

1. DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

I HAVE grouped the documentary sources for early medieval Scandinavian activity in France into four broad categories: material from Scandinavia itself, Carolingian and Breton sources, early Norman manuscripts and insular sources (Anglo-Saxon, Irish and Welsh). These are discussed in turn below and their relevance to the Breton situation assessed. While lack of space precludes a detailed analysis of each work it is nevertheless possible to outline briefly any reservations that should be borne in mind concerning their objectivity and accuracy. Of necessity, some of the more peripheral references are discussed in later sections as they arise.

Scandinavian sources

Among the contemporary written sources from Scandinavia (runic inscriptions on memorial stones, pieces of bone and fragments of wood) there are several references to 'the land of the Franks', usually as the scene of past battles, but no specific mentions of Brittany. We must therefore look to the later medieval sources, in particular the corpus of Icelandic sagas.

Any search for saga references is frustrated by problems of terminology. Several sagas mention *Bretland* but it is uncertain whether this refers to Brittany, Wales or even sometimes the small kingdom of Strathclyde: the inhabitants of all these areas may have been regarded as 'Welsh' by the Scandinavians, and it is entirely possible that the saga-writers themselves, reliant on earlier material, were not clear on the matter either. This problem is compounded by the usual uncertainties of saga information due to its Christian context and late date.

Brennu-Njáls saga, written in the late thirteenth century by an unknown author, mentions raids in *Bretland* by Kári and the Njálssons (1954, chapter 89). Both incidents occur in the late tenth century, though the internal chronology of the saga is inconsistent. Several references to *Bretland* in *Orkneyinga saga*, c. 1200 (1965, chapter 8, 15, 39, 40 and 78) are almost certainly concerned with Wales (see also *Magnúss saga skemmri* 1965, chapter 3 and 4 and *Magnúss saga lengri* 1965, chapter 9 and 10). *Jómsvíkinga saga* is more useful, though cryptic. Tenth-century Vikings are described

as successively ruling and apportioning *Bretland*, and a man called *Björn inn brezki* is mentioned (*Jómsvíkinga saga* 1969, chapter 13; see also Ashdown 1930, 184). While *Bretland* may simply be a convenient faraway place in the context of the saga, it does at least indicate that a *Bretland* colony was not thought unrealistic by medieval Scandinavians. Similarly, in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's dirge for Óláfr Tryggvason, Óláfr is given the epithet of *Breta stríðir* (*Óláfsdrápa* 11); again, this may refer to the Welsh, since Snorri Sturluson mentions Óláfr raiding in Wales (Snorri Sturluson 1941-51, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* chapter 30). *Heimskringla* contains several other references to raids on *Bretland* (Snorri Sturluson 1941-51, *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* chapter 32 and 33; *Óláfs saga ins helga* chapter 98 and *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* chapter 76) including one led by Eiríkr blóðøx (Snorri Sturluson 1941-51, *Hákonar saga góða* chapter 4).¹

By far the most detailed reference is contained in Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Vikingarvísur*, written in the first half of the eleventh century and the main source for the early life of St. Óláfr, before he became king. The place-name forms and syntax suggest that the version of the poem that we have is an early one, and thus a contemporary source. Óláfr is described as fighting a battle in *Hringsfjorðr*, an unidentified place on the Breton coast, before raiding a stronghold held by Vikings at *Hól*, thought to be Dol (Sighvatr Þórðarson 1981, 118-19; Fell 1981).

Although all these sources make only brief mention of Brittany (and it is worth stressing that none of them is unequivocal) they are none the less important contributions if an attempt is to be made to recover the Scandinavian point of view. The relative value of these sources has been discussed further by d'Haenens (1969, 244-5).

Carolingian and Breton sources

The bulk of the historical information is to be found in this category of source material. The documents may be divided into contemporary and non-contemporary records and consist of annals, chronicles, hagiographies, religious texts (sermons and liturgical documents), poems, diplomas, edicts, letters, monastic cartularies and ecclesiastical agreements. The earlier Breton genealogies (Fleuriot 1976) are not relevant in this context.

The viewpoint of the Imperial rulers is presented in the *Annales*

Regni Francorum, compiled as a court product following Charlemagne's move to Aachen in 794. Based on oral reports or occasionally personal experience, the *Annales* highlight the problems of accurate long-distance communications within the Empire (Nelson 1981, 15-36). Notwithstanding their obvious bias towards the Carolingian throne, the *Annales* are a vital source for ninth-century Europe and even provide information about Scandinavia, such as one of the earliest records of Danish kingship. Following on directly are the *Annales Bertiniani* (the name simply refers to the origins of a later copy), written by Prudentius from 835 to 861 and continued by Hincmar until 882. These annals are fully discussed by Janet Nelson (1981, especially 18-24) who reviews their limitations and rejects the suggestion that Hincmar may have used them to set out guidelines for royal behaviour. Suffice to say here that they are written objectively with no attempt to place events in any order of importance, and in measured language giving precise detail. We may be sure that exact distinctions are intended when the *Annales* record that the Vikings raided, sacked or burned a settlement (Wallace-Hadrill 1975b, 221). The growing preoccupation with Scandinavian attacks throughout the ninth century would seem to reflect the worsening situation accurately, and it must be remembered that Hincmar's first-hand experience of such a raid in 882, which might be expected to prejudice his account, occurs at the end of his time as annalist. The *Annales Bertiniani* may be regarded as one of our chief sources.

One of the major sources not only for the Vikings but for Brittany in general is the *Cartulary of the Abbey of Redon*. This contemporary document survives in an eleventh-century manuscript (discussed in detail in de Courson's 1863 translation, i-vi) and gives a wealth of reliable information as to the legal system, social hierarchy, land organisation and partition of early medieval Brittany in its records of 'the sales, mortgages, grants and disputes that affected . . . properties before they were absorbed by [the monastery of] Redon' (Davies 1988, 1). It is the primary source for the complex administrative system and multi-tiered power structure of this area of France (cf. Davies 1981; 1983 and 1988; de la Borderie 1898, 171-209).

The *Chronicle of Nantes* also contains much relevant information for the later phases of Viking involvement in Brittany, but its usefulness is limited by its non-contemporaneity. Composed c. 1050-1059, probably by a canon at Nantes cathedral drawing on earlier annals now lost, the *Chronicle* has a clear ecclesiastical

bias and favours the community at Nantes; this is tempered by a lucid, concise style free of literary pretensions. In spite of its drawbacks, single events and secondary data may be sifted from the *Chronicle* with little difficulty provided that caution is exercised with regard to statistics that could profit from exaggeration, such as the size of Scandinavian fleets. The *Chronicle of Nantes* is particularly rich in references to secular fortifications and the state of Breton defences in the face of Viking attack (cf. Privat 1971, 81-93; Jones 1981, 151-3).

The *Annales* and *Historia Remensis Ecclesiae* of Flodoard, a canon of Rheims who lived 893-966, are almost the only contemporary sources for the Viking occupation of Nantes and Brittany in the early tenth century (see below), and as such are perhaps the most important of all. Although an understandable abhorrence of the Scandinavians is present in Flodoard's work, he records dispassionately and credits Viking victories without hesitation or apparent exaggeration in favour of the Bretons. He is the sole source for much vital information about the Nantes Vikings, including the names of their leaders (when later chronicles mention them, they are ultimately derived from Flodoard). His account of this period differs notably from that of Dudo of Saint-Quentin (see below), but a convincing case for Flodoard's accuracy has been made by de la Borderie (1898, 373, 378-9) based on a detailed study of terminology.

A particularly important contribution comes from hagiography and other religious works. The later Breton saints' lives usually follow the pattern of the *Life of Saint Samson* (Davies 1982a, 148), probably dating to the later seventh century though Poulin (1978) has suggested an early ninth-century date. Many saints' lives preserve contemporary accounts of the Vikings' depredations, such as Bili's *Life of Saint-Malo* and Uurmonoc's heartfelt prayer, written in 884, for the deliverance of Landévennec from the 'continual incursions . . . of these barbarians' (*Uurmonoc* XXI). However, the use of the saints' lives as vehicles for political propaganda should be considered (cf. Poulin 1977, 14-18), especially during the reigns of Nominoe and Salomon in the context of the archbishopric of Dol and its implications for Breton independence (Smith 1982). Scandinavian raids are also the subject of some of the miracles associated with saints' relics, as in the *Miracula Sancti Bertini* which contain heavily embroidered accounts from which details of Viking movements in Brittany must be extracted. Although these texts emphasise the plight of Christianity and the

destruction of monasteries, some, such as Ermentarius's records of the translation of Saint Philibert's remains from Noirmoutier, preserve a degree of objectivity and use distinctive terms to describe the actions of the Vikings in the same way as the *Annales Bertiniani* (Wallace-Hadrill 1975b, 222).

Cartularies from the abbeys at Landévennec, Saint-Bertin, Saint-Croix de Quimperlé and the cathedral at Angers together with the *Gesta Conwoionis Abbatis Rotonensis* also contain intermittent references to the Vikings, but have a rather narrow outlook, being preoccupied with their own foundations.

Among the lesser, but still valuable, sources are the *Annales Fuldenses*, *Annales Vedastini* and *Annales Xantenses*. All are primarily concerned with the Empire itself rather than with Brittany; indeed following the siege of Paris the *Annales Vedastini* are the primary source for Carolingian affairs until 900. Despite each manuscript having its own localised bias (especially the latter pair), insights into the complex political alliances engineered by the Vikings and the Carolingians may still be obtained, together with details of the resulting campaigns. The *Annales Engolismenses* preserve similar information, particularly for the earlier raids and Scandinavian activity along the Empire's coasts in the ninth century. Regino of Prüm's *Chronicon* also records contemporary Viking attacks, but the facts need to be sieved from a slightly dramatised description of events. Hugh of Fleury occasionally mentions Brittany in his chronicle of the Frankish kings, as does Gregory of Tours much earlier (a useful background to Franko-Breton relations at the start of the Viking Age), but both confine themselves to brief references to secular politics.

Norman sources

The only Norman source that directly concerns us is Dudo of Saint-Quentin's *Historia Normannorum*, written in the period 1015-1026 and heavily criticised by most modern scholars. His account is a history of the early dukes of Normandy and their activities, written for the court and stressing the legitimacy of their claim to power. Obviously the accuracy of any work composed for such a purpose is open to question, but it has been recently argued that Dudo did not intend to record facts but instead to write a 'lineage history', in effect a Norman 'saga' incorporating identifiable literary motifs (Searle 1984, 121-2, 134). This may then be used to give us

the Normans' view of themselves, 'the pattern of their present polity and of their destiny' (Searle 1984, 137). While this is undoubtedly of great value it does not assist the student of the earlier period that Dudo writes about. He gives a description of the Viking occupation of Brittany and its end, discussed fully in chapter 2, which is completely at odds with that of Flodoard and stresses the intervention of the Norman duke. Dudo's chronology and interpretation have been examined in some detail by de la Borderie (1898, 373-80) and demonstrated to be false. His account is not complete fiction however, simply a distortion of reality, and his history contains many important items of information. A further insight into the nature of his work and the atmosphere of the Norman court can be gained from a study of his contemporary, the poet Garnier of Rouen (cf. Musset 1954b, 247-8). Thus while Dudo's records may be used, great care must be taken.

Anglo-Saxon, Irish and Welsh sources

Considering English sources first, a wealth of information about the Vikings may be obtained from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Although essentially an 'official' history of the Wessex dynasty, the *Chronicle* gives plausible details about the campaigns of the Great Army in the late ninth century: its wars with the English and its movements on the Continent. The *Chronicle's* treatment of the size and logistics of the Viking threat has been analysed at length in recent years (notably by Sawyer 1971, 123-32 and Brooks 1979) and is of great importance for the understanding of the Scandinavian impact on Brittany in the ninth century, since the army concerned is the same but seen from a different perspective. While the same reservations apply to Asser's *Life of King Ælfred*, this is less concerned with the Scandinavians and instead offers insights into the relationship of Brittany to England, examined in chapter 2.

Relevant source material is also found in Celtic Britain and Ireland with both direct and indirect references. The various Irish annals, especially those of Ulster, Clonmacnoise and the Four Masters, frequently place their emphasis on Scandinavian activities outside Ireland (cf. MacNiocaill 1975). Particularly close links existed between the Norse and Danish colonies of Dublin and York, and the politics of the Irish Sea certainly affected those Vikings travelling to or occupying Brittany (though with less harm-

ful long-term consequences than the Dubliners' preoccupation with external affairs; cf. Ó Corráin 1972, 104). Among the more vexing problems is that of Ragnarr loðbrók, the great Viking chieftain whose very existence is questionable and whose 'sons' are recorded as leading elements of the Great Army in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and elsewhere. Although the Viking forces with which Ragnarr and his 'sons' are associated are central to any study of Scandinavian contact with Brittany, detailed debate as to their involvement or existence is regrettably beyond the scope of this paper (for the main arguments see Smyth 1975; 1977; 1979; Ó Corráin 1977-8; McTurk 1976). Interesting parallels exist between the situations in early medieval Ireland and Brittany, for in both regions the animosity felt towards the Scandinavian invaders by the indigenous people simply confused the existing state of civil hostility, as reflected in the frequent use made of the Vikings as mercenaries by the natives in their power struggles. It is noticeable that the Irish sources do not employ defamatory epithets when describing Scandinavian forces as frequently as do contemporary European documents. Comparisons have also been made between the Irish social structure based on the *rí* and *túath* and the Icelandic social system built around the *goðar*, while there is a remarkable similarity between the complex Irish law codes and the Icelandic laws, especially those governing killing (Sawyer 1982b). As with Ireland, the main Scandinavian influence on Brittany came from Norway – thus the nature of Hiberno-Norse relations is of particular importance.

As mentioned above, Wales has particularly interesting parallels with Brittany. Links between the two regions will be explored in later chapters using evidence from the saints' lives and charters (cf. Davies 1982b), such as those from Llandaff (Davies 1982a, 192). Apart from the *Annales Cambriae*, no continuous chronicle survives for early Welsh history such as does for example in Wessex, so we must rely on contemporary Irish and Anglo-Saxon sources together with later Welsh authors like Giraldus Cambrensis who must be used with great care. An exception is the *Armes Prydein*, the 'Prophecy of Britain', a poem which describes a looked-for alliance of all the Celtic realms and the Dublin Norse who will rise up against Anglo-Saxon rule. Its date is disputed but it is generally agreed to be mid-to-late ninth century, the problem being its relationship to Æthelstan's Brunanburh campaign of 937 and the later wars with Eiríkr blóðøx in the 950s. These issues are discussed in chapter 2, since the poem's references to Brittany are illuminating in a Viking context.

The final primary source to consider is not a document at all, but is nevertheless appropriate to this chapter: the Bayeux Tapestry. Embroidered shortly after the conquest of England, the Tapestry depicts in its earlier sections Duke William's campaign against Conan II of Brittany and shows several Breton towns and fortifications at Dinan, Dol and Rennes. These pictures obviously provide useful references for the earlier period too, and some of the artefacts illustrated have been cited as parallels for items in the Breton archaeological assemblages (cf. Wilson 1985, 175, discussed below). In addition, while the objectivity of the Tapestry is open to question in view of its nature as a celebration and confirmation of Norman power, the contemporary scenes of daily life and military exercises are unimpeachable.

In conclusion, a few words should be said about the effect of the Scandinavian raids on the Breton scriptoria. Before the Viking attacks began, Brittany had a tradition of fine illumination (cf. Wormald 1977; Morey, Rand and Kraeling 1931) and was a centre of book production with recorded transmissions of manuscripts to Wales and possibly England (Davies 1982a, 215). Foci of learning and culture existed at Léhon, Redon and Dol (cf. Périn and Feffer 1985, 449; Riché 1985), while neighbouring Neustria also enjoyed far-reaching fame for the quality of its book decoration (Mütherich 1985) and literary invention (Fontaine 1985), with twenty scriptoria divided among the bishoprics and monasteries (Vezin 1985). Following the initial impact of the ninth-century raids, however, book production dwindled and eventually ceased as the monasteries were sacked and burned. The saints' relics and shrines, once thought to be protection enough against attack as at Paris in 886 (a notion reinforced by rewritten saints' lives), were given priority for evacuation in the face of an onslaught thought by some to be an instrument of divine judgement (Riché 1969, 709). By 882 books were eagerly sought as the raids escalated in the late ninth century, an escalation reflected in the great exodus of church possessions and clergy (discussed in chapter 2, but see Chédeville and Guillotel 1984, 379-89; Wallace-Hadrill 1975b, 222-6). Many relics and manuscripts came to southern England where there is evidence of several Breton saints' cults. A similar situation existed in Neustria, where no monasteries at all remained by the time of Rollo (Göngu-Hrólf) (c. 911-925); the relationship of the Breton and Neustrian churches during this decline is discussed by le Patourel (1944, 137). The resulting dearth of late ninth- and tenth-century Breton records has been noted above, and did not begin to be reversed

until Alain Barbetorte's restoration of the monasteries after 939, when a new cultural lead was taken from the Frankish and Latin traditions.

2. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: FRANCE IN THE VIKING AGE

Although the existing documentary record has been subject both to intentional and accidental distortion by contemporary scribes, and to the arbitrary bias of manuscript survival, it is still possible to construct a fairly coherent, if broad, scheme of events and raids over the ninth and tenth centuries in France; this may then be compared with the archaeological evidence reviewed in chapter 3. In trying to avoid a relentless chronological narrative I have divided the period from the beginning of the ninth century to the end of the eleventh into five phases. Though each phase characterises a different general aspect of Scandinavian operations in France, with a specific reference to Brittany, it is important to realise that this is an imposition of artificial divisions on to a continuous historical sequence. The activities of the dozens of Scandinavian fleets and commanders present in France during this period, considered individually below, were obviously not restricted by any such chronological distinctions. Indeed, the need to consider separately the movements, objectives, composition and leadership of the various Scandinavian groups usually classified collectively as 'Vikings' is not only the central theme of this paper but is also vital if we are to understand the complex relationship of Brittany to the Frankish and Scandinavian worlds.²

The first raids: 799–856

The eve of the ninth century saw the culmination of a series of Carolingian campaigns against Brittany, dating back to the sack of Vannes by Pippin III in 753, possibly an attempt to pacify the Bretons after a failed invasion in 748. (The date of Pippin's campaign is disputed; see Smith 1986 for a full discussion.) After a Frankish army led by the hero Roland had been sent into Brittany in 778, Franko-Breton hostility had intensified, with another invasion in 786 by Audulf (*ARF* 786). In 799, this resulted in the conquest of the whole region by Wido 'as had never been done