         | 6000             |
| 864         |                  |
| 866         | 4000             |
| 877 (Seine) | 5000             |
| 877 (Loire) |                  |
| 882         |                  |
| 884         | 12,000           |
| 886         | 700              |
| 889         |                  |
| 897         |                  |
| 923-4       |                  |
| 926         |                  |

The events at Melun on the Seine in 866 provide a fairly full picture of this process in operation. In that year the Vikings, with significant strength, were menacing places along the Seine: they besieged Melun and demanded payment. Charles the Bald paid them 4000 pounds of silver and much wine. The Vikings left the area, and the Seine valley experienced ten years of relative peace. Like other general Danegelds, this tribute paid in 866 was to be levied on the whole realm – the *mansus*, the basic unit of tenure, being the principal unit of taxation – and required the following payments: six pence for each free *mansus*, three pence for each servile *mansus*,

one penny for each inhabitant, a half-penny for each temporary inhabitant, one-tenth of the value of traders' goods, and a payment by priests according to their wealth. Normally the tax would be expected to be collected within a period of three to seven months. Local Danegelds (i.e., payments made by local communities) must have been numerous: examples are known for Brittany and, at various times, for the area of modern Belgium. How effective, it must be asked, was this Danegeld system? Its effectiveness, in the short term, was generally excellent: the Vikings would sail away and leave the area free from immediate attack. The payment did not ensure against other bands of Vikings appearing on the scene eager for plunder. Nor did it buy permanent immunity: Vikings would and did come again. The Danegeld bought time. Some suggest that it brought a profit to the king, who might levy more than the amount of the Danegeld and keep the difference. The relief, of course, was local or, at best, regional. Vikings receiving Danegeld on the Loire might soon appear on the Seine. The raising of the siege of Paris in 886, as we shall soon see, meant the payment of Danegeld and the unleashing of the Viking fury onto Burgundy. However general a Danegeld might have been in terms of the levying to pay for it, all Danegeld was only particular in its effect and did little to relieve what was obviously a national problem.

The nation perhaps had too many problems: Charles the Bald had to contend with threats from his brothers, the Bretons, the Aquitanians, and the Provençals. His acquisition in 870 of much of the middle kingdom held by his late brother Lothair added further to his burdens. Although he did force the Vikings from Angers on the Loire in 873, he failed to press his advantage. Instead, he was quickly off on the road to Rome and, upon his arrival, made a magnificent entry into the eternal city, where he was crowned emperor on Christmas Day. His empire bore little resemblance to the empire of his grandfather, who, three-quarters of a century earlier on that very day, had been hailed as *Augustus*. It was the strength of Charles the Great to know that his new title was recognition of his power; it was the weakness of Charles the Bald to think that titles confer power. He had little power to control the waterways of his western kingdom, little power to protect his people from plundering invaders. Charles the Great would not have been in Rome seeking empty titles: he would have been striving for the security of his realm. Even while returning north from Rome, Charles the Bald seemed little concerned about the security of his realm: he

paid no attention to the appearance of a large Viking fleet (reportedly a hundred ships strong) at the mouth of the Seine, and he proceeded instead to do battle with his nephew, Louis the Younger, on the Rhine. Charles died in 877, the year before the great raids, having failed to stop the breakup of Frankish society. The further dismemberment of the once united empire of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, by the partition of 876, accelerated the particularizing already well underway earlier in the reign of Charles the Bald. By the 880s, in the face of the massive attacks of that decade, royal permission for local defence was seldom sought or expected. The defence of the realm did not exist; defence was organized locally; castles were built, towns fortified, defensive enclosures constructed, all by local leaders. From this time defence, particularly in the north, lay in the hands of counts and bishops, men with local interests, now left to themselves by the feeble Carolingian monarchs.

#### **Iberia and the Mediterranean**

During the ninth century Viking fleets entered the Islamic world of Spain twice and, on one of these occasions, appeared in the western Mediterranean. The meeting of the worlds of Thor and Allah is well recorded, and in a geographical sense appears appropriate. The ninth-century Viking attacks were not designed as attacks specifically upon the Franks: they were, particularly in their earlier stages, unco-ordinated raiding adventures. Once Aquitaine was reached, then why not Spain? And once Spain, why not carry on through the Straits of Gibraltar to the Mediterranean Sea? And so it happened.

The attack in 844 came directly from Aquitaine. The Vikings had penetrated the Garonne 130 miles to Toulouse and without attacking that town retraced their course to the Bay of Biscay. They then turned their ships south. They raided the Christian communities at Gijon and Coruña, along the northern coast of Spain, but the Asturians quickly gathered an armed force and sent the northmen fleeing in disarray to their ships, a number of which were destroyed. The Viking fleet was still strong – numbers are dubious, but the original fleet reportedly numbered 100 ships in Aquitaine – and it regrouped and sailed around Cape Finisterre. Down the western coast of Iberia they sailed, raiding as they went. The Vikings were now in the land of the Moors, the Moslems of Spain, and they were to find the followers of Allah formidable foes.

At Lisbon the Vikings plundered in the region of the mouth of the Tagus for thirteen days, but they left before having any serious encounter with a Moorish armed force. Part of their fleet might have detoured to Arzilla on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, but the main part of the Viking fleet attacked Cadiz and, in the interior, Medina Sidonia with great success. The Guadalquivir leads into the heartland of Moorish Spain with Seville and Cordova on its banks, the latter the capital of this mighty caliphate. Undaunted or, more likely, unaware, the Vikings sailed up its waters. What they could have thought as they came within sight of Seville the historian cannot know, but he does know that they captured the city, except for the citadel, and that for six weeks Seville was a Viking city or, at least, that the Vikings, in control of most of the city, used it as a base for plundering the hinterlands. The Moors, now ready, ambushed a large part of the Viking fleet. The emir, Abd al-Rahman II, took prisoners, some of whom he had hanged in Seville and others from palm trees at Talyata. He then sent the heads of a Viking chief and 200 noble warriors to his allies in Morocco. The Vikings had met their match: they used what captives they had to purchase escape and food and clothing. After a few raids on the west coast they were back in Aquitaine by the following year, bruised, battered, and sadly depleted after their first encounter with Islamic Spain.

A strange sequel occurred the following year. In 845 Abd al-Rahman II sent an embassy under al-Ghazal to the King of the Majus (i.e., fire-worshippers, in this instance the Vikings), who lived on a large island or peninsula – the language allows either translation – which had beautiful gardens and flowing streams. It was three days' journey from the mainland and in its vicinity were other islands inhabited by other Majus. Al-Ghazal, before his audience with the Viking king, insisted that he should not be required to kneel before the king. This was agreed upon, but, when al-Ghazal arrived at the king's dwelling, he found that the king had constructed the entrance so low that he would be forced to enter on his knees. The Arab ambassador met the challenge diplomatically by lying on his back and dragging himself on his bottom, feet first, into the royal presence. During al-Ghazal's visit to this northern court the Viking queen offered him hospitality of an intimate nature, assuring him that northern men knew no jealousy and northern ladies had liberated views. The southern gentleman was understanding. No one knows the purpose of his mission – perhaps it had to do with trade – nor can one be sure whether the land in



question was Ireland or Denmark or whether the king was Turgeis or Horik. The identity of the queen remains discreetly veiled as befits a lady of her graciousness.

The second assault of the Vikings on the southern world lasted longer than the expedition of 844 and knew greater success. In the annals of Viking adventures the four-year adventure of Bjorn Ironside and Hasting from 859 to 862 must be considered among the boldest. They were to penetrate the middle sea, *mare nostrum*, and touch on most of its shores and some of its islands, at the very time, it must be remembered, that Viking cousins were settling England, intermarrying in Ireland, circumnavigating Iceland, harassing the Franks, and establishing hegemony in Russia.

These two well-known Viking adventurers, who are still heroes to many, had been raiding in the area of the Seine. They took a fleet - Arab sources say it contained sixty-two vessels - southwards and attacked, as had their predecessors, the Christians of Asturias but with no more success. They pillaged as they sailed along the west coast of Iberia, and two of their ships, cruising ahead of the others, were captured by Moorish coastal guards, who found that the Viking ships were already laden with silver, gold, prisoners and provisions. The main fleet soon arrived at the mouth of the Guadalquivir (intent upon Seville and Cordova?), but the Moors were prepared for them. The new emir, Mohammed II, his army and ships at the ready, drove the attackers away. With the Viking fleet still very much intact, Bjorn and Hasting headed their ships through the Straits of Gibraltar and, taking Algeciras by surprise, burned its great mosque. They soon crossed the short distance to the North African coast, and five Moslem accounts tell of the Viking attack upon Nekor, city of the Rif, in Mauritania (Mazimma in modern Morocco). One account relates that 'they captured the city, plundered it, and took slaves'. Were these the same slaves ('dark men') that an Irish source states were brought to Ireland from Africa at this same time? The notables among those captured by the Vikings were ransomed by the local emir. After spending eight days at Nekor they were off again. Back in Spanish waters the northmen attacked along the eastern coast and then sailed eastward where they engaged in lightning raids upon the Balearic Islands (Formentera, Majorca and Minorca) and, from there they turned upon Rousillon on the southern coast of Francia. Winter was approaching and the island of Camargue, near the mouth of the Rhône, was found to be an ideal place to spend it.

When spring came in 860 the Vikings, using their island base, raided settlements up the river as other Vikings had done from their island bases on the Seine and Loire. They raided the lower Rhône valley, attacking Nîmes, Arles, and even as far up river as Valence. Not every raid was successful, as a contemporary letter, in which Abbot Lupus of Ferrières praises Count Gerard of Provence for defeating the plunderers and driving them away, shows.

As the Vikings were attacking southern France, then why not attack Italy? At least part of the Viking fleet, probably under Hasting, sailed down the western coast of the Italian boot, then up the Arno, devastating Pisa and sacking Fiesole. To these Italian exploits belongs the story of their attack on Rome. According to the story, Hasting, flushed with his triumphs, designed to attack Rome and become master of the world. His band sighted a city, magnificent in its buildings and dazzling to their northern eyes. Under a shameless ruse Hasting sent messengers into the town to say that he, in the last moments of life, desired baptism. The inhabitants allowed the entry of the Vikings into the city for this purpose. After his baptism, Hasting 'died' and during the solemn obsequies the 'dead' Hasting rose from his funeral bier and pierced the officiating bishop with his sword. Concealed weapons appeared and the Viking band laid waste the city. Only as they were leaving, we are told, did they discover that the city which they had seized by deceit was not Rome but the coastal town of Luna, the ancient Roman town at the mouth of the Magra on the Gulf of Genoa, far in both distance and grandeur from Rome. The story is related by Dudo of Saint Quentin, writing in the early eleventh century, and bears some resemblance to other tales, especially tales of entry by using simulated funerals such as the story of Pleskow in Russia and London - and could 'Londonia' and 'Luna' have been confused somehow? - and, in any case, merits no serious consideration. One late Arabic and two late Spanish sources claim that the Vikings reached the eastern Mediterranean (Greece and Alexandria), but the lines are too long and the witnesses too weak for us to explore.

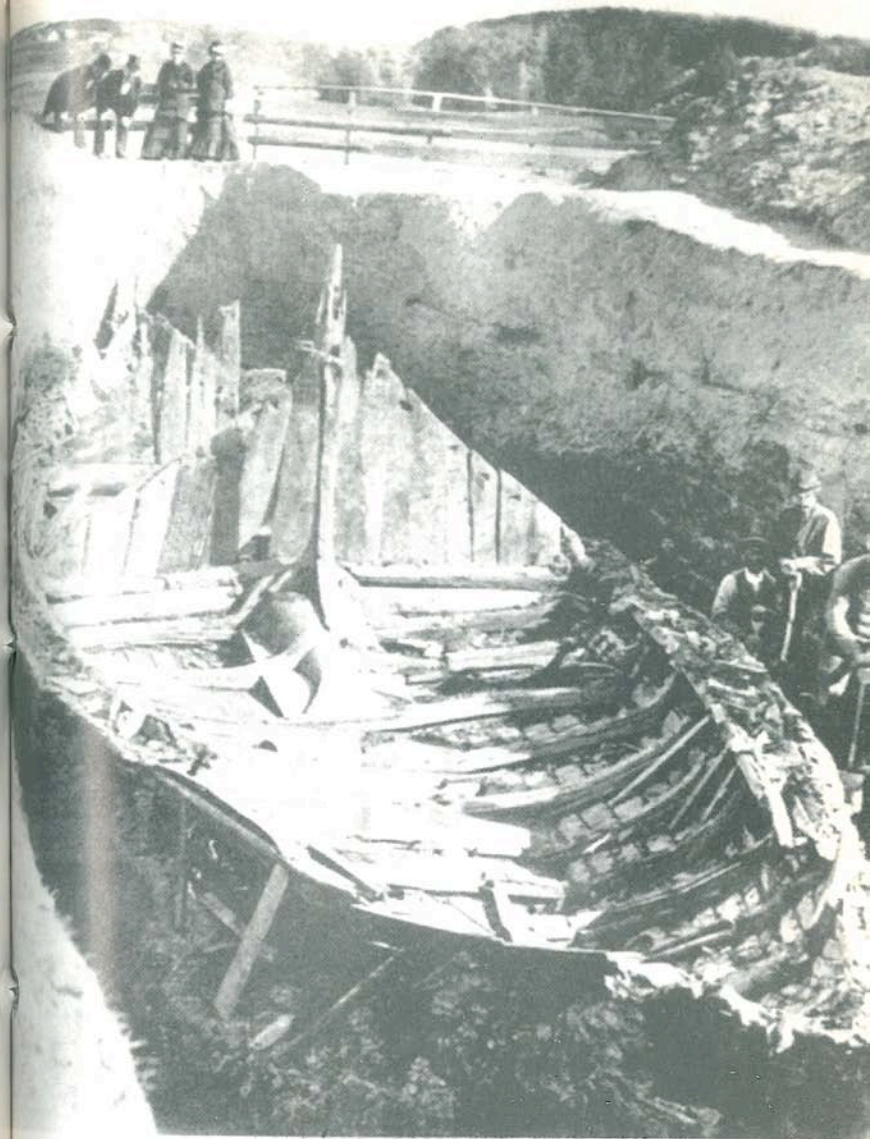
In the summer of 861, after their Mediterranean experience, these Viking raiders sailed again past the Pillars of Hercules into the Atlantic, where they were harassed by gale winds and a Moorish fleet: the former they endured and the latter they defeated. One last raid, however, remained in this southern world. From the Bay of Biscay they descended upon Pamplona and held its prince to

ransom. In 862 they were back in the familiar waters at the mouth of the Loire, their great adventure over. Other Viking raids in the south are mentioned in the sources – Compostella in 968, the caliphate of the Umoyyads in 966 and 971, and Asturias in 1013 – but the principal action remained in the lands of the Franks. The Iberian raids, though adventurous and revealing the Vikings' ambitions, were off-shoots of the Danish attacks upon Francia.

#### The great attacks (879–92)

Thirteen years of the worst devastation wrought by the Vikings was not the result of a strategic plan, a big 'push', an all-out offensive. The Danish Great Army which appeared in the Low Countries in 879 had arrived in England in 878 to join its brothers-in-arms in the wars against the Anglo-Saxons. The new army, learning upon its arrival in the Thames valley that its brothers had indeed been defeated by King Alfred at Edington, stayed the winter at Fulham on the Thames and in the following year sailed for the continent. This army was to range almost freely in the northern part of the Frankish lands – between the Seine and the Rhine – lands which had been largely free from Viking attacks for the previous fifteen years.

The progress of this army can be easily followed. In mid July 879 the Great Army landed on the coast between Calais and Boulogne. By the end of that month they had raided Théroutanne and the abbey of Saint Bertin. Attacking as they went, they visited violence upon the Yser, Lys and Scheldt valleys and encamped for the winter at Ghent. Early in 880 this Viking army left its camp at Ghent and attacked Tournai, Condé, Valenciennes, and even Reims, before returning to Ghent. The next winter (880–1) they camped at Courtrai, from where they attacked Arras, Cambrai and Péronne – all of these raids probably occurred during a one-month period from late December 880 to late January 881. Within a matter of only weeks they were on the move again, harassing Théroutanne, the coastal region between Boulogne and Saint Valéry, and the Somme valley including Amiens and Corbie before returning to Courtrai. The itinerary goes on and on: in 881–2 they were on the Meuse attacking Tongres, Liège and Maastricht; on the Rhine attacking Cologne, Bonn and Koblenz, and on the Moselle attacking Treves, Metz and Remich. Under the year 884 the annalist of Saint Vaast recorded:



*Excavation of the Gokstad ship from a burial mound in Vestfold, Norway*



Top left Spindle whorl of soapstone from L'Anse aux Meadows

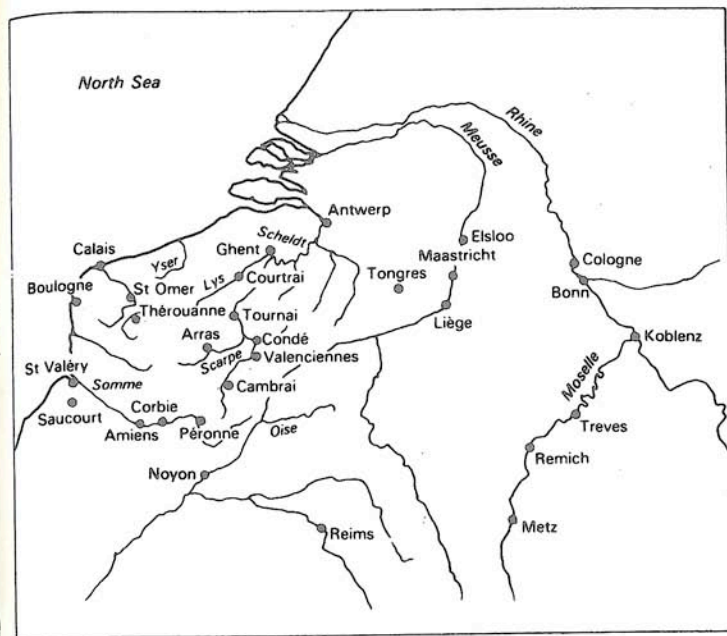


Centre left Stone lamp from the Viking site at L'Anse aux Meadows



Bottom left A ring-headed pin of bronze excavated in a house site at L'Anse aux Meadows, and photographed in situ

Below Site of the largest house excavated at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland



13 The great attacks (879-92)

The northmen continue to kill and take Christian people captive; without ceasing they destroy churches and dwellings and burn towns. Along all the roads one sees bodies of the clergy and laity, of nobles and others, of women, children, and infants. There is no road on which the bodies of slain Christians are not strewn. Sorrow and despair fill the hearts of all Christians who witness this.

And the Christians who witnessed this must have despaired of ever finding relief, for the Vikings seemed able to criss-cross these lands almost at will. Some opposition was in fact mounted, and the Vikings lost one battle to Louis III at Saucourt in 881 and were besieged by Charles the Fat at Elsloo on the Meuse, although neither Carolingian chose to press his advantage. By July 885 the invaders, having exhausted the region - but not themselves - headed south for the Seine. They were not to return to these tired lands of the north and northeast for another five years.

The central event of the Great Army's thirteen years - some would

say it was the central event of the Viking campaigns against the Franks – was the famous siege of Paris. The city was under Viking siege from November 885 until November 886. At this time the greatness of Paris lay in the future: in 885 it was one of several towns, all small, along the Seine, although its location just below the confluence of the Marne and Seine added to its significance. Parisians at this time should be numbered in hundreds and not in thousands. Although tiny settlements existed in the vicinity – and, thus, suburbs in that sense only, for Paris was not an *urbs* – Paris was the island in the Seine, the *Île de la Cité*, joined to the river banks by two bridges. The *Grand Pont*, under construction since the 860s, joined Paris with the north (right) bank and the *Petit Pont* joined it with the south (left) bank. Both these bridges blocked passage on the river and each had towers at either end. The key to the defence of Paris clearly lay in these bridges. The Viking leaders, apparently intent upon the Marne country, were willing to bypass Paris when they reached the city on 24 November 885. Sigfrid, the leader of the northmen, met Joscelyn, the Bishop of Paris, on the following day to arrange passage upstream.

He bowed his head and addressed the bishop thus: 'Oh, Joscelyn, have pity on your self and on the flock entrusted to your care. For your own good listen to what I have to say. We ask only that you let us pass beyond your city; we shall not touch it. We shall strive to safeguard your rights and also those of [count] Odo.' . . . The bishop responded loyally with these words: 'We have been charged with the protection of this city by our king Charles [the Fat], whose kingdom extends almost over the entire earth under the authority of the Lord, King and Master of the powerful. The kingdom must not allow itself to be destroyed; she must be saved by our city. If these walls had been committed to you as they indeed have been committed to us and if you had acted as you have asked us to act, what would you think of yourself?'

Sigfrid answered, 'My sword would be disgraced and unworthy of my command. Nevertheless, if you do not grant my request, I must tell you that our instruments of war will send you poisoned arrows at daybreak, and at day's end there will be hunger. And so it will be; we will not cease.'

And so it was, almost. As Sigfrid had threatened, the attack began at daybreak on 26 November. The northmen launched a full-scale assault on the tower on the right bank of the Seine. All day long stones were hurled and arrows shot against the defenders while burning pitch and boiling oil were poured down upon the attackers.

At the end of that day the tower remained in the hands of the Parisians but much damage had been done to it. The defenders, working by night, added another storey to the height of the tower. When the Vikings returned on the following day, they came equipped with a battering ram to strike at the structure itself and a catapult to send fire into the wooden entrails of the tower. Again, the Parisians prevailed.

The Vikings began their siege. They pitched camp before the city at the Abbey of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois. On the last day of January 886 they began another attack. Dividing themselves into three groups, the attackers sent one band to set upon the tower on the right bank and the other two bands were sent against the bridge. For three days the Vikings fought to capture the tower, trying to fill its ditch with straw, tree branches, animal carcasses, and even with the bodies of dead prisoners, but to no avail. They sent three blazing boats to destroy the bridge but it survived.

The winter weather accomplished what the Danes could not. The Seine flooded on the 6th day of February and the *Petit Pont* was washed away; passage was possible south of the city. The Vikings quickly attacked the tower isolated on the left bank. Some of the Vikings raided overland beyond Paris as far as the Loire, others raided Chartres and Evreux to the south and east, and still others remained at Paris to maintain the siege. The call went forth from Paris for help, and Count Henry of Saxony led an army to lift the siege. His soldiers, weakened by a march in winter, made only one desultory attack on the besiegers before withdrawing. The Danish camp was now on the left bank at Saint Germain-des-Prés. Sigfrid offered to lift the siege for a tribute of a mere sixty pounds of silver, but the Parisians refused and the siege continued. The bishop-leader of the Parisians, Joscelyn, died in April. The attackers knew of his death and shouted tauntingly at the gates that the bishop was dead. Odo, Count of Paris, rallied the defenders, overwhelmed by grief and stricken with disease, to continue the defence. Secretly, Odo left Paris to beg his fellow Franks, particularly the Emperor Charles the Fat, to come to the aid of his city. The Danes, who seemed to know a great deal about their enemy, knew Odo was returning and blocked his entry into the city. The great defender of Paris, his horse killed beneath him, fought on foot and, slaying the Danes on the left and right, gained entrance to Paris. Charles did respond to the Parisian plea, and by October his army was at the foot of Montmartre. Instead of attacking with his

strong army he made terms with the enemy: if they would lift the siege, Charles would let them pass Paris and follow the Seine into Burgundy where they would be free to spend the winter harassing Charles's Burgundian subjects. The Parisians were enraged by this settlement and refused to allow the enemy to sail past Paris. The ships had to be carried overland to a point beyond the city. The Parisians were even further enraged when in the spring Charles paid the Vikings 700 pounds to leave the Seine. Justice was seen to be done, in the eyes of the Parisians, when, in 888, Charles was deposed and in 889 Odo, saviour of Paris, became King of the West Franks. And from that year Paris was spared any further fury from Viking attacks.

During these years other Vikings, taking advantage of the weak and fractured condition of Francia, raided on the other rivers. Hasting was active in the Loire. The Oise and the Scheldt were repeatedly visited by Viking bands, who were disciplined and adept in military tactics, and well equipped for the type of war that they were now waging. The attempts by Odo and others to repel these attacks were only partially successful. In 891, at the same time as Hasting with his army was raiding in Picardy, part of the Viking great army in Frisia suffered a defeat at Louvain. Both armies left in 892, not the victims of Frankish military strength – the army of the north could have recovered from the Louvain defeat – but the victims of nature herself. An exceptionally dry summer in 892 had left a parched earth and a very small harvest. The twin devastations of famine and disease struck these lands, and in the face of these the Vikings retreated, to undertake campaigns against the English King Alfred. This provides further evidence of the interrelation between Danish campaigns. The period of the raiding campaigns in Francia was now coming to an end. Yet, the Vikings were to return, and the great principality of Normandy was to be founded.

#### The settlements: Normandy and elsewhere

Permanent Viking settlements in Francia were the exception rather than the rule. The great success of their settlement in Normandy and the subsequent glory of that principality might give the impression that this was the only Viking settlement in Francia. It was not the only settlement, but it was the only successful settlement. In about the year 840 two Vikings became vassals of Louis the Pious, and they and their successors held the territory around Dorestad until

885, when Charles the Fat ended their rule and also ended what Marc Bloch calls 'this Netherlandish Normandy'. The Vikings on the Loire seemed intent on settling or, at least, on establishing a colony. In 869 Salomon, Duke of Brittany, made peace with the mighty Hasting and his raiders, and after three years these Vikings sailed up the Loire and its tributary the Marne as far as Angers, where they established themselves, perhaps with their wives and children. Charles the Bald was disturbed by the thought of a permanent Viking settlement within striking distance of Tours and successfully besieged Angers by diverting the waters of the Marne, leaving the Viking ships high and dry. An agreement was quickly reached and the Vikings went back down the Loire, remaining in its basin until 882. This early attempt to establish a 'Loire Normandy' in the 870s was a precedent, if not an exact model, for the attempt to establish a settlement in the area of the Loire around Nantes in the early tenth century, at about the same time that Rollo and the Seine Vikings were settling the area of the lower Seine around Rouen. In fact, in 921 Count Robert, son of Robert the Strong, recognized the rule of the Vikings in the county of Nantes; later, in 927, Raoul, King of the West Franks, also recognized them. Their power probably extended into the romance-speaking eastern borders of Brittany. The Loire Vikings were finally driven from their nascent settlement by Alan Crooked-Beard in 937, their attempt at colonization having lasted for, perhaps, a quarter of a century. One can only imagine how different French and, indeed, European history would have been had there been successful Viking settlements on both the Loire and Seine.

Normandy, the Viking settlement on the Seine, its future brilliant with accomplishments, had its beginnings shrouded in the darkness of morning before first light. To say that Normandy was established in 911 as a result of an agreement between Charles the Simple and Rollo is to say too much and too little. The two great chroniclers of this period – Flodoard and a monk of Saint Vaast – both miss the crucial years. Much national pride has been involved in trying to determine, without complete success, the origin of Rollo himself – was he Danish? or Norwegian? or possibly Swedish? No document of the settlement survives, and its terms can be inferred only from later documents. What is known is – and has to be – enough for us to gain a general outline of the process. When Charles the Simple became King of the West Franks in 893, he appeared intent on

ridding his kingdom of the Viking menace. He did reach an agreement with the leader of the Seine Vikings in 897: the latter was baptized, with Charles acting as godfather. (Are we to believe that Charles led him physically to the baptismal font?) This plan failed. Fourteen years later – it is one of the dates we do have – in 911 Rollo, whose place of origin is not really of consequence, led a *Danish* army to the town of Chartres, which he besieged. The siege proved unsuccessful, and Rollo's army suffered a major defeat. In 913 and 918 Rollo, acting as a Christian leader with full authority over Rouen, apparently issued charters, which have, unhappily, been lost. In 918 Charles the Simple referred, in a royal charter, to an agreement which had been made with Rollo. This agreement, then, must have been concluded sometime between 911 and 918, and probably between 911 and 913, established Normandy. Rollo was probably baptized at this time, since it is assumed that Rollo was not a Christian at the time of the siege of Chartres and that Charles demanded his baptism, as he had demanded the baptism of the leader of the Seine Vikings in 897. Rollo also undertook to defend the lower Seine from further attack, thus providing a buffer against both the Bretons and other Vikings. Charles the Simple, for his part, allowed the Vikings to settle in that region; this is clearly implied in the royal charter of 14 March 918, in which Charles the Simple stated that he had given land to Rollo and his companions *pro tutela regni* ('for the defence of the kingdom'). It is not known exactly what lurks behind these words, but the obvious explanation is that sometime, soon after his defeat at Chartres, Rollo became a vassal of the French king: he received the lands around the lower Seine in return for swearing fealty to Charles. The story that Charles and the Viking leader met at Saint Claire-sur-Epte in the late autumn of 911 and that, in paying obeisance to Charles, the Viking Rollo tripped him, has no better foundation in fact than the fertile and impish imaginations of later historians.

What were these lands conceded to the Vikings *pro tutela regni*? The charter of 918 does not itemize them. Even if originally – as seems to have been the case – these lands extended only to the area of Upper Normandy, the lands of the Normans grew to include Bessin and, temporarily, Maine in 924, and also Cotentin (i.e., the peninsula) and Avranchin in 933; these additions no doubt legally recognizing *de facto* Viking occupation.

The lands which the Vikings settled were probably

underpopulated at this time due to the generations of Viking activity in the area and the apparent abandonment of the Seine defences below Pitres. The bulk of the settlers were men. They came principally from Denmark, although some came from the northeast of England and others from Ireland, a conclusion suggested by a sophisticated analysis of known names. How long did the colonizing take? The main lines of the settlement would have been completed in the period of two generations. Inter-marriage between newly baptized Viking men and Christian Frankish women – even if one does not accept that Rollo married Gisèle, the daughter of Charles the Simple – must have occurred from the very beginning. The process of assimilation was well underway and is captured at this dynamic stage in the practice, which was more than symbolic, of Vikings having two names, one pagan and Norse, the other Christian and French. Rollo was Robert; his daughter Gerloc was Adèle; Thurstein of Cotentin was Richard; Stigand of Mezidon was Odo. If Rollo was responsible for winning a permanent home for the Vikings on the Seine, it was his son, William Longsword, who was responsible for the integration of Viking and Frank. A pious Christian, at one time restrained from entering a monastery, William married a Frankish princess, Liégeard, the daughter of Herbert of Vermandois. William's sister married William of Poitiers. Assimilation was taking place. Duke William's son Richard, in order to be brought up a Viking, had to be sent to Bayeux from Rouen for the Viking capital was by then a French-speaking city, a transformation that had taken less than twenty-five years. Of course, new settlers were still coming in the 930s, some of them still pagan, and at one moment in the early 940s Normandy almost reverted to paganism, but the danger quickly passed. The future course of Normandy was now set. Duke Richard became espoused to a Carolingian princess and was known to contemporaries by the Frankish title of count: *comes piratarum* (not 'count of the pirates' but rather 'count of the Vikings'). The Normans quickly adopted Frankish institutions. By mid century Normandy was not a Viking colony; it was a region of France, distinct, indeed, from other provinces (as they were distinct from one another) but unquestionably French.

If change and continuity are the two themes of history and if it is up to the historian to judge which needs emphasis, then an easy generalization to make is that *continuity* is the theme to be stressed in the establishment of Normandy. After all, the Norse language

died quickly – first in Upper Normandy and later in Lower Normandy and there is no sign of its use after 940. It has left few traces in the French language except for nautical words (for example, *bâbord*, *tribord*, *quille*, *havre*) and place-names (for example, those ending *-bec*, *-bu*, *-dique*, *-tot*). Their religion did not survive into the second generation and left no permanent mark. The *thing*, the assembly used by Vikings in the north, is not known at all in Normandy. The political and social structure was feudal: the dukes were vassals of the French king and their men linked to them by feudal tenure. The Normans did more than merely tolerate a change of religion and, with the fervor of the newly converted, championed the Christian cause. They were soon patronizing monasteries and, a century later, leading a reform movement and, soon after that, taking the cross. The younger sons of Norman lords who landed in southern Italy in the decades after 1016 were *French*, and the Norman duke who landed at Pevensey in 1066 was French *tout à fait*. And so the argument for continuity runs. What emerged in Normandy, it is argued, was a feudal, Christian, French society. This view understandably looks to specific, concrete historical phenomena: laws, language, religious practice, societal structure, etc. More elusive, since it is less specific and not at all concrete, is the spiritual dimension brought by the invaders, the Viking qualities which enabled them to adapt to their new conditions and to create their principality. Daring, vigour, drive, vitality, organizational and administrative ability – one resists the temptation to add *élan* – are not so susceptible to measurement and cannot be placed on a scale against the weighty factors arguing for continuity. Yet, the very question concerning continuity and change in this context reflects a Franco-centric view of history: Neustria became Normandy and this process belongs to French history. The Viking historian merely notes that only one successful Viking settlement was established in the south and that, by measurable criteria, the Vikings became quickly assimilated.

The settlement of the Loire – unsuccessful – and the settlement on the Seine – successful – came during the final phase of the Vikings in Francia. Other raids were made in the tenth century, but by then the Viking force was spent. What began in the 830s was by the 930s virtually exhausted, its momentum gone or, rather, directed elsewhere. The Danes, no longer active in France, continued their activity in England, but that belongs to another chapter.

### Selected further reading

The most important works are, of course, in French and in this generation have been written by Albert d'Haenens and Lucien Musset. The reader will find Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1961, book 1, chapter 2 useful. Among the more general books (see above, Chapter 1) Kendrick, Shetelig, Brøndsted, and Jones are in varying degrees helpful. An important interpretive essay is J. M. Wallace-Hadrill's *The Vikings in Francia*, University of Reading Press 1975, reprinted in *Early Medieval History*, Blackwell 1975. For a discussion of the Danegeld, see Einar Joranson, *The Danegeld in France*, Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Library Publications, no. 10, 1923. The Iberian adventures can be studied in W. E. D. Allen, 'The Poet and the Spae-Wife: An Attempt to Reconstruct al-Ghazal's Embassy to the Vikings', in *Saga Book of the Viking Club*, vol. 15, part 3, 1960, and Jon Stefansson, 'The Vikings in Spain from Arabic (Moorish) and Spanish sources', in *Saga Book of the Viking Club*, vol. 6 (1908–9), pp. 30–46. Although it is old, much of interest can still be found in C. H. Haskins, *The Normans in European History*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin 1915. For a reconsideration of Charles the Bald see Margaret Gibson and Janet Nelson (eds.), *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, British Archaeological Reports, International series, vol. 101, 1981.

## 6 The Danes in England

Heroes abound (Alfred, Athelstan, Cnut) as do saints (Edmund, Alphege, Oswald) and villains, (Eric Bloodaxe, Ethelred the Unready) and famous places (Edington, Maldon, York). It is the world of Viking-age England. It is the period when Danes attacked, invaded and settled, when they brought England out of its insularity into the wider life of northern Europe. For 200 years the Vikings from Denmark dominated English history, attacking her shores, traversing her roads, and permanently changing her landscape and language. Fortifications were built; new towns came into being; new markets were opened at home and abroad. England was never to be the same again.

The story of the Vikings in the land of the English is at once blessed and bedevilled by the account in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and by the towering figure of King Alfred.

Overshadowed as an early vernacular history only by the contemporary Irish annals, the Old English chronicles, known collectively as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (and, familiarly, as the *Chronicle*), reveal such a wealth of information about the Viking invasions that, were we forced to rely solely on other sources, we would be left historically poverty-stricken. Yet the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is, at best, a partial, prejudiced account of these years. Its manifest emphasis on the south and, in particular, on the fortunes of the kingdom of Wessex for much of its account of the Viking age leaves vast areas of the country virtually unchronicled over long periods. Paying only occasional attention to events of the northeast and almost no attention to events of the northwest, the *Chronicle* cannot be considered an English *national* history for the period of the Vikings. That was never its intention and that was never the historical reality.

Alfred's great fame owes much to his good fortune in having the deeds of his reign so fully reported – and so favourably – in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and his life so eloquently hagiographed by

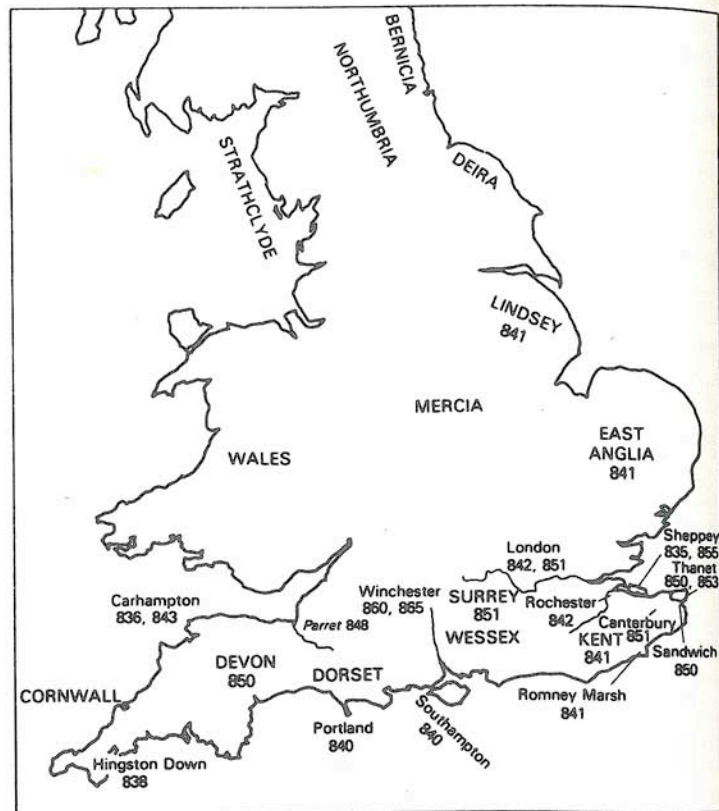
the fawning Asser. Also, since nothing succeeds like success and since the house of Wessex was successful in uniting the English into one kingdom, the Whig and neo-Whig historians have turned to Alfred as the founder of the English state, the greatest monarch before the Norman Conquest, in a word 'the Great'. In truth, the success of the house of Wessex was far from certain at the death of Alfred and the unity of England had been far from Alfred's mind. As a king of Wessex, Alfred was an able monarch, equal but, arguably, not superior to Edward the Elder and Athelstan. The triple tyrannies of the *Chronicle*, Asser and traditional historiography leave us with the fame of a good local king inflated into majestic national greatness. If the Viking age produced a monarch of greatness, then one need look no farther than the foreign-born Cnut, whose legacy to Edward the Confessor and William the Conqueror provided a substantial base for the successes of post-Cnutian England.

Definitions are not easy in all this. Words like 'king', 'England' and 'Denmark' roll very easily from one's pen, but what do they mean? Does 'England' mean anything more than the place where the Anglo-Saxons lived and 'Denmark' the place where the Danes lived? We may be tempted to attribute a political organization and unity to these places which they did not in fact possess. Neither for England nor for Denmark in the beginning of the Viking age should one assume 'one nation, one king' or, even less, 'one state, one king'. The overlay of subsequent centuries can disguise the fact that, at this time, 'king' among the Danes referred to a powerful regional leader with some hereditary claim to rule and that in England a 'king' was ruler of a regional kingdom, again with an hereditary element of some sort. There might have been three such kings ruling in different parts of Denmark and possibly as many as five kings in contemporary England. Kingship was about power, and power was about men – particularly warriors – and wealth. A powerful leader could by force of arms intimidate weaker leaders and demand from the latter military and financial support. Almost like a chant historians must repeat to themselves (and to the world) 'titles do not confer power'. Alfred might have been called 'king of all the English save those captive to the Danes' and Athelstan 'king of all Britain', but the claim and the reality are scarcely the same. Power is not conferred; it is held. Some semblance of unity came to England when Edgar became sole monarch in 959 and to Denmark about the same time under the rule of Harald Bluetooth. In neither case was



regionalism stamped out nor was there anything more than the primitive apparatus of a national state, although England was further advanced in this process than Denmark.

To mention England and Denmark in the same breath helps to emphasize the point that from the 850s to the 1060s England and Denmark belonged to the same northern world. The Danish connection dominated English history during this period. Greater Scandinavia included England, and it took a Norman invasion to break the connection and to draw England into the world of France, the empire, and the reformed papacy.



14 *Early Viking raids on England (835-65)*

### The first Viking wave (835-954)

In 835 the Danes came to England. The same impetus which had moved them to attack Frisia and Francia the previous year moved them to attack England. What released the fury of the Danes at that particular time may never be known: dynastic struggles, population stress, a climate which was growing cold, and restricted crops may all have contributed. The raids upon England from 835 to 865 were surprise raids, in-and-out raids of a seasonal nature, as were the early raids by the Danes – at times the same Danes – on the Continent. Between 865 and 954 the attacks were by large armies and settlement followed. The seasonal raids and the colonizing attacks combined to form the first wave of Danes to come to England.

Table 2 *Early Viking raids on England*

| Year      | Place  |
|-----------|--|
| 835       | Sheppey  |
| 836       | Carhampton                                     |
| 838       | Cornwall (Hingston Down)                       |
| 840       | Southampton<br>Portland (Dorset)               |
| 841       | Romney Marsh<br>Lindsey<br>East Anglia<br>Kent |
| 842       | London<br>Rochester                            |
| 843       | Carhampton                                     |
| 848       | Somerset (mouth of Parret River)               |
| 850       | Devon<br>Sandwich<br>Thanet                    |
| 851       | Canterbury<br>London<br>Surrey                 |
| 853       | Thanet   |
| 855       | Sheppey  |
| 860 x 865 | Winchester                                     |

An analysis of these early, seasonal raids in England – or, rather,

an analysis of the reports of these raids – is instructive. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mentions raids in only thirteen of the years during this period and indicates only twenty-two places which the Vikings visited (Table 3).

The first point to be made from Table 3 is a geographical one. These were obviously coastal raids against *southern* England, seldom penetrating more than fifteen miles inland. With the exception of 841, where the chronicler simply says that 'in Lindsey and in East Anglia and in Kent many men were slain', the raids mentioned in our chief source were southern raids, none of them north of London and the Thames. It should not be overlooked that the south coast and not east Kent, as one might expect, were particularly favoured by the Viking attackers for the raids during the years up to 850. All of the raids chronicled here, except those against Lindsey and East Anglia in 841 and against London in 842, were of immediate concern to the kingdom of Wessex; its principal seat, Winchester, was itself attacked sometime during the reign of Ethelbert (860–5).

Are we to conclude from this evidence that the raids during the period 835 to 865 were in fact mainly raids against Wessex? that the rest of England remained virtually untouched? that there were no Viking raids on England between 843 and 848? It would be fool-hardy for us to rush to these conclusions in the face of such a paucity of surviving sources. It would be historically naive to believe that what is recorded – or, rather, what survives of what was recorded – constitutes the principal events of English history. The so-called 'national chronicle' is, for these years, a chronicle chiefly concerned with Wessex. The fact that the chronicler could dismiss the events in Lindsey and East Anglia in 841 so briefly suggests the narrowness of his interests and perhaps, too, the extent of his information. The *Chronicle* itself has no entry at all for many years during this period. The *Parker Chronicle* (the A version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) does not list events for sixteen of these thirty years, although the annals for 855 and 860 are terse quinquennial summaries and might be amended to read, 855–9 and 860–4 respectively; still, that leaves at least eight years totally unrecorded: 837, 844–7, 849, 852 and 854. The *Annals of Saint Bertin*, concerned with events in contemporary Francia, state under the year 844 that 'the northmen began a major attack on that part of the island of Britain where the Anglo-Saxons live and after a three-day battle the northmen emerged victors: plundering, looting, slaying, they wielded power over the land at will'. For the

year 844 the English chronicle records no Viking attack. In view of such a patently incomplete record, whose focus effectively excludes large regions of England, we can only wonder about the extent of the unrecorded Viking activity outside Wessex. What hides behind the words 'in Lindsey and in East Anglia . . . many men were slain'?

The period of the Vikings' first major attacks on England was marked by alternating victories and defeats. These attacks began in 865: 'in this same year there came a great army to England and it established winter quarters in East Anglia'. And so the *Chronicle* begins its account, and from this time until the year 954, when peace came, its pages are concerned with the Viking invasions and little else. During these years settlements took root; Viking kingdoms were established; the political map of England took on new shapes and these were fluid. The story is not the accepted one of King Alfred defeating the Vikings and his son and grandson mopping up afterwards. On the English side – and here we have names and, behind them, at least faint outlines of people – heroes of equal accomplishment do appear and include Alfred, Edward the Elder, and Athelstan. 'And there came a great army.'

The 'army' which came to East Anglia in 865 numbered somewhere – and the estimates vary widely – between about 500 and 2000 Vikings. They formed a fairly cohesive group, probably led by the brothers Ivar and Halfdan, sons of the legendary Ragnar Lothbrok. Their intention was different from their predecessors' for theirs was not meant to be a summer's raiding; these Vikings came prepared for a sustained campaign, intent upon winning English land for themselves. The unified action of this army suggests a unified leadership: the army moved as an army, although it contained petty kings and *jarls*, who might have been allowed occasional tangents from the general line of attack. It was this army, added to on occasion, which harassed Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and Wessex; it was this army which gave the first outlines to Danish settlement; and it was a remnant of this army that Alfred defeated at Edington in 878. All the evidence invites the conclusion that this was an army whose ultimate purpose was to take land and settle.

The progress of the Viking army from 865 to 886 can be followed without interruption. The East Anglians, faced with this invasion in 865, quickly made peace and provided the invaders with horses, which were to make their rapid advances possible. In the autumn of 866 the Vikings crossed the Humber and entered into a

Northumbria riven by dissension. Rival kings were competing for authority. On All Saints' Day 866, the Danes captured York, having encountered no opposition. York was to be their capital in the north, a Viking city to rival Dublin, Hedeby and Birka, but that lay in the future. For the moment the Vikings had to contend with a gradually uniting Northumbrian response to their presence in York. On 21 March 867, the Northumbrians, their differences put aside for the moment, tried to regain their city. A battle was fought inside and outside the remaining Roman walls, and, in the words of the chronicler, 'A great slaughter was made of the Northumbrians, including both kings.' Again, peace was made. From York the Viking army, mobile on their East Anglian and, perhaps, now Yorkshire horses, turned south towards the enticing land of the Mercians. They seemed to have no trouble in seizing Nottingham, where they spent the winter of 867-8. The King of Mercia, aided by his brothers-in-law, Ethelred, King of Wessex, and the young Alfred, advanced on the Vikings in Nottingham, but the Vikings knew the danger of leaving their fortifications to engage in open battle and so declined. Again, a peace was made. At what price to the Mercians, the suing party? Whatever the price – and the sources are mute – the Mercians were spared further Danish attacks for over three years. The following year, 869, the Danes left Mercia and returned to York, where they had presumably kept some military force to maintain their authority. Later that same year their army was permitted to pass through Mercia on their way back to East Anglia, where they made winter quarters at Thetford. During that winter of 869-70, the East Anglians attempted a stand against the Danes. Like the Northumbrians at York, they failed; their King, Edmund, was slain in the process. There seemed no power in England capable of stopping this disciplined, mobile, well-led Viking army.

There remained Wessex – that is, if one believes that the intention of these Vikings was a conquest of England, and the evidence for this view is not compellingly clear. The scenario that has Alfred saving Wessex and, hence, England depends on a presumed Viking policy of total conquest. If conquest was their intention, why only England? Why not the whole island? How precisely could the invaders distinguish the political units then existing in Britain? What sense could they have had of the movements of political power in Britain? Nevertheless Wessex and its rich lands remained as yet untouched by their fiercely successful army.



15 *England in the time of King Alfred*

The defence of Wessex lay principally in the hands of Alfred. His eldest brother Ethelred only fought the campaigns of the first season. Not a military genius, Alfred responded to the Viking attacks with tactics of passing adequacy. His defence of *England* did not exist: Wessex alone concerned him. At first, each side tested the strength of the other. In 870 the Danes seized Reading, situated at the junction of the River Kennet and the Thames, without difficulty; like York, Nottingham and Thetford it was to serve as a regional headquarters, because it was an easily defended location, and a base for action in the general area. Almost immediately (three days after their arrival, according to the *Chronicle*) the Danes were tested.

Local levies from Berkshire skirmished with them. Four days later (i.e., one week after the Danes seized Reading) the brothers Ethelred and Alfred brought up their army. Major engagements followed at Reading, Ashdown (i.e., the Berkshire Downs), Basing and *Merantiūn* (not now identifiable). Despite a victory by the West Saxons at Ashdown the Vikings held the advantage. Ethelred's death left Alfred with the task of facing his opponents on his own; this he did at Wilton but without success. The chronicler sums up the year 871 (i.e., September 870 to September 871):

In the course of the year nine general engagements were fought against the Danish army in the kingdom south of the Thames in addition to the countless skirmishes which Alfred, the king's brother, and a single ealdorman and king's thane engaged in.

Wessex was not ready, and Alfred wisely sued for peace. Whatever the price – and it need not have involved silver – it removed the Danish menace from Wessex for four years.

The Viking horde left Wessex and wintered (871–2) at the Mercian market town of London. In 872 they travelled from London to Torksey in Lindsey. The Mercians were not able to successfully oppose the seasoned Viking army at either London or in Lindsey, and, in both places, made peace. These must have been local peaces for, after wintering in Torksey, the Viking army proceeded to Repton in Mercia in 873, where they spent the following winter. The occupation of Repton was accomplished only by the slaughter of more than 150 Mercian warriors, whose disarticulated bones were discovered in excavations undertaken during the years 1974 to 1982. The kingdom of Mercia was at an end: the Vikings forced King Burhred into exile and set the subservient Ceolwulf on the throne. Bristling with confidence – in less than ten years they had been victorious in East Anglia, Northumbria and Mercia – the Vikings reached a major decision in 874. The army which had stayed together since its landing in East Anglia in the autumn of 865 now divided. Halfdan took his army north from Repton and, in 876, after a year spent establishing firm border areas against the Picts to the north and the Strathclyde Britons to the west, he began the process of settlement. The *Chronicle* records that 'he shared out Northumbria between himself and his men, and his army was soon ploughing land and living off it'. The other part of the Viking army also left Repton in 874 and went

south, its purpose to gain the coveted lands of the West Saxons. From Cambridge, where they wintered in 874–5, this remnant of the Great Army of 865, now led by Guthrum, Osctel and Anund, attacked Wessex. Whatever might have pre-occupied Alfred during the four-year lull, it certainly had not been the defence of his kingdom. The fact that the Danes moved without interference from Cambridge to Wareham in 875 testifies to the weak state of West Saxon security. Attempts at peace at Wareham and, in the next year, at Exeter led eventually, but not till 877, to the return of the Danes to Mercia. The confident Danes further diminished the size of their army by dividing Mercia in two – West (or English) Mercia and East (or Danish) Mercia – and sharing out the latter for settlement.

The peace was only temporary: the Vikings re-entered Wessex in January 878, determined to acquire land. They used Chippenham as their base and were so successful in occupying large parts of Wessex that the chronicler laments that 'they drove many of the inhabitants overseas'. During his four-year respite, Alfred had not established an adequate defence against the heathen invaders. He had no alternative, short of surrender, but to make a strategic retreat, and this he did. The Danes did not pursue him into the useless wastes of Athelney; they were too busy reducing the land to submission. Alfred engaged in lightning attacks upon the invaders. These were only small skirmishes, but gave combat experience to the local men who joined his small force in the marshes of Somerset in the spring of 878. He then called up what men he could from Somerset, Wiltshire and the nearest part of Hampshire.

And they saw Alfred vigorous and full of vitality despite his misfortunes, and they were overjoyed. (*Chronicle*)

While Alfred was preparing for a spring offensive, his kingdom received yet another blow – an unco-ordinated Viking raid from South Wales upon Devon – and it was the men of Devon who repelled it. The victory won by Alfred's army at Edington in Wiltshire in the spring of 878 was not a total victory nor was it followed by the total surrender of the Viking Danes. The Danish 'army' represented only a fraction, perhaps a small fraction, of the Great Army that had landed in East Anglia in 865, parts of which had already settled in Northumbria and East Mercia. Peace came after Alfred's two-week seige of the Danes in their fortifications at

Chippenham, to which they had fled from the battlefield. The *Chronicle* relates:

The Danes gave him hostages and took a solemn oath that they would quit his kingdom and that their king would be baptized.

The baptism of Guthrum (now known as Athelstan) followed at Aller and his confirmation at Wedmore.

The Danish army, still strong, still a potential menace, did not quit Wessex at once. They remained at Chippenham for the summer and only at the summer's end did they move to nearby Cirencester in West Mercia. It was not until the spring of 879, one full year after the events at Edington, Aller and Wedmore, that they moved to East Anglia, where they shared out and settled the land. There is no evidence to link the Chippenham agreement to the settling of East Anglia. The Danes fulfilled their oath to Alfred by simply moving into English Mercia, i.e., out of Wessex. Why they moved from Mercia into East Anglia is a separate issue, about which our sources are silent. Neither side was to consider this peace as final. In 884 the East Anglian Vikings rose to support their kinsmen who had crossed the English Channel from the Somme and who attacked Rochester in Kent and raided in the lands south of the lower Thames. In response Alfred sent ships to attack East Anglia, where, after an initial victory, they were defeated by the Danes. The partisan West Saxon chronicler charges that the Danes broke the peace when they retaliated by attacking Alfred later that year; the peace, in fact, had been broken many months earlier. Surely, it was in reply to these provocations that Alfred seized London by military force in 886 and placed it under the Mercian ealdorman Ethelred, who seems to have succeeded to the position formerly held by Ceolwulf II.

The claim made by Alfred's chronicler at this juncture – 'and all the English, except those subject to the Danes, submitted to him' – needs closer examination. Certainly a new arrangement existed. The events of the period 878 to 886 had led to a realignment of the power structure and the political geography of England. Alfred was uncontested ruler of Wessex, which was now more secure in its boundaries than it had been since 870; he exercised some power over English Mercia including London, but Mercia remained Mercia and was not annexed to form a Greater Wessex. What about the English outside Wessex and Mercia? It is not clear which of

these English were not subject to the rule of Danish kings in 886; perhaps none. The claim of the chronicler, even if taken at face value, may perhaps be a summing up of the obvious consequences of the taking of London: Alfred ruled Wessex without fear and enjoyed hegemony over parts of Mercia. The Guthrum-Alfred agreement (878–86) drew a boundary line between their territories. The southern boundary of Guthrum's kingdom can be traced along the Thames from its estuary west to the River Lea, up the Lea to its source, then to Bedford and up the Ouse to Watling Street, which formed the western boundary. The northern boundary of his kingdom allows no such clear delineation, but it probably reached as far as the Welland and the upper Avon. Beyond that boundary were other Viking kingdoms at York and elsewhere in the north. The situation was at best fluid and the lines were to change frequently before the Viking age in England came to an end.

Six years of peace followed the taking of London. Then in 892, the Great Army of the Danes which had been harassing the Low Countries, and which was now unwilling to bear the consequences of a bad harvest on the Continent, turned their Frisian-made ships towards England. Their campaign in England, lasting four years, proved unsuccessful. During the years of peace before 892, Alfred had set in motion plans for the defence of the realm. The method of raising a West Saxon military force was being adapted to meet late ninth-century needs. Defensive fortifications had probably been under construction for some years and were almost completed by the time of the new Danish attacks. Alfred also attempted to provide naval defences, but English shipbuilding could in no way compete with either Viking or Frisian techniques. It is a sign of the self-confidence of a man successful in so much else, as indeed Alfred was, to think his talents boundless. The *Chronicle* again:

King Alfred ordered ships to be built in order to oppose the Danish ships: twice as long as the Viking ships, some with sixty oars, some with even more. They were to be faster, safer, and with more deck space. They were not built according to Frisian or Danish design but as the king thought it best.

Of course, bigger-is-better is a heresy which is not peculiar to the modern period. Alfred's ships proved difficult to navigate in tight places: defeat after defeat showed their inadequacy against the best ships and seamen of the time.

Horses, wives and children accompanied this new invasion; the horses at the very beginning and the women and children at least by 893. These Vikings intended to settle. A narrative of their campaign would show their armies criss-crossing England, taking bases among fellow countrymen in Mercia and Essex, never inflicting a serious defeat on the West Saxons, and yet remaining a threat, and never being seriously defeated. This stalemate ended in 896 when the Vikings split up: those who could afford it settled in Northumbria and East Anglia, those who could not looked for further adventure on the Seine.

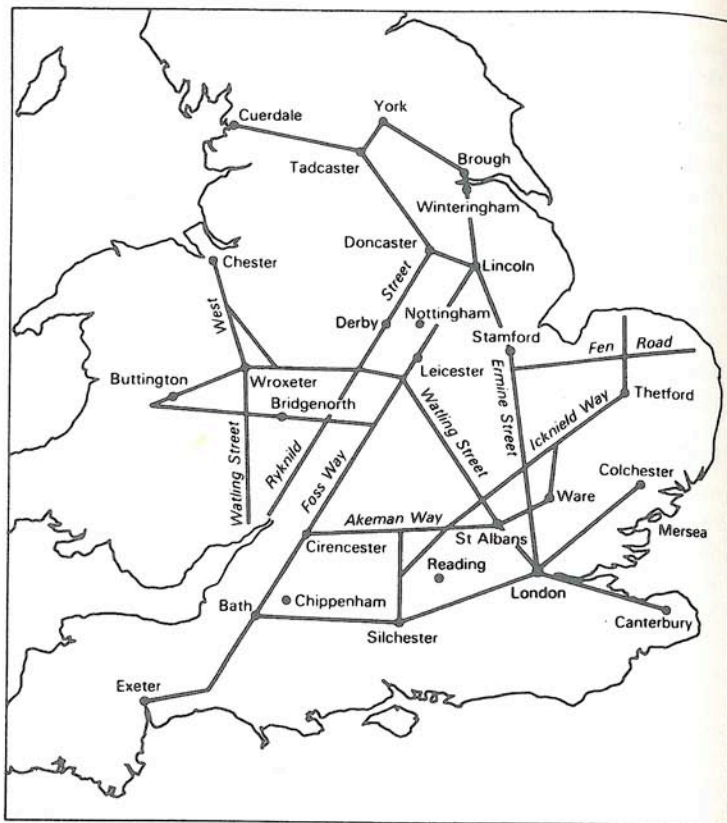
Hasting and the other leaders of these Viking attacks were, to some extent, aided by their fellow Danes, at times perhaps unwittingly. For example, when, in 893, a Danish band was trapped on an island in the River Colne in Buckinghamshire, Alfred and his advancing army, poised to inflict a crushing blow, were forced to march to Exeter, instead, to confront the 'peaceful' Danes who were besieging the place. That same year the Viking army, on its great trek from Wessex to the then deserted town of Chester, was joined by an army from Northumbria and East Anglia. Their main bases were in Danish Essex (at Benfleet and Mersea), and they seemed to have free passage across these Danish lands. It is difficult to imagine the relative success of the raids of 892-4 without acknowledging the active and passive support of the 'Old Danes'.

This is not the place to assess the reign of Alfred: much transpired during his twenty-eight year reign other than the two periods of Viking attacks (871-9, 892-6). Much of Alfred's posthumous reputation, however, derives from his handling of the Viking menace. It is frequently said that he saved England and, also, that he was a military genius. Whatever else Alfred did, he did not save England; and, whatever else he may have been, he was not a military genius. In 871, at the beginning of his reign, the Vikings had a firm hold only in Northumbria, where they were centred at York. In 899, at Alfred's death, they controlled not only Northumbria but also East Anglia and East Mercia and they still posed a threat to Wessex. At best, Alfred 'saved' Wessex and saved it only temporarily. For the time being he succeeded in securing the territorial integrity of his own kingdom. In 873-4, when the Vikings attacked Mercia, Alfred did not move a finger to help. When Alfred made peace with Guthrum in 878 and 886, it was a peace between equals, and he implicitly acknowledged the Danish right to settle large regions of England.

Alfred's fame as a military leader is even more difficult to understand. Against the first major Viking attacks in 871 he distinguished himself by suing for peace and, despite four years untroubled by the Danes, he was still unprepared for their renewed attacks in 875 and had to sue for peace again. In 878 he was still unready and had to seek refuge in the marshes of Somerset. (Alfred the Unready?) Of his victory at Edington nothing is known about field tactics, the size of opposing armies, positions held, etc. Like most battles of the time, victory was achieved as much by the weight of numbers as by superior generalship.

The Alfredian defences did not exist *in vacuo* but existed only in the context of the type of attack which his enemy used in England. Nothing could be further from the truth than a picture of Viking ships appearing in the elaborate waterways of England, cruising through the river systems of the Thames, Trent, Ouse, Severn, Humber, Ribble, etc., penetrating deep into the heartland, attacking from their ships as they went, and striking terror into the souls of the English, most of whom lived near waterways. Such a picture overlooks the crucial fact that it was not by ship that the Vikings conducted their major campaigns (866-86, 892-6). With a few notable exceptions the Vikings, once they had landed in England, penetrated the coastal defences, and established bases, undertook an attack on England over land. The key to their attacks and, indeed, to their successes was not the English waterways but the Roman roads. Without the Roman roads the Viking attacks on England as they happened would be unimaginable. To reach their inland destinations the Danish Vikings used the road system left by the Romans as their most enduring legacy to Britain. Prehistoric trackways and Anglo-Saxon tracks also were used, but it was over the roads laid out by Roman engineers, which can be measured in the thousands of miles, that the Vikings travelled by horse. They did not need roads in full repair or at full width, merely roads good enough for horses to pass. These roads provided a context and dictated a shape for the Viking inland attacks on England. They either got horses from the English, as in East Anglia in 865-6, or brought the animals with them, as when they landed in Kent in 892. The Viking warriors did not fight on horseback - a mode of warfare which was to be perfected in time by the medieval knight - but used horses merely as a means of transport from one place to another: combat was on foot.

When the Vikings landed in East Anglia in 865 - we are not told

16 *Romans roads used by the Vikings*

where – they acquired horses and captured York the following year. How did they get to York? They took the Fen Road west to Ermine Street, where they turned north. They forded the Welland at what was to become Stamford and continued in a straight line north to the Humber, where they crossed from Winteringham to Brough. And thence to York. In all, it was a journey of about 150 miles, about a week's travelling, not allowing, as one perhaps should, for sorties into the countryside, a journey simply described in the *Chronicle* with the words, 'The army went from East Anglia over the mouth of the Humber to York in Northumbria.' In spring 867 they invaded Mercia and spent the following winter at Nottingham. Again they

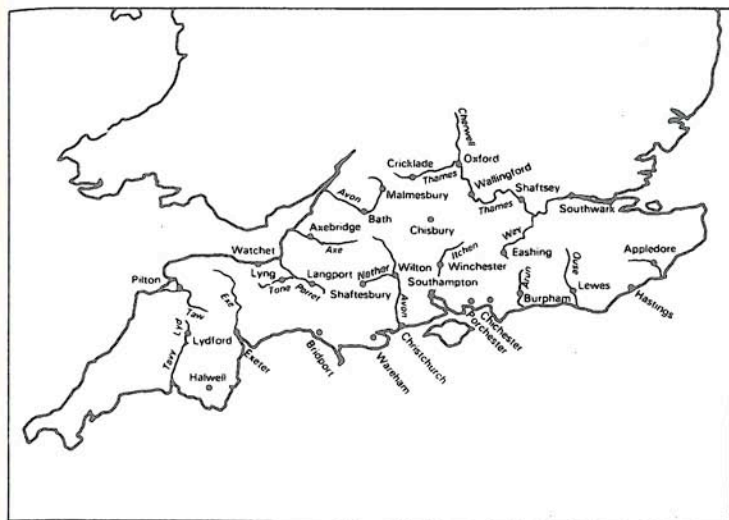
almost certainly travelled by land. Although one could work out a water-route via the Ouse, Humber and Trent, this route is very unlikely. The Vikings who were invading Mercia were well equipped with horses, and in York they stood at the top of a road which reached deep into Mercia. They undoubtedly rode down Ryknild Street as far as the site of a Roman camp, which was later called Derby. From there a spur road took them to the Trent, a few miles from the royal vill at Nottingham. The distance between York and Nottingham was about a hundred miles by this route. When they returned to York in 869, they would have returned by the same route. Later that year the Danes 'rode across Mercia' (*Chronicle*) to East Anglia where they stayed at Thetford for the winter of 869–70. How did they get to Thetford from York? They simply retraced their journey of 866, passing through East Mercia on Ermine Street and taking the Fen Road east as far as the prehistoric Icknield Way, which led to Thetford. How did they attack Reading from Thetford in 871? They rode along the Icknield Way into Wessex, again, no doubt, raiding as they went, until they reached the River Kennet at a point which was only a short distance from the royal vill at Reading. Later, in 878, after the rituals at Wedmore, the Vikings must have returned along the Foss Way to Chippenham, which lies at a point only a short distance west of this great Roman road. When they left Chippenham for Cirencester, they merely rejoined the Foss Way, and headed north for about twenty miles, an easy day's journey. The journey from Cirencester to East Anglia could scarcely have been simpler for them. Cirencester was the hub of a network of Roman roads. To get to East Anglia Guthrum would have led his army east along Akeman Street to the Icknield Way, thence to Thetford and the rich fields of East Anglia, a journey of about 150 miles.

The major campaigns of 890s, when the Vikings came with their horses from the Continent were similar. At the beginning, while they were in Kent (at Appledore and Milton Regis), they were moving by ship, although it should be said in passing that Milton Regis lay on the Roman road from Canterbury to London. When they moved their base into Essex, across the mouth of the Thames, they moved by sea to Benfleet and, later, to Shoebury and Mersea. In 893 they began to use overland routes and for the next three years continued to do so almost exclusively. For example, in 893 a Danish army crossed England and was finally met by a large army of English and Welsh at Buttington on the Severn. How did

they get there? They crossed the Midlands using Watling Street and travelled to its western terminus at Wroxeter, from where they took a continuation of that Street which runs across the Welsh Marches. They followed this Roman road along the ridge of Long Mountain to the stronghold at Buttington on the upper part of the Severn. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* leaves us in no doubt that they travelled by horse: while under siege 'they despaired for lack of food and ate most of their horses'. A remnant of these Danes managed to return to their base in Essex. Reinforced, they rode up Watling Street again later in 893, and at Wroxeter took not the Buttington road – too many bad memories there? – but Watling Street West in a northerly direction. It is conceivable that they used the Wroxeter 'bypass' from Stretton to Watling Street West. They found at the road's end a deserted Roman fortress, which was the once impressive Chester. On their return from Wales later in 893 they would have used the now familiar Watling Street route. When, in the following year, the Danes moved base, they sailed up the Thames and then up the Lea, which, it will be recalled, was the boundary between Wessex and Guthrum's lands. They built a fort at a place probably just below Ware. Alfred blockaded the River Lea below them, and the Vikings – they would certainly have carried their horses as cargo up the Lea – travelled cross-country as far as Bridgnorth on the Severn, which was situated on a Roman road which crossed Watling Street West. The impetus of the Viking attacks of the 890s ended with this last long cross-country campaign. It should be remembered that for much of this time their Essex headquarters was at Mersea, close to Colchester, itself the hub of a network of Roman roads.

What kind of defensive strategy did Alfred employ against the predominantly overland attacks via the networks of Roman roads and ancient trackways? Alfred had no obvious strategic defence – as distinct from tactical defence – against the attacks spanning the years 866–86. His strategic defences were probably only in place by the time the Viking Danes attacked in 892. The Burghal Hidage, although dated from the reign of his son, probably represents the defensive position of Alfred in 892, and strong arguments have urged that conclusion. The Burghal Hidage is not a single document; it exists in several but by no means identical documents. It provided for the financing of the construction and maintenance of *burhs* (i.e., fortified places). Thirty places in Wessex were included in these arrangements, and it can be shown that this is the total

number – or very close to it – and not a fragment. If, then, the Burghal Hidage was largely completed by 892 and if it represents the sum and total of the Alfredian defensive scheme, it obviously



17 *Burghal Hidage defences for Kingdom of Wessex (c. 900)*

merits attention. One feature, above all others, stands out. These fortifications were designed, in general, to oppose water-borne attackers. All but three of these *burhs* were located along the coast or on the inland waterways of Wessex. Of the three that were not – Shaftesbury (Dorset), Chisbury (Wiltshire) and Halwell (Devon) – Shaftesbury stood overlooking the western end of the Nather River valley and Halwell was, in time, abandoned in favour of Totnes on the River Dart. The coastal defences, the primary line of defence, were situated along the south coast and along the Bristol Channel and were, by and large, successful to the extent, at least, that the major Viking penetration was in the area of the Thames estuary. The secondary line of defence – the inland line – was drawn along the northern border of Wessex (i.e., the Bristol Avon-Thames) and also located at strategic places on other Wessex rivers. This secondary line was particularly ill-suited to oppose attacks by land, and, in general, it was by land that the Vikings came. If the Maginot Line was facing the wrong way in 1940, the secondary

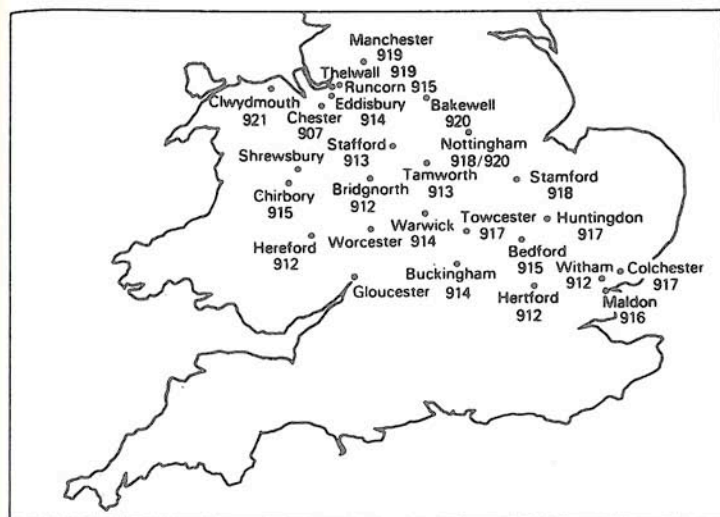


Wessex line was in the wrong place in the 890s. An ideal site for defence which was not used would have been Streatley (Berkshire), located on the Thames at the junction of two major roads (the Icknield Way and the Silchester–Dorchester road). Watling Street, a virtual Viking highway, had no defensive fortifications during Alfred's reign. The conclusion that the Alfredian strategic defence represented, at the most, only a partially successful strategy for defending Wessex against the Vikings seems inevitable.

For a moment, let us consider the Viking position in about 900. The Danelaw was splintered into a number of separate Viking territories, having in common language and custom. Northumbria, the largest of these, had its focal point at York and its leader might be called 'king'. East Anglia formed perhaps two political units, one – an older one – centred at Thetford and another – more recent – centred at Colchester. East (or Danish) Mercia had at least nine separate and, at this time, independent Danish territories. Each territory focused upon a fortified place under the control of a separate Danish army: Northampton, Huntingdon, Bedford and Cambridge, and, to their north, Leicester, Lincoln, Derby, Nottingham and Stamford, which by the 920s appear to form the Territory of the Five Boroughs (i.e., eastern England between the Welland and the Humber). To speak of the division of England into a Danelaw and an Englishlaw is inaccurate – since there was also a Mercialaw – and does not do justice to the complexity of the political situation in the parts of England under Danish rule at this time. The first four decades of the tenth century witnessed the attempt of the West Saxon kings to gain control over some of these territories as direct rulers and others as overkings.

Reconquest is not the correct word – itself so redolent with meaning for other countries and other times – to describe the process by which West Saxon kings conquered the Midlands and the north of England during the first half of the tenth century. Three major figures stand out in this achievement: Edward the Elder (899–924), his sister Ethelfled, Lady of the Mercians (911–18), and his son Athelstan (924–39). Alfred's two children and his grandson made the Wessex kings rulers in fact – and not merely in self-description – of a very large part of England.

During the second decade of the century it was Edward and Ethelfled acting in tandem who pushed back Danish rule. Were it not for the brief *Mercian Register*, we would scarcely know anything about the Lady of the Mercians and her defence of Mercia. Before



18 *Fortifications by Edward the Elder and Ethelfled, 907–23*

the death of her husband, King Ethelred of Mercia in 911, they had fortified Worcester, Hereford, Shrewsbury, Chester and probably Gloucester. The *Mercian Register* describes the incredible feat of fortress-building under her direction during the years 912 to 915: *Scergeat* (location unknown), Bridgnorth, Tamworth, Stafford, Eddisbury, Warwick, Chirbury, *Weadburh* (location unknown), and Runcorn. Her territory thus protected, she was able to take Derby and Leicester. Her brother, meanwhile, concentrated his attention upon the Vikings at Colchester, then those at Hertford, and in 914 captured Bedford. In the year 917 he defeated the armies of Towcester, Cambridge, Huntingdon and Northampton. Thus, by 917 Ethelfled and Edward controlled England south of the Welland. Soon after Ethelfled's death in 918, Edward reached the Humber, and thus everything south of this natural boundary was in his control. Forty years before, his father had retreated to the worthless swamps in west Somerset. Now the separate Viking armies were no match for the synchronized efforts of Edward and Ethelfled. To dramatize the extent of Edward's power at this time the Wessex chronicler boasted with understandable satisfaction:

920 The king of the Scots and the whole Scottish nation accepted him as father and lord. So, too, did Ragnald and the sons of Eadwulf and all the people living in Northumbria – English, Danes, Norwegians, and others – and also the king of the Strathclyde Britons and all his people.

Such submissions – there was a similar submission to Athelstan in 927 – meant perhaps that there was a vague recognition that Edward and, later, Athelstan were the most powerful men on the island. Neither Edward nor his son were unrealistic enough to misunderstand the limits of their power. When Edward the Elder died in 924, many Danes – the numbers will have to be discussed shortly – dwelled in his kingdom in the areas of the east Midlands and East Anglia where they had settled. The only effective Viking state was that north of the Humber, the kingdom of Northumbria, with its centre at York.

#### The Viking kingdom of York

On the eve of the Viking raids of the mid ninth century northern England had four principal political units. The Pennines divided northern England effectively between east and west, although Roman roads through the passes allowed some communication. East of the Pennines, between the Humber and the Tyne, was the kingdom of Northumbria and north of it, between the Tyne and the Tweed, the kingdom of Bernicia. West of the Pennines a less clear situation prevailed. A British (i.e., Welsh) kingdom existed in Strathclyde, stretching from the Clyde to the Solway, and to its south Anglian settlements, about which little is known, existed in Westmorland and Cumberland. The kingdom of Northumbria exercised some influence over the entire north, its actual power varying from situation to situation. The coming of the Vikings produced three major effects on the north. First and foremost, they established a kingdom at York, which, in effect, replaced the English kingdom of Northumbria. Second, the English kingdom of Bernicia remained Christian and English and, for a while at least, accepted the overlordship of the kings of Wessex. Third, in the northwest, Strathclyde was to be recognized as separate and independent – not losing its independence until the eleventh century – and between the Wirral and the Solway a number of northmen settled, dependent, at first, on Dublin and, later, on Dublin–York, and later still, on York.

The 'Viking kingdom of York' is the name given to the Scandinavian kingdom north of the Humber, its centre at York, its western limits at times the Pennines and at times the Irish Sea and, for a very brief period, some point west of Dublin. The Vikings held sway over Northumbria from 876 to 954 with some interruptions. After they marched on York in 867, took it unopposed, and defeated in the following spring the Northumbrians who tried to recapture the city, the Vikings made York a Viking city. In 876 a large number of Viking warriors returned to Northumbria from southern campaigns and partitioned the land. Either 867 or 876 can be used as the date of origin of this kingdom. Between these dates they had appointed an English king as their puppet in Northumbria. Halfdan took control in 876, and for much of the next seventy-eight years the north was ruled by Viking kings.

It is one thing to say that Viking kings ruled in the north, but it is quite another to list these Viking rulers in sequence. Gaps, ambiguities, conflicting evidence render this impossible. The tentative list of the Kings of York in Table 4 will illustrate this point.

Table 3 *The Viking Kings of York*

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Halfdan   | 876–877 (expelled and killed in Ireland) |
| Guthfrith   | c.883–c.895                              |
| Sigfrid   | c.919–c.921                              |
| Cnut  | c.900–c.902                              |
| Ethelwald   | 902                                      |
| Halfdan   | } joint(?) kings c.902–910               |
| Eowils  |  |
| Ivar  |  |
| Ragnald   | c.919–c.921                              |
| Sihtric   | 921–927                                  |
| Guthfrith   | 927 (expelled same year)                 |
| (Athelstan, king of England, ruled directly, 927–939) |  |
| Olaf Guthfrithson                                     | c.939–941                                |
| Olaf Sihtricson                                       | 941–943, 949–952                         |
| Ragnald Guthfrithson                                  | 943–944                                  |
| Eric Bloodaxe   | 948, 952–954                             |

Table 4 shows major lacunae in our knowledge. It would be exceedingly rash to assert that there was no Scandinavian king for the years 877–c.883, or to state with certainty the precise sequence

of succession from c.895 to c.902, or to attribute a fully simultaneous reign to the allegedly joint kings Halfdan, Eowils, and Ivar. And should one date the beginning of Ragnald's reign from 912, when he invaded Northumbria, or from 919, when he took York?

Two kings, Sigfrid and Cnut, are known to us only by way of coins found among a hoard discovered at Cuerdale on the River Ribble in Lancashire. The historian here, as in so many other places in Viking history, owes a great debt to the careful, disciplined investigations of numismatists. Discovered as long ago as 1840, these coins, now unfortunately scattered in more than half a dozen places, have yielded rich historical information under the scrutiny of generations of numismatic scholars. Although the Cuerdale coins have introduced two Kings of York to our list – Sigfrid and Cnut – the dates of the reigns of these two kings can only be approximations. The doubts raised at one time about whether they were two persons or only one have now been settled, but the presence of both their names on some coins suggests a period of joint-kingship. That the Sigfrid and Cnut coins were minted at York within twenty years of the Viking settlement in York and that Christian symbols were used on these coins testify to the rapid seizure of real power and an early Christianizing of these Danes. The size of this hoard (more than 7000 coins) is simply staggering: it is more than all the coins known in Norway before the 1060s. Why were there so many coins in one place? Why were they hidden? No coins in this hoard can be dated after 903. All the circumstances suggest that they were buried about 903: the size of the hoard and the number of coins from the very late ninth century and opening years of the tenth century – over 3000 from Sigfrid and Cnut alone – make an almost contemporary burial a certainty. The location of Cuerdale on the Dublin-to-York route argues for the relationship of this hoard to the Dublin-York connection. Attempts have been made to show a continuing connection between the Northumbrian Vikings and the Dublin Vikings from 860s. There were, indeed, connections: Halfdan, who had shared out Northumbria, died in battle in Ireland and Sigfrid – an unusual name – might have been the same Sigfrid who was involved in Dublin affairs in the 880s. In the opening years of the tenth century the Norse Vikings crossed the Irish Sea from Dublin to the Wirral and to the littoral to its north. The fortifications built in that region by Ethelfled and her brother Edward were aimed at repelling attacks from Ireland. In 902

Hingamund had led a band of Norse Dubliners, who had been defeated by the Irish, to the Wirral. It is surely more than a coincidence that a hoard of enormous size was hidden in the very years of these Hiberno-Norse attacks and buried on the very route from Dublin to York, a route which went up the River Ribble and via a Roman road through the Pennines to York. What would one like to see here? Were a Viking King of York (perhaps Cnut) and his army, who were encamped – the royal treasure with them – to oppose a Norse attack, caught by surprise and forced to bury their silver? Perhaps. Or were Hiberno-Norse warriors, having captured a Danish treasure, themselves attacked by surprise on their return? Or was it treasure brought by refugees driven from Dublin in 902 by the Irish from Meath? Other explanations are indeed possible. But the essential point to grasp here is the fact that from the early days of the tenth century the Dublin factor existed in York history and remained for half a century.

The Dublin kings enjoyed considerable success in Northumbria largely because of the costly defeat of the Northumbrian Danes at Tetterhall in 910, where at battle's end three Danish Kings of Northumbria – Halfdan, Eowils and Ivar – lay dead on the field of battle. Ethelweard, the Wessex nobleman and chronicler, tells us:

They joined battle without protracted delay on the field of Wednesfield; the English enjoyed the blessing of victory; the army of Danes fled, overcome by armed force. These events are recounted as done on the fifth day of the month of August. There fell three of their kings in that same storm . . . Halfdan, Eowils, and Ivar were hurried to the hall of hell as also their jarls and nobles.

Never again were the Northumbrians to attack to their south. More importantly, a leadership vacuum must surely have followed in the north as a consequence of Tetterhall, and the threatening Vikings from Dublin were able to exert their power in Northumbria. In 912, the Dublin Viking Ragnald was active with his army in Northumbria and before the decade's end became undisputed king.

And so the Dubliners came. Some of the English who could flee from the northwest did so. In 910 the Abbot of Heversham and the son of the English 'prince' of Cumbria fled to safety east of the Pennines in the Wear Valley. In about 911 Ragnald captured York temporarily, and coins were issued at the mint in his name. By 913 he had asserted his authority north of the Tyne, and in the following

year he crossed lowland Scotland, inflicting defeats on the King of Bernicia and the King of the Scots. In 919 he recaptured York, and it is from this time that it is usual to date the rule of the Irish-Norse in York. The recognition of Edward the Elder as overlord of Northumbria in 920 was not a surrender by Ragnald but merely the realistic recognition of his own limited manpower and of the power of his English neighbours to the south. The meaning of overlordship is far from clear, but it is clear that a virtually independent kingdom existed in Northumbria with its capital at York and that at its head was an Irish-Scandinavian king.

During this period (919–54), although it was interrupted by twelve years of English rule (927–39), Norse kings ruled York. Although Dublin and York were both ruled by Norse kings and, at times, by the same kings, a joint kingdom of Dublin and York did not exist. What did exist was a Dublin–York axis, in which political control permitted a remarkable flourishing of trade, the extent of which is being revealed by the excavations under the streets and buildings of modern Dublin and York. An important factor in this axis was the Irish Sea–River Ribble–Roman road route that took warriors and traders across the waters and through the mountains joining the two cities, who rivalled in significance the great towns of Scandinavia.

The fate of this northern kingdom was inextricably bound up with the ambitions of the West Saxon dynasty to extend active control north of the Humber and west of the Pennines. Contemporaries stressed the importance of Athelstan, son of Edward the Elder, standing on the banks of the River Eamont in 927 and accepting the submission of the King of Scotland, the King of Strathclyde, and the ruler of that part of Northumbria north of the Tees. Ten years later these kings, Olaf Sihtricson and a Norse force from Dublin attempted to undo the Eamont settlement. Their hopes were dashed, at least temporarily, when Athelstan inflicted so serious a defeat on his challengers that the compiler of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* inserted a verse commemorating this English victory.

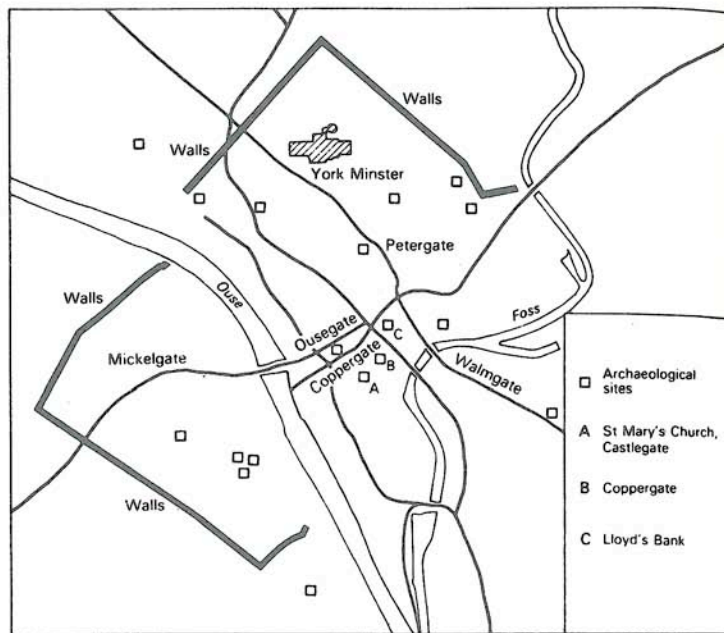
In this year king Athelstan, lord of warriors,  
Ring-giver of men, with his brother prince Edmund,  
Won undying glory with the edges of swords,  
In warfare around Brunanburh.  
With their hammered blades, the sons of Edward  
Clove the shield-wall and hacked the linden bucklers,

As was instinctive in them, from their ancestry,  
To defend their land, their treasures and their homes,  
In frequent battle against each enemy.  
The foemen were laid low: the Scots  
And the host from the ships fell doomed. The field  
Grew dark with the blood of men after the sun,  
That glorious luminary, God's bright candle,  
Rose high in the morning above the horizon,  
Until the noble being of the Lord Eternal  
Sank to its rest. There lay many a warrior  
Of the men of the North, torn by spears,  
Shot o'er his shield; likewise many a Scot  
Sated with battle, lay lifeless. . . .

The victory, we know, was less permanent than the Anglo-Saxon poet believed. Two years later, Athelstan having died, the Norse once again ruled the kingdom of Northumbria. But, they never fully re-established their power. Eric Bloodaxe, son of the King of Norway – his nickname unfortunately gives this noble warrior an undeserved posthumous reputation – failed in a last attempt to assert Viking control in the north of England; his dead body lay at day's end on Stainmore in 954 as a symbol and more than a symbol of the end of the first Viking wave against England. Henceforward, English earls ruled the region.

Excavations at York, particularly since 1972, underline the significance of this Viking capital. A peaty layer of subsoil has created very favourable circumstances for the survival of material. At the Lloyd's Bank site, Pavement, striking evidence of leather manufacture was found: leather-stretching frames, animal hairs, beetles used in tanning, and thousands of pieces of cut leather. Its companion industry, shoemaking, left signs of activity at the same site: lasts, tools, soles, etc. The Church of St Mary, Castlegate, was the site where archaeologists found fragments of crosses decorated in the Danish style of the last half of the tenth century. In 1976, the city of York aided archaeologists considerably by acquiring four pieces of property in Coppergate and turning them over to the York Archaeological Trust for investigation. On this archaeologically rich site stood four eighteenth-century buildings. Excavations showed that these buildings were built on the very same lines as Viking-age buildings constructed there, probably as part of urban renewal, between about 950 and 960. These tenth-century structures were long buildings, rectangular in shape

and extending from Coppergate along their long-side down a then existing slope towards the River Foss. Behind each of these houses was another building, probably used as a workshop. The material remains clearly show that Coppergate came by its name appropriately ('the street of the coopers'), for the wide variety of finds at this site indicate that it was used primarily by woodworkers. One of the workshops, however, contained beads and amber pieces, evidence of jewellery-making.



### 19 *Viking-age York*

In general, the evidence from the various archaeological sites in York indicates a variety of manufacture: textiles, combs, different sorts of metalwork (in bronze, gold, silver and lead alloy), woodwork and leather products. The presence of goods manufactured abroad – silk probably from the East, wine jars from the Rhineland, honing stones from Norway, etc. – argues strongly for a significant mercantile component in the economy of Scandinavian York. The goods manufactured at York and those

from its hinterland (for example, pottery from Lincolnshire) provided the exports necessary to balance this trade. Writing about the year 1000, the anonymous author of the *Life of Saint Oswald* described York as:

the metropolitan city of the whole Northumbrian people, nobly built and surrounded by firm walls, yet now become old with age, although still enjoying a large population, numbering now more than 30,000 adults, a city amply fed and greatly enriched by the wealth of merchants, who come from everywhere but especially from the Danish people.

The very size of York signifies its importance. Roman York measured about fifty acres. A short time after the beginning of the Viking settlement, the enclosed area was extended towards the Foss, thus increasing the size of York to nearly ninety acres. Soon the pressures of population and commerce forced the development of the Micklegate area across the Ouse. By the early tenth century York covered an area close to a hundred acres and by the end of that century had perhaps ten churches. At their height the other great northern trading centres were not so large: Hedeby had sixty acres within its ramparts and a total of about eighty-three acres over all, Birka had perhaps fifty acres. The population of pre-conquest York, although placed by Saint Oswald's hagiographer at 30,000, was probably between about 5000 and 10,000, making it one of the great Viking cities, comparable in many ways to tenth-century Kiev.

All disciplines have their limitations, and one must not demand more from archaeologists than they can tell us. We should like to know what were the *immediate* places with which York conducted trade. Obviously, the presence of silk from the East cannot be used to argue that there was a direct link between York and the East. What were the trading centres favoured by York merchants? Certainly, Dublin; but where else? There remains the question that is most difficult to answer: given that there was a variety of manufactured and trading commodities, how extensive was that manufacture and trade, and how intensive was the economy of Viking York?

### *The settlement process*

With and after the warring there was landtaking, a great landtaking.

And with the great landtaking came a great migration.

Danes came in very large numbers to work the land, their migration exceeding in size even the migration that settled Normandy. There were no immigration officers to check their papers; no ships' passenger lists with names and places of origin; no accounts written by immigrants of successes in their new world. They sailed to East Anglia and Northumbria, went inland and established farmsteads virtually without recorded notice. They were to create an Anglo-Scandinavian society that survived the political demise of their kings at York in 954, a society which was severely disturbed by the destruction inflicted on the north by William the Conqueror in 1069, and a society that still lived on in the regional peculiarities existing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The word Danelaw itself was first used in the eleventh century and continued in official use well after the Norman Conquest.

The widely accepted 'two-step' theory argues that the Danes migrated to England in two stages: first as warrior-settlers and then as settlers who came later, protected by the military shield. According to this theory, the colonizing took no more than about seventy-five years, probably less, and was a period of settlement comparable to the Norwegian settlement of Iceland. The Viking warriors, whatever their initial intention – they were capable, as we are, of multiple intention – settled in England. The *Chronicle* in a number of laconic but revealing passages tells us of the first step in the settlement by these warriors-become-farmers:

- 876 In this year Halfdan divided out the lands of Northumbria, and they began ploughing and supporting themselves.  
 877 In harvest time the Danish army went into Mercia, and a part of it they shared out.  
 879 In this year the Danish army left Cirencester and went into East Anglia, which they occupied and shared out.  
 892 In this year the great Danish army . . . crossed the sea, horses and all.  
 893 The English army attacked the [Danish] fortifications [at Benfleet, Essex] and seized everything, personal property as well as women and children.  
 895 The Danes had sent their women to safety in East Anglia before setting out from the fort [on the Lea].  
 896 In the summer the Danish army dispersed, some to East Anglia, some to Northumbria, and those without land to the Seine.

And from a northern source we are told that sometime between 912 and 915

[Ragnald] divided out the villages of St Cuthbert. He gave to his mighty soldier Scula one part, extending from the village called Eden as far as Billingham. He gave to someone called Onalafball another part, from Eden as far as the River Wear.

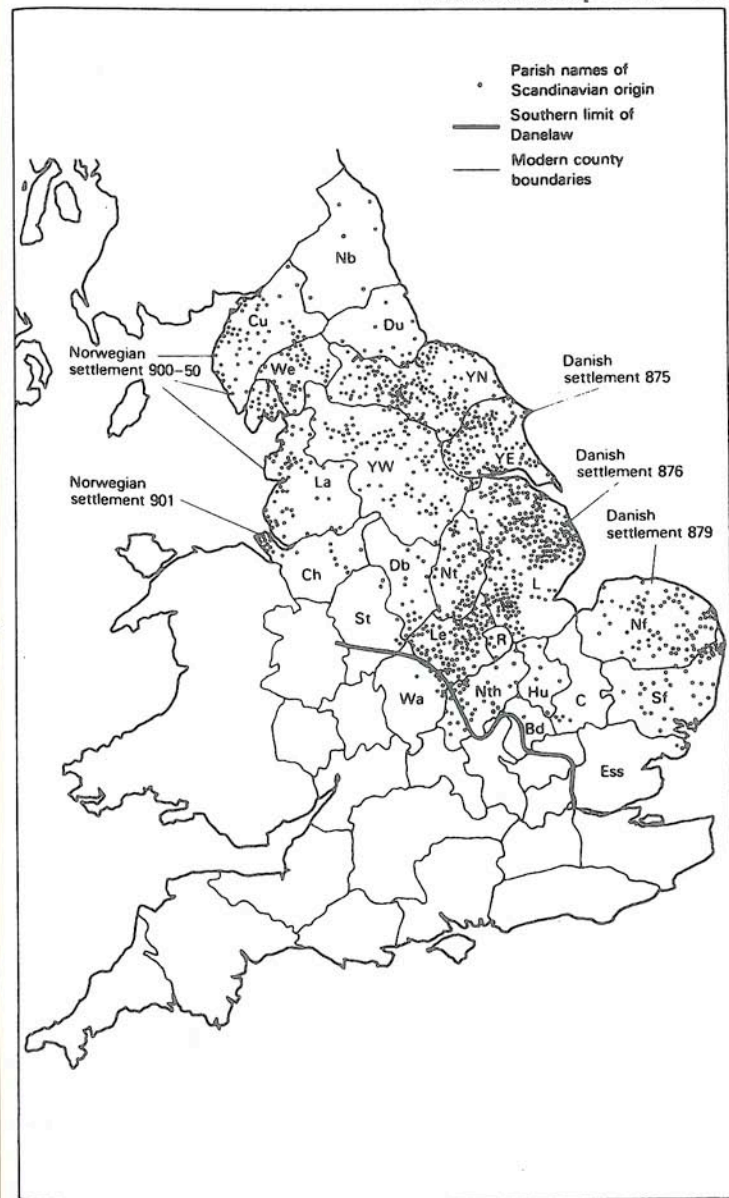
The pattern is fairly clear. In 876 the portioning of modern Yorkshire occurred and, in the following year, the portioning of East Mercia, centred around the Five Boroughs. East Anglia was divided by Guthrum in 879. Both Northumbria and East Anglia received warrior-settlers in 896. In the second decade of the tenth century Hiberno-Norse settlers colonized parts of County Durham. None of these Viking armies was enormous: the so-called Great Army that was active from 892 to 896 could scarcely have exceeded a few thousand, and the others probably considerably less.

The second step in the 'two-step' theory is known only by way of inference. The argument runs that the place-name and personal-name evidence as well as the linguistic evidence suggest a very considerable Scandinavian colonization, and, since the relatively small armies cannot explain a settlement of such a great size, another immigration, an immigration behind the shield of the warrior, must have occurred. The inference merits elaboration.

Place-names in this context refer to places recorded principally in Domesday Book (1086). Map 20 (p. 169) demonstrates vividly the magnitude of the Scandinavian influence on the names of the Danelaw. A few places with Scandinavian names exist in Warwickshire and Northamptonshire south of the boundary, but, these apart, the south and west are devoid of parish names of Danish origin. Fewer are found in Suffolk than in Norfolk. The densest concentration is clearly in the territory of the Five Boroughs, with the exception of Derby, and in the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire. In Lincolnshire, for example, almost 50 per cent of the still existing names of villages are of Danish origin and, in some parts of Lincolnshire, the density reaches nearly 75 per cent. Domesday Book contains over 500 place-names of Danish origin from the territory of the Five Boroughs. A thick belt of place-names of Scandinavian origin can be traced westward from the North Sea, beginning on the Lincolnshire coast between Grimsby and Saltfleet and extending as far as Leicester. Yet, in all

this one must bear in mind the incompleteness of the places recorded in the Domesday survey, the purpose of which was to provide lists of estates as sources of income to the crown and not to provide a full list of settlements. Still, it is our major source.

In general, three forms of place-names of Danish origin appear, and they seem to indicate three phases in the settlement process. A group of place-names called 'Grimston-hybrids' are names with an English suffix such as *-tūn* (a village, a farmstead) but with a Danish personal or appellative name preceding it. Examples abound: Grimston (Leicestershire, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Suffolk, Yorkshire), Barkston (Lincolnshire), Thurvaston (Derbyshire), and Colston (Nottinghamshire). A strong case can be made for the argument that these names represent previously existing English villages taken over at the beginning of the Danish colonization, the individual colonizer replacing an English name with his own. The second general category of place-names with a Scandinavian element comprises the names ending in *-by* (a village, a farmstead) and preceded by a Danish word, which is often a personal name (e.g., Derby, Selby, Danby, Thoresby). Such places are common: there are nearly 800 in all, and over 200 in Lincolnshire alone. These names seem to indicate a phase when hitherto unused land was being colonized, and when still desirable land was settled: the in-fill phase. The places whose names end in *-thorp* (a secondary settlement, an outlying hamlet) – for example, Scunthorpe, Mablethorpe, Weaverthorpe, Swainsthorpe – form a third group of places, less suitable for farming and settled last. The Kesteven region of Lincolnshire has twenty-eight such places, and Leicestershire eighteen. The northern part of the Yorkshire Wolds has a concentration of places ending in *-thorp*, but otherwise these places are scattered about other parts of Yorkshire where there is poorer land. A map of the north and east of England which did not contain places with names of Danish origin would be a map of a sparsely settled, underdeveloped area. The wealth of such place-names cannot be explained by the settling of soldiers, whose numbers were never extremely large, but – the theory runs – by a migration of their kinsmen and other fellow countrymen. The assumption in this use of the place-name evidence is that there existed in the Danelaw much unused but usable land at the time of the settlement; thus, the conclusion that the *-by* and *-thorp* places indicate new settlements. No one knows the pattern of land use on the eve of the Viking settlement; indeed, no one knows the



topography of these areas. Broad generalizations about forests and clearings can be made, but particularizations are difficult to come by. A commonsense view suggests that a conquering army would seize, by the right of might, whatever land they wanted and not merely the lands that the vanquished were not using. Otherwise, we would be required to attribute to the Danes a massive restraint, which neither they nor most conquering armies have shown. This does not mean that the Vikings did not use marginal lands – the *-thorp* names probably refer to this kind of land – but it does mean that they must have seized land from the English, particularly in the early days of the settlement.

No other single outside force has influenced the English language to the extent the Danes did. The number of loan-words would fill columns, not words for unusual concrete objects – as was the case in Normandy – but common words such as *happy, ugly, call, fellow, loose, ill, law*, not the sort of words imposed on an English peasantry by a Danish ruling elite. Contemporary English had words which were quite simply replaced by Danish words. Furthermore, there was not merely wholesale borrowing of Danish words: there were substantial changes in the structure of the language, particularly in the development of clear pronoun forms for the third-person plural. Also, pronominal adverbs such as *thence, hence, and whence* were introduced into English by the Danes as were prepositions such as *fro* and *till*. Changes of such significance argue to the *dönsk tunga* persisting during a bilingual period, after which it became conflated with Old English to such an extent that the term 'Anglo-Scandinavian' can be used to describe the language during this later period.

No one can provide numbers for the settlers who gave names to places and who changed the English language, but thousands upon thousands of them must have entered the Danelaw under the protection of the warrior-settlers. Nor need the historian conclude that the settlement was complete by 954. Evidence suggests that other Danish settlers ('new Danes') came to England from the 990s well into the reign of Cnut (1016–35). A longer period of settlement, one which lasted perhaps into the fourth decade of the eleventh century, a migration thus spanning a hundred and fifty years or so, seems more in accord with what is known about the second Viking wave.

Without a rapid conversion to Christianity the Danish settlement would have been a much more difficult process than it was.

*Connubium* between Danish men and English women became easier after conversion. Even marital arrangements below the level of the Christian ideal no doubt existed. The Danes were indeed alien and conquering, but no longer heathen and no longer separated from the English by this one unbridgeable chasm. The speed of this process of conversion is still astounding. Until 878 the Vikings in England were pagan. Then Guthrum, who was to settle East Anglia, was washed with the waters of baptism. Another Viking leader, Guthfrith, was buried with Christian rites beneath York Minster in about the year 895. Not only two individual Viking leaders but undoubtedly the bulk of their followers also took the Christian name and followed their kings to the font and tomb. In 875 the monks of Lindisfarne fled with the bones of St Cuthbert westward to the Irish Sea, but by 883 they could return across the Pennines and establish themselves peacefully at Chester-le-Street, where they soon received a suitable patrimony. The coins of York attest these changes. The Sigfrid/Cnut coins, which were issued at the turn of the ninth into the tenth century, contain Christian crosses; some even contain Christian inscriptions: *Mirabilia fecit* (He has done marvellous things), *Dominus deus omnipotens rex* (Lord God, almighty King). From 905 a series of coins was issued by the mint at York Minster (the Church of St Peter), and they bore the legend *Sancti Petri moneti* (Saint Peter's money).

The coming of Ragnald to York as king in about 919 meant the coming of a pagan. No sign of any general reversion to paganism exists, but there are indications of the coexistence of paganism and Christianity during the early decades of the tenth century. Ragnald's coins seem to have had the hammer of Thor and a Viking sword, while coins issued during the reign of Sihtric carry on their reverse side either Thor's hammer or a Christian cross. On the reverse of some coins dating, it would appear, from the reign of Sihtric one can see the hammer of Thor below the name of Saint Peter. Some archaeologists see in the Middleton Cross an early stage in the conversion process because, it is said, an Anglo-Saxon craftsman tried to incorporate Scandinavian motifs in this Christian high cross. This identification, however, is based on the assumption that Jelling-style decorative elements occur here, an assumption not, on the face of it, fully imperative. Residual acculturated pagan practices were not simply washed away by the cleansing waters of baptism, as was clear from the experience of Saint Augustine in England, Saint Boniface in Germany, and many other missionaries.



Professor Dolley sensibly sees a Viking good-luck symbol as no more offensive to the Christian than the horseshoe on a modern wedding cake! Soon the Danish settlers were as fully Christianized as their English neighbours. Oda, Archbishop of Canterbury from 941 to 958, had a Danish father, and it was this Archbishop who was responsible for re-establishing a diocese at Elmham in Danish East Anglia. The great Saint Oswald, Oda's nephew, then, was the grandson of a pagan Viking. Two or three generations from hammer to cross; by any measure a rapid assimilation.

#### The second Viking wave (980–1035)

Two stones stand between two burial mounds in Jelling in the central part of the Jutland peninsula in Denmark. The larger of the two – in fact, the largest runestone in Denmark – holds the key to the second period of Danish attacks upon England. It reads:

King Harald ordered this monument to be erected in memory of his father Gorm and his mother Thyra, the same Harald who gained control over all Denmark and also over Norway and who brought the Danes to Christianity.

The King Harald mentioned on the stone (c.960) is known to history as Harald Bluetooth, and his son and grandson are known as two conquerors and, indeed, kings of England. The runestone is at once a memorial and a claim of inheritance. Harald succeeded Gorm. Yet Harald not only succeeded Gorm but held control over a Danish state coming of age, his control extending to the limits of medieval Denmark. Jelling, his stronghold, was located near the centre of this state, with the emerging towns almost all equidistant (Arhus, Viborg, Odense and Ribe). The major expeditions to England were led by members of a royal Danish family – the Jelling dynasty – and their lieutenants, and they came as leaders of *national* armies in campaigns undertaken for *national* reasons. They were the political and economic extension of Danish power. There is no need to attribute imperial designs to either Svein or Cnut: the effect of their deeds was the creation of a virtual Danish empire in northern Europe. It failed to last, and the later attempt of a Norwegian king to claim it fell with him at Stamford Bridge in 1066.

Silver, movable wealth, and possibly more land were the goals of the second wave of the Vikings. The payment in the form of

Danegeld is almost totally unknown in the first period of Viking attacks on England, but it became a hallmark of these later attacks. From the 990s such payments, which were astonishingly large, reflect not only the designs of the new Vikings but also the wealth of England. A vast amount of silver was paid to the attacking Vikings from 992 until 1012, when Danegeld became part of the tax structure. The measure of the failure of the English policy of paying Danegeld to the Danes is simply that the English continued to pay it, that a stable peace was not purchased by it, that the Danes came back for more, and that the English ended up with a Danish king. One commentator has observed that England paid for its own conquest. Table 5 lists their payments.

Table 4 *Danegelds paid by the English*

| Year | Amount in pounds of silver |
|------|----------------------------|
| 991  | 22,000                     |
| 994  | 16,000                     |
| 1002 | 24,000                     |
| 1007 | 36,000                     |
| 1009 | 3,000                      |

More than 100,000 pounds of silver – coins, armlets, etc. – went to Scandinavia, much of it to appear in silver hoards there, including tens of thousands of Ethelred coins. Vast amounts continued to be exacted under the title of Danegeld after 1012. For example, in 1018 the English raised a sum in excess of 82,000 pounds of silver to pay Cnut. Danegeld remained throughout this period – at first, random, then, institutionalized – an instrument of Viking policy against England.

The principal actors were kings and future kings: on the Viking side, Olaf Tryggvason, Svein and Cnut and, on the English side, the long-reigning Ethelred. The English sources blame their defeat on the inefficiency of their leaders and on the weakness and failure to lead on the part of their king. There is no understanding Asser, no fawning chronicler, no successful posthumous rehabilitation for King Ethelred. He stands as the cause and symbol of English defeat. Few Kings of England have a soubriquet which is so easily remembered and so damning – Ethelred the Unready, Noble

Counsel No Counsel – and the misfortune is not merely Ethelred's; it is at the expense of a proper historical focus. This preoccupation with Ethelred emphasizes the English defeat, the failure of the English to defend themselves successfully – as they had done under Alfred – against Viking attack. The spotlight belongs not on this lingering licking of wounds, but on the great victory of the Vikings. They won England. They gained control of one of the wealthiest parts of Europe. They placed their king upon the throne of England. It is Svein and Cnut – not the hapless, defeated Ethelred – who stood in the centre of the stage, triumphant and victorious. Could any of the great Wessex kings – Alfred, Edward the Elder, Athelstan – have withstood this Danish army, which came in organized force under leaders of the blood royal? Would Alfred have been any more successful than Ethelred? Does one hear, even if unspoken, the assumption from insular sources that English defeat can only be the result of English weakness?

The Danish army – well equipped, tightly disciplined, highly motivated and brilliantly led – gained the victory. Although mainly Danish in composition, the invading army had in its number Vikings from elsewhere in Scandinavia: five stones in Sweden commemorate such warriors and the thousands of English coins found in Gotland, mainland Sweden and Norway are evidence of their presence. The legend of the Jomsvikings, a community of Viking warriors whose services were for hire, belongs to a later age, and there is no need to attribute the Viking victory in England to these legendary men trained in the strict and celibate atmosphere of Jomsborg. Three late tenth-century fortresses in Denmark – at Trelleborg, Fyrkat and Aggersborg – were not used as military training camps for the invasion of England, as was once believed, but they stand for us as signs of an organized society capable of garrisoning strategic places for the purposes of defence and toll-collecting. This organized society bred the army that went with Svein and Cnut and their military commanders to conquer England.

These invading Danish armies are not to be numbered in the hundreds, at least not the army of Olaf and Svein in 994 nor, especially, the army of Thorkell and his associates in 1009 – described as 'immense' by the chronicler – nor the victorious armies of Svein in 1013 and Cnut in 1015, when on both occasions the full military force of the Danes was used. These were large armies ready for long, protracted periods in the field, capable of bearing reverses, and ultimately of defeating an English army not as ill-prepared as

apologists might have it. No wonder that in 1009, faced with the extraordinary army of Svein's man Thorkell, King Ethelred ordered prayers to be said after Mass beginning with the third psalm, 'O Lord, how they are multiplied that trouble me'. It may not be much of an exaggeration to compare the size of the army Cnut brought to Sandwich in 1015 with the size of the Norman army landed by Duke William at Pevensey in 1066.

The events can be quickly recounted. England lived from 954 to 980 in peace: a hiatus between the first and second wave, a pause not unlike the forty years' rest in Ireland. The early attacks – those of the 980s – were small in size and fairly infrequent; they were only minor raids. But they were indicative of renewed unrest in Denmark. Although the Old English poem about the Battle of Maldon has made famous the defeat of an English army in Essex in 991, the significance of the battle lies not so much in the gallant code of conduct on both sides and the foolhardy courage of the English under Byrhtnoth, as in the English defeat, which was a sign of things to come.

The first major invasion in half a century came in 994, led by Svein, King of Denmark (987–1014), and Olaf Tryggvason, later King of Norway (995–1000), who had recently returned, it seems, from adventures among kinsmen in Russia. Olaf's conversion to Christianity at Ethelred's court in the aftermath of peacemaking in 994 was to have profound consequences in Norway and in the Norse lands of the North Atlantic. The Danish army which came to England in 997 remained until 1000 and probably limited its raids to the south coast of England and to Wales. They returned in 1001, using the Isle of Wight as a base for actions, particularly in the southwest, and peace came only in 1002 with the payment of 24,000 pounds of silver to the Danes. The rehabilitators of Ethelred would have trouble explaining his order to massacre the Danes on 13 November of that year. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* simply states:

The king ordered that all the Danes in England be killed on St Brice's Day because he had learned that they conspired to kill him and his counsellors and then take possession of his kingdom.

The king in a nearly contemporary charter describes the fearsome events of the Saint Brice's Day Massacre at Oxford:

With the counsel of the leading men and magnates I issued a decree that all

Danes who had sprung up in this island, like chaff amidst the wheat, were rightly to be exterminated. All the Danes living in Oxford, fearing for their lives, sought sanctuary at the monastery of St Frideswide, from which they were forced to leave when their pursuers set fire to the monastery.

A massacre of all the Danes living in the Danelaw defies imagination: tens of thousands would have had to have fallen under the English sword without a murmur in contemporary records. Reliable tradition tells us that the sister of King Svein was among those murdered. Vengeance, a potent stimulant, would be enough to explain the way in which Svein descended on England in the campaigns of 1003, 1004, 1006 and 1007 – wisely leaving England during the famine year of 1005. They came relentless, intent on punishing Ethelred. And always the Viking at heart, Svein had an eye for silver, 36,000 pounds of which he and his army took back with them to Scandinavia in 1007. It bought two years of peace.

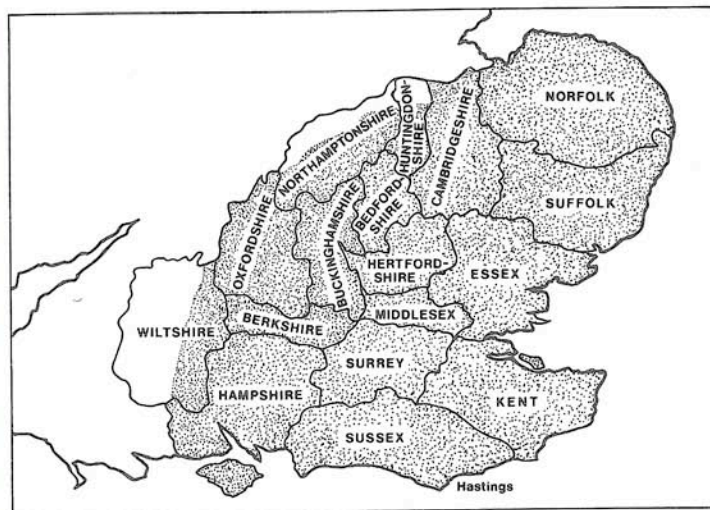
A large Danish army under the command of Thorkell the Tall came in 1009. It moved, attacked and ravaged at will. There seemed to be no power in England to stay the Viking warriors. The chronicler, under the year 1011, merely said of Thorkell's successes:

They had by this time overrun (i) East Anglia, (ii) Essex, (iii) Middlesex, (iv) Oxfordshire, (v) Cambridgeshire, (vi) Hertfordshire, (vii) Buckinghamshire, (viii) Bedfordshire, (ix) half of Huntingdonshire, and (x) a large part of Northamptonshire as well as, to the south of the Thames, all Kent and Sussex and the district around Hastings and Surrey and Berkshire and Hampshire and a large part of Wiltshire.

This army ceased its attacks only when 48,000 pounds of silver was paid to them. Still greedy for a ransom for Alpheah (Alphege), Archbishop of Canterbury, and more than a little drunk with southern wine, a group of Thorkell's men pelted the Archbishop with bones and ox-heads and split his skull with an axe on the Saturday after Easter. Another Christian to add to the lists of martyrs and saints. The kingdom, its defences almost non-existent after three years of campaigning by Thorkell, was ripe for taking, and that is what Svein did. In 1013 Svein gained the support of the English Danelaw, marched south, and by year's end was sole ruler of England. He enjoyed this triumph for only a matter of weeks, because on 3 February 1014 he was dead. Ethelred revived his

kingdom, but only briefly, because Svein's son, the 18-year-old Cnut, at the head of a great army, regained Danish control of England by 1016.

Cnut's reign (1016–35) belongs more to English than to Viking history, yet the fact that a great Viking warrior-king ruled England for nearly twenty years cannot be overlooked. England remained a separate kingdom; it did not become a province of the Danish kingdom, when Cnut became King of Denmark in 1019 nor a part of a Scandinavian empire when Cnut became King of Norway in 1028. Yet, there was a Greater Scandinavia under Cnut. In a proclamation of 1027 he could style himself 'king of all England, Denmark, and Norway, and part of Sweden'. Was it modesty, a most unViking-virtue, that led him to omit 'lord of Orkney and Shetland, overlord of the kings of Scotland and Dublin'? The Viking world had changed since captains of ships had led raiding attacks on the English coast in the 830s. Cnut attended the coronation of Emperor Conrad II in Rome in 1027; nine years later, his daughter married the Emperor's eldest son. Cnut stood with the mighty, and had every right to do so. No previous king in England had cut such an important figure on the European scene. He could



21 *Extent of attacks by the army of Thorkell the Tall, 1009–11*

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afford to be magnanimous and honour the cult of King Edmund of East Anglia, slain by fellow Danes in 869, and to help bear the remains of Archbishop Alphege to Canterbury.

The second Viking wave against England came to an end with Cnut's death in 1035. Attempts made by other Scandinavian kings to add England to their diadems failed. Harald Hardrada, the Varangian from the Court of Constantinople and King of Norway (1046–66), failed at Stamford Bridge in 1066, and the attempt of a later Danish king called Cnut was aborted in 1085 before the ships sailed. And with these vain efforts to reassert Viking power in England, the force, first felt at Lindisfarne in 793 and which had dominated English history for much of the interval, was spent. Great forces have struck this island in its recorded history: to the name of Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Norman must surely be added Viking.

## Selected further reading

An enormous volume of literature exists on the subject of the Danes in England, and it grows before one's eyes. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the principal source, exists in translations by Dorothy Whitelock *et al.*, Cambridge University Press 1961, and by G. N. Garmonsway, Dent 1953, on which the translations in this chapter are based. The original texts (Old English and Latin) are being edited in a projected 23 volume edition, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, David Dumville and Simon Keynes, eds, Cambridge: Brewer 1983–. An English translation of Asser with a valuable introduction has been done by S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1983. Asser's life of King Alfred awaits a modern translation. There is an edition and translation of *The Chronicle of Aethelweard* by A. Campbell, Nelson 1962. An essential source in the study of this subject is the magisterial treatment given by Sir Frank Stenton in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn, Oxford University Press 1971. More recent studies of considerable interest are P. H. Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press 1977; P. H. Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England*, Methuen 1978; and H. R. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*, 2nd edn, Longman 1970, and *The Vikings in Britain*, Batsford 1977. A revised view of the military threat to King Alfred appears in N. P. Brooks, 'England in the ninth century: the crucible of defeat', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vol. 29 (1979), pp. 1–20. For a fresh reading of old sources see A. P. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles, 850–880*, Oxford University Press 1977. Ethelred

symposium published under the title *Ethelred the Unready*, D. Hill (ed.), in *British Archaeological Reports*, British series, 59 (1978); see also Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready', 978–1016*, Cambridge University Press 1980. The rehabilitation of King Ethelred is brought a step further in a stimulating essay by Simon Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vol. 36 (1986), pp. 195–217.

For a study of the north see A. P. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, 2 vols., Dublin: Irish Academic Press 1987. A popular summary of the York excavations by P. V. Addyman is entitled 'Excavating Viking age York', in *Archaeology*, vol. 33, no. 3 (May/June 1980), pp. 14–22. A fuller description is Richard Hall, *The Excavations at York: the Viking Dig*, Bodley Head 1984.

The key titles in the settlement controversy are P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd edn, Arnold 1971; Kenneth Cameron, *Scandinavian Settlement in the Territory of the Five Boroughs*, University of Nottingham Press 1966; and G. Fellows Jensen, 'The Vikings in England: a review', in *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 4 (1975), pp. 181–206. The classic study of personal names is Olof von Feilitzen, *The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book*, Oslo: Almqvist & Wiksells 1937. For interesting remarks about the 'new Danes' of the eleventh century see Ann Williams, "'Cockles Amongst the Wheat": Danes and English in the Western Midlands in the First Half of the Eleventh Century', *Midland History*, vol. 11 (1986), pp. 1–22. For a discussion of the archaeology, see D. M. Wilson (ed.), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, Methuen 1976, and Richard N. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England*, Collins 1980. For numismatics see R. H. M. Dolley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Coins*, Methuen 1961; idem, 'The Anglo-Danish and Anglo-Norman Coinages of York', *Viking Age York and the North*, R. A. Hall, ed.; CBA Res. Rep. 27; London 1978, pp. 26–31; Philip Grierson and Mark Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, Cambridge University Press 1968, chapter 10; and M. A. S. Blackburn and D. M. Metcalf, eds, *Viking-Age Coinage in the Northern Lands*, 2 parts, BAR International Series 22, Oxford 1981; and for a discussion of towns see Susan Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns*, Clarendon Press 1977.

Lists of new titles appear annually in the journal *Anglo-Saxon England*.