

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

before' (*ARF* 799). In the early years of the ninth century the Franks launched several further consolidatory campaigns, notably in 811 by one of four Carolingian armies in the field that year (Verbruggen 1967, 428), and by Louis the Pious in 818. Following the rebellion of the Breton leaders Morvan and Wilhomar, Louis ordered additional expeditions against Brittany from Vannes and Rennes in 822, 824 and 825 (McKitterick 1983, 242). The friction between the Franks and Bretons, and the numerous Carolingian interventions in the area, had several causes. In part, the Carolingians were suppressing raids into Frankish territory, but more importantly perhaps, in doing so they were reviving earlier Merovingian claims to the region and extending the power of the Empire. Military gains along the Breton march had been consolidated by the granting of monastic estates there, which acted as both a buffer to Breton aggression and a convenient excuse for further Frankish campaigns to protect them. The rôle of the Frankish church in the attempted subjugation of Brittany was matched by aristocratic involvement, fostered through family connections (for example, from 813 to 822 the count of Vannes appears to have been the brother of Lambert of Anjou; see Davies 1981).

799, the year of Wido's initial conquest of Brittany, was a doubly significant one in that it also saw the first recorded Viking raid on Gaul, in the Vendée region, and thus the introduction of a new, extra-systemic factor into the politics of the Empire.³ Following the first Scandinavian attacks, Charlemagne reacted by ordering the defence of Aquitaine in 800, and built a fleet to protect the Elbe eight years later. Until the 830s raids on France were scarce, although in 820 a small fleet of thirteen ships attacked Flanders and the Seine estuary before moving on to the Vendée coast (*ARF* 820; Hill 1981, 33), possibly using an island near Noirmoutier as a temporary base as they had done in 819 (Davies 1988, 22). The island of Noirmoutier itself became one of the major Viking sea-bases in France by the mid ninth century, and by 830/831 the monks of the monastery there had been forced to construct a *castrum* to defend themselves against the Scandinavians (Chédeville and Guillotel 1984, 253).

At about this time, a Breton called Nominoe was appointed as imperial representative in Brittany by Louis the Pious and appears to have been accepted by the populace as well as remaining loyal to the emperor. During the early years of Nominoe's office Viking attacks on Noirmoutier became so severe that between 834 and 836 the whole monastic community evacuated the island, taking

with them the relics of Saint Philibert (*AE* 836; see *Ermentarius* for an account of their journey). It is, however, worth stressing that the only records of Scandinavian raids on Brittany itself prior to 843 come from the eleventh-century *Chronicle of Nantes*. Until 838, Frisia had been the focus of Viking activity in western Europe, coming under constant attack by a large Danish fleet. Efforts to fortify the coasts against them had failed in 835, as had an abortive siege of the Vikings' base on Walcheren Island (*AB* 837); the trading centre of Dorestad was burned four times and the whole region laid waste (*AF* 835-7; *AB* 834-7; the Vikings in Frisia are discussed by Braat 1954). In 838, this same Danish fleet, probably composed of exiles from the Danish power struggles with Horik (cf. *AB* 836; papers by Olsen, Lebecq and Sawyer given at the 1987 Société d'Archéologie Médiévale conference at Caen), was wrecked by a storm off the Frisian coast (*AB* 838).

In 840, Louis the Pious died, an event with great repercussions for Brittany and the Carolingian Empire. The following year a massive Viking fleet sailed up the Seine, burning Rouen, Jumièges and several monasteries, and taking many captives (*AB* 841). They then sailed to the Loire estuary to meet with heavy resistance from Count Renaud, after the new emperor, Charles the Bald, had ordered the nobles of the Loire to organise their defences (Chédeville and Guillotel 1984, 258). Coinciding with this phase of Viking aggression (in 842 a second fleet destroyed the northern coastal emporium of Quentovic in collaboration with Frankish traitors (*AB* 842)) the strained military capacity of the Empire made it possible for Nominoe to lead the Bretons in revolt against Carolingian rule. Count Reynald of Nantes was killed by Nominoe's son, Erispoe, and Bretons fought alongside Saxons and Gascons at the battle of Worms (Verbruggen 1967, 425; for a discussion of Breton military tactics see Nicolle 1984, 16).

In June 843, Nantes was attacked on the festival of Saint John the Baptist by a Viking fleet operating in alliance with the rebellious Count Lambert (*AB* 843). The cathedral was stormed and Bishop Gunhard slain with all his clergy and many of the citizens. The fleet then continued up the Loire to sack the monasteries at Indres and Vertou (see de la Borderie 1898, 310-14), northern Poitou and back down along the coast of Aquitaine, wintering on an island, perhaps Noirmoutier. The next year, 844, saw further raiding by this same fleet, severe enough to bring Nominoe back from Le Mans, where he was campaigning against the Franks, in order to fight the invaders (*AB* 844). The fleet withdrew, sailing

up the Garonne destroying everything as far as Toulouse. They then turned south to Galicia, where they were driven back by missile-throwing war machines (*AB* 844), wintering on the coastal islands off Poitou.

The depredations of this fleet acted as a severe drain on Carolingian military resources, taxing Charles the Bald's ability to respond to such a mobile threat. In 845, the Scandinavian fleet which had first appeared on the Seine four years earlier sent 120 ships upriver to Paris, exacting a Danegeld payment of 7000 pounds of silver from the emperor. Taking advantage of Charles's weakness, Nominoe defeated a large Carolingian army at Ballon later in the year (*AB* 845). The following year, 846, Charles, faced with raiding all along the northern and western coasts of France, had no option but to make peace with the Bretons. A growing threat was also appearing in the far north, as the Danes consolidated their hold on Frisia after Horik of Denmark had sent a massive raiding force (the sources claim 600 ships, almost certainly a gross exaggeration) up the Elbe against Louis the previous year, destroying Hamburg after three battles (*AF* 845; *AB* 845-6).

In 847, Brittany suffered its worst raiding up to that time, as the fleet of Vikings based on the coastal islands near the mouth of the Loire launched a major offensive. Nominoe and the Breton army resisted, fighting three battles, but eventually the Scandinavians were victorious (*AB* 847). Nominoe himself was forced to flee for a short time, but managed to buy the Vikings off — one of only two occasions on which the Bretons paid Danegeld (Smith 1985). The fleet then ravaged the coast of Aquitaine.

It is apparent that after 841 there were two main Scandinavian fleets raiding in France, broadly based on the Seine and Loire rivers, though they recognised no fixed boundaries (for example, the Seine Vikings fought on the Loire in 841). Those operating on the Seine are usually referred to as *Dani* 'Danes' in the *Annales Bertiniani*, in preference to the more common term *Nordmanni* 'Norsemen' used for Scandinavians in general. This fleet did not winter in France until 851, instead returning to Denmark. It was probably not a cohesive unit as such, rather a loose affiliation of looters and pirates returning regularly to an area known to be a worthwhile target. The Loire fleet was very different, wintering off the coast of Poitou and Aquitaine for three years after 843. Only a few estimates of size are given in the sources for its early activities, but between 67 and 80 vessels is likely (see Brooks 1979 for a comparison of Viking fleet sizes). Nothing is known of the

change in composition of this fleet, if any, over these three years but it seems probable that it acted as an effective, combined force presumably under a nominal leadership and with at least a basic command structure (the infrastructure of peripatetic Scandinavian forces is discussed briefly below in relation to the Great Army and the mercenary fleets of the 880s and 890s, and in more depth in Price, forthcoming). As to the fleet's origins, the *Annales Engolismenses* call them *Wesfaldingi*, 'Westfoldings'(?), in 843, a statement supported by recent scholars (McKitterick 1983, 232). These two armies, Danish and Norwegian, are henceforth referred to as the Seine and Loire Vikings respectively. A third fleet, mentioned above and operating along the Somme and in Frisia, also formed an important factor in the mid ninth-century Frankish political situation, acting as a constant threat and drain on resources though never active on the west coast or in Brittany.

During this first phase of raiding, Nominoe had made strenuous efforts to further Breton independence from Carolingian influence, particularly that of the Frankish church. The details of this are the subject of much debate. The establishment of the Redon community in 832 during the reign of Louis the Pious may have been a deliberate element in this policy; the expulsion of four Frankish bishops in 848 over the question of the Rule of Saint Benedict of Aniane, and their replacement with Breton clerics seems unequivocal (*CN* 848; Bernier 1982, 109–11). Nominoe apparently set up an archbishopric at Dol in an attempt to foster an independent Breton church, though the see was not ratified by Rome for several centuries, but there are still too many source problems to be certain (see Smith 1982; for a discussion of Breton religious institutions, see de la Borderie 1898, 246–75). In addition to his efforts to achieve ecclesiastical autonomy, Nominoe also expanded Brittany's borders, gaining Rennes and Nantes from the Franks in 846, and raiding far into Anjou, the Vendômois and the Bessin.

In 848 Charles managed to drive off a small fleet of Danes who had been besieging Bordeaux (*AB* 848), but no further Viking activity is recorded until 850. In that year the *Annales Bertiniani* report that the Scandinavians began to fight amongst themselves. The arrival of a new Danish leader in Frisia, Roric, the brother of the Haraldr who commanded the fleet raiding there in the 830s, seems to have disrupted the balance of power among the Frisian Vikings with a significant effect on north-western France. Having previously served as a mercenary under both Louis and Lothar,

Roric began to ravage along the Rhine and Waal in 850; in response, Lothar ceded Dorestad to him on the condition that he took over the administration and resisted further Danish attacks, thus granting the Scandinavians a major power-base in the north. In the same year, Haraldr's son Godfred moved into the Seine and formed an alliance with Charles the Bald (*AF* 850; *AB* 850).

The following year, 851, Nominoe died and was succeeded by his son Erispoe. Charles the Bald attempted a hasty invasion but was defeated by Erispoe at the Battle of Jengland. As a result, Rennes and Nantes were again ceded to the Bretons along with the Pays de Retz. This may also have been an attempt to buy Breton aid against the Viking threat from Noirmoutier, since in the same year Charles had already had to drive back a Danish force which had moved south from Frisia to sack Rouen, before marching on foot to Beauvais (*AB* 851). To complicate the situation still further, Charles also began actively to support Erispoe's cousin, Salomon, against him. In 852, Charles went so far as to grant Salomon a third of Brittany.

The same year Haraldr was killed fighting in Frisia, and Godfred's fleet (recorded as 252 ships) was bribed to leave the region. Ignoring this agreement, Godfred raided along the Scheldt and attacked settlements in Frisia before sailing down to the Seine. His fleet was met by a combined Frankish army under Charles and Lothar, and besieged (*AB* 852). It proved only a temporary halt to Godfred's Vikings however, since the siege was lifted when Charles was forced to leave in 853. The Danes sailed out into the open sea and round the Breton peninsula into the Loire estuary, where they sacked Nantes and Saint-Florent (*AB* 853; it is interesting that an entry written in 1054 in the *Annals of Saint-Florent* attributes the destruction to Nominoe, see Chédeville and Guillo-tel 1984, 230). Tours was also burned, though the monks of Saint-Martin's had time to remove relics to Corméry (*AB* 853).

Godfred's fleet encamped on the Ile de Bièce in the Loire at Nantes. At this time, another Viking fleet (itself perhaps a subdivision of a larger force) under the command of Sidroc had arrived at the mouth of the Loire. In desperation the Bretons agreed an alliance with Sidroc's Vikings, the terms of which are not recorded, and in 854 Sidroc and Erispoe attacked Godfred's camp with 105 ships. The Bretons suffered heavy casualties and were driven back (Smith 1985). The following day Sidroc betrayed the Bretons and allowed Godfred to sail up the Vilaine with 130 ships towards an unprotected Redon. Sidroc led his fleet round the coast into the

Seine. Redon was saved by a sudden storm which wrecked some of Godfred's ships, but the remainder of the fleet disembarked to loot elsewhere in Brittany (CR 369, 21-2), taking many captives including the bishop of Vannes.

In 855, Godfred withdrew to join his uncle Roric in Dorestad. The previous year civil war had broken out in earnest in Denmark, causing many Danes to return home from Frisia (AF 854). The resulting carnage wiped out almost the entire Danish ruling family, including Horik himself (AB 854; for the Frisian politics see Sawyer 1982a, 87-8, 91, 98). Sidroc's Loire Vikings returned from the Seine to attack Bordeaux, and were driven back to Nantes after an abortive assault on Poitiers (AB 855).

The career of Godfred provides a convenient link with which to conclude this discussion of the first phase of raiding in France. The

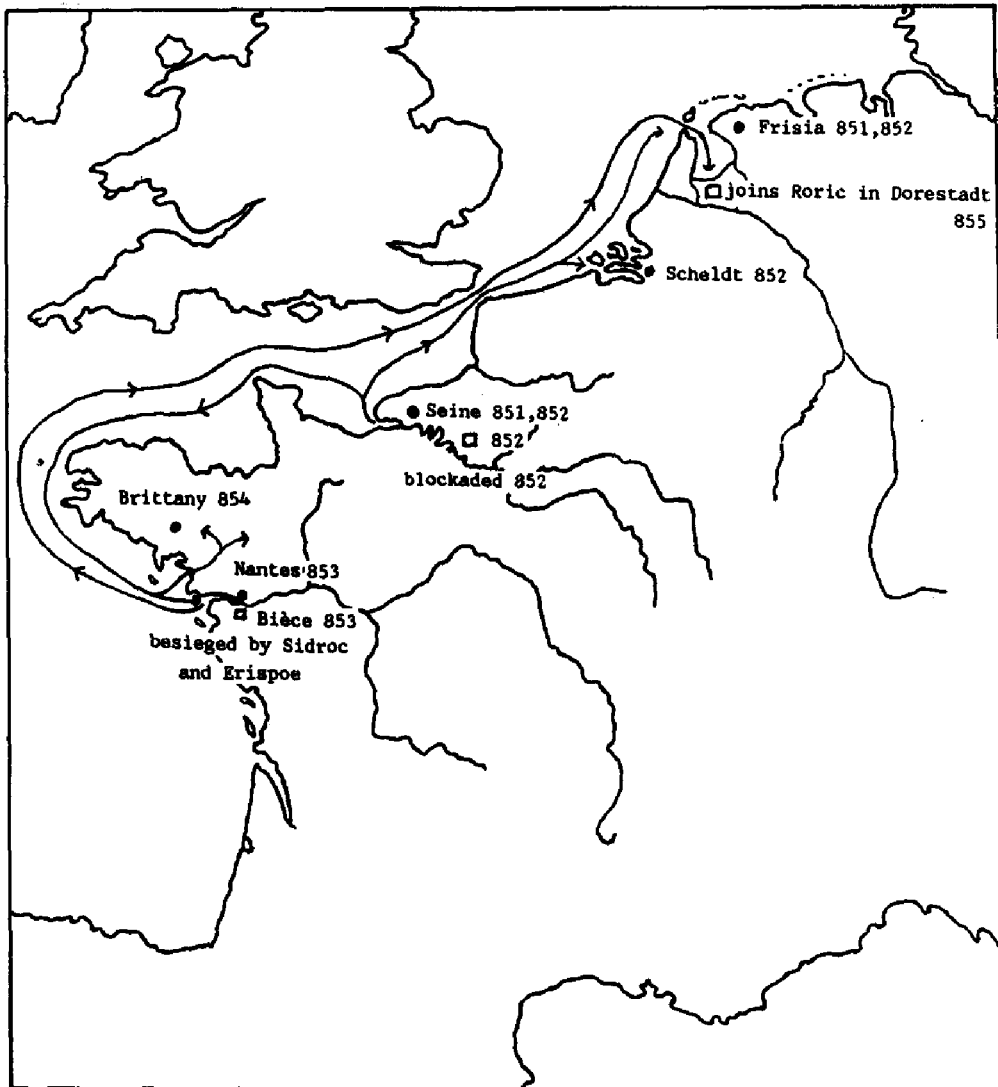


Fig. 3. The campaigns of Godfred, son of Haraldr, 851-855

only Viking commander known to have fought in Frisia, on the Seine and on the Loire, which can be considered the three foci for Scandinavian operations in ninth-century western Europe, Godfred is an excellent example of a pirate chieftain of this period. Like many of the Viking leaders, often described as 'kings' (*reges* or *regii*) in Frankish sources, he was an exiled renegade from Scandinavia's constant struggles for power, taking the opportunity provided by foreign raiding to gain wealth and a following in a way not possible before (earlier exiles had gone to Sweden or Finland). Godfred's activities embody the rôle played by Scandinavians in France up to 856: peripatetic raiding over a large area with a medium-sized fleet, with occasional over-wintering and occupation of Frankish settlements, involvement in Scandinavian politics, and shifting alliances with and against the Carolingians, Bretons and other Viking fleets. The mid ninth century saw a dramatic change in the Viking attitude to Europe.

The assault on France: 856-892

856 saw the beginning of one of the most intense periods of Scandinavian activity abroad in the ninth century. The simple piratical operations carried out before were replaced by a carefully planned attack on the centres of wealth, settlement and trade, taking into account local topography and religious festivals when the targets would be unprepared for defence: the 'Great Invasion' of 856-862 (McKitterick 1983, 234-5). This period particularly highlights the extent to which the Vikings were involved in Frankish politics, and the rivalries between Charles the Bald, the sons of Louis the Pious, the disaffected Neustrian and Aquitanian nobles and the Bretons.

In July 856, Charles the Bald was occupied fighting renegade counts in Aquitaine and an alliance of the Loire Vikings and Pippin II when news reached him of a combined Viking attack on Paris. Sidroc had sailed up the Seine and joined forces with a second Scandinavian fleet commanded by Björn at Pîtres; continuing up-river to Paris, everything had been burned except for the churches of Saints Germain-des-Prés, Denis, Stephen and Vincent which had paid bribes to be spared. Charles reacted in October, launching an offensive with Adalhard, Rudolf, Welf and Counts Ricoin, Augier and Bérengar. The Vikings were driven back to their winter base on Oselles island (*AB* 857 [856]). In addition to defending

Aquitaine and the Seine, Charles was faced with attacks from the west. Orléans was sacked by a Danish host and Charles was forced to cede Maine to the Bretons in return for a temporary alliance against the Vikings. The Carolingian position was so threatened that Charles even attempted to gain English help against the Scandinavians by marrying his daughter Judith to Æthelwulf of Wessex (a similar policy had been promoted by Charlemagne, see Wallace-Hadrill 1967, 691-4; Hodges, 1981a, 224).

The following year, 857, Charles's support of Salomon in Brittany grew to fruition when Erispoe was assassinated in a church. Although Salomon immediately seized control of Brittany, however, ostensibly as a Frankish vassal, he at once began to ally with anyone who would oppose Charles; notably Louis the Stammerer and Robert the Strong of Neustria. Charles was unable to deal successfully with a major raid on Tours and the surrounding districts by the Loire Vikings, being simultaneously faced with a Danish attack on Chartres during which Bishop Frotbald was killed (*AB* 857). In response to Charles's inability to defend the Seine and Loire, not surprising in the circumstances, Robert the Strong and his supporters rebelled in 858. Charles the Bald formed an alliance at Verberie with Björn, one of the Seine Viking commanders who had fought at Paris two years earlier (*AB* 858). The outcome of this alliance is not known, but Charles besieged the remaining Seine Vikings on Oselles in July, after paying a massive ransom to Sidroc for the abbot of Saint-Denis who had been captured at Paris. Although joined by his nephew Lothar II after tense negotiations, Charles was once again obliged to raise the siege in September to quell a rebellion of Neustrian counts. The revolt had been backed by Salomon in alliance with Louis the German (*AB* 858).

In 859, the Seine Vikings continued to raid widely, destroying Noyon and Beauvais, killing bishop Immo and forcing the monks to flee with the relics of Denis, Eleutherius and Rusticus. In this year too, a new threat to the Empire appeared in the north, as a new Danish army arrived on the Somme under the command of Weland. (Although Roric had sailed to Denmark in 857, Danes had continued to raid in Frisia, attacking the Scheldt basin and Saxony from their bases at Dorestad and Batavia.) Weland's fleet laid waste Amiens and Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme and wintered at the mouth of the river (*AB* 859). The following year, 860, this Somme fleet campaigned in England but Weland offered to return and fight the Seine Vikings for Charles, provided he was paid 3000

pounds of silver and supplied with food and wine. Charles agreed, raising the money by levying a tax on church land (*AB* 860; Davies 1988, 57-8, 213). In the same year, another Danish fleet raided along the Rhône.

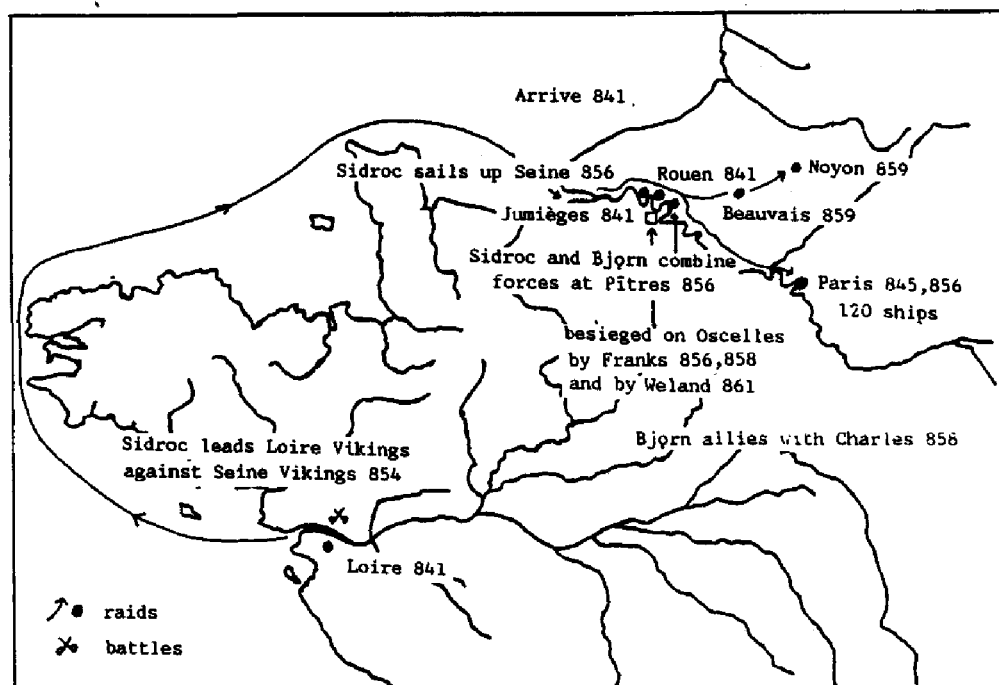


Fig. 4. Seine Viking activity 841-861, and the movements of Sidroc and Bjørn

Weland returned from England with 200 ships in 861 and besieged the Seine Vikings on Oselles, being joined later in the blockade by reinforcements of 60 ships which had sailed up the Seine and Epte. After a payment of 6000 pounds of silver, however, Weland allowed the Seine Vikings to sail away and winter elsewhere on the river while his own Somme fleet made camp at Saint-Meur-des-Fossés (*AB* 861). Paris was burned again by a Danish fleet which also ravaged the Théroutanne district.

In early 862 Charles the Bald changed his response to the Viking raids from a reactive to a preventative basis (cf. Sawyer 1982a, 88-91), initiating a programme of river fortifications to restrict access for the Scandinavian fleets. The Marne was blockaded at several points, trapping Weland's ships at Trilbardon Bridge and forcing them into Jumièges for repairs. In February, Weland formally submitted to Charles (*AB* 862), who then ordered the construction of fortifications on the Seine. The remainder of Weland's vessels split from his command and joined a small force of Vikings on the Loire, which had hitherto been raiding in Spain. This combined fleet was hired for a reported 6000 pounds of silver by Robert

the Strong who was now campaigning against Salomon, 'before Salomon could ally with them against him' (*AB* 862), a salutary reminder of the changeability of Viking loyalties. Salomon responded by hiring 12 ships of Loire Vikings who had been troubling southern Brittany (*CR* 121, 269-70).

After 862 the pressure of raids on France eased for a short time. Weland, since 859 the principal Viking commander in France, was killed in a duel in 863. Salomon made peace with Charles in the same year, acknowledging his power and receiving land grants between the Mayenne and the Sarthe in return, as well as being made lay abbot of Saint-Aubin of Angers. The Viking threat was concentrated in the north, in Frisia, as Dorestad was sacked again and a Danish fleet sailed up the Rhine to a base near Neuss; they were contained and driven back by Lothar and a Saxon army (*AB* 863). Limited raiding still continued in France, however, as at Poitiers in 863.

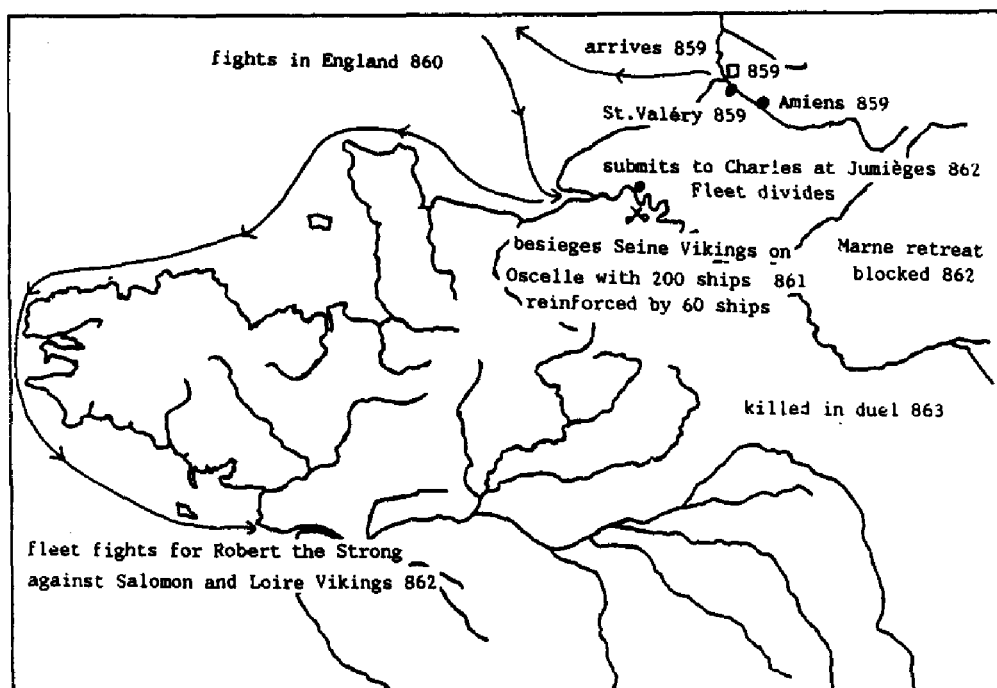


Fig. 5. Weland's campaigns in north-western France, 859-863

Several of the Frankish defensive works set up in the early 860s seem to have been almost immediately dismantled, with royal sanction, and the stone re-used in ecclesiastical buildings, perhaps an indication of the value of cathedrals as refuges (McKitterick 1983, 233). At the assembly of Pîtres in 864 Charles requested that these fortifications be rebuilt. Local defences were proving an inadequate containment to the Viking threat; in the same year the

citizens of Aquitaine took up arms against the Seine Vikings but were unable to prevent them sacking Clermont and reaching their ships, Robert of Anjou defeated one group of Loire Vikings but was beaten back by a second, and Pippin II of Aquitaine had actually joined the Danes and renounced Christianity (*AB* 864). The dynasty of Haraldr was still causing trouble in the north, as his son Rodulf was able to extort a Danegeld payment from Lothar, who was fighting Vikings in Flanders and on the Rhine.

Through a combination of mismanagement and civil dissension Charles was unable to employ his fortification system to good effect. In 865, 50 ship-loads of Seine Vikings escaped a blockade at Pîtres, bypassing fortified bridges at Auvers and Charenton after a raid on the Parisian vineyards, while the Loire Vikings were able to raid upriver as far as Fleury and burn Orléans before returning to their base. A second Loire force was defeated at Poitiers by Count Robert (*AB* 865 mentions five hundred casualties and a great haul of 'banners and weapons') and in Aquitaine the local militia fought with a Scandinavian host from the Charente under the command of Sigefrid. Later in the year Salomon again allied with Vikings for a joint raid on Le Mans.

866 saw a dramatic victory for the Seine Vikings: after defeating Robert and Odo at Melun a large host forced Charles the Bald to pay not only a tribute of 4000 pounds of silver and *wergild* for dead Vikings, but also to agree to release all Scandinavian prisoners. An abortive attempt to block the Seine at Pîtres failed in June and by July the Seine host had reached the open sea (*AB* 866). The Franks did have some success, however, confining the Loire Vikings to their base after repulsing them from Neustria. Their permanent camp in the Loire estuary made the surrounding area so hazardous that Bishop Actard of Nantes was forced to request translation to a safer see (*CR* 264), which was granted to him by the Pope two years later.

The period 866-873 was one of escalating Viking activity in Brittany, as often in alliance with the Bretons as in opposition to them, while Salomon's political manoeuvres grew more intricate and sophisticated. The year after the Le Mans raid of 865, Salomon made contact with Hæsten (Hásteinn), one of the main commanders of the Great Army, and a joint Breton-Danish force attacked Poitou, Anjou, Maine and Touraine. Le Mans was sacked again and a Frankish army was defeated at Brissarthe, a battle in which Counts Robert and Ranulf were killed (*AB* 866; *Regino* records the battle under his 867 annal, describing a night attack

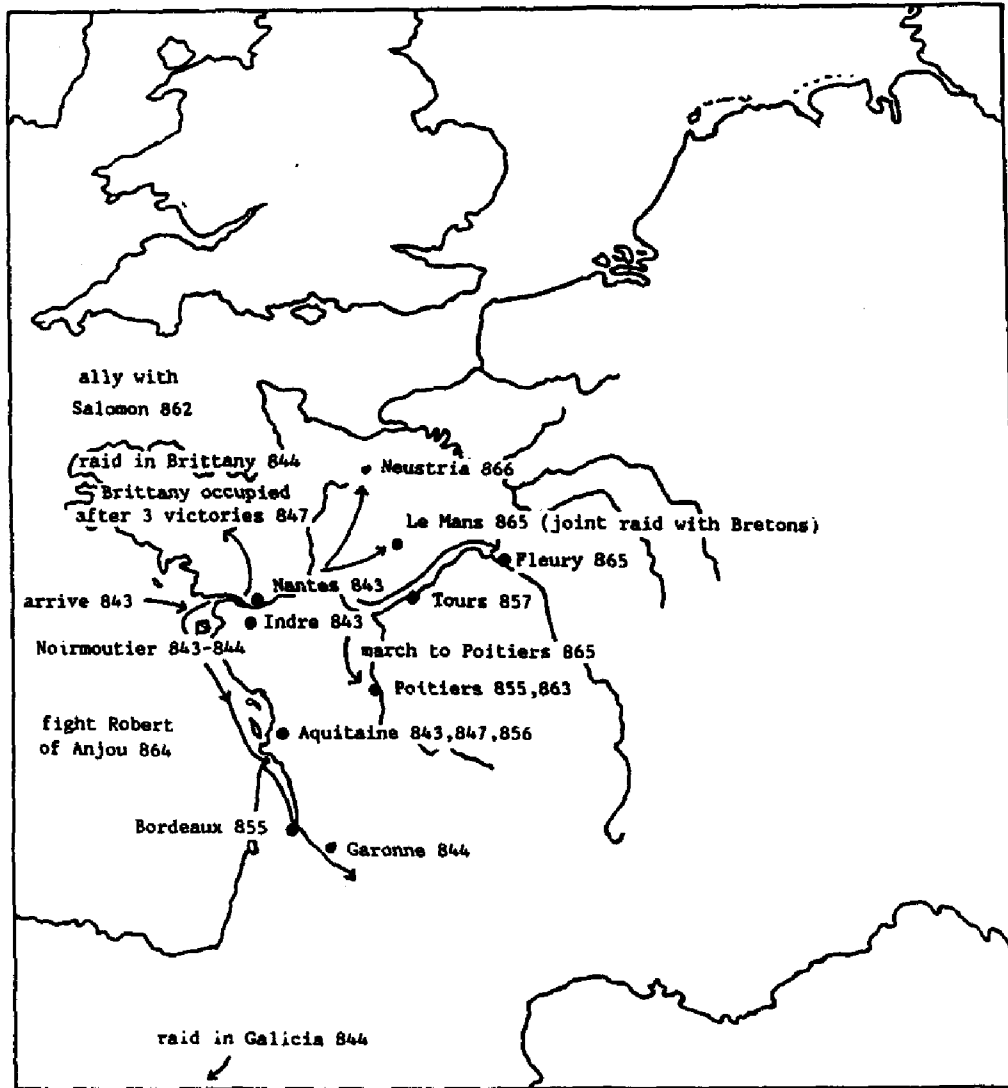


Fig. 6. The Loire Vikings, 843-866

on a fortified church). As a result, Salomon was granted the abbeys, *villae* and *fiscs* in Coutances and thereafter styled himself *rex* (though it would be inappropriate to lay too much stress on this title; Wendy Davies, pers. comm.). It is important to note that Salomon was an ally, not a vassal, of Charles and ruled a very much independent Brittany (see Davies 1981). The first contemporary reference to the Dol archbishopric occurs at this time, and it is possible that ecclesiastical estrangement from the Empire was more pronounced under Salomon than Nominoe. Through his complex web of mutually exclusive alliances, Salomon nevertheless sought to make himself and Brittany vital to the protection of north-west Francia, where he may have held equal power to Charles (Davies 1981, 91).

By 868 Salomon had agreed to lead a campaign against the Loire

Vikings with Carolingian aid, perhaps in return for a grant of land (Davies 1988, 20), but instead found himself defending south-eastern Brittany after the promised Frankish army ignored the Scandinavians and ravaged Neustria itself. It was left to the levies at Poitiers to drive off the Vikings (*AB* 868). In April 869 Salomon confirmed the monks of Redon in the sanctuary at Plélan, to which they had fled earlier, and the relics of Saint-Maxent were brought there (*CR* 189-92; Privat 1971, 84-5; Davies 1988, 23). By May, Hásteinn had assumed command of a group of Loire Vikings and attacked the Vilaine region. They were met in battle by 'Salomon and all the Bretons' (*CR* 242) and the *princeps* Guorhwant, who had halted in Auessac before proceeding towards Nantes (Davies 1988, 171); a peace treaty was concluded by exchanges of hostages, livestock and food, with the Bretons also gaining part of the Anjou wine harvest as part of the agreement since their access to it had been blocked by the Vikings (*AB* 869; *Regino* 869). Despite the treaty, Abbot Hugh and Gauzfrid attacked the Vikings later in the year and killed a monk who had become apostate (*AB* 869); Charles the Bald ordered the fortification of Le Mans and Tours. The early 870s saw further Viking activity in Brittany, sufficient to cause the Breton nobles to prevent Salomon's intended pilgrimage to Rome so that he could lead the Breton defence (*CR* 247), but no details are recorded of the raids (though *Bili* mentions a raid on Alet before 872: II, 15-16). In 873 Hásteinn's army was besieged at Angers by the Franks who had trapped the Scandinavians by diverting the course of the river there (de la Borderie 1898, 94).

In 874 Brittany's internal politics were thrown into turmoil when Salomon was murdered by a rival. The resulting surge of Viking attacks made possible by the power vacuum was narrowly held at bay by a hasty Breton-Frankish alliance between Alain of Vannes and Bérengar of Rennes (de la Borderie 1898, 334; see also Musset 1965). The civil warfare intensified the following year when Pascwethen, Salomon's son-in-law, made an alliance with the Loire Vikings, probably under Hásteinn, and attacked Erispoe's son-in-law Guorhwant at Rennes, having sacked the monastery of Saint-Melaine en route. From this power struggle Pascwethen's brother Alain and Guorhwant's son Judicael emerged as joint rulers of Brittany, cooperating well until 877, when the Vikings began to exploit their growing dissension.

In the late 870s the Scandinavian raids intensified as the deaths of both Charles the Bald and Louis the Stammerer gave the Vikings virtual immunity from retaliation (Chédeville and Guillotel 1984,

361). Widespread devastation in Neustria forced the monks of Evreux, Lisieux, Bayeux and Avranches to flee. The inability of Charles the Bald to fight the Vikings successfully had led to the promotion of those who could, such as Baldwin II of Flanders. However, this caused a preoccupation with more localised and opportunistic resistance since many of these men frequently made alliances with Vikings for their own ends, despite being charged with the defence of the Empire (cf. Flodoard *HRE* III, 23). From 880 to 882 the imperial frontiers were overrun by Vikings, with raiding all along the Rhine, in Frisia and in the area north-east of the Seine; no attacks are recorded in Brittany during this period. The main Viking commanders are recorded as Godafrid, Sigifrid, Vurm and Hals, and are sometimes said to have fought in mounted units. The dislocating effect on the Franks was considerable, with numerous key noblemen and clerics slain and many towns and monasteries destroyed; to this was added a financial drain as enough Danegeld was paid to fill 200 ships. (The details of these raids are not relevant to the Breton issue; they are discussed in Price 1988, 31-6 and visually summarised in Hill 1981, 42. The main primary sources are the *Annales Fuldenses*, 880-82, which are severely critical of the Frankish response to the Vikings.)

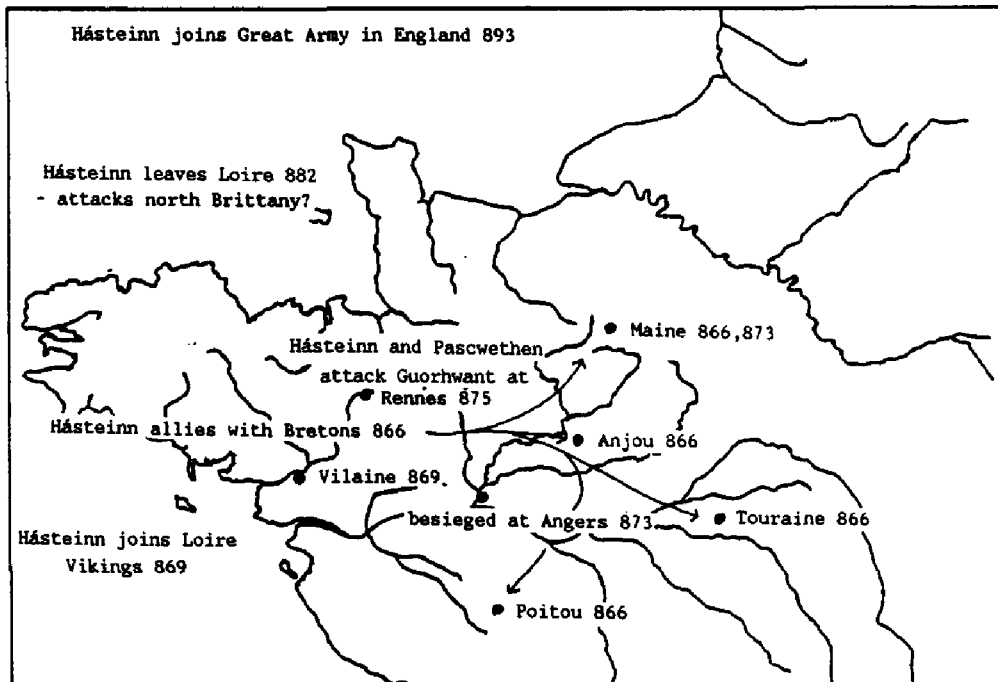


Fig. 7. The Loire Vikings 866-882, and the campaigns of Hásteinn

During 883 and 884 the Carolingians began to recover, rebuilding and fortifying the Rhineland settlements and driving the Vikings

back to the frontiers. Count Heimrich freed the Rhine and the Frisians won a great victory at Norden; peace was strengthened by the marriage of Godafrid to Lothar's step-daughter (*AF* 883-4). Brittany had suffered least from the five-year assault: in 882 Hásteinn had left the Loire Vikings under the terms of his agreement with Louis III and may have begun raiding northern Brittany (de la Borderie 1898, 326-8; Smith 1985), and in 884 *Uurmonoc* (XXI) records a raid on the Ile Lavret monastery.

The Frankish recovery continued through 885, as Paris withstood the siege of Sigifrid's Danes. Heimrich killed Godafrid who had broken his oath and attacked the Rhineland, and a Viking army in Frisia was wiped out (*AF* 885). Despite these victories the tide began to turn against the Franks with startling speed. Scandinavians had now been in Francia continuously for over six years, and in one of the worst years of raiding in the ninth century the whole eastern Empire was inundated by Vikings. In 886 the Franks were defeated near Paris and Abbots Hugh and Gozelin were killed. In July of the same year, Heimrich, the defender of the eastern frontiers, was slain in battle by Sigifrid; the emperor decided to pay a tribute and retreat.

Brittany found itself the target of renewed raiding in 886, and in the latter part of the year the county of Nantes was overrun and the city captured. Alain of Broweroch was able to maintain only a guerrilla force to fight them (de la Borderie 1898, 329). By 888 the power-struggle between Alain of Vannes and Judicael had intensified to such a degree that no resistance was offered to the Scandinavians, and the Loire Vikings were able to occupy western Brittany completely (*Regino* 890). The death of Judicael in battle with the invaders left Alain in command of the Breton forces, and he led a united army to a great victory at Questembert, driving the Vikings back to the mouth of the Loire (see de la Borderie 1898, 494-5 for a discussion of the battle).

In 889 the Vikings in Frisia and their Slav allies concluded a peace treaty with the Empire (*AF* 889), leaving the Carolingians able to push the Seine fleet eastwards. Some Frankish settlements seem to have drawn up their own truce agreements with Vikings in their area, such as that made by the citizens of Meaux (McKitterick 1983, 232). Over 889-90 the Seine Vikings moved into Brittany, hard on the heels of the Loire fleet that Alain had successfully driven out (this latter force had broken up into several small flotillas and sailed west). Alain again joined forces with Bérengar of Rennes and led two Breton armies into the field. Finding their

retreat down the Marne blocked, the Vikings hauled their ships overland to the Vire and besieged Saint-Lô, where the Bretons virtually annihilated the fleet (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 890; Smith 1985). A second force was also defeated on the river Couesnon. Alain won two more victories against the Seine Vikings the following year (*Regino* 891), which consolidated his hard-won peace.

As Alain finally cleared Brittany of Vikings, the Scandinavian stranglehold on the Empire was also coming to an end. King Arnulf destroyed the great army encamped at Louvain, killing Sigifrid and capturing sixteen Viking standards (*AF* 891), and attacks also lessened in Flanders after the strengthening of city walls. By the end of 892 the Great Army had left mainland Europe and sailed for England (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 893), shifting the focus of Viking activity in the West firmly on to the kingdom of Wessex.

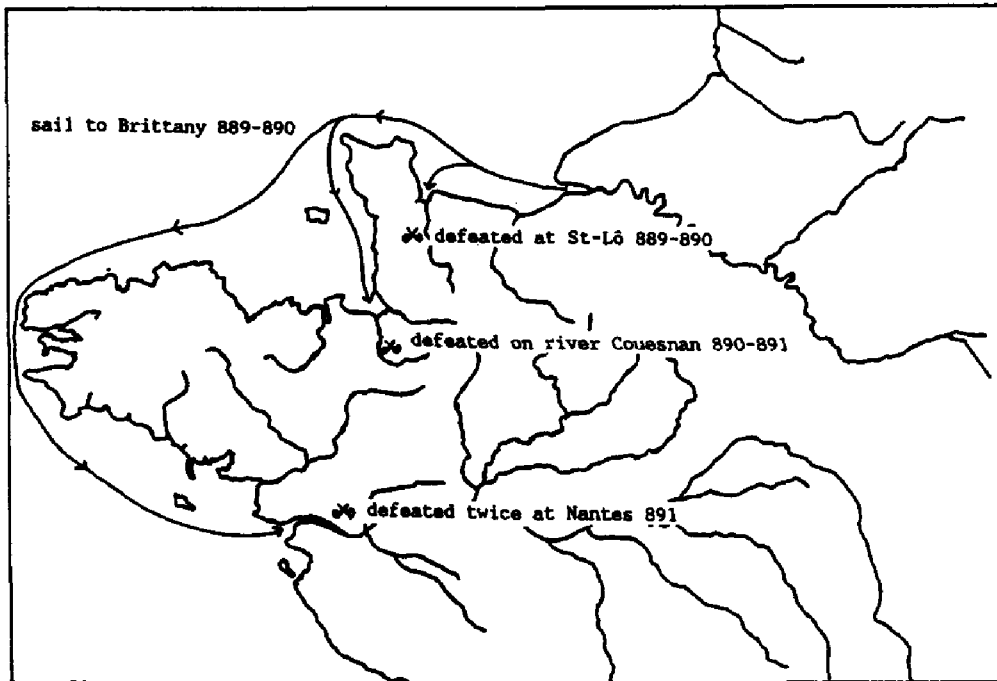


Fig. 8. Seine Viking campaigns in Brittany, 889-891

The peace of Alain the Great: 892-907

Alain's success in battle heralded a few years of peace for Brittany, and there are few raids recorded before his death in 907 (though the Loire Vikings sacked Tours in 903; see also *AV* 898 and Smith 1985). Instead, he made an attempt to rebuild the Breton church after its decline as a result of the Viking disruptions.

For several years after 899 there is no recorded activity by the Seine and Somme Vikings. It has been suggested that they congregated in the lower Seine area and began to settle (McKitterick 1983, 236), though this has not been proved.

Although severe, the Viking threat had been withstood up until 907 through a combination of military endeavour, judicious alliances and payment of tribute. Just as the Frankish response was marked by local defence rather than organised national resistance, in the ninth century the Viking attacks tended towards piecemeal raids rather than concentrated invasions (the apparent emphasis on the Scheldt basin may be due to an annalistic preoccupation). Before the early tenth century the Scandinavians showed no clear inclination to settle, but instead specialised in carefully planned attacks in ecclesiastical and market centres. Although the economic losses seem immense (and Danegeld payments certainly led to increased financial demands on the populace) it is possible that Charles the Bald had inherited an empire with already declining trade networks (Hodges 1981a, 228; though see Wallace-Hadrill 1975b, 228 for an alternative view).

There are no references to widespread agrarian devastation in Brittany (see Wallace-Hadrill 1975b, 229-32), but it has been argued that the Vikings may have deliberately avoided this and allowed agricultural production to be maintained, to provide themselves with a food supply to be exacted as part of tribute payments (Davies 1988, 55; *AB* 869). Viking supply routes and logistics are discussed in Chapter 4 below. In Brittany the raids seem to have been largely a problem for the aristocracy, with the peasants fighting only in personal defence, though it must be stressed that the details of Breton military organisation at a local level are obscure (Davies 1988, 23, 170). Certainly the capacity for armed resistance in Brittany may have been affected by dislocations in the chain of command from the ruler to the *machtierns*, the local hereditary officers upon whom the civil administration depended (see Davies 1981, especially 99; de la Borderie 1898, 124-64).

The dismemberment of Carolingian power, notably the division of the Empire in 888, was partly a result of the Vikings' drain on Frankish resources. This loss of coordinated regional control, together with the many gaps in the local power structures caused by the deaths of officials during raids, was a contributory factor to the establishment of small states such as Flanders and Normandy (Bates 1982, 5; see also Yver 1969, 302-6).

The conquest and occupation of Brittany: 907–939

Following the death of Alain the Great in 907, Brittany was left without a strong leader (it has been suggested that Breton resistance up to that time was chiefly dependent on the personal leadership in battle of Salomon and Alain, see Smith 1985). Although the sources are unclear, Viking attacks seem to have escalated dramatically during the reign of Gurmhailon, the count of Cornouaille, who succeeded Alain.

Far more significant for Brittany's future was a battle fought at Chartres in 911 between Charles III (the Simple) and the commander of the Seine Vikings, Rollo (usually identified with Gøngu-Hrólf); as a result of this battle Hrólf was granted the *pagi* of Talon, Caux, Roumois and parts of the Vexin and Evrecin in the 'Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte'. This agreement has been much discussed, and the statement by Dudo of Saint-Quentin that the cession included Brittany as well should be dismissed. The entire treaty may be an invention of Dudo, but a charter of 918 confirming a grant of land to the monastery of Saint-Germain-des-Prés says that land has been granted *Nottmannis Sequanensibus videlicet Rolloni suisque comitibus* 'to the Northmen of the Seine, namely Rollo [Hrólf] and his followers', *pro tutela regni* 'for the defence of the kingdom' (McKitterick 1983, 237; Lauer 1940–49, no. 92).

Hrólf seems to have been made a count with responsibilities for defence and judicial administration, on similar terms to Salomon's receipt of the Cotentin but with the inclusion of bishoprics. Although Hrólf was probably a Norwegian, the son of Earl Røgnvaldr Mœrajarl, his army is likely to have been a conglomerate of Scandinavians including many Danes who had been with the Great Army in England. The valleys of the Orne, Dives and Risle were settled sporadically by different groups of Vikings over the following years. They seem to have ruled the Frankish population, which may not have been large, and to have rapidly absorbed Frankish customs and culture at a rate accelerated by intermarriage and conversion (see Musset 1975b, 42). The various Viking groups were by no means mutually friendly (see Douglas 1947, 107–8), and the constant civil strife recorded led to instability in the early years of Normandy's creation. Though there is no evidence of widespread repopulation, place-name research suggests settlers from Scandinavia, England, Ireland and possibly Orkney (see Fellows-Jensen 1988; Davis 1976, 21–5; Bates 1982, 16–19; Adigard des Gautries' definitive studies 1951–9 and Guinet 1980; the Celtic names may point more closely to the Hebrides — Gillian Fellows-Jensen, pers. comm.). There may have been a particularly strong

element of militant paganism in western Neustria, where place-names show that Scandinavian settlement was densest (see Bates 1982, 13–14).⁴

With the settlement of Hrólfr's Seine army, the character of Scandinavian involvement in France changes. 'Vikings' no longer, the invaders pursue definite land-taking objectives, linked to the fortunes of their fellow Scandinavians in England and Ireland. The attacks of the early tenth century in Brittany, however, represent the last phase of the 'First Viking Age', the period of raiding and devastation, and it has been suggested that the heaviest attacks on Brittany occur when Viking activity elsewhere eases off (Smith 1985), a theory discussed below. It is certainly clear that the 911 settlements around the Seine reduced raiding in that area and that only Brittany and Ireland were then subject to serious assault, something doubtless welcomed by the Franks.

For Brittany, the most dramatic consequence of Hrólfr's agreement with the Franks was that the most aggressive and ambitious of the Seine Vikings split off from the main group and sailed round the coast to the Loire. From this time onwards, Brittany was the focus of Viking raiding activity in France.

In 912 the raids continued with unparalleled ferocity. The monastery of Saint-Guenolé at Landévennec was destroyed by Vikings from the Loire in 913, and the monks fled to Château-du-Loir with the saint's relics (in 926 they moved again to Montreuil-sur-Mer). The impact of this phase of attacks can be seen particularly clearly in such evacuations, recorded at many monasteries, though it is not always apparent whether it is the whole community that leaves or just an escort for the monastic treasure and relics. Léhon was used as an assembly point for clerical fugitives as the attacks worsened, organised by Salvator of Alet who had fled there earlier with the relics of Saint Machutus (de la Borderie 1898, 364–5).

The effect on the church was already considerable by the early tenth century. After leaving Noirmoutier in 836, the community there travelled through Saint-Philibert-de-Grand-Lieu, on to Cunauld in Anjou, Messay in Poitou, finally reaching Tournus in Bourgogne by May 875 (Chédeville and Guillotel 1984, 379–89). The monks of Saint-Martin-de-Vertou had left in 843 to go to Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes in Poitou (de la Borderie 1898, 310–14) and the clergy of Saint-Florent-le-Vieil at Mont Glonne departed for Berry in 866 (Chédeville and Guillotel 1984, 379–89). The Quimper community also went to Montreuil-sur-Mer, and Saint-Guenaël's sent many monks first to Coucouronne and then to

Corbeil (de la Borderie 1898, 336). The relics of Saint Samson were moved from Dol to Avranches and Orléans (de la Borderie 1898, 367–8), and those of Saint-Paul-de-Léon were taken to Fleury (McKitterick 1983, 245). Saint-Méen removed its relics to safety in 919, Redon did the same in 924 and Saints Maxentius, Gildas, Melenius and Paternus of Vannes were among many others whose remains were evacuated between 917 and 927. Not all the major saints were removed, however, and some, such as Marcellinus, Hypothemius and Conwoion, remained in their churches. Hugh the Great made considerable efforts to settle the fleeing clergy, notably those from Dol and Bayeux (see Guillotel 1982).⁵

Many of the Breton saints' relics, monks and cult practice found their way to Æthelstan's England, where they became established bastions of the church, notably Samson's remains at Milton Abbas (*William of Malmesbury* 399–460); the English lists of saints' resting-places provide many more examples (Rollason 1978; Gougaud 1919–21).

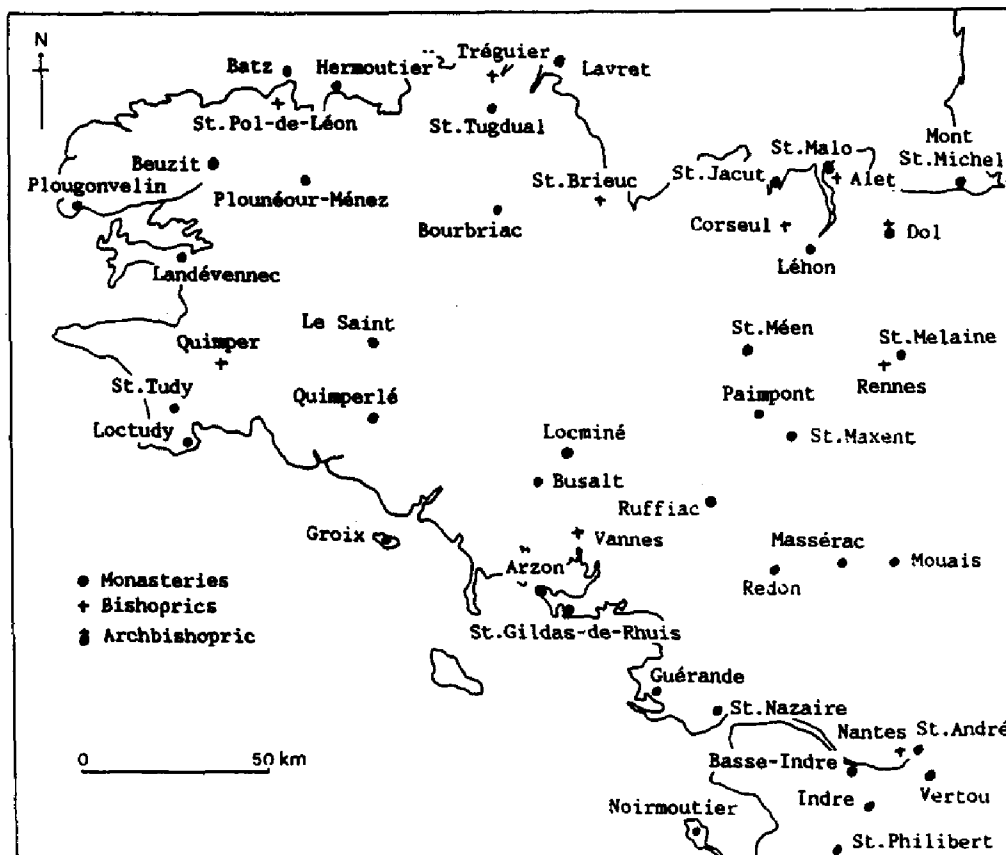


Fig. 9 The Church in Brittany from the eighth to tenth centuries

The movement of relics and monks has been seen by Wallace-Hadrill (1975b, 222–32) as reflecting the contemporary perception

of the Vikings as a real threat to Christianity itself, perhaps still felt as late as the eleventh century (cf. Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*). He draws attention to the emphasis placed on conversion as a condition in treaties (e.g. *AB* 873) and argues that perhaps the Scandinavians sometimes demanded apostasy as a similar indication of loyalty, as with Pippin II of Aquitaine (*AB* 864; also discussed by Brooks 1979, 12–16). Certainly, the desecration of churches was a widespread phenomenon (Wallace-Hadrill 1975b, 223–5) and possibly even blood sacrifices, as at the siege of Paris. But in Brittany itself there is no evidence either in the archaeology or place-names to suggest specific pagan cult activity (Olaf Olsen, pers. comm.).

In 914 Brittany suffered its worst raiding to date. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that a large fleet of Danes led by Ohter (Óttarr) and Hroald/Hraold (Haraldr?) sailed south from the Severn estuary to attack Brittany. It is possible that these Vikings were kept informed about the political situation both in Brittany and Frankia through connections with their countrymen in Normandy, and were thus able rapidly to take advantage of the disorganised and divided Bretons (Chédeville and Guillotel 1984, 337). The Danes campaigned in Brittany for nearly four years before moving north again to ravage England and Wales: during this time the Breton church, aristocracy and general popular morale were further eroded.

The end came in 919. A massive fleet of Loire Vikings sailed for Brittany under the command of a Norwegian, Rognvaldr, and landed at Nantes. It is possible that the incentive for the invasion came from reports of Óttarr's and Haraldr's success reaching the Scandinavian homelands, though there is no proof of this (de la Borderie 1898, 355). The picture we get is one of total devastation:

Nortmanni omnem Britanniam in Cornu-Galliae, in ora scilicet maritima, sitam depopulantur, proterunt atque delent, abductis, venditis, ceterisque cunctis eiectis Brittonibus.

Flodoard *Ann.* 919

Although the initial target seems to have been Nantes, a wealthy city excellently placed for controlling the mouth of the Loire and access to further targets upstream, there is no evidence that the effects of the invasion were confined to the south-east. The impact is particularly evident in the flight of refugees. Mathedoi of Poher and his son Alain Barbetorte (grandson of Alain the Great) together with many other counts, clerics and *machtierns* fled to England. Others went into Bourgogne and Aquitaine (*CN* 81–3);

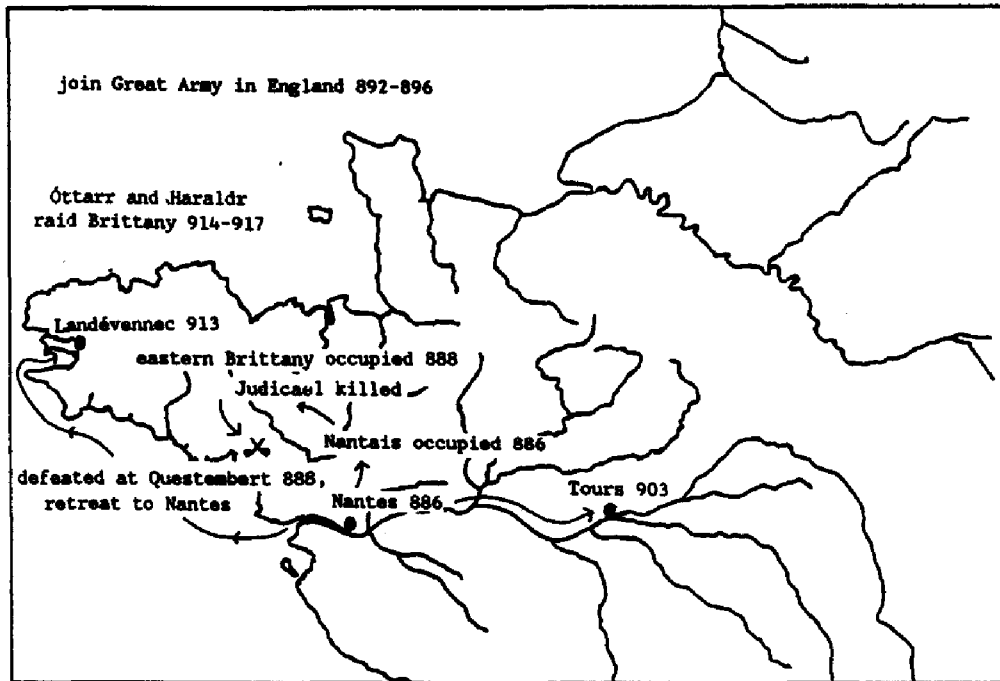


Fig. 10 The Loire Vikings, 886-917

Breton resistance appears to have been small, followed quickly by abandonment. This is not to imply a completely empty land (as Chédeville and Guillotel state, 1984, 397), since several monasteries obviously remained occupied at least until the 920s; Abbot Radbod of Dol was certainly present there in 926 when he sent a letter to Æthelstan requesting aid against the Scandinavians. The surviving Bretons may have been led by Judicael Bérengar, who seems to have stayed in Brittany throughout the invasion (*Hugh of Fleury* 4). It is nevertheless apparent that the scale of the invasion was unparalleled; the thoroughness of Rognvaldr's army in eliminating all opposition certainly implies that they intended to stay for a long time. The mention of slave-raiding by Flodoard is probably a mistake, as there is no evidence of an increase in slavery in Scandinavia or elsewhere at this time (though see Wallace-Hadrill 1975b, 232), and any such prisoners would most likely have stayed in Brittany. It should be emphasised that only the Loire Vikings occupied Brittany in 919, not a combined force involving the Scandinavians from the Seine too as stated by Dudo of Saint-Quentin (see chapter 1 and de la Borderie 1898, 373, 776).

By 920, Rognvaldr had gained complete political control of Brittany, which was confirmed in 921 when Nantes was ceded to him by Robert of Neustria after an unsuccessful five-month siege during which the Vikings dug fortifications around the estuary to protect their fleet; as part of the agreement the Vikings nominally

'received the faith of Christ' (Flodoard *Ann.* 921). From this point onwards there is an almost total absence of documentary references to Brittany until the return of Alain Barbetorte in 937; sources from other areas may illuminate the picture slightly, however. In 923 and 924 Hrólfr's Scandinavians raided widely along the Seine in alliance with Rognvaldr's Nantes army, destroying Beauvais in 923 (Flodoard *Ann.* 923-4). It is possible that Rognvaldr aided Charles the Simple in his struggles with Herbert of Vermandois, and Flodoard believed that Rognvaldr was seeking land for settlement (*Ann.* 925); this will most likely remain obscure since the precise details of the 921 agreement are unknown. In 923 Rognvaldr devastated Aquitaine and the Auvergne, and then sailed up the Oise to the Ile de France, only returning after land concessions on the Seine (Flodoard *Ann.* 923). The following year the Breton Vikings and some of Hrólfr's forces again raided in France, striking down into Bourgogne; despite this, Hrólfr was granted Le Mans, Bayeux, l'Huernin and the Bessin, thus consolidating his hold on Neustria. From late 924 to early 925 Rognvaldr was driven back to Nantes after a major battle against the combined armies of Raoul I, Hugh the Great and Herbert of Vermandois, though many of the Neustrian aristocracy were killed. Having broken free of their siege, Rognvaldr was forced to fight a retreat through heavily forested country in order to reach Brittany, though he accepted a payment of silver to do so (Flodoard *Ann.* 925). This is the last reliable record that survives of this Viking leader; his impact on popular consciousness may be seen in the fictionalised account of his death in the second book of the *Miracles of Saint-Benoit* (see Chédeville and Guillotel 1984, 379) written in the early eleventh century by Aimoin, which tells of gaudy pyrotechnics, moving stones and apparitions accompanying the passing of one of the last Viking sea-kings.

In 927 the Loire Vikings were attacked again in a five-week siege by Hugh the Great and Herbert of Vermandois. A truce was drawn up, and in return for peace elsewhere in France the Scandinavians were ceded Nantes again, though Brittany itself is not mentioned (unlike in the 921 treaty), probably because it was not under nominal Frankish control in the first place (Flodoard *Ann.* 927). A new agreement may have been thought necessary following Rognvaldr's attacks after 921. Despite the terms of the 927 cession, the Loire Vikings raided Limousin in 930 but were driven out by twelve cavalry squadrons led by Raoul I (Flodoard *Ann.* 930).

Throughout the Carolingian period Brittany had been vulner-

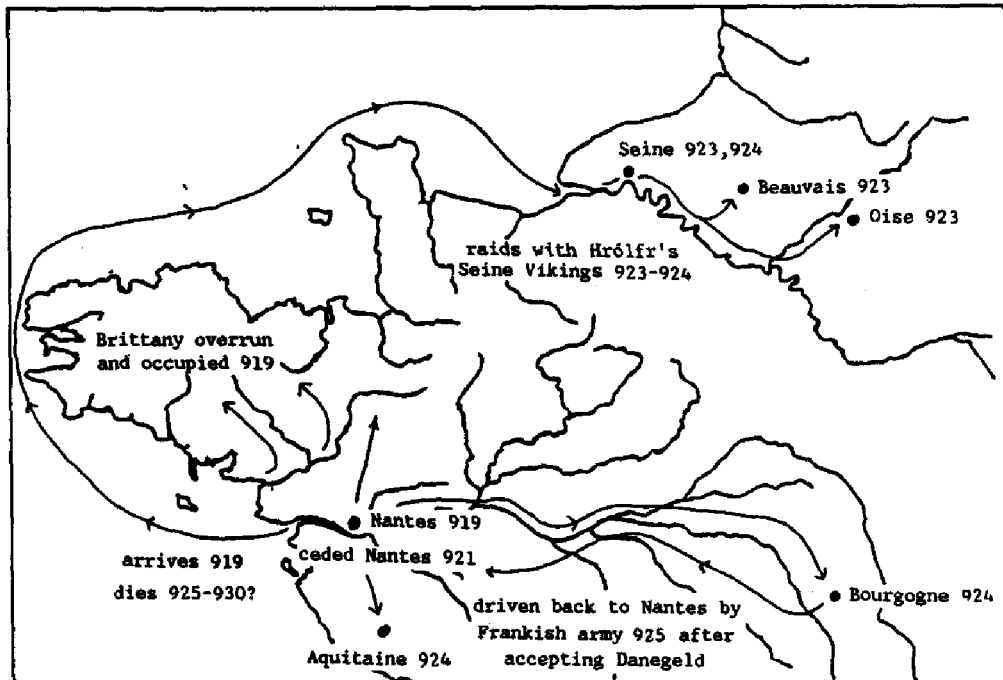


Fig. 11 The career of Rognvaldr and the occupation of Brittany, 919-925

able to attack from the neighbouring regions of France, especially at times of civil strife, and the Loire Vikings now seem to have experienced similar difficulties. In 931, Scandinavians from all over Brittany assembled in a great army on the Loire, poised for an attack on the Franks. The Bretons seized their chance and rebelled, an indication that at least some of their leaders had stayed behind in 919. The Vikings appear to have been taken completely by surprise and many were killed in a series of small battles throughout the region, including one Felekan, 'their duke' (Flodoard *Ann.* 931; *Cartulary of Quimperlé* 931). A counter-attack was rapidly mounted by the Loire army mentioned above, under their chieftain Incon, and Brittany was reconquered (Flodoard *Ann.* 931).

The 931 rebellion gives us an important insight into the nature of the Viking occupation, through studies of the names of the two commanders mentioned by Flodoard. Unlike *Rognvaldr*, a common Norwegian name, *Felekan* and *Incon* are not Scandinavian names. Initial research suggested an Irish origin for *Felekan*. The *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (O'Brien 1976) yielded several possible parallels and Musset (1978, 108) claimed that the name was well attested in twelfth-century Irish sources.⁶ Given the context, however, the name is more likely to come from the Breton/Cornish *Felec*, with an added *-an* diminutive ending

(Gillian Fellows-Jensen, pers. comm.; cf. Olson and Padel 1986, 48). The only parallel for *Incon* is a name from the *Chrestomathie Bretonne* (Loth 1890), *Inconmarc*. Since the only close parallels for these chieftains' names are Breton, this raises the interesting possibility that the Loire Vikings may have been commanded by Bretons after the death of Rognvaldr (presumably sometime between 926 and 930/31). Close integration with the indigenous population is a marked feature of other Scandinavian colonies, and it is possible that some parties in the Breton civil power struggles actively joined the Vikings to further their own causes or to prevent widespread disruption within Brittany. This would certainly explain the 931 rebellion as the action of disaffected Breton political factions. It must however be emphasised that this deduction is by no means conclusive and the names as preserved by Flodoard are probably corrupt. It is unlikely that Felekan was Rognvaldr's sole successor since he would surely have been with the Loire host; perhaps he and Incon were joint-rulers or leaders of separate groups of Vikings. Whatever the truth of the matter, Incon became the ruler of Brittany after the 931 rebellion.

The rôle of the Normans in quelling the revolt should be considered. Hrólfr's son William Longsword had assumed power c. 925 (Hrólfr actually died in 932), and had nominally submitted to Ralph in 928. Flodoard records that in 933 William was given by the Franks 'the territory of the Bretons at the edge of the sea' (*Ann.* 933), which has been interpreted as meaning the Franko-Breton March, thus implying a deliberate attempt on the part of the Franks to foster conflict between the Loire Vikings and the Normans of the Seine. This is further confused by Dudo of Saint-Quentin's assertion that William put down the Breton revolt himself, a fiction designed to support retrospectively the Normans' claim to Brittany (see de la Borderie 1898, 379-80; Fellows-Jensen 1988, 115-16). A detailed examination of Flodoard's terminology, however, shows that only the Cotentin and Avranchin were ceded to William, territory earlier acquired by Salomon in 867, and that Incon still held the whole of the Breton peninsula. In 935 William Longsword made an alliance with Hugh the Great, thus effectively ruling out any further assistance for the Loire Vikings in the case of war (Chédeville and Guillotel 1984, 400). By early 936, the Vikings in Brittany were completely isolated and without allies.

During the years of Scandinavian occupation in Brittany, Alain Barbetorte had grown up at Æthelstan's court in England, raised as the king's foster-son (Breton links with England dated from at

least Ælfred's time; see *Asser* 76, 102). Abbot John of Landévennec, who seems to have remained in Brittany, had maintained contacts with the exiled Bretons and in 936 asked Alain to return, perhaps sensing the Vikings' vulnerability. With the help of a fleet and some troops given by the English king, Alain landed at Dol with an army of Bretons (*Flodoard Ann.* 936). Brief references to the situation in Brittany as Alain found it on his return help towards the reconstruction of a picture of the area under Scandinavian rule. As in 931, the Vikings were unprepared and Alain quickly defeated a contingent of them who were reveling in the monastery at Dol. He then met a second small force at Saint-Brieuc and was obliged to retreat, sailing along the coast to Plourivo where he fought another Viking host and erected a victory cross, an action which perhaps indicates that the Scandinavians were pagans (*Flodoard Ann.* 936; de la Borderie 1898, 388-90). Given that within a few days Alain had encountered three separate groups of Scandinavians in the north of Brittany, none of whom had apparently gone there to oppose him, we can hardly conclude that Viking settlement was restricted to the Nantes area. Instead it seems that they had dispersed throughout Brittany, occupying settlements and looting at will, and only banding together when concerted action was required, as with the assembly of the Loire army in 931. The following year Alain renewed his march, his army probably growing as he passed through the country. Flodoard records that he fought many battles, gradually driving the Scandinavians back until the whole occupying force was concentrated in Nantes. No Viking leaders are referred to at this time; perhaps Incon had died and the Scandinavians were divided by internal feuds (common enough in Viking colonies), though this is pure conjecture.

The Scandinavians built a great camp at Saint-Aignan in the angle of the Loire and the Erdre, just outside Nantes. Alain had been declared duke by the surviving Bretons on his return, and now led them in a charge against the ramparts, only to be beaten back. After forcing a Viking sortie to retreat in disorder the Bretons rested and attacked again. In a battle lasting the whole day in stifling weather, Alain's army eventually stormed the fortress; the Viking force was badly mauled and the survivors retreated down the Loire in their remaining ships, leaving Alain in possession of the field (the siege is described, perhaps somewhat fancifully, in the *Chronicle of Nantes*, 90-92).

We are given a vivid picture of Nantes as it was when Alain

entered it: his army walked through weed-covered streets past ruined buildings, and Duke Alain was forced to cut his way through thick brambles to reach the basilica of Saint Felix, empty and disused for nineteen years (*CN* 92; although the *Chronicle of Nantes* is a later, untrustworthy source, it is quite likely to derive from an earlier chronicle, now lost). Nantes was established as Alain's capital and he immediately set about ordering its defences and built a great rampart around the cathedral.

By 939 many of the exiles had returned to Brittany and Duke Alain II had established his rule over the area. The previous year the scattered remnants of the Nantes Vikings had re-formed and moved north-east into the county of Rennes, where they had built a large fortification at Trans. In 939 they resumed raiding in the vicinity of Rennes, opposed by Judicael Bérengar. In August he was reinforced by an army under the joint leadership of Alain and Hugh the Great; after a brief siege, a combined assault on the Viking camp finally removed the last of the Scandinavians who had occupied Brittany for so long (*Flodoard Ann.* 939).

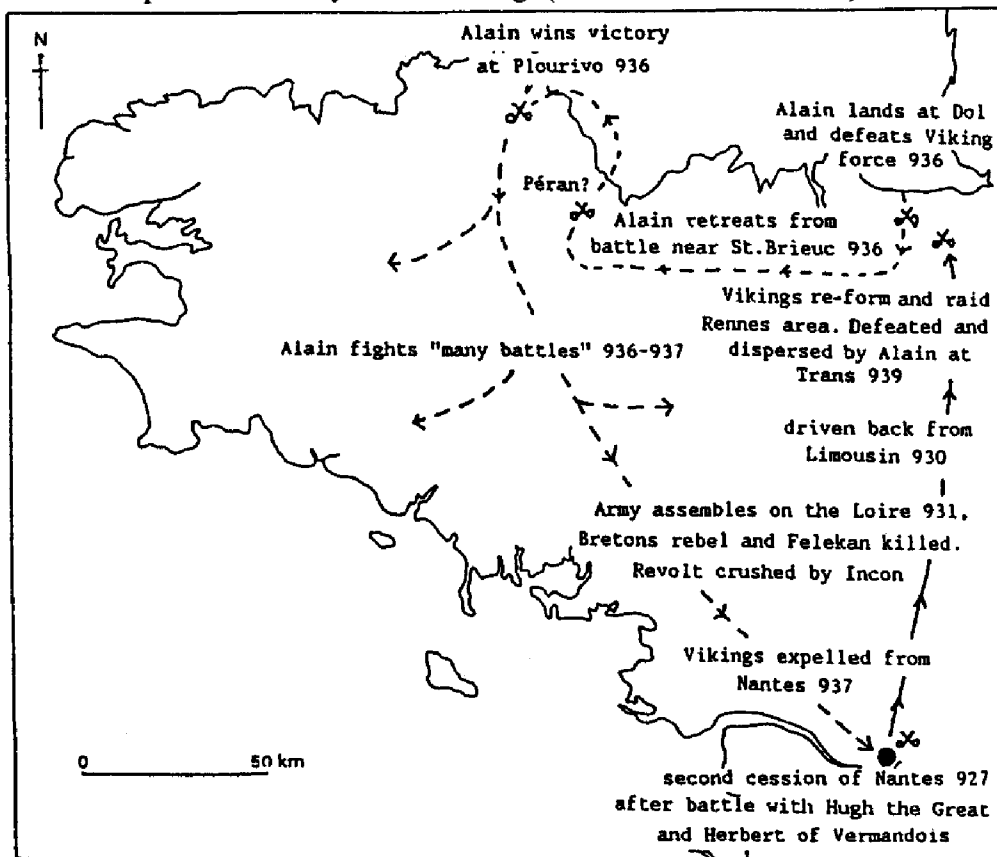


Fig. 12. The return of Alain Barbetorte and the dispersal of the Loire Vikings, 930-939

Interesting light is thrown on the last years of the Viking colony

by a Welsh poem, the *Armes Prydein* or 'Prophecy of Britain', which describes an alliance of the Celtic kingdoms, the Hiberno-Norse and the Vikings of the Northern Isles against Æthelstan. Amidst bitter complaints about Anglo-Saxon rule there is a cryptic reference to Brittany:

From Llydaw [Brittany] will come a splendid army,
Warriors on war-steeds who spare not their foe.

Armes Prydein 153-4 (tr. Clancy 1970, 111)

The poem is of problematic date (see chapter 1), but if it does refer to the 'Great Battle' of Brunanburh in 937 rather than to the campaigns against Eiríkr blóðøx in the 950s then the Breton reference is particularly important. Even if the poem is an 'appeal to history', a reference to a myth of Celtic unity from which Brittany could not be excluded (Roberts 1976, 36), the unlikelihood of Bretons joining such a coalition does not detract from the absurdity of such a request given the close links between Æthelstan's court and the descendants of Alain the Great, even assuming the presence of disaffected Breton nobles in the homeland. The reference makes much more sense if it is interpreted as an appeal to the Nantes Vikings, which would be ironic considering the dire straits in which they found themselves in 937 (cf. Dumville 1983, 151-2).

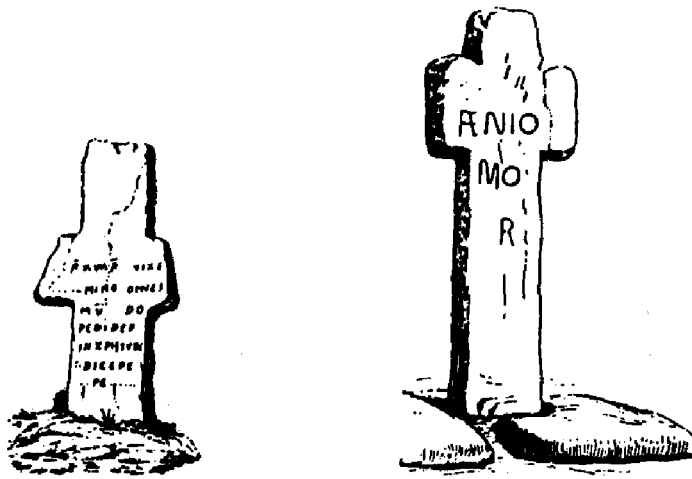


Fig. 13. Memorial crosses erected on the sites of two Breton victories over the Scandinavians, at Plourivo in 936 (left) and Questembert in 888 (right).

From de la Borderie 1898.

With the Scandinavian defeat at Trans in 939 the period of major Viking involvement with Brittany came to an end. Before considering later contact with raiding fleets and campaigning armies, it is appropriate to review the Scandinavian occupation, the

motives of the invaders and why they were ultimately beaten so rapidly. The ninth-century raids have already been shown to have been typical looting expeditions of the period, Brittany perhaps being in an unfortunate position on the route between the Continent and the Irish Sea. Apart from convenient islands for coastal bases, Brittany had little to offer the prospective land-taker when compared with the richer prizes of England, Ireland and the Northern Isles. As mentioned above, however, the options and openings for Vikings who wished to settle down had become severely restricted by the start of the tenth century, due more to political considerations than to lack of space (there is no real evidence of population pressure in Scandinavia at this time). By c. 900 the complex power struggles of York and Dublin were already well advanced, extending to Man, Scotland and Orkney; Scandinavia itself was riven by political strife resulting in numerous exiled pretenders with their retinues. Many of these must have joined the Great Army, but the majority who wished to do so would surely have been able to settle in the Danelaw unless prevented by personal or political differences.

The Vikings operating on the Seine under Hrólfr's general command appear to have been just such a polyglot army as might be expected (cf. Fellows-Jensen 1988, 129-33): the severe divisions within it have already been noted. The settlement of northern Neustria and the rise of Normandy, although taking place towards the end of the settlement period, still unfolded within the periphery of the Viking world. With the baptism of Hrólfr and William Longsword Normandy became at least nominally integrated into Christian Europe (Musset 1975b, 42), and after an initially pronounced Scandinavian cultural impact the settlement began to assume a Frankish character. The perceived threat to paganism has already been discussed; is it not possible that towards the second decade of the tenth century there were increasing numbers of true 'Vikings' left stranded in and around north-western France, hard-core mercenaries who had no wish to settle down and farm the land? The choices open to such men would have been limited indeed, and Brittany may have seemed a natural target, in fact the only one remaining.

It would be foolish to suggest that Rognvaldr's Loire army was entirely composed of such renegades, or read too much from such meagre evidence, but there are a number of singular features of the Viking occupation that are inescapable. Firstly, there are no references anywhere to actual Scandinavian settlement, only to

military occupation. The only Scandinavian place-names in Brittany cluster around Mont-Saint-Michel and Dol, and probably represent settlers coming from the Cotentin in the later tenth century; indeed it would be unusual to observe a significant impact on place-names after only nineteen years of occupation. There is no mention of agriculture or stock-rearing (the nearest equivalents are raids on the vineyards of Anjou), only random and senseless violence very different from the precisely planned assaults of the ninth century; even the later raids into the Frankish heartland seem to serve little practical purpose. Similarly, the signs of occupation seen by Alain II and his troops as described in the *Chronicle of Nantes* do not present an image of ordered settlement: deserted, overgrown streets lined with ruined, empty buildings. The very devastation apparent in Brittany is uncharacteristic of Viking colonies; the shock in Flodoard's 919 annal is evident and surprising considering the long years of raiding that France had seen.

Everything points to occupied Brittany as an anachronism, isolated politically and militarily. The fact that Alain was able to succeed in the liberation of a vast area of land, starting from a seaborne invasion and landing launched from another country, a very rare occurrence in the early medieval period, testifies to the Viking colony's weakness. Long-term settlement would in any event have been impossible without the maintenance of Brittany's trade networks. York had extensive mercantile contacts in the tenth century, with links to Scandinavia, western Europe and beyond; a prosperity unmatched elsewhere in the Danelaw (see MacGregor 1978). Dublin looked to the Irish Sea and the Celtic kingdoms. Normandy itself had considerable trading connections, not only with the Viking homelands (see Breese 1977, 54-7), but also with the local markets of the Franks (Musset 1975b, 43-4). Without comparable trade Brittany could not be maintained as a viable state. There is no evidence that the Loire Vikings made any attempt to introduce an administrative system of their own, or to maintain and absorb Breton institutions (see Davies 1988, 52-60). What is surprising in fact is that the occupation lasted for nearly twenty years, a testament to the capabilities of Rognvaldr who managed to hold his army together for so long and also perhaps an indication of Frankish relief at being presented with a Viking threat that was both containable and centred in the lands of their old enemies, the Bretons.

The last of the Vikings: 939-1076

Between 941 and 947, the already strained relationship between the Bretons and Normans gave rise to some of the last Scandinavian activity in Brittany. In 941 or 942 William Longsword allowed a Danish exile, Aigrold, to settle in the Cotentin with his followers (Aigrold has been identified with Haraldr Gormsson of Denmark (Gillian Fellows-Jensen, pers. comm.); cf. Albrechtsen 1979, 123 note 27). Based at Bayeux, for a time Aigrold maintained an uneasy peace with the Bretons. In 942 however, William was murdered, an event that sparked off a wave of civil warfare for control of Normandy. William's son Richard, in alliance with Aigrold and Louis IV of Outremer, fought with Hugh the Great in a series of internecine struggles involving considerable treachery and several broken agreements. Late in the year Sigfrid Sigtrygsson arrived in the Seine with warriors from York and a Viking called Tormod; the latter led a pagan revolt in Normandy and together with Sigfrid joined forces with Hugh. Both Vikings were killed in battle at Rouen by Louis IV (*Richer of Rheims* IV, 57; see also de la Borderie 1898, 413 and Bates 1982, 13-14).

In Brittany, while the warring Norman factions sought to extend their control by force, Judicael Bérengar rebelled against the authority of Duke Alain. This left Dol unprotected and Aigrold led a raid against the town in 944. The citizens took refuge in the cathedral and the Scandinavians were driven off by a Breton relief force (de la Borderie 1898, 413). By 947, Richard had emerged the victor of the Norman disputes (see Bates 1982, 12-15) and ruled an autonomous Normandy as duke. After marrying the daughter of Hugh the Great he revived his father's claims to Breton overlordship, as celebrated by Dudo of Saint-Quentin.

In 952 Alain II died, having kept Brittany free from Viking attack since his victory in 939. He had slowly restored all the Breton monasteries except for Indres and had consolidated his ducal authority, exercising power far in excess of that once wielded by Nominoe. Alain was succeeded by his son Drogo, still a child, precipitating renewed civil conflict in Brittany. Drogo's mother, the sister of the count of Blois and Chartres, married again, to Fulk the Good of Anjou who was a rival of her brother. In the fighting that followed, Conan I of Rennes eventually became duke, having made an alliance with the count of Blois and defeated Judicael Bérengar. In order to rid himself of influence from Blois, Conan then signed a pact with Richard I of Normandy and thus established firm Breton-Norman links for the first time (see de la Borderie 1898, 246-8).

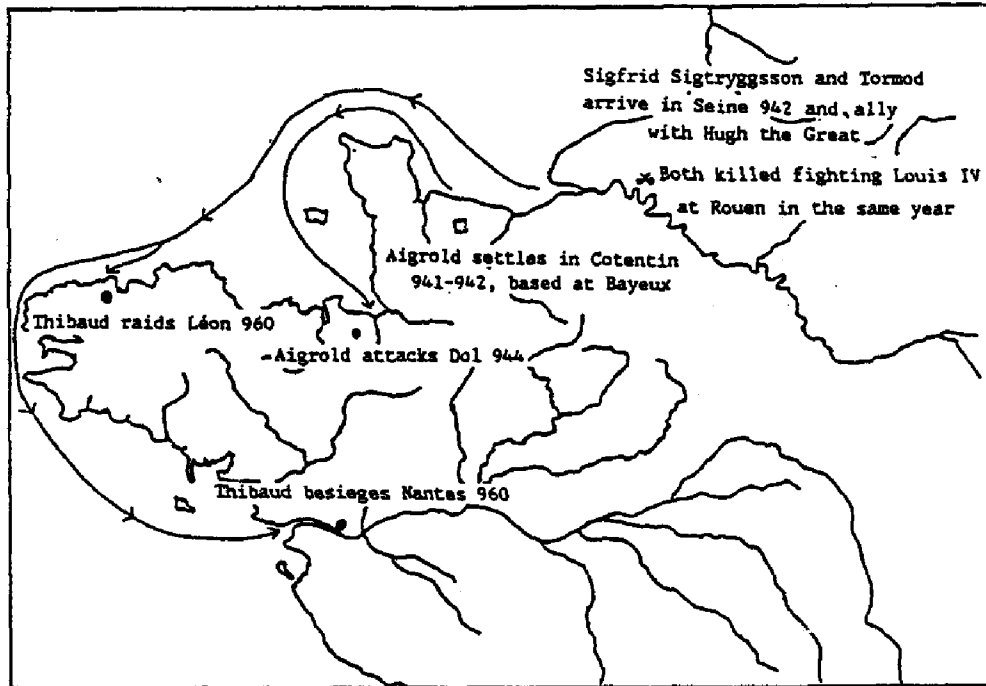


Fig. 14. Viking raids from Normandy, 941-960

In 960 a renegade Norman, Thibaud, attacked the monasteries around Léon with a small fleet and went on to besiege Nantes; he was defeated after a short battle (*CN* 111-12). Between 961 and 965 Normandy was again wracked by internal warfare following raids made from the Seine against Chartres and the Breton March (Breese 1977, 53; Douglas 1947, 107-8). As the tenth century wore on the Neustrians and Normans rapidly fused into a single people, encouraged by growing prosperity and urban expansion. The Normans, however, did not lose their Scandinavian links. Richard II (996-1026) received from Sveinn Forkbeard of Denmark a share of the plunder from his invasion of England (Bates 1982, 7), and Norman mercenaries may have fought alongside Vikings at Clontarf in 1014. That year also saw the last recorded raid on Brittany, when Dol was burned by a Viking fleet (Chédeville and Guillotel 1984, 400).

Breton dependency on the Normans grew (in 1030 Alain III paid homage to Duke Robert) and by the reign of William the Conqueror, Brittany was feudally dependent on Normandy after the duke had reasserted the old claims to overlordship (see de Boüard 1984, 222-7). William seems to have played the Bretons against each other; the Bayeux Tapestry shows him besieging Conan II at Dol with the help of Harold Godwinson (though Conan was in fact probably besieging it himself). Although he

supported Riwallon of Dol against Conan, William later released Conan after his defeat, and the latter promptly imprisoned Riwallon. Having demonstrated his power, William had gained an ally and while a Breton contingent fought at Hastings in 1066, Conan attacked Anjou rather than taking advantage of William's absence from Normandy (Wilson 1985, 178-81), though it is interesting to note that it was the Bretons of all his army who failed him in the battle.

After the Conquest, several notable Bretons, among them Judhael of Totnes, Alan of Richmond, Eudo of Tattershall and Alfred of Lincoln, received lands in England from which they took their names; a small Breton colony was established in Richmondshire (Stenton 1971, 628-30). The problems caused by the imposition of feudalism on Breton society made them always something of an anachronism among William's subjects (they actually mounted a brief rebellion at Dol in 1076, see Stenton 1971, 608; feudal elements in earlier Breton society are considered by de la Borderie 1898, 210-44). Within decades of the Conquest they found themselves without an independent homeland and with no direction for development or expansion; this was especially true for those in England, 'alien among the invaders of an alien land' (Stenton 1961, 28). It is surely ironic that after more than a century of struggle for self-assertion and freedom from Scandinavian oppression, culminating in Alain's great victory of 939, within a hundred and fifty years the Bretons were reduced to second-rate vassals of a fifth-generation Viking.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Having reviewed the historical background we can now turn to the archaeological material as an independent record, comparing it with the theories put forward in the previous section. Of particular importance is the period 919-939, the duration of the Scandinavian occupation, and it is to this that archaeology can make the biggest contribution. Although meagre by comparison with the archaeology of Danelaw towns such as York, the material impact of the Scandinavians in Brittany is considerable and certainly more pronounced than in Wales or Cornwall. This is surprising considering both the relatively short period of known occupation and also the limited nature of Breton medieval archaeological investigation to date (see Sanquer 1976).