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**Forging Ninth and Tenth Century Western Europe: A Comparative
Study of the Viking and Hungarian Activities**

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by

Miklós Somogyvári

(Hungary)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements

of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU

Chair, Examination Committee

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I, the undersigned, **Miklós Somogyvári**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 25 May 2009

Signature

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Abbreviations

MGH SS: Monumenta Germaniae Historia Scriptores in folio

MGH SS rer. Germ: Monumenta Germaniae Historia Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum
scholarum separate editi

MGH SS rer. Germ. N. S.: Monumenta Germaniae Historia Scriptores rerum Germanicarum,
Nova Series

DAI: De Administrando Imperio

Introduction

Foreword

I have devoted my thesis to a comparative study of the Viking and Hungarian activities in the Frankish Empire and Northern Italy in the ninth and tenth centuries. My goal is to show that their success throughout Europe can be explained by examining the most important factors of their activities. I will examine these factors as a complex system. I also want to show that even though they caused destruction in Europe they still contributed Europe's development in a long term.

A further aim of the study is to raise new conceptions for reaching a better understanding of the question how these pagan cultures were able to threaten Europe and the Frankish Empire for at least a century. To accomplish this goal I have chosen to write a comparative study of these two cultures distant from each other¹ using the Franks, a Western European Christian civilisation, as a test case. The Franks serve as a kind of control group or operational base to help identifying similarities and differences in the activity patterns of the peripheral Scandinavian and Hungarian societies.

Numerous studies have dealt with the question of the temporary ascendancy of these groups, treating every possible and interesting field within Old Norse or Hungarian studies, but without a single effort to compare them to each other, probably because of the distance between them. This distance is mainly geographical and cultural. Temporal differences also exist but it is not too significant in the first phase of the Viking and Hungarian attacks. My research is justified by the fact that a comparison will always create something new or something more from the already available and known ingredients.

¹ Both in geographical and cultural sense.

Another goal here is to establish patterns in pagan activities to show that not only military or social factors took part in the success of these peripheral cultures but a combination of these. I anticipate finding major correspondences and divergences which can be applied later in an extended Ph.D. research to every attacking group, be it Western or Eastern Scandinavian, Slavic, Arab or Hungarian, regardless of origin. I plan to create a matrix of factors where every group and field what was studied separately so far will get its correct place in the correct ratio. This will help objectify the impacts of these societies and move away from stereotypes based on nineteenth (and earlier) ideas.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis has three chapters, each of them treats, compares and contrasts one particularly selected field, namely, the military, the social and the historical. Each of the chapters will focus only on a general overview backed up with some case studies and will end with summary conclusions.

The first chapter will deal with the most visible and most obvious part of this system, the weaponry, ships, and horses, or in short, the instruments of war, military tactics and intelligence. Formerly the military factor was so popular that it alone was declared responsible for the pagan ascendancy over Europe, therefore I have to proceed carefully when dealing with this field. I will stress on the military intelligence, which in my opinion was more important than the weaponry itself, but still has not gotten credit. The main reason for this is that its methods are historically hard to verify.

The second chapter will treat the social backgrounds of the Scandinavian and Hungarian societies, examining their social stratification, layers defined by birth rights, fame or wealth.

Connected to this topic I will examine the spiritual and physical abilities and features that were taken as virtues or shameful things. By examining this segment of their cultures I will introduce a closer look at the world views of these pagan societies. In my opinion their conception of the world led to the brutality of their attacks and some of the mutual misunderstandings between the Christian and pagan worlds.

The last section will treat the topic of the suffering Frankish Empire and Northern Italy. The main aim of this last chapter is to show the contribution that these attacks made, to describe military and social evolution and development through responses to destruction by the pagans. In the appendix I will add three-dimensional maps of the homelands of the attackers as environmental history is an important aspect in dealing with these topics.

Sources and methodology

I used only the most important written sources with a close-reading methodology. In the case of the Arab, Greek, Old Norse and Old English sources I used Hungarian and English translations. I treated the Latin sources in original. With this method I got firsthand information about this era and its events, although I had to bear in mind the circumstances of their creation to properly contextualise them. In the case of archaeological data I use the data provided by experimental and field archaeology.

I will introduce the most important written sources that will appear in this thesis in a few words. I predominantly use Latin sources as they are the most extensive and numerous concerning both Viking and Hungarian movements and all the Frankish sources were recorded in Latin. The second great category is the group of Arabic sources or excerpts from them which are quite detailed concerning the Hungarians and sometimes even mention Scandinavians although

mostly treating the activity of the Swedish-Finnish Væringjar. The third group is Greek source material on the Hungarians, consisting of only two works.

Among the Latin sources the first is *Annales Regni Francorum* or, by other name, *Annales Laurissenses maiores*,² which treats the period between 741 and 828. As a complement to this I used *Annales Xantenses*, a work that was compiled from two separate parts written in Lorsch and Cologne treating the events from 790 until 873³ and the *Annales Bertiniani*, dealing the period between 830 and 882.⁴ I used some parts of the *Chronica*⁵ of Regino of Prüm, the *Res Gestae Saxonicae*⁶ written by Widukind of Corvey, and the work⁷ of Ekkehard from St. Gallen. I also used parts of *Annales Alamannici*,⁸ *Annales Iuvanenses*,⁹ *Chronicom Aquitanicum*,¹⁰ Einhard's *Vita Karoli Magni*,¹¹ Ermentarius' *Ex Miraculis Sancti Filiberti*,¹² the work *De Carolo Magno*,¹³ which was allegedly written by Notker the Stammerer.

² Critical edition: *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur, Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum 6, (Hannover, 1895).

³ Critical edition: *Annales Xantenses et Annales Vedastini*, ed. Bernhard von Simson, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum 12, (1979).

⁴ Critical edition: *Annales Bertiniani*, ed. Georg Waitz, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum 5, (Hannover: Hahn, 1883).

⁵ Critical edition: Regino, *Reginonis abbatis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum 50, (1890).

⁶ Critical edition: Albert Bauer and Reinhold Rau (eds. and trans.), "Die Sachsengeschichte des Widukind von Korvei," *Quellen zur Geschichte der sächsischen Kaiserzeit*, (Darmstadt: Freiherr-vom-Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe 8., 1971).

⁷ Critical edition: "Ekkehardi IV. Casus Sancti Galli / Ekkehard IV. St. Galler Kloster geschichten," *Ausgewählte Quellen zur Deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (Darmstadt: Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe 10 1991), 15-285.

⁸ Critical edition: *Annales Laureshamenses, Alamannici, Guelferbytani, et Nazariani*, MGH SS 1, Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000868 (Accessed: 25 May 2009).

⁹ Critical edition: *Annales Iuvanenses*, MGH SS 30.2, Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000883 (Accessed: 20 May 2009).

¹⁰ Critical edition: *Chronicom Aquitanicum*, MGH SS 2, Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000869 (Accessed: 19 May 2009).

¹¹ Critical edition: Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ein.html> (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

¹² Critical edition: Ermentarius, *Ex Miraculis Sancti Filiberti*, MGH SS 15.1, Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000890 (Accessed: 19 May 2009).

¹³ Critical edition: *De Carolo Magno*, MGH SS rer. Germ. N. S. 12, 76, Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000692 (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

The most important Latin source on the Vikings was written in the eleventh century, around 1075, by Adam of Bremen, who was the canon and magister of the episcopal centre of Hamburg-Bremen. His work, the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum*,¹⁴ contains four tomes and gives the first and sole account of a pagan – Svear¹⁵ – shrine or church in Uppsala, Sweden¹⁶, mentioning the names of the gods Óðin, Þór and Frey.¹⁷ He is the first to mention the word Viking (*wichingus*)¹⁸ in a Latin source.¹⁹ He writes about the slave trade of the Vikings,²⁰ the Scandinavian customary law,²¹ and he devoted his whole fourth book, the *Descriptio insularum aquilonis*, to the geography and economy of the north.²² Although his data concerning the far north is dubious,²³ his other data is mostly correct because he used the accounts of his personal acquaintances, the Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen, who travelled personally

¹⁴ Critical editions: Adamus Bremensis, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte, Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum, Magistri Adam Bremensis*, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum 2, (Hannover, 1876).

And: Adamus Bremensis, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, F.J. Tschann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

¹⁵ The *Svears* were the original inhabitants and the most powerful Germanic pagan tribe in the central part of Sweden, in Uppland in the vicinity of today's Stockholm. Their port cities, Birka and Hedeby gathered a great deal of fame in the North being the most important connections between Novgorod, Russia and Hedeby, Denmark. Their importance is justified by the fact that Sweden's Swedish name, *Sverige*, was formed from the self denomination of this tribe and the word "*riki*" meaning "kingdom". Sweden is the only Germanic Scandinavian country that was named for its leading nation, as Denmark got its name from the Frankish border county, Danmarc, while Norway was named after the long north-south trade route along the western coast of the country.

¹⁶ Else Roesdahl, *A vikingek* [The Vikings], trans. Vera Bánki (Budapest: General Press Kiadó, 2007), 27. I used the updated Hungarian translation of the book.

¹⁷ Roesdahl 2007, 198-199.

¹⁸ Adamus Bremensis, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum, Descriptio Insularum Aquilonis*, Capitulum 6: *Aurum ibi plurimum, quod raptu congeritur pyratice. Ipsi enim pyratae, quos illi Wichingos appellant, nostri Ascomannos...* Source: <http://hbar.phys.msu.ru/gorm/chrons/bremen.htm> (Accessed: 31 March 2009).

¹⁹ The Old English poem, the *Widsið*, what preserved in the Codex Exoniensis, a tenth-century codex from Exeter, mentioned this word earlier than Adam of Bremen. It is highly likely that the poem was composed in an oral form around the sixth or seventh century when the Anglo-Saxons were still living in South Jutland, although it was only written down in England.

²⁰ Roesdahl 2007, 74.

²¹ Roesdahl 2007, 82.

²² Johannes Brøndsted, *A vikingek* [The Vikings], trans. Judit Vásárhelyi, (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1983), 45-46.

²³ His information seems to be correct only about Denmark and Southern Sweden, but he used tale elements in the description of the far north, like the people there can cast spells with which they are able to command huge sea monsters to come ashore and their speech is like the grinding of the teeth. He even mentioned the farthest lands of the King of Norway among which he – as the first European – described Vinland what is the first reference to America. This territory though did not mean him any more than Iceland of course what he also mentioned.

to the Danish royal court around 1050,²⁴ and the king of Denmark, Sven Estridsen.²⁵ I used some parts of the Elder or Poetic Edda, the *Hávamál*, the *Loddfáfnir Song* and the *Rígsþula*.²⁶ I also used a short part of the *Flateyrbók* from the *Grænlandinga saga*²⁷ and for a short glimpse the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.²⁸

All of the sources on the Hungarians were critically edited and translated into Hungarian by Gyula Kristó,²⁹ therefore I used his edition. The sources I used are Gardezi's *Zayn al-akhbar* (The ornament of accounts), the work of Jaihani, preserved only in the works of his followers in the Jaihani tradition,³⁰ the works of Al-Masudi (the *Muruğ al-dahab*/Golden Fields, and the *Kitab al-tanbikh*/The book of warning), and the work of Al-Makdisi. I also used two Greek sources, the *Taktika* of Emperor León VI and the *De Administrando Imperio*³¹ of Emperor Constantine VII.

Setting the scene

In my thesis I compare military and sociological aspects of the northern pirates known as Vikings and the tribe confederation known as Hungarians (or Magyars, as they called

²⁴ Roesdahl 2007, 63.

²⁵ Brøndsted 1983, 45. According to Brøndsted Adam of Bremen never travelled to Scandinavia, although Roesdahl (Roesdahl 2007, 130.) states that he did go there. I also think that he went to Denmark, as he met the king Sven Estridsen, and it is more likely, that a simple canon had to travel to meet the king than vice versa.

²⁶ István Bernáth, *Skandináv mitológia* [Scandinavian mythology], (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 2005), 44. The Elder Edda preserved in two manuscripts, the first, the Codex Regius Gks 2365 4^o was written around 1265, the second, the AM 748 4^o was written somewhat later according to Ian Page. See: Raymond Ian Page, *Chronicles of the Vikings, Records, Memorials and Myths*, (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 12. These are both copies of an older original manuscript according to Else Roesdahl. (Roesdahl 2007, 23.)

²⁷ Critical edition: *The Greenlanders' saga*, trans. George Johnston (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976).

²⁸ Critical edition: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. G. N. Garmonsway (London: J.M. Dent, 1992).

²⁹ Gyula Kristó, *A honfoglalás korának írott forrásai* [The written sources of the era of the Hungarian conquest], (Szeged: Szegedi Középkortörténeti Könyvtár 7, 1995).

³⁰ These were Ibn Rustah, Gardezi, Al-Bakri, the work *Hudud al-Alam* [The borders of the World], Marvazi, Aufi, Sukrullah, and Behget üt-tevarih.

³¹ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, Greek text ed. Gyula Moravcsik, English translation by R. J. H. Jenkins, (Washington, 1967). And: Gyula Moravcsik, *Bíborbanszületett Konstantín: A birodalom kormányzása*. [Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio], (Budapest, 1950, Szeged, 2003).

themselves). At first sight they seem to be far from each other. The word “Viking” referred to a member of a vertical social layer³² in the early medieval Scandinavian society, while the name “Magyar” meant an artificial tribal organisation and its members and was more like coherent confederacy than the Vikings.

Despite fundamental differences, these cultures can be compared and contrasted because both groups acted the same way. They followed defined patterns, using their homelands (Scandinavia in the case of the Vikings, and the area between the Dnieper and Dniester rivers called Etelköz³³ and later the Carpathian Basin in the case of the Hungarians) as bases of operation. They successfully raided Europe for quite a long time, and for some reason Europe was not able to respond adequately to these attacks for almost a hundred years except on a few occasions. The reasons for this success must be seen as multilayered and can not simply be explained with a single unitary reason, as scholars tried in the nineteenth and twentieth century. As a response to this problem I created a system addressing the main elements of this complex problem in the chapters of my thesis.

The time range of my study is not defined by exact dates but by periods of the attacks to which, of course, dates can be added. I have chosen this method instead of sticking to dates because the beginnings of the Viking Age and the Hungarian attacks on the West are a bit blurry

³² The word “Viking” has triggered serious scholarly debates. I am not intending to show the entire debate process around this topic, although I am very well aware of it. I interpret the word as a composition of the existing explanations instead. This means that the word “Viking” throughout my work means a vertical social layer in Western Old Norse society. Under the new term “vertical social layer” I mean a composite group consisting of men who were physically able to go on campaigns regardless of their social standing or role. Therefore the notion “Viking” covers the meaning of those people from all social strata temporarily and annually conducted sea raiding, piracy and plunder of any land, and traded the booty abroad or at home. One can apply this term only to those Scandinavians who were raiding the West, as in the East instead of the word “Viking” the sources used either the Swedish word “Væringjar”, meaning “travelling merchant who can supply his own business” according to Adolf Stender-Pedersen’s explanation, or the Finnish “Rus” probably originating from the geological name Roprsland (Uppland, Sweden). Even today Finnish call Swedes *ruotsalaiset* where the stem of the adjective is *ruots-*. None of these notions bear any reference to religion or ethnicities as Christian or non-Scandinavian “Vikings, Væringjar, Rus” are also known. See: footnote 77 below.

³³ Meaning the “Mid-Etel” where Etel means “river”. The word originates from the Turkish word *âtil*.

and connected to particularly infamous raids. Although one has exact dates for the beginning of these epochs the first problem is that scholars have used these dates as the starting points of new eras without taking into consideration that before these attacks the pagan presence can be attested in the West. The second problem is the fact that my thesis deals only with the territory of the Frankish Empire and Northern Italy. The first Viking raids reached the empire in 799 and 810, but the large-scale assaults started only after 833, that is forty years later than the “official” starting date of the Viking Age.

I examined the first phase of the movements what reached the Frankish Empire, the era what began with the so called hit-and-run tactic, when every single attack started from and returned to the original homelands of the raiders dealing only quick blows mostly with small raiding parties. This first era slowly developed into a large scale pagan settler activity into the new lands of the West and ended with serious military defeats. In the case of the Vikings, this era means roughly 100 years between the mid-780s and the late 890s. In the Hungarian case the only Western raiding period lasted from the 860s until the severe defeats of the Magyars at Merseburg/Riade in 933 and Augsburg in 955.

The main purpose of this comparison is to see the roots of the Viking and Hungarian ascendancy and to find out to what extent this success can be explained by the tactics, weapons and the social background of the invaders. They attacked roughly the same territories therefore they must have faced the same enemies with the same background. This fact raises the opportunity to compare and contrast these two non-Christian peripheral cultures and their activities, using the Franks as a control group to find out the similar and distinctive factors of their success.

I based my study on archaeological finds supplemented by written sources on tactics. The reason for this distribution is that most of the information about weapons, ships, and horses comes from well equipped warriors' or leaders' graves, while the strategies are mainly known from written sources. To create the control group, first I will briefly describe the Frankish military background as a basis for the comparison, although I will not analyse its development as it is not within the scope of my study. This is important because, as it will be shown below, the Viking and Hungarian weaponry and travelling methods were quite distinctive, or rather, totally different. The only connection between them was the way of striking, the time of arrival, their non-European background to their contemporaries (in both a social and religious sense) and the identical enemy, the Franks. Therefore it is reasonable to present a short overview of the Frankish military organisation and weaponry to connect the two independent studies on the attackers on the battlefields.

Chapter I

Weaponry, tactics, army structure and military intelligence

Introduction

In this chapter I am going to compare the weaponry, tactics, and military structure of the Scandinavian and Hungarian cultures on the basis of the Frankish data. My main goal with this is to show that neither the very distinctive tactics of the Hungarians nor the army structure of the Vikings could have been the main reason for the pagan success over the Frankish Empire. I will place a special emphasis on the military intelligence because after thoroughly examining the history of pagan destruction I found it to be the most important factor of military success.

Franks will serve as a control group as they were common enemies for both peripheral cultures. Scandinavians and Hungarians were far from each other in technology and space and they still managed to achieve the same result against the Franks. Therefore I will use them to shed light on similarities between the Scandinavians and the Hungarians.

Frankish army structure in the ninth century

According to archaeological and written sources the Frankish army consisted of heavy infantry and cavalry at least from the Merovingian times. The question of Frankish cavalry has triggered scholarly debates on the interpretations of two sixth century Byzantine accounts on the Frankish army. Both Procopius and Agathias described Frankish cavalry as an unimportant element. Bernard S. Bachrach questioned this concluding that the Frankish cavalry was

important part of the army according to laws concerning horse keeping and the developed system of horse breeding estates.³⁴

Charles Bowlus also emphasised the crucial role of the Frankish heavy cavalry in the process of empire building³⁵, and it is also very telling that the Franks in 753 wanted the Saxons to pay their yearly taxes in horses.³⁶ Most likely the Byzantine authors were influenced by their own perception on the army. The proportion of infantry to cavalry was one to one in the Byzantine army. This proportion in the case of the Franks was larger, they had more foot soldiers than horsemen³⁷, but it did not mean that cavalry was unimportant to them.

When the first invaders³⁸ arrived to the frontiers of the Frankish Empire they met a composite army of infantry and cavalry. It means that Franks probably were more versatile than the pagans. The Vikings were predominantly foot soldiers in their Western campaigns even though they also had cavalry while the Hungarians were exclusively horsemen. Therefore none of the attackers showed up with a combined army as the Franks did and still they defeated the more versatile but slower Christian armies. This was the time of the first two Viking attacks³⁹ against the Frankish Empire in Aquitania in 799⁴⁰ and in Friesland in 810⁴¹ and the first Hungarian raid in Bavaria in 862.⁴²

³⁴ Bernard S. Bachrach, "Procopius, Agathias and the Frankish Military," *Speculum* 45/3 (Jul. 1970): 435-441, 440.

³⁵ Charles R. Bowlus, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars. The struggle for the Middle Danube, 788-907*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 18.

³⁶ Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdom under the Carolingians 751-987*, (London: Longman, 1983), 45. The Saxons had to pay an annual tribute of 300 horses.

³⁷ Bachrach 1970, 439.

³⁸ I only treat the Viking and Hungarian examples. The first non-Christian attackers were the Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula who attacked Aquitania and the southern Frankish marks (frontier territories) since 711.

³⁹ The first recorded Scandinavian – most likely Norwegian – attack against Western Europe happened in Portland, south Wessex in 789. Some scholars stated that Scandinavian attacks already reached the British Isles as early as 617 although there is little evidence on that. See: Axel Olrik, *Viking Civilization*, trans. J.W. Hartmann and H.A. Larsen, (London: Allen&Unwin, 1930), 91.

⁴⁰ Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, (London: Oxford University Press, second ed. 2001), 195.

⁴¹ Roesdahl 2007, 118.

⁴² Szabolcs de Vajay, *Der Eintritt des Ungarischen Stämmebundes in die Europäische Geschichte (862-933)*, (Mainz: Hase & Koehler Verlag, 1968), 11.

The Carolingian military organisation had its roots in the Merovingian and Gallo-Roman army structures but it was reorganised during the eighth and ninth centuries during the Muslim, Germanic, and Slavic wars. The core of the army was the infantry. The foot soldiers had to equip themselves from the revenues of their lands and had to serve only the king although the conscriptions were made by the local counts.⁴³ The question of infantry weaponry was also scholarly debated again because of the interpretation and comparison of Byzantine and Frankish sources. The sixth century accounts of Procopius and Agathias basically differ in this question but their common point was that the Franks did not use bows.⁴⁴ This perception was proved to be wrong due to the numerous arrowhead finds in Frankish graves.⁴⁵

Frankish weaponry in the ninth century

The armament of the Frankish foot soldiers was very complex having a wide selection of available weapons. In the ninth century it could have consisted of several types of light spears, the mid-length, barbed heavy javelin named *angón* (ἄγγων)⁴⁶, the one- or two-bladed axe named *francisca*, what was also used as throwing weapon in close quarter combat,⁴⁷ the single edged *scramasax*, *sax*, or *semispatum*⁴⁸, in rare cases the double edged longsword (*spata*)⁴⁹, and

See also: *Annales Bertiniani*, MGH SS rer. Germ. 5, 60: *Sed et hostes antea illis populis inexperti, qui Ungri vocantur, regnum eiusdem populantur.* Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000871 (Accessed: 06 May 2009).

⁴³ Imre Papp, *Nagy Károly és kora* [Charlemagne and his era], (Debrecen: Csokonai Kiadó, Történelmi Kézikönyvtár, 1997), 67.

⁴⁴ Bachrach 1970, 438.

⁴⁵ Bachrach 1970, 438.

⁴⁶ Agathias, *Historiae* II.5: ...The angóns (τας ἄγγωνας) are spears which are neither very short nor very long; they can be used, if necessary, for throwing like a javelin, and also, in hand to hand combat... Translation: Bachrach 1970, 436.

⁴⁷ Bachrach 1970, 437. Although Procopius describes this weapon as the main throwing weapon of the infantry, Gregory of Tours gives five accounts on the francisca and he mentioned that this weapon could be thrown only in one case.

⁴⁸ Simon Coupland, "Carolingian Arms and Armor in the Ninth Century," *Warfare in the Dark Ages*, ed. John France and Kelly DeVries (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2008), 249-270, 262-263. The sax was a single

bows and arrows.⁵⁰ It seems that the most important weapons were the different types of spears and javelins.⁵¹

Frankish longswords were famous in the ninth century due to their outstanding quality what meant that they were also expensive.⁵² Nevertheless, this did not keep the Vikings and through them the Russians and Arabs from preferring these works of art to the products of their own smiths. These weapons had a very long prehistory in the Germanic past sharing the same characteristics from the fifth century onwards, namely the length around 90 centimetres, the weight around 700 grams and the structure. Swords were constructed from a soft iron core and a well carburised edge made of one piece of steel joined to the core by hammering.⁵³

The most fearful of the Frankish weapons was maybe the *angón* with a barbed iron head and a long iron covered haft. It was used to pierce through the shields or armours of enemies and paralyse them with the barbed head while the haft's iron cover prevented the victim from freeing himself by cutting the iron head off of the wooden haft. The iron barbs stuck in the armour, shield or flesh of the enemy and gave the Frankish warrior the opportunity to tear down the shield of his enemy or even his person and give the final blow with another weapon.⁵⁴

edged weapon made of iron, some 65 to 80 centimetres in length. In the seventh century it was a standard feature of graves, but by the late eighth century the sax was already beginning to disappear due to the evolution of the longsword.

⁴⁹ Coupland 2008, 263. Due to its high price the 90-100 centimetres long longswords were not compulsory for the foot warriors only for the horsemen. Its shape in the ninth century was significantly different from the longsword before 800. The blades of the earlier ones were made with damascene technique and the edges were parallel while in the ninth century the damascene technique gave its place to better metalworking techniques and the blades started to form an elongated triangle shifting the gravity of the weapon towards the grip making the sword more manoeuvrable in swordplay. With the combination of the power of the longsword and the manoeuvrability of the sax the latter became redundant therefore it disappeared to the ninth century.

⁵⁰ Bachrach 1970, 438.

⁵¹ Bachrach 1970, 438.

⁵² Coupland 2008, 262. The price of these swords varied between three to seven solidi, what means a fairly high value.

⁵³ Vasco La Salvia, *Archeometallurgy of Lombard swords*, (Budapest: Central European University, 1996), 33.

⁵⁴ Richard Underwood, *Anglo-Saxon Weapons and Warfare*, (Stroud: Tempus, 1999), 44.

According to the financial state of the warriors they could use any of these weapons. Most of them though were probably armed only with axes or bows as these were the cheapest.⁵⁵

For protection, round or elongated leather covered wooden shields were used. It could have been combined with any type of armour from thick cloth or leather to metal breastplates which were quite expensive.⁵⁶ The question of helmets is problematic as no grave finds preserved from the eighth or ninth centuries. Written sources rarely mention helmets (*helmus*, *galea*) and if they do, they do not refer to their shape or material. The words of the *capitularia* implies that only commanders of armies are expected to have their own helmets and this suggests that similarly to longswords these items were expensive metal objects. The cheaper ones were most likely made of leather.⁵⁷

As the diversity of the war equipment shows the Carolingian army – just like any temporary armies at that time – did not have any regularised weaponry or regularised composition. The Frankish army consisted not only of Franks but of other Germanic tribes under Frankish rule like Saxons, Taifals, Alemans, Alans, Burgundians and non-Germanic Gallo-Romans but without integrating them into the army. This led to the fact that sometimes the Franks were in minority in their own army⁵⁸ what never happened in the Scandinavian and Hungarian side resulting a serious difference in the army structure. The incorporated alien units were allowed and eager to keep their identity inside the Frankish army and Empire.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Coupland 2008, 269.

⁵⁶ Coupland 2008, 258.

⁵⁷ Coupland 2008, 252.

⁵⁸ Bachrach 1970, 435.

⁵⁹ Bachrach 1970, 435. This fact is proven by those Taifals who were settled near Poitiers as garrison still by the Romans in the fourth century and were still guarding their different ethnicity in the sixth century according to Gregory of Tours.

The Frankish cavalry was the core of the later classical medieval knighthood. Their compulsory weaponry was prescribed by royal orders, *capitularia*.⁶⁰ Our knowledge on the cavalry armament is based on two documents, the *Capitulare missorum* and a royal letter written to Fulrad, abbot of Saint-Quentin in the year 806.⁶¹ These sources prescribe that every horseman must be armed with a shield, a lance, a longsword (*spata*), a shortsword (*sax*, *semispatum*), and a bow and a quiver of arrows.⁶² The date of these sources must be taken into consideration as the *sax* disappeared from the weaponry of the cavalry to the ninth century as well just like in the case of the foot warriors.

A significant difference to the weaponry of the infantry was that the cavalry never used throwing weapons but preferred the flail instead, as this weapon was especially designed for mounted fight. Another difference is that the armour of the mounted warriors was much more elaborate, stronger and, therefore, more expensive. The whole gear of a mounted warrior with the horse, the helmet, the iron breastplate or scalemail, the long shield, the leg armour and the lance equalled the price of 50-60 cows.⁶³

Frankish Tactics

The regular battle order of the Frankish infantry was the thick and closed, phalanx-like formation although the Frank contingents were deeper. Its task was to begin the battle and by forming a wedge to break the battle lines of the enemy. The flanking cavalry finished the battle by scattering the remnants of the hostile army.⁶⁴ This military organisation though had great

⁶⁰ The capitularia were given to local counts or high ranking clerics, bishops or archbishops.

⁶¹ Coupland 2008, 250.

⁶² Coupland 2008, 250.

⁶³ Papp 1997, 110-111.

⁶⁴ Papp 1997, 111.

disadvantages. It took months to organise the army and its process was very slow as it could move only three to four hours per day.⁶⁵ Following the Germanic habit the king or the royal princes themselves had led the army or in lesser campaigns it was led by leaders simply called *dux*.⁶⁶

The ninth century Frankish warriors and their allies were fighting as units and not individually as scholarship earlier proposed.⁶⁷ Between these contingents there was great flexibility and interchangeability. On attacking the leaders usually used the encircling pincers method against their enemies. The different units converged on the enemy from several different directions to divide their energies and cut off the supplies to remove the enemy from its fortified camps.⁶⁸

After conquering a given area only a low number of the troops (*scarae*) left in the new territory to uphold the Frankish rule.⁶⁹ The defence of the Empire was adequate against similarly working armies. The lack of a standing regular army – what meant that the army had to be organised in every case before the campaigns – meant a serious setback to the defence when quickly appearing and disappearing enemies attacked the frontiers. The Frankish way to defend such coastal and border areas was to develop the mark system and build forts and to settle regular garrisons in them, but this method started to develop in the coastal regions only after the Viking attacks had begun and the fully developed fort network was finished only at the end of

⁶⁵ Papp 1997, 111. Based upon my own calculations it could not have meant more than nine-sixteen kilometres a day presumably closer to the lower end of this range if I take into consideration that all the equipments of the army was carried on oxcarts behind the troops. This marching speed is even worse in the mirror of the speed of the Viking and Hungarian attacks. Griffith calculated that a Viking army on foot could have marched approximately twenty-five kilometres a day while he gives approximately fifty kilometres to mounted troops. See: Paddy Griffith, *The Viking Art of War*, (London: Greenhill Books, 1995), 103. Csaba Hidán gave fifty to sixty kilometres to the Hungarians a day. See: Csaba Hidán, “The military tactics of the ancient Hungarians – Die Taktik der Landnehmenden Ungarn,” *Between East and West. Über die Grenze zwischen Ost und West*. ed. Csilla Siklódi (Budapest: Promptus, 1996), 39-68, 45.

⁶⁶ Papp 1997, 111.

⁶⁷ Bowlus 1995, 19.

⁶⁸ Bowlus 1995, 19.

⁶⁹ Bowlus 1995, 20.

the ninth century.⁷⁰ The same applies to the line of fortresses in the Eastern Frankish Kingdom and later Germany where Henry I and Otto I had to organise the defense against Hungarian incursions in the first decades of the tenth century.

Viking army structure in the ninth century

It seems self evident that foot soldiers made up the predominant majority of any Scandinavian armies. Although the Viking ships were able to transport livestock and horses as well but the transport capacity of the longships or warships were less than of the transport ships. Therefore the foot warrior army structure was predominant in the raided Western European territories but it is clear from the written sources that – at least in Denmark – the Viking armies included cavalry as well.⁷¹ In the West only the leaders (the *konungrs* and *jarls*⁷²) had horses,⁷³ as archaeology and skaldic poetry informs us.

Significant differences can be seen in the military organisation of pagan societies compared to the Christian Western European ones, namely the speed of gathering an army and the fact that every free man in the society was a warrior. The recruiting was done by local chiefs

⁷⁰ Roesdahl 2007, 262.

⁷¹ On the Danish cavalry, *Annales Regni Francorum*, 804: *Eodem tempore Godofridus rex Danorum venit cum classe sua necnon et omni equitatu regni sui ad locum, qui dicitur Sliesthorp, in confinio regni sui et Saxoniae*. Source: <http://thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregnifrancorum.html> (Accessed: 04 May 2009).

Roesdahl 2007, 203. From the Oseberg tapestry it seems highly likely that Norwegians also had some cavalry elements, just like the Swedish. The Swedish cavalry though is more strongly connected to Russian inland territories.

⁷² The *konungr* is usually translated as *king* but I will avoid applying this translation as the notions do not match each other completely. A *king* is rather a Christian conception on the sole ruler of a country who ruled his lands by the grace of God, while a *konungr* is a Scandinavian lord very often without any land to rule only commanding a fleet strong enough to give orders to the *jarls*, the noble warriors who were richer than the common Scandinavian. It is also a significant difference that the *konungar* (in plural) were sometimes ruling simultaneously that is why we are informed by Latin sources that sometimes there were even three or more kings ruling in Scandinavian countries. The most detailed account from the *Annales Regni Francorum* is of course treating Denmark.

⁷³ Kelly DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology* (Petersborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1992), 45.

similarly to the Frankish case but not always to a royal order. These local leaders⁷⁴ after gathering the army set sail and looted lightly defended or undefended rich places like monasteries and then sailed away. The strength of such raiding forces most likely was not high,⁷⁵ usually about 200-400 armed men, the crew of four to ten ships accompanied only for a short set of raids. They did not necessarily come from the same region⁷⁶ as Norwegians, Danes and even Swedes or in rare cases other ethnicities⁷⁷ worked together in the West. Although Viking armies were quick, their greatest weakness was besieging and assaulting fortresses; they avoided doing it if it was possible.

Paddy Griffith created a weighted graph about the factors that must be taken into consideration in the success of attacks of small raiding parties in the Viking age. He concluded that adequate weaponry was the least important factor in decreasing the risk of failure and loss of men and the strength of the troop was barely more important than that. The most important factors were intelligence before the raid, the mobility of the troop and the swiftness of the

⁷⁴ In the Latin sources they appear as *primores* in contrary to their kings *reges* or the Frankish nobility denominated *duces*. The Scandinavian term to them was *jarl* (pronounced as *yarl**) which meant “noble warrior” and was the origin of the English word “earl”.

⁷⁵ Although the sources sometimes speak about huge pagan armies. They are probably exaggerating, but they usually exactly give the numbers of the Viking ships taking part in the described action. In 845 the *Annales Bertiniani* described the largest Viking army of six-hundred ships devastating Hamburg. Such a force must have been consisted of 24-30 thousand Vikings what is an incredibly large force at that time.

Annales Bertiniani, 845, MGH SS rer. Germ. 5, 32: *Nortmannorum rex Oricus sexcentas naves per Albim fluvium in Germaniam ad versus Hludowicum dirigit.* Source: http://bsbmdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000758 (Accessed: 27 January 2009).

⁷⁶ Roesdahl 2007, 17.

⁷⁷ Like in the case of a Finnish and a – probably – Hungarian or German Viking. The earlier was called *Suomi* what means “Finland, Finnish” in Finnish the latter was called *Tyrker* meaning “The Turk”. His ethnicity is a matter of debate as the Old Norse source refers to him only as a *sudr madr* what only means “southern man” what is not too exact seeing that all European areas lie south from Scandinavia.

On *Suomi*: *Annales Regni Francorum*, 811: *...de parte vero Danorum inprimis fratres Hemmingi, Hancwin et Angandeo, deinde ceteri honorabiles inter suos viri, ... et Suomi...*

Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregni francorum.html> (Accessed: 23 April 2009).

On *Tyrker*: *Flateyrbók, Grænlendinga saga*: *...Þar uar sudr madr æinn j ferd, er Tyrker het.*

...there was a southern man with them, who (as) Tyrker was called. Translation and source: <http://www.northvegr.org/lore/flatey/001.php> (Accessed: 23 April 2009).

action.⁷⁸ This leads to one of the most important pillars of the Viking success, the ships, which were the best in the world in the ninth century and what made it possible for their owners to strike swiftly and then disappear.

It is noteworthy that the Vikings seem to set up cavalry in the Western European territories as well by the second half of the ninth century. Since they settled down in the territories of the Frankish Empire they needed horses to travel inland and to fight against Frankish cavalry. This development changed the whole course and outlook of the Scandinavian army and raiding activity in the West. We have indirect written evidence to the development of the Viking cavalry on the Western inland areas. At least the laws issued at the Pîtres general congregation in 864 prohibiting horse trade to the Vikings⁷⁹ imply this.

Viking weaponry in the ninth century

The main weapon suppliers of the Vikings were the Franks themselves as far as swords are concerned. This can be proved with grave finds and with written evidence as well, because at least one of the *capitularia* is preserved prohibiting weapon – especially sword – trade to the Vikings.⁸⁰ Also many sword blades have been found in Scandinavian graves with the engraved names of Ulfberth and Ingelri. They were famous Frankish weapon smiths whose products were much in demand all over Europe.⁸¹ The same applies to the armour trade prohibition what also

⁷⁸ Griffith 1995, 111.

⁷⁹ Roesdahl 2007, 258-259.

⁸⁰ Roesdahl 2007, 258-259. In the year 864 Charles the Bald in the general congregation in Pîtres sentenced everyone to death who sold horses or swords to Vikings. This trade must have been very lucrative if it was one of the main reasons of the weapon and horse shortage of the Frankish army and had to be prohibited by laws.

⁸¹ Brøndsted 1983, 113.

was a continuous effort of the Carolingian rulers, apparently without the expected success as these laws had to be announced numerous times.⁸²

The swords of the Vikings⁸³ though were not only objects crafted to serve as weapons, but they were works of art as well. Although Scandinavian smiths could also forge outstanding swords, to buy Frankish blades and adorn them with fine, gilded and ornamented hilts was more frequent. It is not a surprise that these swords had names⁸⁴ and were personified by skalds.⁸⁵

The most distinctive weapon of the Vikings was the axe. It became one of the infamous symbols of the Scandinavian invaders.⁸⁶ In fact, there were several different types of axes⁸⁷ which differed in the form and weight of the head but they always were single bladed⁸⁸ not like the double edged *francisca*. Spears and bows were also frequent, although there is only one longbow by the size of 192 centimetres what preserved in a grave in Hedeby, Denmark.⁸⁹

In the Western European region there are only few Viking armours finds. Because of the naval lifestyle the rich Scandinavians preferred light chainmail according to the written evidence and to a well preserved long chainmail from a leader's grave in Gjermundbu, South Norway.⁹⁰ Some Swedish platemails also preserved in the cemetery of the trading centre Birka, but its usage was the influence of the Russian inland territories.⁹¹

⁸² Coupland 2008, 259.

⁸³ Peter Godfrey Foote and David MacKenzie Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* (London: Sidgwick&Jackson, 1970), 274. These swords usually had a blade 90 centimetres long and a hilt 10 centimetres long and were double edged and straight just like the Frankish ones. To forge such a weapon took a smith approximately one month.

⁸⁴ Foote-Wilson 1970, 273. The known names usually contrasted the quality of the swords or the deeds done with them. Such were *brynjubitr* ("armour biter"), *fótbitr* ("leg biter"), *gramr* ("strong"), *gullinhjalti* ("golden-hilted"), *hvati* ("sharp"), *langhvass* ("long-sharp"), *miðfáinn* ("adorned to the middle"), *kvernbitr* ("millstone biter").

⁸⁵ Griffith 1995, 173.

⁸⁶ Griffith 1995, 176.

⁸⁷ From the cheap and light hand axe (*handöx*) through the mid-weighted barbed axe (*skeggöx*) to the heavy wide axe (*breiðöx*), what was a relatively late development appearing from the beginning of the eleventh century.

⁸⁸ Foote-Wilson 1970, 277.

⁸⁹ Roesdahl 2007, 189.

⁹⁰ Roesdahl 2007, 190.

⁹¹ Roesdahl 2007, 190.

The large, colorful, round wooden shields with iron cores also became a symbol of the Vikings. These shields were around one metre of diameter protecting its wielder from his neck to his thighs. Due to the naval and foot soldier army structure the shields were always round. Elongated forms only make sense on horseback.

From the expensive helmets only one preserved in the already mentioned Gjermundbu grave in Norway. It had a round top instead of the pointed one that can be usually seen in tapestry depictions.⁹² Contrary to the popular common place, Vikings never wore horned helmets in combat. The only depiction showing a Scandinavian wearing such a thing is a tapestry from a Gokstad grave most likely depicting the leader of a ritual procession ceremony.⁹³

Viking Ships

All that is known about these masterpieces came from ship burials of mostly Norwegian leaders (Gokstad, Oseberg, or Tune, only to mention the most famous ones from the more than five hundred Norwegian ship burials⁹⁴), from the excavation of sunken shipwrecks (the most important are the Skuldelev, Hedeby, Klåstad and Äskekärr ships), from some contemporary depictions on Gotland picture stones, and from the sagas and skaldic literature that was written down somewhat later. Supplementary data are provided by experimental archaeology as the replicas of Viking ships named Saga Siglar, Roar Ege and the Viking were built and successfully tested on open seas.⁹⁵

⁹² Roesdahl 2007, 190. The pointed helmet was the product of Eastern influence in the North and only became popular later in the eleventh century.

⁹³ Roesdahl 2007, 203.

⁹⁴ Foote-Wilson 1970, 233.

⁹⁵ Roesdahl 2007, 121. and Foote-Wilson 1970, 234. The replicas of the freight ships Skuldelev 1 and 3, the so called Roar Ege and Saga Siglar and the replica of the Gokstad warship called Viking were built from the same materials and using the same techniques what was used to build the original ships and they were successfully tested

The ships were built in different styles and categories⁹⁶ and used different materials due to local habits and access to materials and they developed during the long Viking Age.⁹⁷ Presumably a ship with twenty pair of oars,⁹⁸ which meant at least forty men aboard, was the average size.⁹⁹ This is important information as the sources never give the exact number of Vikings but always refer to the number of ships.

The greatest advantage of the Viking ship was the combined usage of oars and sails that can not be attested anywhere else in the North outside Scandinavia, not even in the British Isles what is astonishing. All the seafaring vessels in the North used only oars without sails as Procopius wrote in 560. His words are verified by the Sutton Hoo ship from the seventh century.¹⁰⁰ The sails, which were quite normal in the Mediterranean from ancient times, slowly developed in Scandinavia between the sixth and eighth centuries according to the depictions on Gotland picture stones.¹⁰¹ According to the Gokstad ship, the widths of these enormous sails were double of the widths of the ships and they were always rectangular, contrary to the triangular sails of the Mediterranean.

This navigation method gave the Viking ship swiftness and mobility on the seas and safe movement on shallow rivers as its second great advantage was its small draft. Even the greatest

on open seas. The Viking in 1893 even crossed the North Atlantic from Bergen, Norway via Iceland to New Foundland in 28 days.

⁹⁶ The smaller ones were categorised according to the number of oars. The category consisted of ships having six to twelve oars where one man used two oars, while the larger ones according to their rowing benches. These had thirteen to thirty-four rowing-benches where one man used only one oar.

⁹⁷ Per Bruun, "The Viking Ship," *Journal of Coastal Research* 13/4 (1997): 1282-1289, 1282. The first Nordic ships did not have sails, as the Nydam boat from around 320 CE proves it.

⁹⁸ Jones 2001, 189. Royal ships could be larger, as in the case of the ship of Olaf Tryggvason, king of Norway at the end of the tenth century as his mighty ship, the *Ormr inn langi* ("Long Serpent") had thirty-four benches, or Knut the Great in the eleventh century who had a ship of sixty benches. No such formidable monsters have been found so far.

⁹⁹ Foote-Wilson 1970, 234-235.

¹⁰⁰ Foote-Wilson 1970, 240-241.

¹⁰¹ Brøndsted 1983, 23.

ships like the Gokstad ship did not submerge deeper into water than 90-95 centimetres¹⁰² and the deepest draft of its replica, the Viking, was one metre during her way from Bergen, Norway to New Foundland, Canada.¹⁰³ This is the explanation of how these ships could navigate even on the smallest rivers (like the Lympe in Kent) and take advantage of heavier and slower British and Frankish ships.¹⁰⁴ The victims of the raids did not try to adopt the “Danish style” of ship building for unknown reasons. Alfred the Great in 896 still insisted on building large ships in the traditional Anglo-Saxon way, namely without sails.¹⁰⁵

The body of the Viking ship was made using planking technique where the edges of the planks overlapped starting from bottom to the top and were held together by iron rivets. Tarred cow hair served as waterproofing. The keel was always made from one piece of wood without sawing. The keel and cross beams provided the flexibility and stability and gave the well known symmetrical form to the Viking ships.¹⁰⁶ During the building process the Scandinavians avoided

¹⁰² Foote-Wilson 1970, 242.

¹⁰³ Jones 2001, 187.

¹⁰⁴ Even the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle justifies this fact when it describes that in 897 Alfred the Great's ships were stranded on the shore so the Danish Vikings attacked the smaller detachment of ships then fled.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D, 897 (896): ... *Pa gefengon hy þara þreora scipa twa æt þam muþan utewardum, þa mæn ofslogon, þæt an oðwand, on þam wæron eac þa men ofslægene butan .v., þa comon for ðy onweg þe þara oðera scipu æsæton, on þa healfe þæs deopes þæ þa Dæniscan scipu asæton wæran, þa, oðru ealle on oðre healfe, þæt hire ne meahte nan to oðrum.* ...

... Of the first three ships they took two at the mouth outwards, and slew the men; the third veered off, but all the men were slain except five; and they too were severely wounded. Then came onward those who manned the other ships, which were also very uneasily situated. Three were stationed on that side of the deep where the Danish ships were aground, whilst the others were all on the opposite side; so that none of them could join the rest...

Source: <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/d/d-L.html> (Accessed: 21 May 2009), Translation: <http://omacl.org/Anglo/part2.html> (Accessed: 21 May 2009).

¹⁰⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS D, 897 (896): ... *Pa het Ælfred cyning timbrian lange scipu ongean þas æsceas, þa wæron fulneah twa swa lange swa þa oðre, sume hæfdon .lx. ara, sume ma, þa wæron ægþer ge swiftran ge untealran ge eac hearra þonne ða opru, næron hi nawðær ne on Frysisc gesceapen ne on Denisc, butan swa him sylfum þuhte þæt hi nytwyrðe be on meahdon.* ...

... Then King Alfred gave orders for building long ships against the esks, which were full-nigh twice as long as the others. Some had sixty oars, some more; and they were both swifter and steadier, and also higher than the others. They were not shaped either after the Frisian or the Danish model, but so as he himself thought that they might be most serviceable.

Source: <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/d/d-L.html> (Accessed: 21 May 2009), Translation: <http://omacl.org/Anglo/part2.html> (Accessed: 21 May 2009).

¹⁰⁶ Roesdahl 2007, 114.

sawing the wood as far as it was possible. They tried not to shape the natural wood too much, although if it was necessary they split the wood instead of sawing.¹⁰⁷

I will not go into a detailed analysis of the ships because it would take me too far from my purpose and the topic has already been well treated in several good publications. It is enough to say that the warships – which are more important in the present study than freight ships – were narrow and low compared to their length. They were usually made of oak and pine, their masts were flexible and could be laid down if the ship had to cross under bridges, if it had to hide or in time of storms. Two of their characteristics also became the symbols of Vikings, that is, the stem of the ship usually formed as an animal head¹⁰⁸ which gave the ship her name, and the outer side of the upper plank was used to carry the shields of the Vikings to protect the rowers from missiles and to save storage space in the ship.¹⁰⁹

To treat the speed and the action radius of these vessels I will use my own calculations based on the data provided by experimental archaeology. According to the tests with the replicas, the ships must have been able to reach 18.52 kilometres per hour (10 knots) with good wind conditions, as Saga Siglar did. Roar Ege reached 16.668 kilometres per hour (9 knots) in a side wind. These two ships were able to sail against the wind at 60 degrees with the speed of 3.7 kilometres per hour (2 knots).¹¹⁰

Since these replicas followed the building patterns of freight ships I conclude that longships or warships were even faster and could have travelled farther. This must mean that a well provisioned fleet directly moving towards its destination setting sail from Vestland, South Norway could have easily reached the region of the mouth of the Garonne and the coasts of

¹⁰⁷ Roesdahl 2007, 115.

¹⁰⁸ Although dragons and snakes were the most popular, wolves, herons and other kinds of birds can also be found.

¹⁰⁹ Roesdahl 2007, 115-116.

¹¹⁰ Roesdahl 2007, 124-125.

Aquitania, in the southern part of the Frankish Empire within five days through the English Channel or within seven-eight days along the coast of Scotland and Ireland. These fleets were surely able to travel the seas day and night for longer periods for the distance between the Vestland region, Norway and Iceland is approximately 1600 kilometres via the Shetland and Faroe islands. Between the Faroe and Iceland there are no islands to moor the ships so approximately the half of the distance had to be travelled in one course what probably meant three or four times twenty-four hours journey.

Vikings Tactics

The core element of the Viking tactic was swiftness. The Vikings used their ships to carry out very quick plundering activities against unprotected or barely protected targets probably in small troops.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ This could mean either as few as the three ships in first recorded attack in 789 or a fleet where the number of the ships did not exceed thirty-five. My conclusion on small war parties is based on the wording of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This source is very consequent on the denomination of the troops and most frequently it uses the word “*hlop*” on the attacking Viking fleet. It is known from the Laws of Ine, that a “*hlop*” is a troop of thieves, marauders containing seven to thirty-five members. Over thirty-five the word “*here*” is used. See: ed. trans. F.L. Attenborough, *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), 40-41. In other cases of course larger numbers can also be found like the sixty-seven ships raiding Nantes in 843 or the incredible fleet of six hundred ships what razed Hamburg to the ground in 845 but these attacks were exceptional and royal campaigns.

On the attack on Nantes: *Annales Bertiniani* 843, MGH SS rer. Germ. 5, 29: *Pyratae Nordmandorum urbem Namnetum adgressi, interfectis episcopo et multis clericorum atque laicorum sexusque promiscui, depraedata civitate, inferioris Aquitaniae partes depopulaturi adoriuntur.*

Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000758 (Accessed: 07 May 2009).

On the attack on Hamburg: *Annales Bertiniani* 845, MGH SS rer. Germ. 5, 32: *Nortmannorum rex Oricus sexcentas naves per Albim fluvium in Germaniam ad versus Hludowicum dirigit.*

Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000758 (Accessed: 07 May 2009).

Paddy Griffith identified four different types¹¹² of the Viking attacks.¹¹³ These four types in my view are only three from which two is important in my thesis. The “classical” Viking attacks and the large scale royal campaigns, though these all shared the same attributes only their size were different. The doctrinal background surely consisted of the classical “strength, pride, honour” elements but with the addition of cheating, tricking and evade straight conflict if it is possible.¹¹⁴ The key elements of the tactics of the Vikings were the swift and fearless execution and the military intelligence on the raided areas.¹¹⁵ The swiftness was provided by the ships, the boldness – in my opinion – by the Nordic world interpretation and the intelligence was the natural attendant of the very elaborated and traditional way of receiving and hosting guests and the trading activity what had started in the Merovingian era according to archaeological and written evidences.¹¹⁶

Large open field battles between the Franks and Vikings are also known, but as far as the sources inform us the Scandinavians tried to avoid such battles just like sieges. In the first hundred years of the Viking Era there was only one significant and long lasting siege with war engines in the territory of the Frankish Empire, that is, the siege of Paris in 885-886.¹¹⁷ The

¹¹² 1. “Saga-warfare”: From duels to the very popular nocturnal hall burning meaning to burn the neighbouring farm at night carried out by a few men.

2. “Royal Household Action”: the plundering activities of the king and his immediate retinue.

3. “Going A-viking”: The most infamous and known type of looting meaning any kind of piratical or robbing activity with a few hundred men involved either on sea or on land. Here I have to add that I do not find any difference between Griffith’s second and third category as basically they were the same and sometimes leaders from non-royal blood were stronger than weaker kings.

4. “Royal Army Campaigning”: The largest true campaigns led by kings or self-appointed rulers involving truly large forces.

¹¹³ Griffith 1996, 105-109.

¹¹⁴ Griffith 1996, 109.

¹¹⁵ Griffith 1996, 110-111.

¹¹⁶ Jones 2001, 82.

¹¹⁷ Roesdahl 2007, 191.

Scandinavians preferred to take fortresses by tricks if it was possible¹¹⁸, as outwitting others was also taken as a great virtue in the Old Norse society as I will show in the next chapter.

Hungarian army structure in the ninth and tenth centuries

Because of the numerous archaeological excavations and written sources much is known about the mounted Hungarian warrior in the ninth and tenth century. Their Asian steppe origin resulted in a completely different society, weaponry and military organisation to that what I have described above in the case of the Franks and Vikings.

The Hungarians, just like every steppe nation, were basically horsemen. According to Arab sources the number of the army was twenty thousand mounted warriors organised into groups of thousands. The head of the army was the gyula/djilah, the military leader of the Hungarians.¹¹⁹ Most likely the gathering of the army was done in the winter months by local clan leaders who either led their men to smaller campaigns or to the camp of the gyula/djilah to go to large scale campaigns. The tribal organisation of the Hungarians already started to dissolve in Etelköz what gave the power and opportunity to these clan leaders to organise their own retinue in a territorial basis and not only within the tribe itself.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Brøndsted 1983, 51.

¹¹⁹ Ibn Rustah's account. In: Kristó 1995, 32-33.

¹²⁰ István Dienes, *A honfoglaló magyarok* [The conquering Hungarians], (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1972), 23.

Hungarian weaponry in the ninth and tenth centuries

The armament of the Hungarian soldier consisted of two reflex bows held in the right side of the warrior's richly decorated belt¹²¹ in soft or half hardened leather or bark sockets, a quiver of arrows on the left side. Bows and arrows were the most important elements in Hungarian weaponry. The arrowheads by the time the Hungarians started their attacks against Europe were mainly flat and made of iron. They wielded two melee weapons as well, a curved, single edged sabre and a dagger.¹²² The usage of lances and pikes are mentioned in the written sources but so far it was barely attested archaeologically.¹²³ Long hafted, single bladed light axes are also attested¹²⁴ although these weapons did not play serious role in the armament of the ninth-tenth century Hungarian warrior.¹²⁵

The sabre in the ninth-tenth century was the most important melee weapon of the Hungarians. Due to the long evolution of the weapon by that time the blade of the sword had a slight "S" shape and was clearly the product of mounted fight. The sword was basically single edged but the sharp blade continued on the back, notch of the blade for till the one fifth of the length of the whole blade. This part was used to injure or kill the horse of the enemy or to cut the

¹²¹ Katalin U. Köhalmi, *A steppék nomádja lóháton, fegyverben* [The nomads of the steppes on horseback, armed] (Budapest: Kőrösi Csoma Kiskönyvtár, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972), 112-113. The belt of the nomadic steppe nations was the most important part of the clothing. It served not only as a utilitarian object holding together the loose coats, caftans of the riders and practically carrying everything which was crucial for everyday life – e.g. weapons, tools, lighters, dining cups – but also as indicators of status within the society and as symbols of the manhood, adulthood. According to the status of their owner these belts were decorated with small precious metal – gold, silver or copper – plates, rivets and embroidery and along with the weapons and the lighter holder sockets held on it they were taken as whole units. In the case of Hungarians – exclusively among the steppe nations – the lighter holder sockets were further decorated with precious metal plates. These broad leather objects also served as light armours protecting the hips and the waist of the warriors. Not all the soldiers necessarily had this type of belt but it was characteristic to the upper stratum of the society.

¹²² Kristó 1986, 232-233.

¹²³ Kristó 1986, 230-231. The lances probably served as grave markers, this should be the reason why there are so few of them in the graves.

¹²⁴ Köhalmi 1972, 185.

¹²⁵ Köhalmi 1972, 191.

strapping of the saddles by riding by the enemy.¹²⁶ The sabre was designed for a mounted fight as its power was assured by the velocity of the horse and not by the personal strength of the warrior as in the case of long, straight, double edged Germanic swords.¹²⁷

The most important and deadly element of the weaponry, the large¹²⁸ and complex reflex bows were made of soft wooden core on which thin horn plates were glued from both sides and were also fixed with deer sinew. The two ends and the grip of the bow were made of carved antler in the case of the expensive ones otherwise hardwood or ox bone elements were used instead of the antler.¹²⁹ These precious weapons were normally kept in loosened position in their sockets.¹³⁰

According to the results of experimental archaeology¹³¹ it was possible to shoot out three to four arrows in thirty-forty seconds while riding a horse.¹³² During a charge of a Hungarian war party consisting of several hundreds or less warriors according to the *Casus Sancti Galli*¹³³ this must have meant an arrow shower of four or five hundred arrows within a single minute. In cases of large campaigns where the soldiers were organised in thousands shooting continuously¹³⁴ the number of arrows must have been enough to break up enemy lines of the Frankish legions from a distance of 50-100 metres. The demoralising effect on the enemy must have been great. The

¹²⁶ Köhalmi 1972, 111.

¹²⁷ Hidán 1996, 53.

¹²⁸ The reflex bows of the Hungarians were the products of a long development and compared to other bows used on horseback they were large. Next to a foot soldiers longbow though what was around two metres long all the reflex bows were small.

¹²⁹ Dienes 1972, 34.

¹³⁰ Köhalmi 1972, 185.

¹³¹ These data provided by experiments most probably represent the worst possible level compared to the Hungarians in the ninth-tenth century who were actually practicing horseback archery from a very young age. Therefore when counting with these data it must be born in mind that these experiments offer only a weak hold on estimating the exact shot numbers in a minute.

¹³² Hidán 1996, 46.

¹³³ MGH SS 2, 105: *Silvis quoque centeni vel minus interdum latentes eruperant...* Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000869 (Accessed: 04 May 2009)

¹³⁴ Like in the case of a battle between the Hungarian-Peceneg alliance against the Byzantines described by Al-Masudi in: Kristó 1995, 55.

effective – meaning deadly, armour piercing – range of these weapons was around sixty-seventy metres¹³⁵ so the enemy most probably did not even have the chance to retaliate.

The reflex bows though were not better weapons than any simple longbows in ninth-tenth century Europe. The experiments of Gábor Szöllőssy have shown that a longbow around 200 centimetres length was just as strong and deadly as a reflex bow. Therefore an explanation is needed why to build such complex reflex bows instead of using cheaper longbows.¹³⁶ The first reason that on the steppes the wooden material good enough for making strong bows was missing. The second reason that the steppe tribes had to find a solution for creating a shorter bow with the same power as a longbow. The average stretch distance of a 200 centimetres long longbow was 70 centimetres but a longbow could not be used on horseback as it was a typical infantry weapon. The ideal length of the bows on horseback was around 130 centimetres but a simple bow with that length could not be stretched to 70 centimetres because it would have broken into two. Reflex bows were not superior to longbows, they only combined the strength of a longbow with small size resulting a short but strong bow.¹³⁷

It is highly likely that numbers were also very important as shooting at 45° made it improbable to give an aimed shot. In fact to use these weapons the harness of the horses was just as important as the weapons themselves as the archer had to stand up and turn backwards to shot but this manoeuvre is impossible without proper stirrups and saddles.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Hidán 1996, 47. The maximum range probably reached 200-250 metres but at this distance without the energy to pierce the armour. Gábor Szöllőssy however gave 200 metres as the highest possible value preferring rather a lower distance around 170-180 metres. See: Gábor Szöllőssy, “Mennyivel voltak jobb íjaik a honfoglaló magyaroknak, mint a korabeli Európa más népeinek?” [How many times were the bows of the conquering Hungarians better than those of other nations of contemporary Europe?], *Keletkutatás* (1995/fall): 37-51, 44.

¹³⁶ Szöllőssy 1995, 45. To finish a reflex bow took at least half a year. To finish a longbow two months were enough.

¹³⁷ Szöllőssy 1995, 45.

¹³⁸ Hidán 1996, 47.

The clothes of the warriors and the harness were richly decorated,¹³⁹ having metal curbing or scales and carved bone pieces on them.¹⁴⁰ These metal pieces also served as light armour, but in the case of the leaders chain mails or armours sewn from bone pieces has also been found¹⁴¹ otherwise armours were mostly made of leather or felt only. The helmets were made of iron and had a circular diameter, a pointed, typically eastern shape as one of the grave finds in Pécs, Hungary showed it.¹⁴²

Horses and harness

The horses of the Hungarians had basically the same harness as the horses of the other steppe nations. The harness consisted of the saddle, the two stirrups, the bridle and the strapping. The saddles were made of wood with a low, opened structure, the rear saddlebows were leaning backwards while the in the front together with the pommel they were upright to offer a stable hold to the rider when standing up in the saddle. They were and richly decorated just like the leather pillows on it.¹⁴³ To protect the back of the horses from injuries caused by the wooden structure of the saddle the Hungarians placed raw meat under the saddle.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Hidán 1996, 39. The clothes of the Hungarians were especially fine and elaborated. According to Ibn Rustah's account the leaders and rich members of the society were dressed in silk and brocade with gold and silver embroidery on it. The lower classes were probably not so well equipped wearing simple linen or leather clothing and a caftan or long coat called dolman. The richly carved or gilded buttons and expensive fur collars were also the part of clothing just like the high caps. The very richly decorated clothes are also attested in cemeteries. See: László Révész and Ibolya M. Nepper, "The archaeological heritage of the ancient Hungarians," *The Ancient Hungarians. Exhibition Catalogue* (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum, 1996), 37-56, 52-55.

¹⁴⁰ Köhalmi 1972, 184.

¹⁴¹ Köhalmi 1972, 185.

¹⁴² Hidán 1996, 41.

¹⁴³ Köhalmi 1972, 184. For a detailed study see: Gyula László, *A koroncói lelet és a honfoglaló magyarok nyerge* [The find of Koroncó and the saddle of the conquering Hungarians], (Budapest: Országos Magyar Történeti Múzeum, 1943).

¹⁴⁴ Hidán 1996, 45.

The stirrups were made of either metal or metal covered wood their lower part was curved and ribbed to offer the greatest possible stability to the standing warrior.¹⁴⁵ The curved lower part shows that the footwear of the Hungarians most probably had soft soles and it shows a strong connection to the stirrups of other steppe nations in Inner Asia. Because of the striking similarities it seems likely that not only the saddles and stirrups were almost the same as the Inner Asiatic ones but the bridles and the whole outlook of the strapping of the harness.¹⁴⁶

The Hungarians most probably rode the small sturdy steppe wild horse called tarpan (*Equus ferus ferus*)¹⁴⁷ which became extinct in the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁸ The question of the horses though more complex than that and offers scholarly debate topic for more than a hundred years now. It seems likely that the horses were already in a state of a developed but divergent breeding consisting mainly of small Eastern European type. To this heterogeneous breed came a higher type from the South, from Bulgaria and a smaller one from the Kievan Rus. The horses of the Hungarians in the end of the ninth century very likely were small¹⁴⁹, warm blooded Eurasian type originated from tarpan ancestors showing Arab breeding influence.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Köhalmi 1972, 186. To shoot an arrow backwards in 45° the soldier had to stand up in the stirrups. In the next subchapter I will treat the tactic of the Hungarians.

¹⁴⁶ Köhalmi 1972, 187.

¹⁴⁷ According to some photos from the nineteenth century depicting the last *tarpan* the horses of the Hungarians' probably looked like the following: "...the Dubrovka or Taurian tarpan was described [...] as 140-145 cm high, with a big head, small ears and short neck; «field-mouse-grey» with a broad dorsal stripe and an ill-defined shoulder-cross; the mane, tail, shanks black; and a thick mane, semi-erect but falling somewhat to both sides of the neck; the forehead broad, vaulted, the profile straight." Colin P. Groves, "Morphology, Habitat and Taxonomy," *Przewalski's Horse. The History and Biology of an Endangered Species*. ed. Lee Bold and Katherine A. Houpt. SUNY Series in Endangered Species. (New York: Albany State University of New York Press, 1994), 39-60, 52.

¹⁴⁸ Hidán 1996, 45.

¹⁴⁹ István Vörös, "A honfoglaló magyarok lovai," [The horses of the conquering Hungarians] *A honfoglalás korának régészeti emlékei* [The archaeological records of the era of the conquest], ed. Mária Wolf and László Révész (Miskolc: "A Magyar Honfoglalás 895-1895 Tokaj" Alapítvány and Hermann Ottó Múzeum, 1996), 335-345, 338. Although the archaeological evidence is very narrow, it showed that 97.2% of the horses in the end of the ninth century belonged to the small size category with the height between 128 and 144 centimetres.

¹⁵⁰ Vörös 1996, 339.

The strong, sturdy body structure of this type of horse allowed the horse to easily carry a lightly armoured rider for 50-60 kilometres a day¹⁵¹ what according to my calculations made possible to the Hungarians to reach Bavaria from the middle of the Hungarian dwelling territories approximately in twelve days, the region of St. Gallen in sixteen days, Saxony via Bavaria in twenty-two days, the valley of the Po River in twelve days, Provence and Burgundy in thirty days.

Hungarian Tactics

Numerous written sources treated the appearance and warlike nature and the tactics of the Hungarians. Among the most important ones must be mentioned the *Taktika* of Emperor León VI, the work of Al-Masudi and Regino of Prüm. These sources basically telling the same information about the tactics of Hungarians and their leadership during times of war therefore it is enough here to recall the data of the most detailed account, the *Taktika*.¹⁵²

The Hungarians – just like the Vikings – were untrustworthy people and they preferred using tricks, traps and they usually did not mind to break their oaths and contracts if a good opportunity arose.¹⁵³ Before battles the larger part of the army were hidden while a smaller detachment started to skirmish the enemy shooting arrows at the enemy lines to provoke their attack. When that happened the Hungarians imitated flight to draw the enemy into pursuit and thus the larger hiding part of the Hungarian army could encircle the attacking enemy. Lastly the

¹⁵¹ Hidán 1996, 45.

¹⁵² Although this Greek language source describes the Hungarians according to their southern activities it describes the same features as the Western sources.

¹⁵³ *Taktika* XVIII. 47. In: Kristó 1995, 105.

fleeing Hungarian contingent turned back so they shot arrows from every direction on their trapped enemy crawling around them in large circles.¹⁵⁴

This tactic was especially effective in open field battles where there were shrubs or forests to give a good hiding place to the army but it was rather ineffective during sieges. If there were no places to hide the whole army formed several long lines and the flanks started to ride towards the other end of the line shooting arrows to the enemy army while the middle of the army stood still. If the flanks managed to trigger the attack of the other army they started their encircling manoeuvre while the main body of the army started its imitated flight.¹⁵⁵ The end of the battle was like in the previous case. The Hungarian warfare is very similar to the Viking in that fact that it was ineffective in sieges. If the Hungarians had to besiege fortified places they rather tried to cut all the resources of the defenders to force them to give up the fortifications¹⁵⁶, and only very rarely constructed siege engines.

At times of larger campaigns – except for the large field battles – the Hungarians attacked in small groups of around a hundred warriors what made them possible to swarm the whole countryside dealing blows anywhere as I have quoted the *Casus Sancti Galli* above. This is a similar feature to the Viking warfare. In the same work there is a reference of the connections between these small detachments that were using large fires, smoke and horn signs to communicate each other from a distance.¹⁵⁷

In conclusion it can be said that the Hungarians were relatively few in numbers¹⁵⁸ compared to their victims but the coordinated cooperation of the two upper, free, armed military

¹⁵⁴ *Taktika* XIV. 42. In: Kristó 1995, 102.

¹⁵⁵ Al Masudi, *Muruğ al-Dahab*. In: Kristó 1995, 55.

¹⁵⁶ *Taktika* XVIII. 60. In: Kristó 1995, 107.

¹⁵⁷ Kristó 1995, 247.

¹⁵⁸ The serious question of the number of the Hungarians in the ninth and tenth centuries has triggered long debates. I am fully aware of this matter but to treat such a question here is impossible as could fill an entire MA Thesis in itself.

strata combined with their military intelligence earned them victory many times. Their success was also helped by the fact that their tactics was unusual and unknown to European armies therefore it was dangerous as Regino of Prüm mentioned.¹⁵⁹

Pagan military intelligence

As I mentioned earlier the factor of the military intelligence of the attacking pagans has not been emphasized as much as it should have been although its significance is out of the question. I think that both the Vikings and the Hungarians already knew the various political and geographical circumstances of their target areas even at the time of their first attacks. Their quick and devastating blows can surely be attributed to careful planning and good intelligence.¹⁶⁰ In both cases guests and hospitality, trade and travelling merchants¹⁶¹ played a crucial role. The traded “goods” however were slightly different, as the Scandinavians mostly sold furs, slaves and looted goods¹⁶² while the Hungarians traded their military prowess in the first place.¹⁶³

The ancestors of the ninth-century Vikings sailed the Northern Sea from the Merovingian Era and they had contacts with the continent¹⁶⁴ so they had the time to explore the coastal regions.¹⁶⁵ From the ninth century onwards, with the beginning of large scale Scandinavian movements, all these data and information would have been useful as the first attacks show. The

¹⁵⁹ Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon*, in: Kristó 1995, 198.

¹⁶⁰ Griffith 1996, 145.

¹⁶¹ The *Annales Regni Francorum* explicitly mentions that the Danish king, Goðfreð sent messages to Charlemagne via merchants. *Annales Regni Francorum*, 809: ...*Godofridus rex Danorum per negotiatores quosdam mandavit...* Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregni francorum.html> (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

¹⁶² Roesdahl 2007, 146.

¹⁶³ Gyula Kristó, *Az Árpád-kor háborúi* [The Wars of the Árpád Era], (Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1986), 8.

¹⁶⁴ Jones 2001, 82.

¹⁶⁵ Some sources (like the *Widsið* and the *Beowulf*) even give account on an allegedly early Viking attack against Friesland in 521 (Jones 2001, 41.), and some scholars like Axel Olrik also stated that the earliest attacks began in the first decades of the seventh century, to be precise in 617. See: Olrik 1930, 91.

second recorded¹⁶⁶ Viking attack on England hit the rich but undefended small monastery¹⁶⁷ of Lindisfarne. This demonstrated that the Scandinavians knew where to look for easy targets along the coasts of the North Sea. The same applies to the first two attacks against the Frankish Empire in Aquitania¹⁶⁸ in 799 and in Friesland under the leadership of the Danish king, Goðfreð himself, in 810.¹⁶⁹ Later examples also show that the Vikings collected information before launching attacks.

The same applies to the attacks of the Hungarians especially as they were hired as mercenaries by rivalling lords, princes or kings or even the pope himself to break the resistance of their enemies. It is likely that the employers were eager to give detailed accounts of the position of their enemies and offered help in logistics¹⁷⁰ to assure the effectiveness of the Hungarians' attack.

The problem with the exact process of gathering military intelligence, however, is that its methods are not exactly known. Neither the Vikings nor the Hungarians had maps of the

¹⁶⁶ Actually the first one in Portland, Wessex in 789 was not a classical Viking raid. The three – probably Norwegian – ships moored at the shore and because of some kind of misunderstanding the crew killed the bailiff (shire reef) of king Brithric. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle informs us, that the appearance of the North men as traders was not unusual at all that is why the ill fated shire reef approached them with trust to escort them to the market.

¹⁶⁷ The monastery never hosted too many monks, their upper limit was probably ten or twelve which means that even a single longship could have laid it waste.

¹⁶⁸ Aquitania was far from the Frankish core territories but it was a lucrative target for the Vikings, as the valley of Garonne and Loire were rich trading routes offering wine and salt and the main trading and redistributing centre of these goods was on the island of Noirmoutier (See: Jones 2001, 211.) what later became a permanent base of Viking operations against the Western Frankish Empire.

¹⁶⁹ Again, the Danish king, Goðfreð knew that with a quick action he can challenge and defeat the Franks as they were far from Friesland. His formidable fleet of 200 ships (meaning approximately nine-ten thousand warriors) with a quick raid defeated the Frisians three times and took a heavy toll from them even before Charlemagne was informed about their landfall. At least the words of the *Annales Regni Francorum* let me derive this information.

Annales Regni Francorum, 810: *Imperator vero Aquisgrani adhuc agens et contra Godofridum regem expeditionem meditans nuntium accepit, classem ducentarum navium de Nordmannia Frisiam appulisse totasque Frisiaco litori adiacentes insulas esse vastatas iamque exercitum illum in continenti esse ternaque proelia cum Frisonibus commisisse Danosque victores tributum victis inposuisse et vectigalis nomine centum libras argenti a Frisonibus iam esse solutas,...*

Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregni francorum.html> (Accessed: 08 May 2009).

¹⁷⁰ Just as in the case of the Byzantine-Bulgarian war in 894-895 when Emperor León VI hired the Hungarians against Simeon's troops and sent a Byzantine fleet to the Danube to transport the Hungarian detachments to the right bank of the river in Bulgaria. *Taktika* XVIII. 42, in: Kristó 1995, 103.

Frankish Empire or any kind of compasses to navigate in this realm but it seems likely that their merchants, messengers, envoys and travellers who managed to reach these areas collected information at the same time.¹⁷¹ The same applies to the courts of leaders and kings of the pagans who were famous for their hospitality even though their guests could have been regarded as enemies.¹⁷² It seems sure that behind the hospitality there was the constant need for the flow of information, to get and give news in the form of simple chatting, gossip or tales and court poetry.

The Scandinavians and the Hungarians though had an advantage that the Franks did not, namely, that they were the aggressors, the moving enemy who had to find the other who was standing still. An immobile victim is easier to find and hit while it is hard to localise a highly manoeuvrable and nimble opponent or to find his base of operations.¹⁷³ In the case of Scandinavians such localisation was even more difficult as they did not have any land connection¹⁷⁴ with the Frankish Empire. This caused great difficulties during campaigns, as when Louis I decided to intervene in the fight over the Danish throne in favour of his Danish vassal, Haraldr klak, in 815. When the Frankish army reached Denmark the enemies of Haraldr,

¹⁷¹ Like in the case of a Hungarian embassy to the German king, Otto I, in July 955. Widukind of Corvey states in his work, that the Hungarians arrived at the court of the king seemingly to uphold the old loyalty and good relationship between the Germans and Hungarians, but in fact they came to spy on the state of the civil war between the king and his son, who was allied with the king's son-in-law against Otto I. Widukind, *Chronica* III. 42, in: Kristó 1995, 224.

¹⁷² Griffith 1995, 145.

¹⁷³ Griffith 1995, 145.

¹⁷⁴ Except for Jutland what was not taken as the part of Denmark tough in the ninth century, at least the travel account of the Norwegian jarl, Óttar – preserved in Aelfred the Great's Orosius translation – let me conclude this. He had spoken about his voyage from Skiringssalr/Kaupang to Hedeby (that is travelling from north to south) mentioning that the voyage lasted for five days from which in the first three days Denmark was on the left side of the ship. Óttar sailed in the Skagerrak between Jutland and Götaland (today in Sweden) and if he said that Denmark was on the left side, on the East he must have meant that Götaland belongs to Denmark and Jutland is not. Although this conception had changed to the eleventh century as Adam of Bremen in his *Descriptio Insularum Aquilonis* enlisted Jutland as the part of Denmark.

the sons of Goðfreð, withdrew their forces to the main island of Fyn and surrounded it with an enormous fleet of two hundred ships,¹⁷⁵ making it impossible for the Franks to cross.

The time for information gathering and pondering all the questions was the winter, when usually no military actions took place.¹⁷⁶ Data collecting included the methods mentioned above, namely, hosting travellers and guests, sending out merchants and spies, and moving between winter camps. This constant move made it possible to meet more people, to get information from different points of view, to make plans with allies and to make the enemy's task more difficult in finding out the exact place or numbers of the invaders.¹⁷⁷

Chapter Conclusions

After listing and examining these data I conclude that the main reason for the pagan success over the Franks and Italians was not the armaments or the number of invaders, although Christian written sources often give the latter as a sole explanation. The Hungarians used different weapons and tactics than the Vikings, but they attained the same result against the Franks. This must mean that although weaponry or tactics might have made invasions easier they were unimportant for achieving the known pagan results.

I found that well planned, coordinated, swift execution of the raids was more important than sheer numbers, just like the methods of recruiting and setting up armies. The keywords were mobility and adaptability both in the military and social senses. Versatility was also important,

¹⁷⁵ Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, "The making of the Danish kingdom," *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia. Vol. I. Prehistory to 1520*. ed. Knut Helle (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 168-183, 173.

¹⁷⁶ Jones 2001, 223. A winter campaign is known from England in January 878, executed by Guporm and his Vikings, who attacked Alfred the Great in Wessex in the middle of the winter. This kind of warfare was totally unusual, which is why it was so effective. The raid almost delivered a death blow to the reign of the greatest Anglo-Saxon king, who had to flee to the marshes to save his life as the Viking attack caught him completely off guard. The Hungarians usually organised and started their campaigns during the winter. See: Bowlus 1995, 236.

¹⁷⁷ Griffith 1996, 146-147.

but as I have shown, in this case the Franks were better, therefore this factor can not be counted among those, what would have significantly helped the pagans against the Christians.

Chapter II

The Social Background of Viking and Hungarian Raids

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the social conditions, social structures and behavioural standards of Old Norse and Hungarian societies. My goal here is twofold. First, I will show that the worldview of the pagans and their need for social display basically determined their approach to their enemies. Second, I will point out that pagan societies enjoyed certain advantages and disadvantages compared to the Franks. The social flexibility and versatility of the pagans helped the cause of the raids. The community of free and armed men had a swifter military mobilisation capability but also suffered the urge to go to raid its neighbours.

Scholars have already examined some segments of the possible social reasons for the pagan successes and also the societies of both Scandinavians¹⁷⁸ and Hungarians.¹⁷⁹ The main purpose of the previous research in this field was to identify social conditions which could have triggered or helped these attacks. Another goal was to identify those elements or layers in society what were involved in the raiding activity.

¹⁷⁸ The studies so far have not treated the question of Old Norse society in general, only different subfields have been examined. See:

Jesse L. Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

D.M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

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¹⁷⁹ Károly Mesterházy, *Nemzetségi szervezet és az osztályviszonyok kialakulása a honfoglaló magyarságnál* [The formation of the clan structure and the social level conditions of the conquering Hungarians], (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980).

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The three-layered pattern of the Old Norse society and the Scandinavian state structure

The Old Norse society like many societies in the world, had three major strata defined in the birth rights of its members. A crucial difference from the Christian threefold society pattern though, was that out of these three layers, two consisted of free and armed men who formed the majority of the whole society.¹⁸⁰

This stratification is vividly described in the so-called *Rígsþula*,¹⁸¹ a poem from the *Elder Edda*, which describes the three traditional layers of Scandinavian society. The lowest stratum was the layer of slaves and servants,¹⁸² where all the – mostly non-Scandinavian – war captives belonged, regardless to their gender, age or even skin colour.¹⁸³

The second layer was the core of society, the widest stratum, consisting of the common free armed farmers – bondsmen –, craftsmen and traders all around Scandinavia.¹⁸⁴ They could be richer or poorer, as this layer was very diverse concerning wealth and occupations.¹⁸⁵ The common feature of this group was that they sold their military prowess. They served armed, their lords were the richer Scandinavians, who could afford to provide warships to go to raids.

¹⁸⁰ Around the half of the population were women of course. The number of the women however in public spheres were low, it was still greater than in the Christian societies.

¹⁸¹ Roesdahl 2007, 42. A poetic work probably dated to the tenth century but preserved only in a fourteenth century manuscript. It tells the story of the travel of the god Ríg – an aspect of Heimdallr – through the social layers of the Old Norse society. The work uses allegoric pictures of families and their wealth to show the different layers, giving telling names to each member of the given family.

¹⁸² The names of the parents were Ai and Edda (Grand-grandfather and Grand-grandmother), their child was Praell (Servant), he was ugly, black skinned, wrinkled with curved legs. His wife was Þír (Servant maid) who was also ugly. They had numerous children doing all the lowly and inglorious jobs like swine herding, digging up turf and dunging the plough lands. The race of servants originated from them.

¹⁸³ Jones 2001, 216. Irish sources testify that the three-year campaign of the jarls Hástein and Björn járnsiða in the Mediterranean between 859 and 862 actually brought lots of war captives to the slave markets of Dublin. Among them there were numerous black men – blámenn, “blue people” as the Scandinavians called them – from Northern Africa.

¹⁸⁴ The names of the parents were Afi and Amma (Grandfather and Grandmother), their child was Karl (Boy, Free man), he was strong, sturdy, had flashing blue eyes, he had his own houses, oxen, and carts. His wife was Snör (Bride), a decent and typical Scandinavian woman. Among their sons were Halr (Hero), Dreng (Warrior), Smið (Smith), Breith (Broad one), Þegn (Royal servant, Retinue), Bondi (Farmer), Brattskegg (Steep bearded), and Seggr (Warrior). Among the daughters were Snotr (Wise), Brúðr (Bride), Svani (Sea bird), Fljótr (Swift, Diligent), and Víf (Wife). As the names show, these people were the members of the widest stratum that formed the base of Old Norse society.

¹⁸⁵ Roesdahl 2007, 76.

This layer was very mobile and was on the way to social transformation during the Viking Age, therefore its richer members had an urgent need to display their wealth, which created a need for large quantities of precious metals. This need was one of the driving social forces behind the raids. The lower side of this class also had the chance to reach better life conditions through military campaigns, as the Scandinavian society was not as static and democratic as it was imagined earlier.¹⁸⁶ In my opinion, this need and this mobile layer were the main reasons for the military ascendancy over Western European Christian societies, as all members¹⁸⁷ of this stratum was not only free men, farmers or craftsmen, but soldiers at the same time.

The third layer was the stratum of the leaders of the society, the noble warriors (jarl), and kings (konungr), the military aristocracy in one word. According to the *Rígsþula* the members of this group were truly rich and even though they were fewer in number than the free commoners the Scandinavians understood them as the true warriors who were born to fight and lead people to battles,¹⁸⁸ while women in this group probably represented the ideal type of that age.¹⁸⁹ The king who was depicted in the *Rígsþula* was inspired by a crow – I interpret this as an allegoric

¹⁸⁶ Roesdahl 2007, 76-78.

¹⁸⁷ Roesdahl 2007, 80-82. I do not need to limit my statement here only to men as it is known that even women took part in the Viking activities as they were always treated as equal to men in general. The roles, of course, were different, as women did not have the right to go to the assemblies (þing) and they did not have small but coherent groups (félag), but at home they enjoyed a higher status than their husbands. Women in the public domain were few in numbers but according to Irish written sources there were female warriors. One female skald, Jörunn skaldmær and a female rune carver, Gunborga, are also known.

¹⁸⁸ The names of the parents were Faðir and Móðir (Father and Mother), they were noble and beautiful, their child was Jarl (Nobleman). Heimdall called Jarl his own son. Jarl was taught how to handle all weapons, how to ride a horse, how to swim and how to use the secret knowledge of the runes. His wife was Erna the wise, the daughter of Hersir (Overlord) and among their children the youngest was Kon (according to the translation of István Bernáth Kon means “Offspring”. See: Bernáth 2005, 299). Here there is a word game; the original text contains in verse 43 “Konr ungr” meaning “Kon the young” while the word “konungr” means “king”.

¹⁸⁹ *Rígsþula*, verse 29: The lady sat, at her arms she looked,
She smoothed the cloth, and fitted the sleeves;
Gay was her cap, on her breast were clasps,
Broad was her train, of blue was her gown,
Her brows were bright, her breast was shining,
Whiter her neck than new-fallen snow.

picture of Óðin, who was the god of war, among other things¹⁹⁰ – to go to rob and burn the lands of his neighbours, probably referring to the regions of the Don and Dnieper rivers.¹⁹¹

It is important to emphasize that in the beginning of the era I treat here, the political units known today as Norway and Denmark did not exist. Instead, there were numerous Scandinavian kingdoms where local rulers, lords exercised their power, but the extent and might of these political units are not known.¹⁹²

It seems likely that in southern Denmark¹⁹³ there was a certain kind of centralised government from the eighth century onward¹⁹⁴ because all the large scale building activities¹⁹⁵ started around that time needed more manpower than a simple local ruler could have mobilised. Otherwise, other parts of Denmark and the whole of Norway were divided into petty kingdoms.

Towards to end of the ninth century sharply different processes developed in these Scandinavian territories as the relatively united Denmark had fallen apart after a serious and long conflict over the throne culminating in the massacre of the Danish royal house in 854.¹⁹⁶ The country later temporarily became the part of Sweden.¹⁹⁷ Norway under the long, iron fist rule of Haraldr hárfagri for the first time in her history experienced the most successful attempt of a charismatic leader to become sole ruler.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁰ The animals associated to Óðin were the ravens Huginn and Muninn. Although the original wording of the *Rígsþula* uses the term kráka “crow” and not hrafn “raven” I still think that the inspiration here comes from Óðin.

¹⁹¹ Bernáth 2005, 300.

¹⁹² Roesdahl 2007, 87.

¹⁹³ According to more written sources the territory was called Sillende and was independent to the rest of the Danish territories. Its inhabitants were named south Danes in the poem Widsið.

¹⁹⁴ Roesdahl 2007, 98-99.

¹⁹⁵ The foundation of the trading centre of Ribe on the western coast of Jutland around 700, the construction of the Kanhave channel on the island of Samsø in 726, the construction works of the first phase on the Danevirke from 737 onwards.

¹⁹⁶ Jones 2001, 109. The *Annales Regni Francorum* offers a very detailed contemporary account on all the political events in Denmark at this time.

¹⁹⁷ Brøndsted 1983, 69.

¹⁹⁸ Roesdahl 2007, 100. The rule of Haraldr hárfagri has triggered scholarly debates. The topics of these debates were – or rather are – the dates of his rule, the date of the major battle of Hafsfjord and whether his nearly fifty years of rule were able to unify Norway or not. A detailed study was offered by Claus Krag in 2003. See: Claus

To sum up in one sentence what is known, Scandinavia was too large and too difficult of access even for the Scandinavians themselves to build up a strong, centralised government over all the territories, and the population lived in segmented small communities. Unification processes occurred through the ninth century with serious internal fights for power. Most of the society belonged into the two upper strata, which were free and armed. The members of these strata had different wealth and rights, and under them was the lowest class of slaves and servants, who could be either Scandinavians or non-Scandinavians dealing – probably – with any kind of jobs,¹⁹⁹ but warfare.

The three-layered pattern of Hungarian society and the Hungarian state structure

The structure of Hungarian society is mostly known from archaeological and place name evidence, with few written sources and nothing written by Hungarians.²⁰⁰ First, at least from the 830s – when Muslim sources started to deal with the Magyars – the Hungarians formed an independent political unit, a “nation” or rather tribal confederation, as all the Arab authors used their own name – Magyars²⁰¹ – when they mentioned them.²⁰² The nation formation must have come to an end somewhere in the region of Magna Hungaria, as the eight tribe names²⁰³ given by

Krag, “The early unification of Norway,” *The Cambridge history of Scandinavia*, ed. Knut Helle (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 184-201.

¹⁹⁹ Roesdahl 2007, 75-76. Not necessarily only the lowly ones, as a certain Toke is known from a rune stone from Hørning, Denmark. Toke was a slave and after he got his freedom back from his master, Þorgisl Guðmundsson, he became a smith, a respected member of any community at that time.

²⁰⁰ I do not take Anonymus’ *Gesta Hungarorum* as a relevant source for the ninth and tenth century.

²⁰¹ The sources use the name forms *muġf.rīya* (Ibn Rustah), *m.ġġ.rīyan* (Gardezi), *m.hf.rīya* (Al-Bakri), and *maġġari* (Hudud al-Alam). The base form must have sounded like *maġġarīya*. See: Kristó 1995, 39. n.74.

²⁰² Dienes 1972, 9.

²⁰³ The tribe of the Kabars, Nyéki, Gyarmati, Kürtügyarmatu, Tarján, Jeneh, Keri, Keszi. (*DAI* 40. In: Kristó 1995, 127-128.) It is likely that the tribe Kürtügyarmatu originally was two tribes and was contracted into one later as there are no place names originating from the combined name, Kürt and Gyarmat can only be found separately.

Emperor Constantine VII in the *De Administrando Imperio* can be found in place names both in the Carpathian Basin and Baskiria.²⁰⁴

Hungarian society in the ninth century was more compact and more complex than the Scandinavian society due to its smaller size and smaller dwelling place. It consisted of the same three layers²⁰⁵ as the Old Norse according to grave finds, but at the same time it was also vertically divided into eight parts, tribes.²⁰⁶ The tribal division was artificial and according to the grave finds of the ninth century it started to diminish before the conquest of the Carpathian Basin, which took place from 895 onwards.²⁰⁷ The dissolution of the tribe system was a longer process, but it seems sure that the late structure of the society based on blood relationships gave place to the territorial organisation of the tenth century. In the new system, one big family – clan (genus)²⁰⁸ – held power over large areas²⁰⁹ and recruited its military retinue from this territory regardless of the vertical divisions (tribes).²¹⁰

The *Taktika* of Emperor León VI mentions that the Hungarians were led by many leaders except times of war.²¹¹ One is well informed about the typical Asian dual leadership of the tribal confederation, where the main representative of the people before the gods was the sacral ruler

²⁰⁴ Dienes 1972, 8.

²⁰⁵ Dienes 1972, 18. Although Dienes divides the second stratum, the free commoners into two layers according to their wealth, the same could have been done in the case of Scandinavians, therefore I do not agree with Dienes. I rather think that the military aristocracy, the actual body of the mounted army was the part of the uppermost stratum and the second stratum, the free armed men belonged to the culture what can be attested in the graves of the so called Bjelo Brdo culture.

²⁰⁶ A different question is how many of the eight tribes were actually Hungarian. According to the names of the tribes, at least four out of the original seven had non-Hungarian names, implying that those tribes consisted of mostly alien – Turkish – elements. The eighth tribe was totally alien; the Khazar tribe was organised from three different tribal fragments into one tribe, and it joined the tribal confederation only after it had left the territory of the Khazar Khaganate.

²⁰⁷ Dienes 1972, 12.

²⁰⁸ Dienes 1972, 21. Most likely five clans formed one tribe.

²⁰⁹ According to György Györffy these territories correspond to the later territories of the counties. See: Dienes 1972, 20.

²¹⁰ Dienes 1972, 23.

²¹¹ *Taktika* XVIII. 43. and 46. In: Kristó 1995, 104-105.

called *kündü/kändü*, while the military leader was the *gyula/djilah*.²¹² This dual system suffered a serious blow during the combined Bulgarian-Peceneg attack in 895. Álmos – the sacral leader at the time – was sacrificed after the serious defeat, according to the customary laws.²¹³ The new sacral leader, Kussal, was assassinated by the Bavarians in 907,²¹⁴ which most likely put an end to the institute of dual leadership.

In the raiding activities the uppermost class was the best represented but also the second one, the layer of the armed free men, were involved just as in the case of the Scandinavians.²¹⁵ In the earlier times though – unlike the Viking case – these strata acted as one unit in the campaigns. The raids were fragmented later, when only different territorial groups took part in them.²¹⁶ I conclude from the sources that perhaps some appropriate members of the third – the slave – stratum also took part in the raiding activities, based on the work of Regino of Prüm, who stated that the Hungarians diligently taught their children and servants how to ride and how to shoot arrows.²¹⁷ The numbers of these auxiliary forces, however, were surely relatively small.

Virtues and the world interpretation in Scandinavia

Every society in the world has norms and paradigms which tell and circumscribe the way of ethical life for the members of that society, by giving examples to the people to be socialised properly and by restricting and restraining several things. These morals, the ethical and unethical

²¹² Ibn Rustah's account in: Kristó 1995, 32-33. There are still questions around the dual leadership. Its existence seems highly likely, its characteristics may have originated from the Khazar Khaganate but identifying the *kändü* and the *gyula* with known contemporary leader names is often a problem.

²¹³ Kristó 1986, 10.

²¹⁴ *Annales Alamannici*, 907. In: Kristó 1995, 202.

²¹⁵ Kristó 1986, 181.

²¹⁶ Kristó 1986, 25-27. It seems sure that only a few clans took part in the raid of 906 in Saxony. Otherwise, 917 was the first year when two raiding campaigns were organised at the same time; one to the West and one to the South which means that the earlier unity of the upper layers involved in the raids was surely divided at least into two.

²¹⁷ Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon* in: Kristó 1995, 199.

or sinful things are defined by the basic world view, the religious life of the society, by the customary laws, and in the end by the community itself. These laws and rules often take the shape of divine laws or promulgations.

In my opinion it is crucial to examine this question if one wants to understand the main spiritual pillar that elevated the pagan ideas on life over the Christian conception of the world and to see why Christianity was later so popular among the Scandinavians. Psychology has shown scientifically that it is normal for a member of any group to prefer his or her group over “others”, but in the case of Scandinavians I think it was also important in addition to the normal self-preference that their interpretation of the world had a serious, totally determined nature with no place for doubts concerning one’s fate.

The ancient, and in the first times shapeless, spirits, the *Norns* – Urð, Verðandi and Skuld, the Past, Present and Future – were responsible for determining the unchangeable fate of every living being and lifeless thing in the Scandinavian universe. Their decision was definite, therefore nothing – not even the gods themselves, although very hard they tried – could ever possibly change it.²¹⁸ And there were frightening bad omens. The death of a god, Balðr, and the aggressiveness of the untameable Fenrir wolf were the first signs of the coming Fimbulvetr and the end of the world, the Ragnarök, when almost all the gods fallen.²¹⁹ This dark and inevitable world view influenced the wild behaviour of the Vikings. Why would one have had any inhibitions – especially in connection with the “other” folks – if everything and everyone’s fate was already decided?

Scholarship is well informed about what the Scandinavians saw as desirable and undesirable personal features, so a wide and – let me add in advance –controversial worldview

²¹⁸ Bernáth 2005, 11.

²¹⁹ Bernáth 2005, 19-20.

appears in the pages of the *Elder Edda*. The *Hávamál*, the sayings of Óðin, conveyed a two-layered teaching for the Scandinavians. One layer speaks about the “classical” Scandinavian virtues like bravery, pride and being cunning and outwitting others. The other enlists the virtues of a good farmer who only cares about his crops, homestead and everyday pleasures of life, avoiding the stereotypical issues connected to the Vikings. These two layers appear mixed in the work without any external signs of separation.²²⁰

The *Hávamál*²²¹ is a long poetic work consisting of 1082 lines in 164 verses. It has three major sections from which the first two contain information that pertains here. The first and oldest ninety-three stanza contains Óðin’s councils and admonitions concerning the community and everyday life of the Northern free farmers in the ninth to eleventh centuries. It does not explicitly mention the Vikings, but seeing that this vertical social layer was formed mostly from the free farmers, in their virtues one can also see the virtues of the Vikings.²²² The second section, the so called *Loddfáfnir Song*, most probably contains admonitions for young people (as *Loddfáfnir* means “he who knows little” or “empty headed”) and most likely it was connected to the ritual of initiation to manhood.²²³

The most important common and simple virtues are the ones connected to travelling, receiving guests and community behavioural matters, as these were strongly connected to everyday life. Among these the most important general rules are that one should always welcome guests and newcomers in his house,²²⁴ he should be always happy and friendly to the guests and

²²⁰ In my opinion this means that the Scandinavians did not take the Vikings as a separate unit or social layer in their community. To be a Viking was an occupation just like as being a farmer or a merchant therefore there was no need to teach the sociological norms to them separately.

²²¹ Preserved in the manuscript Codex Regius (Gamle Kongelige Samling 2365) written around 1260.

²²² Bernáth 2005, 163-164.

²²³ Bernáth 2005, 165.

²²⁴ *Hávamál* verse 132: ...never mock or laugh | at a guest or traveller.

Hávamál verse 136: Powerful is that beam | that must move from side to side | to open for all; | give a ring, | or it will call down | every evil on your limbs.

the host should be always ready to speak fast and wise words,²²⁵ offering meals, drinks and good company and entertainment to his guests,²²⁶ as the speechless and avaricious host was just as bad as the gluttonous guest.²²⁷

The timing of these social events is also treated from the time of guest's arrival²²⁸ through the properly timed behaviour of the guest²²⁹ till the proper time to leave the house of the host.²³⁰ The same applies to the simple manners, common sense;²³¹ a rather long part covers the desirable role of sharp wits, a clever mind and being good with words. The lines about being clever are rather realistic, showing the Norsemen's simple conceptions of life and its beauty, as these verses take cleverness and wisdom as a great value but with limitations. The measure of one's wits should be medium, no one should be too wise or too foolish in order to reach happiness, which is also a value.²³²

The role of this strictly organised social activity must have been twofold. First, it was the perfect occasion for the host's social display where he could show off his wealth gained in the

²²⁵ Hávamál verse 103: At home a man must be glad | and cheerful with guests, | knowing about himself, | mindful and fluent, | if he wants to be well-informed; | he should often speak of good things. | He is called a monstrous fool, | the one who knows how to say almost nothing: | it is the character of the unwise.

²²⁶ Hávamál verses 3-4: There is need of fire | for him who is come in | with cold knees; | there is need of food and clothes | for the man | who has journeyed on the mountainside.

There is need of water, | for the one who comes for a meal, | of towel and friendly intonation; | of good disposition, | if he can get it, | of speech and silence in return.

²²⁷ Hávamál verse 67: Here and there | I would be invited home | if I needed no food at meals; | or two hams would hang | at a loyal friend's | where I had eaten one.

Hávamál verse 20: A greedy man, | unless he knows his mind, | often causes his life's sorrow by eating; | often the stomach gains ridicule, | when he comes among wise men, | for the foolish man.

²²⁸ Hávamál verse 66: I came to many places | very much too soon, | and too late to some; | sometimes the ale was drunk, | sometimes it wasn't ready; | the unwelcome one seldom hits the spot.

²²⁹ Hávamál verse 19: Do not let a man hold on to a goblet, | but let him drink mead in moderation, | let him talk sense or be silent. | No man blames you | of bad manners, | that you go early to sleep.

²³⁰ Hávamál verse 35: The guest must go, | he must not be | always in the same place; | loved becomes loathed | if he stays a long time | in the hall of another.

²³¹ Hávamál verse 7: The wary guest | who comes for a meal | is silent with strained hearing, | listens with ears | and examines with eyes; | so each of the wise searches about himself.

²³² Hávamál verses 54-56: Each man must be | moderately wise, | but never too wise; | for those people | it is most pleasant to live | when they don't know a great many things.

Each man must be | moderately wise, | but never too wise; | because the wise man's heart | is seldom glad, | if he who owns it is completely wise.

Each man must be | moderately wise, | but never too wise; | no-one should know beforehand | his fate; | for that one is the mind most free from care.

raids, which surely inspired the guests to join to such campaigns. Such a display would strengthen the new social status of these upcoming men. Wealth justified their claims to new roles in society. Second, it was the perfect occasion for spreading and receiving news.

The *Hávamál* does not leave any doubt concerning whom or what one should trust,²³³ how to choose friends and keep them close, how to win love even with another's wife,²³⁴ what one should think about oneself and others.²³⁵ It places happiness over strife, but with a strict restriction: everyone should always give what he gets from the other, no matter if it is a friendly manner, acrimonious irony or silent suspicion.²³⁶ Contrary to the Christian worldview, in Old Norse society the lies, tricks and flattery had their rightful place among the virtues of common men, as tools of outwitting others.²³⁷

This layer of the *Hávamál* is full of the joy of life. Here there is nothing about the too proud and too aggressive Viking lifestyle, here even old age and handicapped members of the society have their rightful and useful place. The only useless state of men here is being dead.²³⁸

²³³ *Hávamál* verse 84: No-one should trust | in the words of a maid, | nor in what a woman says, | for their hearts were shaped | on a (potter's) turning wheel, | and fickleness placed in their breasts.

Hávamál verse 86: ...a flying spear, | a falling wave, | ice one night old, | a coiled snake, | a bride's bed-talk | or a broken sword, | a bear's game | or a king's son,...

Hávamál verse 89: In his brother-slayer, | though he is met on the road, | in a half-burnt house, | in a horse too-speedy – | a steed is useless | if he breaks a foot – | a man should not be so trustful | that he trusts all these.

²³⁴ Although adultery in general was taken as a crime with very serious consequences (See: Roesdahl 2007, 82), the *Loddfáfnir* Song gives a typical middle way perception on this matter. It is a sin but if one has to commit it, it is allowed but one has to be wary. *Hávamál* verse 131: ...wary I bid you be, | but not too wary: | with ale be the most wary | and with another's woman,...

²³⁵ *Hávamál* verse 24: The unwise man | thinks them all to be | his friends, those who laugh at him; | he does not notice | even if they express malice against him | when he sits among wise men.

Hávamál verse 26: The unwise man | thinks he knows everything | if he has refuge for himself in a corner | but he does not know | what he must say in reply, | if men test him.

²³⁶ *Hávamál* verse 46: There is more about the one | whom you mistrust | and whose disposition you suspect: | you should laugh with him | and speak other than your thought. | There should be repayment for such gifts.

²³⁷ *Hávamál* verse 45: If you have another | whom you mistrust, | but you want to get something good from him, | you must speak fair to him, | and think deceitful thoughts, | and give deception in return for a lie.

²³⁸ *Hávamál* verses 70-72: It is better for the living | than for the dead, | the living man always gets the cow; | I saw the fire burn up | before a rich man, | but death was outside the door.

The lame man rides a horse, | the one-armed man drives the herd, | the deaf man fights and is useful; | it is better to be blind | than burnt: | no-one is helped by a corpse.

This conception differs sharply from the Viking ideas on life and pride as death here appears as the most avoidable thing.²³⁹

To turn to the more warlike and aggressive aspect of the Old Norse society I will examine those virtues and conceptions which had led to the world interpretation of the Vikings. I think that in the spiritual background of their success these ideas were responsible for the arrogant, doubtless and bold behaviour against the Christian people of Western Europe. The Scandinavians were, of course, not against Christianity or against any religious attitude at all. Their acts were most probably influenced by the simple fact that their victims did not belong to the Norse cultural group or rather to their narrower environment where these rules guided everyday life. This seems apparent in Adam of Bremen's account, who states that not even the Scandinavian were safe from the attacks of their own kind, as the Vikings were just as ruthless to their kinsmen as to anyone else.²⁴⁰

The more aggressive aspect of the *Hávamál* starts with simple safety advices connected to the everyday life of the ninth century. One should be ever-vigilant when going to known or new places,²⁴¹ should not be unarmed at any time,²⁴² and treat true friends well but never talk to the friends of enemies.²⁴³ After these basic directives comes what saturated the Viking mentality deeply. Always be ready and eager to fight whenever opportunity or need arises, fight in cold blood, and be brave and enthusiastic till death comes. Death is not a dreadful thing in this

A son is better, | though he be late-begotten, | after a man is gone; | memorial stones seldom | stand by the road | unless a kinsman should raise [them] to kin.

²³⁹ Page 1995, 139-141.

²⁴⁰ Adam of Bremen, *Descriptio Insularum Aquilonis*, capitulum 6: *Unde etiam contingit, ut licentia, quam in hostes acceperunt, saepe abutantur in suos; adeo fide nulla utrique ad invicem sunt, et sine misericordia quisque alterum, mox ut ceperit, in ius famulicii vel socio vendit vel barbaro.* Source: <http://hbar.phys.msu.ru/gorm/chrons/bremen.htm#descrip> (Accessed: 11 May 2009).

²⁴¹ *Hávamál* verse 1: Before one would advance | through each doorway, | one must look about | and peer around, | because one can't know for sure | where enemies | sit in the hall beforehand.

²⁴² *Hávamál* verse 38: A man in the open country must not | go more than one step | from his weapons; | because one can't be sure | when, outside on the roads, | a spear will be needed by a warrior.

²⁴³ *Hávamál* verse 43: A man must be a friend | to his friend, | for himself and for the friend, | but no man must | be a friend of a friend | of his foe.

conception, it is rather a desirable and heroic event, and it does not matter if it reaches someone during fighting against Christians or one's own Scandinavian kinsmen.²⁴⁴ To grow old is rather shameful here as old age is attributed to cowards and foolish people who escape fights because they fear death and foolishly hope to have eternal life.²⁴⁵

Another important topic in the “Viking layer” of the *Hávamál* is the question of pride and vengeance. The Sayings of Óðin give advice on how to rob, mock or kill one's neighbours to humiliate them and also gives permission to do that.²⁴⁶ This aspect is probably connected to what I have already mentioned in the first chapter, namely, that “nocturnal hall burning” – as Paddy Griffith termed it – became a popular “social activity”. Its heyday was the eleventh century; its purpose was to take revenge on or simply to insult a rival family or village. Revenge and pride went hand in hand in the Viking era as insults were meant to put shame on one's fame and reputation. Since to gain reputation and fame were key notions behind the spiritual driving force of the raids,²⁴⁷ and also the main virtues to elevate someone to an immortal status²⁴⁸ in the collective memory of the society,²⁴⁹ any insult or shame on pride by an enemy was taken as an intolerable act.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁴ Page 1995, 105-106.

²⁴⁵ *Hávamál* verses 15-16: A ruler's son must be | silent and thoughtful | and brave in battle; | each man must be | happy and cheerful | until he suffers death.

The foolish man | thinks he will live forever | if he avoids battle; | but old age gives | him no peace, | though spears might spare him.

²⁴⁶ *Hávamál* verse 58: He must rise early, | the one who wants to have another's | wealth or life; | seldom does a lying wolf | get a ham | or a sleeping man victory.

²⁴⁷ Of course together with the more mundane wish to gain wealth and a better life than in Scandinavia.

²⁴⁸ *Hávamál* verses 76-77: Cattle die, | kinsmen die, | the self dies likewise; | but the renown | for the one who gets good fame | dies never.

Cattle die, | kinsmen die, | the self dies likewise; | I know one thing | that never dies: | the reputé of each of the dead.

²⁴⁹ This elevation was accomplished with the invaluable help of heroic court poetry pursued on a very high level by the skalds. Their style actually was more complex and rigid than the style of the elaborated classical Roman hexameter based poetry. Rigidness does not apply to the word order but to the strict rules of the metrum and the length of the lines what makes these poems even harder to translate and interpret. In my opinion it can be said without exaggeration that skaldic poetry was the most difficult to create and to understand in Europe in the ninth-twelfth centuries.

²⁵⁰ *Hávamál* verse 127: ...when you come upon misdeeds | speak out about those misdeeds, | and give your enemies no peace.

Virtues and the world interpretation of the Hungarians

The question of the worldview of the Hungarians is more problematic, as there are no written materials produced by the Hungarians themselves. Therefore, one has to rely upon other sources which are one-sided and exaggerated and mostly shed a very bad light on the Magyars in the ninth and tenth centuries. The account of the mentally handicapped monk of Sankt Gallen, Heribald on the Hungarians invading the monastery in the 1 of May 926 may be the only positive exception giving a lively and vivid picture of the friendly and human side of the pagans.

According to Gardezi the Hungarians liked splendour and to show their wealth by wearing gilded weapons, belts and clothes.²⁵¹ The words of the source are further confirmed by archaeological finds such as the cemeteries of Karos and Benepusztá, where numerous gold coins were found in a leader's grave from around the 930s. All the coins had two holes in them implying that these objects were sewn to the cloth of the owner, clearly showing a very direct way of showing off wealth.²⁵²

The work *Hudud al-Alam* describes Hungarians as wealthy but coarse and primitive people.²⁵³ Probably this conception of the Hungarians originated from the fact that the Muslim author(s) simply took the nomadic steppe nations in general as barbaric, low class people. Therefore I think this statement was not against the Hungarians themselves but against the state they occupied in the traditional world interpretation of a high culture.

However the *Taktika* of Emperor León VI is the finest source on the tactics of the Hungarians – as I have shown in the previous chapter – it also contains a few bits of information concerning the behaviour and society of the Magyars. It states that the “Turks” [Hungarians] –

²⁵¹ Kristó 1995, 38.

²⁵² László Révész, *A karosi honfoglalás kori temetők. Régészeti adatok a Felső-Tisza-vidék X. századi történetéhez* [The conquest period cemeteries in Karos. Archaeological data to the tenth-century history of the Upper Tisza region], (Miskolc, 1996), 187.

²⁵³ Kristó 1995, 42.

unlike other Scythe nations – obeyed the orders of a single leader [probably only in times of war²⁵⁴] but otherwise they were ignorant concerning community duties.²⁵⁵ The Hungarians were disciplined, but only because of they feared their leaders. They also were resistant to extreme natural conditions like heat or cold, they were unfriendly, cunning and untrustworthy, never exposed their real intentions, and their greediness knew no limits. Usually they were well informed concerning the political affairs of their victims, precariously spying out the best opportunity to strike them down. The Hungarians – if they had a chance – did not use their military prowess but rather their tricks and lies to outwit and defeat their foes.²⁵⁶ The greatest sin in their eyes was the betrayal of their own kinsmen and they never gave up fighting except after they had suffered a crushing defeat.²⁵⁷

The work of Regino of Prüm is too general and exaggerated on the habits and origins of the Hungarians, still it is worth mentioning as it shows some topics what the Latin author believed to be true concerning the Magyars. He states in his chronicle that the Hungarians were proud and rebellious, untrustworthy and disrespectful towards everybody. Their very nature was to be wild, they were always ready to wage war on anyone, and they would rather act than speak.²⁵⁸ It seems likely that Regino followed the mandatory topoi in describing the pagans, as one can find striking similarities with the description of the Vikings shown above. Although – as I will treat in detail in the conclusion – the behavioural patterns of the pagan societies surely followed similar patterns that were different from the Christian regulations of the society.

So far I have only shown negative perceptions of the Hungarians, but fortunately there is a fair contemporary account from the work of Ekkehard, who continued Ratpert's *Casus Sancti*

²⁵⁴ Kristó 1995, 105.

²⁵⁵ *Taktika* XVIII. 43, in: Kristó 1995, 104.

²⁵⁶ *Taktika* XVIII. 46-48, in: Kristó 1995, 105.

²⁵⁷ *Taktika* XVIII. 67 and 74, in: Kristó 1995, 108-109.

²⁵⁸ Kristó 1995, 199.

Galli.²⁵⁹ The account of the Hungarians attacking the monastery of Sankt Gallen in 926 is partly based on the tale of the monk Heribald, the only one who did not flee with the others. His act did not come from bravery but from his handicapped mental state.

Heribald stated the he had never before met such a friendly, cheerful, playful and generous people, who lavishly gave him food and drink whenever he asked for it. He added though, that he did not like that the Hungarians were so wild and rampant obeying to nobody's orders but their leaders'. The final addition to the whole picture was that although the Magyars were rude and obscene, making fun of everything, they were nevertheless always eager to earn a friendly attitude with the help of small presents like wine or food.²⁶⁰

From these extreme accounts I conclude that the major patterns and virtues of the Hungarian moral standards were more or less similar to the Scandinavian ones, at least as far as the warlike aspect is concerned. Pride, aggression, wild and free behaviour, trickiness, lies, and breaking oaths in the hope of greater gain were also found among the Scandinavian virtues, just like keeping friendly demeanour towards travellers, giving small presents, enjoying life without any inhibitions, or being silent and ready to act. Probably the perception of everyday life was similar to the Scandinavian one, as it is known that social gatherings and great feasts were popular among Hungarians. Kussal, the *kändä* was even assassinated in such a feast.

Not as much is known about the religious worldview of the pagan Hungarians as about the Scandinavians. There is no sign that they had such a deterministic fate and universe as the Scandinavians had.

²⁵⁹ Kristó 1995, 246.

²⁶⁰ Kristó 1995, 251-252.

Chapter Conclusions

I think that one of the most important key factors of pagan ascendancy over Western Europe was their social structure and crucially different world views. Both pagan cultures shared some common features concerning how to treat different nations and people in general²⁶¹ and both societies had similar structures.

Most people in both cultures belonged to the free and armed social layers who had the right, power, opportunity and the obligation too to use their weapons if they wanted to get a better life, to get fame or simply to survive. This probably radically boosted their effectiveness against the settled Christian communities where – compared to the pagans – only a narrow part of the society had the right and the wealth to wield weapons.

I think – at least in the times of the first encounters – that was the reason for the Viking brutality against every man, as they only saw men and they probably thought that it was destined for every man to be a soldier. They did not care if their victims were monks or craftsmen, if they ran and if they did not have weapons it was their own fault, originating from their cowardice or slave status.

A similarly important factor would have been that Christians were promised eternal life in heaven in certain circumstances, which – at least theoretically – kept them from behaving too wildly. At the same time the pagans – at least the Scandinavians – had no hope for eternal life although they had conceptions of the netherworld.²⁶² Therefore the pagans had only one chance

²⁶¹ The personal level – as usually – was quite friendly as Heribald's account and the *Hávamál* showed.

²⁶² The Scandinavians in fact believed in more netherworlds in the same time. The Halls of Óðin, the Valhöll was opened for the righteous, brave and bold warriors, the halls of other gods hosted other men, while the goddess Freya's palace was the place for women. Hel, the daughter of the mysterious Loki was the eternal queen of the deepest bowels of the netherworld – to which she actually gave her name – meant to receive the damned, who were carried to hell by the Niðhöggr dragon. Nevertheless these numerous eternal places – after Heimdallr had given sign with his Gjallarhorn – were destroyed in the Ragnarök. The end of the Nine Worlds destroyed almost everyone in every level of the netherworld. Therefore the Scandinavians knew that even the most prestigious place, Valhöll did not mean safety from the destruction as its lord, Óðin was devoured by Fenrir wolf. The topic has a wide literature.

to commemorate their name for eternity, that is, their very lifetime on earth. They probably were fatalists, as they were told about the *Norns* who had already decided everyone's fate. This fatalism had two effects. First, the unscrupulous behaviour towards aliens, second, the quick adaptation of the notion of a safe and eternal afterlife in the form of an emerging new god, the resurrected White Balðr-Christ.²⁶³

I also have to add one more key notion to this analysis of the social backgrounds of pagan success, the flexibility, versatility and the ability of both peripheral societies to be adaptive.²⁶⁴ This factor was important for the successful survival of both cultures. It made possible to take over from the target cultures whatever what was regarded as useful, whether weaponry or anything else, and made it easier to survive in different life conditions. The two most telling examples of this versatility are the Norse colonisation in the North Atlantic and the adaptation of the Christian faith by both cultures in the eleventh century, which was a tool for a successful survival and contributed the High Middle Ages.

For a short overview see: Bernáth 2005, 10-21.

For longer treatise see the newest publication:

eds. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, Catharina Raudvere, *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006).

Among numerous others classical works are:

H.R.E. Davidson, *Scandinavian Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1969). Reissued as *Viking and Norse Mythology* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996).

Raymond Ian Page, *Norse Myths (The Legendary Past)* (London: British Museum and Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

²⁶³ Bernáth 2005, 19.

²⁶⁴ On the Viking versatility see: Roesdahl 2007, 243-244.

Chapter III

Historical Analysis of Pagan Attacks; What Devastation Contributed?

Introduction

In this chapter I will show how the Viking and Hungarian attacks affected the historical development of the West, namely the Frankish Empire and later successor states. My main goal with this historical overview is to show that even though both pagan cultures damaged the Christian world they still contributed to the rise of the High Middle Ages.

My presumption is that the proportion of the damage caused by the pagans was less than the damage caused by the internal wars among fellow Christians in the empire.²⁶⁵ The attacks – although they caused suffering – were rather an inspiring force behind the renewal and revival of ninth and tenth century Western Europe.

Viking attacks on the Frankish Empire

The first Viking attacks on the empire happened in 799 and in 810 during the sole reign of Charlemagne. The first one, though, did not hit any important areas of the empire, only the distant archipelago along the Aquitanian coast. It was most likely executed by Norwegians coming from Ireland.²⁶⁶ This event was so unimportant that neither the *Annales Regni*

²⁶⁵ Roesdahl 2007, 286. This statement is true and justified in other territories as well, like the British Isles, although these territories are out of the scope of my present work. Still it is important to note that in Ireland in the first twenty five years of the Scandinavian – mostly Norwegian – raids the Irish written sources mention twenty six Viking raids while in the same time the Irish led eighty seven campaigns against each other.

²⁶⁶ Jones 2001, 195.

Francorum nor the *Annales Xantenses* recorded it.²⁶⁷ The second one in 810 can be taken as the first full-scale Viking attack led by one of the Danish kings, Goðfreð.

The Vikings started their attacks against the empire more than twenty years later than against the British Isles; the reason was probably that mostly Norwegians, who lacked arable lands more than the Danes, attacked the latter territories.²⁶⁸ *Annales Regni Francorum* and the archaeological evidence let me conclude that the Danes were engaged in securing their trade system²⁶⁹ centred in Hedeby, which was threatened by the Franks and their Slavic allies.²⁷⁰ The sources clearly show a process between 804 and 810 that turned the relationships between the Empire and the Danes hostile.²⁷¹

The *Annales Regni Francorum* describes that during the raid of 810 Goðfreð arrived at the northern frontiers of the empire, to Friesland, with two hundred ships. He exploited the

²⁶⁷ This attack was mentioned in a letter of Alcuin of York.

²⁶⁸ The Danes were who started to attack the Empire from 810 onwards, the Norwegians joined up only later as far as we can tell from the sources.

²⁶⁹ Foote-Wilson 1970, 11.

²⁷⁰ The Saxon wars of Charlemagne from 772 till the early years of the ninth century surely made the Danes wary of the dangers of the Frankish conquest in their very vicinity. The ill fate of Widukind – a Saxon prince and refugee in the Danish court – most probably served as a good and baleful example to the Danes.

²⁷¹ The Frankish source gives an account of the Danes from 782 onwards. In 804 it implies that Goðfreð attacked the Slavic tribes just south of the Danish frontier, and in 808 he led a full-fledged campaign against the rival merchant town of Reric and the Frankish ally Slavic Obodrite (“Abodritus”) tribe that triggered open hostilities between the empire and the Danes. The emperor sent his son against Goðfreð, but no battle took place between the two powers. In 809 Goðfreð asked the emperor to keep a general assembly where he wanted to settle the matter in peace, but the gathering was fruitless. These events led to a Viking attack in the next year.

Annales Regni Francorum, 804: *Eodem tempore Godofridus rex Danorum venit cum classe sua necnon et omni equitatu regni sui ad locum, qui dicitur Sliesthorp, in confinio regni sui et Saxoniae.*

Annales Regni Francorum, 808: *...Godofridum regem Danorum in Abodritos cum exercitu traiecisse, Carlum filium suum ad Albiam cum valida Francorum et Saxonum manu misit...*

Godofridus vero, priusquam reverteretur, distructo emporio, quod in oceani litore constitutum lingua Danorum Reric dicebatur et magnam regno illius commoditatem vectigalium persolutione praestabat, translatisque inde negotiatoribus, soluta classe ad portum, qui Sliesthorp dicitur, cum universo exercitu venit.

Annales Regni Francorum, 809: *...Godofridus rex Danorum [...] Petebat etiam, ut conventus comitum imperatoris atque suorum iuxta terminos regni sui trans Albim fieret, in quo res invicem gestae proferri et emendatione digna inter partes enumerari potuissent. [...] multisque hinc et inde prolati atque enumerati rebus negotio penitus infecto discessum est.*

Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregni francorum.html> (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

Turning to the archaeological evidence according to dendrochronology the fortified wall on the southernmost border of Denmark, the Danevirke was started to be built in 737 and was continuously enlarged and supplemented from this time onward obviously to protect the town of Hedeby and to serve as a channel between the Schlei fjord and the river Treene going to the Northern Sea. On the date of the building see: Roesdahl 2007, 178.

swiftness of his army and destroyed the archipelago along the Frisian coast and defeated the Friesian troops inland three times. All this happened before Charlemagne was informed about the arrival of the raiders.²⁷² The attack was surely well planned; according to the work *De Carolo Magno* the Danes had carefully chosen the time of attack.²⁷³ This source also mentions that Goðfreð was killed during this raid by one of his sons so the strife did not lead to open war.²⁷⁴ The other reason for the postponed battle was that although Charlemagne collected his army and marched against the Danes he hesitated to pick up the fight.²⁷⁵ He had experienced some tragic omens²⁷⁶ right before the conflict which may have kept him from rushing into battle or maybe he simply knew that the situation would be solved with the death of Goðfreð.²⁷⁷

²⁷² *Annales Regni Francorum*, 810: *Imperator vero Aquisgrani adhuc agens et contra Godofridum regem expeditionem meditans nuntium accepit, classem ducentarum navium de Nordmannia Frisiam appulisse totasque Frisiaco litori adiacentes insulas esse vastatas iamque exercitum illum in continenti esse ternaque proelia cum Frisonibus commisisse Danosque victores tributum victis inposuisse et vectigalis nomine centum libras argenti a Frisonibus iam esse solutas...*

Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregni francorum.html> (Accessed: 08 May 2009).

²⁷³ Although there is a contradiction between the works *De Carolo Magno* and the *Annales Regni Francorum*. The previous work states that *Cum vero per non modicum tempus latissimum peragraret imperium...* (MGH, SS rer. Germ. N. S. 12, 76).

Source: http://bsbmdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000692 Accessed: 18 May 2009). The latter states that *Imperator vero Aquisgrani adhuc agens et contra Godofridum regem expeditionem meditans nuntium accepit...* (Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregni francorum.html> Accessed: 18 May 2009). I accept the latter information as the *Annales* is a contemporary source with the addition that the timing of the Danish attack was surely the result of careful planning.

²⁷⁴ *De Carolo Magno* II. 13: *...consecutus eum filius suus...* (MGH, SS rer. Germ. N. S. 12, 76). Source: http://bsbmdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000692 (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

²⁷⁵ S. Fischer-Fabian, Nagy Károly, *az első európai* [Karl der Grosse. Der Erste Europäer], trans. Tamás Szántó (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 2000), 277.

²⁷⁶ According to Einhard's *Vita Karoli Magni* one of his daughters, Rotrud and two of his sons, Pippin and Carl died right before the coming battle and his favourite white elephant, Abu Abbas – the gift of the Caliph of Baghdad – also perished. Einhard was stunned as the emperor contrary to his strong spirit, lamented crying. Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, caput 19: *Mortes filiorum ac filiae pro magnanimitate, qua excellebat, minus patienter tulit, pietate videlicet, qua non minus insignis erat, compulsus ad lacrimas.*

Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ein.html> (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

²⁷⁷ In my opinion it can not be excluded that the Franks were somehow involved in the assassination of the Danish leader – as they assassinated other Danish kings later – because they could immediately make peace with the new Danish king, Hemming, at the end of the year 810. *Annales Regni Francorum*, 810: *...Godofrido Danorum rege mortuo Hemmingus filius fratris eius in regnum successit ac pacem cum imperatore fecit.*

Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregni francorum.html> (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

After the first large-scale raid Charlemagne started to build up a fleet and a coastal defense system along the coasts of Friesland and the Low Countries. This newly introduced system served well in the next two decades as the next serious Viking attack hit the empire only in 834.²⁷⁸ This was the first contributory step of the Vikings to the development of the imperial military structure.

There were only smaller skirmishes between the Vikings and the Franks in these twenty-four years.²⁷⁹ The Franks were also helped by the chaotic internal throne wars in Denmark after the death of Hemming, the king who made peace with Charlemagne in 810 and in 811 as well.²⁸⁰

The next attack in 834 was not a coincidence at all. By this time some of the Danish jarls and throne aspirants were already the vassals of Louis I so they had a good insight into the Frankish internal affairs. Civil war broke out in the empire after 829, where the Danish Vikings were also involved as soldiers of Lothar against Louis I.²⁸¹ Emperor Louis I was defeated by his sons in the battle of Colmar,²⁸² which eventually led to the weakening of the coastal defenses in Friesland and Flanders in 833.

²⁷⁸ Brøndsted 1983, 47.

²⁷⁹ The sources speak about smaller attacks, though. In 812 there is an implicit reference in the *Annales Regni Francorum* that implies that there must have been some armed conflict between Danes and the empire as the kings Haraldr klak and Ragnfrið asked for peace and that their brother, Hemming – not identical with the previous king with the same name who died in 812 and whose death triggered the throne fight in which Haraldr klak and Ragnfrið seized the power – should be released from Frank captivity.

Annales Regni Francorum, 812: *Harioldus et Reginfridus reges Danorum missa ad imperatorem legatione pacem petunt et fratrem suum Hemmingum sibi remitti rogant.*

Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/annalesregnifrancorum.html> (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

It is also known that thirteen Viking ships tried to attack Flanders in 820 but without luck, therefore they went to the mouth of the Seine but they did not have any luck here either. The small fleet then sailed to Aquitania where they robbed the coastal region.

Annales Regni Francorum, 820: *de Nordmannia vero tredecim piraticae naves egressae primo in Flandrensi litore praedari molientes ab his, qui in praesidio erant, repulsae sunt; ubi tamen ab eis propter custodum incuriam aliquot casae viles incensae et parvus pecoris numerus abactus est. In ostio Sequanae similia temptantes resistentibus sibi litoris custodibus, quinque suorum interfectis inritae recesserunt. Tandem in Aquitanico litore prosperis usae successibus vico quodam, qui vocatur Buyn, ad integrum depopulato cum ingenti praeda ad propria reversae sunt.*

²⁸⁰ Roesdahl 2007, 90.

²⁸¹ Roesdahl 2007, 255.

²⁸² Papp 1997, 146.

The well informed Danish Vikings immediately struck and looted Dorestad – their main target for many years because of the city’s lucrative trade and wealth –every year between 834 and 837.²⁸³ Dorestad was also robbed in 846-847 and for the last time in 863 as the city was destroyed by a flood in 864. According to the *Annales Xantenses* in 837 the “pagans” also destroyed the monastery in Walcheren, taking many Christian captives.²⁸⁴

From this time the Viking attacks against the empire became regular. In 841 the Danes invaded and destroyed Rouen²⁸⁵ under the leadership of Asgeir and left before the Franks could even gather an army against them.²⁸⁶ The Vikings were apparently well informed as their leaders, like a Danish king named Haraldr in service of Lothar, received the monastery of Walcheren as an honorary estate. The author of the *Annales Bertiniani* was obviously shocked at hearing this.²⁸⁷

Civil war raged in the empire, the emperor was defeated by his brothers at Fontaneum so he could not do anything to defend Quentovic – the trading centre of the Frankish-English trade – what was looted in 842.²⁸⁸ In the year of the Treaty of Verdun where the nominal unity of the empire was dissolved for good the first attested Norwegians²⁸⁹ arrived in the empire to attack the city of Nantes during the fair of St. Ivan. The crews of the sixty-seven ships proved their

²⁸³ Roesdahl 2007, 254.

²⁸⁴ *Annales Xantenses*, 837: ...pagani vastaverunt Walicrum multasque feminas inde abduxerunt captivas cum infinita diversi generis pecunia. Source: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/xanten.html> (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

²⁸⁵ *Annales Bertiniani*, 841, MGH SS. rer. Germ. 5, 25: ...Interea pyratae Danorum ab oceano Euripo devecti, Rotumam irruentes, rapinis, ferro ignique bachantes, urbem, monachos reliquumque vulgum et caedibus et captivitate pessumdederunt et omnia monasteria seu [quae]cumque loca flumini Sequanae adhaerentia aut depopulati sunt aut multis acceptis pecuniis territa reliquerunt. Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000692 (Accessed: 18 May 2009).

²⁸⁶ Jones 2001, 210.

²⁸⁷ Roesdahl 2007, 255.

²⁸⁸ Jones 2001, 210.

²⁸⁹ *Chronicon Aquitanicum*, MGH, SS 2, 253: ...Eo quoque anno Namnetis a Wesfaldingis capitur... Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000869 (Accessed: 19 May 2009). The name “Wesfaldingi” refers to the region of Vestfold in Norway. It happened for the first time after this raid in the territory of the empire that the invading fleet did not return home to Scandinavia but spent the winter on the island of Noirmoutier.

outstanding ability at military intelligence and navigation as they managed to hit the city during the fair, when the whole countryside gathered in Nantes with many goods and they sailed more than 30 kilometres up in the dangerous Loire, full of rocks and sandbanks.²⁹⁰

845 was perhaps the most lucrative year for the Vikings. In this year the Danes – by the order of the king, Hröríkr Goðfreðsson – attacked and totally destroyed Hamburg with six hundred ships²⁹¹ while another fleet under the command of the infamous Norwegian Ragnarr loðbrók, in the service of Hröríkr Goðfreðsson,²⁹² attacked and devastated Paris on Easter Sunday, 28 March, collecting the first Danegeld of the history.²⁹³ Still in the same year a fleet of one hundred fifty ships attacked Aquitania²⁹⁴ along the Garonne River where Charles the Bald and Pippin II fought their civil war.

In the 850s Western Frankish kings made the first attempts to settle Vikings in the main territories²⁹⁵ of the country to use as defense against their own kinsmen and as mercenaries against other Frankish kings.²⁹⁶ An attempt was also made to hire Vikings against Vikings, which happened in 861. One of the most infamous Viking jarls, Björn járnsiða, settled on an

²⁹⁰ Jones 2001, 211.

²⁹¹ Most probably the largest Viking force ever attested. Six hundred ships should have meant at least 27-30 thousand warriors. *Annales Bertiniani*, 845, MGH SS rer. Germ 5, 32: ...*Nortmannorum rex Oricus sexcentas naves per Albim fluvium in Germaniam ad versus Hludowicum dirigit*. Source: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000758 (Accessed: 19 May 2009).

²⁹² Roesdahl 2007, 257. He was in the service of the Danish king because after the attack he returned to the Danish court giving the treasures to Hröríkr Goðfreðsson. The keen sight of the Danish king on political situations is vividly attested in my opinion by the fact that he offered a large part of the Parisian treasures to Louis the German as a “gift” to buy peace from the enraged German king who was obviously angry because of the devastation of Hamburg. Hröríkr managed to buy peace to himself on the treasures of Charles the Bald.

²⁹³ Jones 2001, 212-213. The Danegeld was 7000 pounds of silver (3175 kgs). The fact that it was paid only attests that Charles the Bald had the wealth to pay to get rid of the smaller bad thing, the Vikings, while he saved his forces against his attacking brothers, Lothar and Louis the German and the rebellious Aquitanian king, Pippin II.

²⁹⁴ Jones 2001, 212. After the attack the Norwegians settled down in Aquitania as they were seeking arable lands. The Danish settlement started only later as they had enough lands for cultivation.

²⁹⁵ Meaning the areas along the river Seine as in Friesland and Flanders the Viking lords had estates from the 820s onwards.

²⁹⁶ Roesdahl 2007, 258. Charles the Bald gave land to Goðfreð Haraldsson to use his forces against the Emperor, Lothar.

island of the Seine River in 856 and ravaged the surrounding lands for years.²⁹⁷ Charles the Bald could not get rid of him and his troops because his brother's, Louis the German's continuous attacks engaged his forces, therefore he hired another Viking group under a certain Weland to attack and disperse the Vikings on the island. The attempt failed as Weland – after taking five thousand pounds of silver from Charles as a payment – agreed with the other group to take a bribe of six thousand pounds of silver and after that they laid waste the countryside together.²⁹⁸ After this episode Charles decided to start to develop a fluvial fort system consisting of fortified bridges over the Seine River as the Vikings were not too good at besieging such defensive structures.

I will not go into details concerning the 860s as in these years so many Viking raids happened, mostly in the western Frankish Kingdom, that even enumerating them would take me too far from my subject. The account of the monk of Noirmoutier, Ermentarius gives a proper – although surely exaggerated – picture about the tragic situation of the kingdom.²⁹⁹

After the year 870 – when the empire was finally divided into two by the Treaty of Meerssen – the Vikings again found opportunities to offer their services to the Western and Eastern Frankish kings. For instance, Charles the Bald was eager to return³⁰⁰ the estates around

²⁹⁷ Although Björn had left his camp in 859 to go to the three years long Mediterranean campaign his Vikings stood on the island.

²⁹⁸ Jones 2001, 215-216.

²⁹⁹ Ermentarius, *Ex Miraculis Sancti Filiberti*, MGH SS 15.1, 302: *Augescit numerus navium, crescit innumerabilis numerus northmannorum; fiunt passim christianorum strages depredationes, vastationes, incensiones, sicuti, quamdiu saeculum stabit, manifestis patebit indiciis. Capiuntur quascumque adeunt civitates, nemine resistente; capitur Budegalensium, Petrocorium, Santonum, Lemovicensium, Egoisma atque Tolosa civitas; Andecavensium, Turonensium, perinde et Aurelianensium civitates pessumdantur. ... Deinde post aliquantulos annos innumerabilis pene multitudo navium Northmannorum ingreditur Sequanam fluvium. Nihil enim illis in partibus minus grassatur malum. Invadunt Rotomagensium civitatem populantur incendunt; Parisiorum deinde, Belyacensium, atque Melduorum capiunt civitates necnon Melidunensium devastant castellum; capitur Carnotis; Ebroicas populantur atque Baiocas reliquasque undique secus civitates invadunt.* Source: http://bsbmdmgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000890 (Accessed: 19 May 2009).

³⁰⁰ Hröríkr had been expelled from his estates earlier in the 860s by the inhabitants themselves.

Dorestad to a certain Danish jarl, Hröríkr, just to secure Flanders which after Meerssen belonged to the Western Frankish Kingdom.³⁰¹

In the second half of the 870s the Vikings had their last great opportunity in the ninth century to invade the states of the Franks. Between 875 and 877 all three Frankish rulers died and the political instability helped the cause of the Vikings very well. What is more, the Scandinavians suffered serious defeats in England in 878 so they decided to attack the Frankish states instead of Alfred the Great's kingdom. The political instability was strengthened even more by the swift power changes in the Frankish kingdoms. In ten years after 877 the two Frankish states had six kings, most of them ruling at the same time.³⁰² The Vikings took advantage of the unfortunate state of the Eastern Frankish Kingdom, where two of the kings had died and the Scandinavians even defeated the Eastern Franks at the battle of Thuin, Belgium killing the only royal prince,³⁰³ so Carl III became the emperor in 881 and the only Eastern Frankish king in 882.

At the same time the Scandinavians swarmed the Western Frankish Kingdom. They attacked along the Loire and Schelde-Somme rivers, looting Ghent, Tournai and the monasteries along these rivers sailing up and raiding even Trier and Cologne.³⁰⁴ They were not unstoppable though, as a charismatic young king like the Western ruler Louis III defeated a large Viking force at the battle of Saucourt in 881. He could not profit from his success as he died in the next year at the age of nineteen.

³⁰¹ Roesdahl 2007, 260.

³⁰² In the Western Frankish Kingdom Charles the Bald was followed by his son, Louis the Stammerer (877-879), but soon he died so his sons inherited his realm, Louis III (879-882) and Carloman (879-884). In the Eastern Frankish Kingdom Louis the German was followed by his three sons, Carloman (876-880), Louis III (876-882) and Carl III (876-887).

³⁰³ Brøndsted 1983, 52.

³⁰⁴ Roesdahl 2007, 261.

The Vikings unwillingly helped Carl III to become sole ruler and he was not eager to fight against them. He was commanding a large Frankish army when he met a smaller and encircled but still formidable Viking force at Elsloo in 882. Instead of going to battle for reaped an assured victory Carl III chose to pay Danegeld again.³⁰⁵

Although Carl III became the sole ruler of all the Frankish territories in 885, his poor leadership ability allowed the Vikings to raid almost every river in the territories of the former empire.³⁰⁶ Even Paris was besieged between 885 and 886, which was a significant development in Viking warfare,³⁰⁷ as they even constructed and used siege engines. Again, the Vikings changed the flow of Frankish and European history. Count Odo, who successfully defended the city, could thank his fame and later kingdom to his military success.³⁰⁸ He was also helped by Carl III, who did not attack the besieging Vikings, paid them Danegeld again and let them loot the country north of the Seine to punish some of his rivals.³⁰⁹ The Vikings rampaged there till 892.³¹⁰

Carl III, after such a shameful deed was deposed from his throne in 887 to give place to two young and energetic warlords, Odo in the West and Arnulf in the East. In 889 a Viking fleet returned to Paris, but for the last time.³¹¹ The ending dates for the first Viking raiding period in the territories of the former Frankish Empire are 890 and 891 when the Scandinavians suffered two crushing defeats in Bretagne by the armies of Alain of Bretagne³¹² and in Dyle, Belgium by the armies of Arnulf. Arnulf was the first Frankish king who managed to capture sixteen Viking

³⁰⁵ Jones 2001, 224.

³⁰⁶ Jones 2001, 224. Both Scheldes, the Meuse, the Somme, the Marne, the Seine, the Loire, the Rhine, the Maine, the Aisne, the Vire, the Garonne and the Oise rivers were swarmed with Viking ships, the cities on the riverbanks like Cologne, Aix, Trier, Liège, Rouen, Paris, Soissons, Bayeux, or St. Lô were raided.

³⁰⁷ Jones 2001, 224.

³⁰⁸ Jones 2001, 225.

³⁰⁹ Jones 2001, 225.

³¹⁰ Brøndsted 1983, 52.

³¹¹ Jones 2001, 225-226.

³¹² Roesdahl 2007, 250.

battle banners, which was indeed the sign of an overwhelming victory.³¹³ Both defeats were so important that even the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* gave accounts of them. To the end of the ninth century many new fortresses were built in northern France and in Belgium-Zeeland. Probably the circular coastal fort – like Souburg on the island of Walcheren – dates from the early 890s.³¹⁴

General attributes of the Viking attacks, defensive attempts and chapter conclusions

As this short overview has shown the Viking attacks were always connected to internal wars in the empire or to the absence of a ruler in a certain area. All the attacks were carefully planned beforehand and were based on the data provided by Viking military intelligence. Most of the attacks were quick and hit rich and undefended places using hit-and-run tactics.

There was a development in the course of the raids. In the beginning they started from and returned to Scandinavia and never included sieges or open field battles. Later, as the Vikings settled in certain areas – mostly islands – of the empire they started their attacks from these newly occupied territories. Viking settlement was always coordinated by Scandinavian lords, jarls or konungrs, who were usually baptised and became the vassals of a Frankish ruler, although this did not keep them from attacking their own lords or his enemies. After settling the Scandinavians raised cavalry and organised more inland attacks. These attacks still remained quick and well planned but sometimes included sieges as well.

The Frankish rulers and lords started to organise coastal defenses, building forts, fortified inland structures like bridges, and fleets against the Vikings. They tried to bribe them, use them as mercenaries against other Scandinavians – with little success – and against other Frankish rulers. At the end of the ninth century the Franks realised that only swift and well planned

³¹³ Roesdahl 2007, 191.

³¹⁴ Roesdahl 2007, 262.

defeats would stop the Vikings. In order to achieve that, charismatic and sole rulers were needed, therefore Viking attacks raised an urgent need for such rulers, which surely helped the formation of France and Germany.

Hungarian attacks in the Frankish Empire

In the case of Hungarian attacks a difference can be seen compared to the Scandinavians, namely, when they attacked for the first time the eastern Franks in 862³¹⁵ they still lived in Etelköz, and not in the Carpathian Basin their later – and present – homeland. The first incursion is connected to the open rebellion of Carloman and his Slavic Wend ally Rastislav against Carloman's father, the king Louis the German.³¹⁶ Although the *Annales Bertiniani* reported that the “earlier unknown *Ungri*” depopulated the Eastern Frankish Kingdom it can surely be taken as an exaggeration. A reference to a Hungarian attack from 863 is also given in the pages of *Annales Sangallenses maiores* but it seems likely that the two sources speak about the same incursion.³¹⁷

The second attack in Austria was similarly connected to the internal wars of the Eastern Frankish Kingdom in Austria, Kärnten and Pannonia in 881. The Hungarians came as an ally of Svatopluk against the Franks and – according to the wording of primary sources – arrived together with the Kabars. This implies that their attack was not a simple raid, but a well organised campaign with full army. In this year two battles were fought against the Franks.³¹⁸ Such a force surely would not leave Etelköz without proper payment and previous agreement or

³¹⁵ de Vajay 1968, 11.

³¹⁶ Bowlus 1995, 126.

³¹⁷ Bowlus 1995, 26.

³¹⁸ Bowlus 1995, 237.

contract.³¹⁹ Taking advantage of the wars between Arnulf and Svatopluk in Pannonia and Austria the Hungarians, again as mercenaries, intervened the fight in 892 at the side of Arnulf and in 894 helping Svatopluk again.³²⁰ Tenth century Ottonian authors accused Arnulf of releasing the Hungarians on Western Europe in support of his short sighted but successful aspirations to the imperial throne.³²¹

Here again a different pattern in the Hungarian appearance in the West can be seen to the Scandinavian attacks, namely, that the Magyars from the first time were hired by rivalling lords as mercenaries. In fact from the first mentioning of the Hungarians in the 830s they appeared as a warlike mercenary steppe nation eager to intervene in different wars for a proper payment but always after careful planning.³²² I think that the Western powers treated the Hungarians like this because they already had some experience with Scandinavian mercenaries and the Hungarians – due to their smaller number – were a more local problem easier to keep in bay.

A serious change happened in the location of the centre of the Hungarian power in 894-895 what eventually led to the forced conquest of the Carpathian Basin. The event was connected to the Byzantine-Bulgarian war where the Hungarians served as the mercenaries of emperor León VI thus triggering a simultaneous Bulgarian-Peceneg attack on Etelköz.

This attack reallocated the Hungarian homelands eight or nine hundred kilometres to the West resulting serious changes in the character of the Hungarian military appearance in the Western territories. The action radius of the Magyar tribes also was removed towards the West making it possible that the Hungarians reach the Western Frankish Kingdom and even the

³¹⁹ de Vajay 1968, 16.

³²⁰ Kristó 1986, 8.

³²¹ Bowlus 1995, 235. Bowlus states that the Hungarians remained always faithful to Arnulf who used them in his Italian campaigns and agrees with the charges of the tenth century Ottonian sources. He does not mention however the Hungarian campaign against Arnulf in 894 what proves that the Hungarians were not faithful to anyone but to the money of their current employer whoever it would be.

³²² Kristó 1986, 21.

Iberian Peninsula.³²³ After the conquest there was a sudden surplus of armed and unemployed men due to the loss of the majority of cattle herds and the better life conditions in the Carpathian Basin what made cattle herding possible with relatively few men around.³²⁴

After a few years of recovery the Hungarians attacked again in 898 and 899 but at this time they attacked their very neighbourhood, the Franks in Pannonia. Arnulf hired³²⁵ the Hungarians though to attack Northern Italy thus deterring the threat caused by the pagan forces from Pannonia.³²⁶ Arnulf though died in the end of 899 what made possible to the Hungarians to attack Bavaria.³²⁷ The Magyars went to their first long campaign in 899-900 to Italy via the region later called *Strata Hungarorum*, the territory between the Drava and Sava rivers. The number of the included forces was around five thousand and this army seriously defeated the three times larger army of king Berengar, a bitter enemy of Arnulf.³²⁸ Berengar after his defeat paid to the Hungarians to leave his domains who happily accepted the treasures and left.

On returning from Italy the Magyar forces taking advantage of the political instability of the Eastern Frankish state – or rather Germany by 900 – caused by the death of Arnulf and the Moravian wars raided and looted Pannonia in preparation³²⁹ of the permanent conquest of the territory. The military intelligence of the Hungarians is showed here again: they sent envoys to the Bavarians offering help against the Moravians whom they attacked in a little while but after

³²³ As the account of Al Makdisi informs us about a Hungarian (Turk) attack against Al-Andalus. Kristó 1995, 67.

³²⁴ Not to mention the fact that the size of the territory of the new dwelling place in the Carpathian Basin in the first years was approximately only the one fifth of the territory size in Etelköz what was undoubtedly too little for the tribes who were therefore pushed forward to the open territories of the West just by the very need of living space.

³²⁵ Bowlus 1995, 245. Charles Bowlus pointed out very properly that without an agreement between Arnulf and the Hungarians the pagans would have met serious troubles crossing the Alps via the *Strata Hungarorum* what was controlled by Arnulf's margraves.

³²⁶ Kristó 1986, 14-15.

³²⁷ Bowlus 1995, 236.

³²⁸ Kristó 1986, 18.

³²⁹ Bowlus 1995, 246. The Hungarians did not conquer Pannonia at this time as the Eastern Frank tax registers show that the Franks hold Pannonia under their control after this raid.

that they turned against the Bavarians and – properly knowing their status – the Hungarians dealt a crushing defeat to the Germans pulling the frontiers forward till the region of the Enns river.³³⁰

In the first decade of the ninth century – after the Viking attacks ceased for a while – the Hungarians fought numerous battles in the Moravia, Lower Austria and in different regions of Germany to ensure their permanent conquest over Pannonia and the Carpathian Basin. According to the *Annales Alamannici* what gives a good but laconic account the Hungarians led at least eleven campaigns in thirteen years and were victorious most of the times³³¹ although they lost the kändä, Kussal in 904 or in 907. Most probably this issue – just like the Bavarian-Moravian alliance against the Hungarians – disoriented the Hungarian war parties for a while³³² but not for a long time as the accounts of the *Annales Iuvanenses* also show the Hungarians continued their raids from 907 destroying large Frankish armies.³³³

The attacks against Germany from the end of the year 911 had one purpose, to ensure the taxes of the new king, Conrad. Also from 911 onwards the Hungarians led campaign as far as France raiding Burgundy, Aquitania and the Low Countries.³³⁴ I have to separately mention the Hungarian defeat in Bavaria in 913 by Arnulf, prince of Bavaria as he – according to the sources – learned and used the tactics of the Hungarians against the Magyars returning from France

³³⁰ Kristó 1986, 19-20.

³³¹ *Annales Alamannici*, MGH SS 1, 53-56: 899. *Ungri Italiam invaserunt, et Langobardos bello vicerunt.* 900. *Norici cum Ungaris pugnaverunt, et partera ex eis occiderunt.* 901. *Iterum Ungari in Italiam...* 902. *Et bellum in Maraha cum Ungaris et patria victa.* 903. *Bellum Baugariorum cum Ungaris.* 907. *Baiovariorum omnis exercitus ab Ungaris occiditur. Item bellum Baugariorum cum Ungaris insuperabile...* 908. *Ungari in Saxones.* 909. *Ungari in Alamanniam, et cum innumerabili preda hominum animaliumque reversi sunt.* 910. *Ungri cum Alamannis et Francis pugnaverunt eosque vicerunt.* 913. *Ungri in Alamanniam; quibus per Baioariam redeuntibus Arnolfus filius Liupoldi et Erchangerus cum Perahtoldo et Uadalrico cum eis pugnaverunt et eos superarunt.*

Source: http://bsbmdgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000868 (Accessed: 20 May 2009).

³³² Bowlus 1995, 250-251.

³³³ *Annales Iuvanenses*, MGH SS 30.2, 742: 907. *Bellum pessimum fuit ad Brezalauspurc (Bratislava/Pressburg?).* 910. *Bellum fuit iuxta Nuchinga cum Ungaris.* 912. *Bellum fuit cum Ungaris ad Aeni flumen et Ungari superati sunt ab Arnulfo duce Bawariorum.*

Source: http://bsbmdgh.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/app/web?action=loadBook&bookId=00000883 (Accessed: 20 May 2009).

³³⁴ Kristó 1986, 26.

hiding the larger part of his troops and trapping the pagans.³³⁵ This victory and development was truly a breakthrough in the Western tactics but the opportunities it offered was not exploited later.

From this time onwards the larger campaigns – although the raids started to become to the private affairs of the clan from 906 for sure as I have already mentioned – were always connected to power shifts and ruler changes in Germany, France and Northern Italy. They defeated the new German king Henry in 919 and in 924, they sacked Italy in 919, 920³³⁶, 922 and in the payroll of Berengar also in 924 and even Charles III could not stop them as the Hungarians appeared and disappeared too quickly and the king of France did not have time to collect his army.³³⁷

Saxony got peace for nine years in 924 as Henry accepted to pay yearly taxes to the Hungarians, but it did not keep the pagans from attacking Bavaria, Alemannia and the Swiss regions in 926 attacking the monastery of Sankt Gallen.³³⁸ In the next year, 927 they arrived to Italy again as the pope, John X hired them against his enemy, Hugo. The Hungarians served the Holy See till 929 then they changed sides and helped Hugo.³³⁹

The Hungarian victory in Saxony over Henry in 924 was crucial for the later development of the Hungarian raiding activity and to the revival of the young German state. In this year Henry accepted peace for nine years meaning that he had to pay taxes in every year to the Hungarians but he used these nine years to rearrange and extend his basis of power.³⁴⁰ There is no

³³⁵ Kristó 1986, 26.

³³⁶ The two dates are dubious, maybe these two refer to the same campaign.

³³⁷ Kristó 1986, 27-28.

³³⁸ Kristó 1986, 28.

³³⁹ de Vajay 1968, 79-80.

³⁴⁰ de Vajay 1968, 72.

information about Hungarian raids between 927 and 933 in the West what can not exclude that there were some small scale raids though.³⁴¹

The year 933 brought two large Hungarian campaigns, one to Italy – about what nothing is known except for the very fact of the raid – and another one to Germany to lengthen the tax paying obligation of Henry who refused to pay anymore however. This led to a Hungarian attack who – allied with the Dalamancs – divided their army into two and invaded Saxony and Thüringen. Henry gathered his forces quickly, or he already had them gathered by the time of the Hungarian embassy, and defeated the Western part of the invading army. The Eastern part however continued its pillage and even besieged fortified towns with siege engines when Henry's army arrived to Riade probably in the vicinity of Merseburg. Although the situation was not the best for the Hungarians as they were forced to fight a close quarter combat, they managed to use their military intelligence and manoeuvrability very well as they evaded the German army and the open field battle as much as possible and find safety in flight.³⁴²

The defeat at Merseburg was more important to the Western world than to the Hungarians who already suffered some defeats. Merseburg did not keep the Hungarians back to lead two new campaigns in 934 towards Metz and Byzantine Empire and in 935 against France, Aquitania and Italy, but it rather served the cause and fame of king Henry, who inherited his personal might to his son, Otto in 936.³⁴³ The campaign against the Germans in 937 was meant to test the mettle of the new king who proved to be a ready and quick foe, as he immediately marched against the

³⁴¹ Kristó 1986, 32.

³⁴² Kristó 1986, 32-33. The accounts on the battle are very extreme, one of them stating that hundred thousand Hungarians were slain at Merseburg, what is simply impossible seeing that the number of the armed forces of whole Hungarian tribe confederation was twenty thousand in the middle of the ninth century and it does not seem likely that in eighty years this number would have multiplied to five times bigger. The other extremity – what seems more likely to me though – is another account stating that the Hungarians simply fled without their treasures and captives, and since their horses were obviously faster than those of the German heavy cavalry only a few Hungarians was slain.

³⁴³ Kristó 1986, 36.

Hungarians when he heard the news of their coming attack and defeated them. The Hungarians fled from Saxony to France where they even reached the coast of the Atlantic Ocean as early as May or early June³⁴⁴ and in their way back home they depredated Aquitania and Italy again, although here they suffered defeat. Otto defeated the Hungarians again in 938.³⁴⁵ The purposeful German policy in creating a fortified barrier against the Hungarians slowly took shape.

We know about Hungarian campaigns to Italy in 940 and 942 when king Hugo offered money to the pagans and sent them to the Iberian Peninsula. One of the campaigns in 943 towards Bavaria met a complete failure as the Hungarians barely passed the frontier at the river Enns, they met the Bavarians and suffered a quick defeat. It did not break the warlike behaviour of the Hungarians who were aware to the fact that the prince of Bavaria died in 947 so they immediately attacked in 948 but they were defeated again. The same happened in 949 and in 950 when for the first time the Germans attacked the Hungarian frontier. By the end of 951 the unified German leadership under king Otto and his brother Henry was even able to defeat the Hungarian raiders in Italy who were just returning from Aquitania after a successful campaign.³⁴⁶

The defensive system sealing off the Western territories broke up for a short time in 953 when Otto's son, Liudolf and son-in-law, Conrad the Red revolted against the king. The rebels invited and hired the Hungarians but not against Otto's army itself, they sent them against Belgium and France and the Hungarians after looting these areas went home via Northern Italy. In 955 Hungarian envoys arrived to the court of Otto officially to seek the friendship of the king but it is highly likely what the text of the source supposed: the Hungarian messengers were spies. The pagans surely thought that the civil war will let them break through the defenses as they had

³⁴⁴ Bowlus 1995, 236. This means that their campaign – just like many other before – must have started during the winter time. Bowlus even concluded that it was a Hungarian habit to start raiding campaigns in the middle of the winter.

³⁴⁵ Kristó 1986, 37-38.

³⁴⁶ Kristó 1986, 39.

to know about the fight between the rebels and Otto in the beginning of 955. Therefore they attacked Otto's realm but for once the German military intelligence was better.³⁴⁷

The Hungarians after looting the lands around Augsburg gathered under the city to besiege it with siege engines. Otto arrived just in time to save the city and he even had the rebels on his side. Spies were sent out from each side to map to exact place of the armies, but again, the Hungarian intelligence was better. Otto started his march against the Hungarian camp at dawn of 10 August at the left bank of the river Lech but the Hungarian army took an evasive manoeuvre, marched in the right bank of the river, and after crossing it attacked the rear legions of the German army. By the time Otto was able to attack the main body of the Hungarians three out of his eight legions were scattered and Conrad the Red was dead. He won the battle though and the Hungarians had to flee and fight another battle in 11 August against prince Boleslav and lost the battle again.³⁴⁸ This double defeat meant the end of the Hungarian raiding activity in the West.

General attributes of the Hungarian attacks, defensive attempts and conclusions

Similarly to the Viking case the Frankish and Italian political background of the Hungarian attacks was the internal wars of the target areas. The Hungarians appeared as mercenaries from the first time. They led large scale campaigns in the first three decades after the 880s and later smaller predominantly ones. This is a difference to the Viking attacks where the change in the size of the attack went the other way around.

The Franks and Italians used the Hungarians as mercenaries only against other Christian lords but they never tried to hire them against other Hungarians. They never tried to settle them down to defend an area from the incursion of other Hungarians probably because the Magyars

³⁴⁷ Kristó 1986, 40-41.

³⁴⁸ Kristó 1986, 42-43.

had their own homelands in the Carpathian Basin and the Western lords already had bad experience with this habit connected to the Scandinavians.

The main contribution of the Hungarian attacks was the revival of the German state where after Arnulf's death there were no charismatic sole rulers who could have organised the defenses against the Hungarians. The German foothold in Northern Italy – what later led to serious fights between the Papacy and the Emperor – can also be connected to the continuous incursions of the Magyars here. Maybe that the title of the Emperor remained connected to the Eastern Frankish and later German ruler can also be a result of the Hungarian attacks.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ Maybe the success of the Ottonian rulers in making Byzantium and acknowledge their claims of the title of the Western Emperor was somehow helped by the military success over the Hungarians who attacked the Byzantine Empire as well.

Conclusions

From all the material I have covered above I have re-formulated my previous presumption that the Viking and Hungarian attacks on the Frankish Empire and Northern Italy in long term caused more development than destruction. In the first stage of the attacks these raids really destroyed important segments of Western society and economy but with the continuous pagan reappearance Western Europe had to find a solution to deter them. The Scandinavians and the Hungarians appearing in large masses in the 840s and 880s in the territories of the empire forced and hastened the state formation of the successor states of the late Frankish Empire.

Their attacks, by creating a constant and direct impact, helped charismatic sole rulers emerge to organise the defence against the pagans. The Hungarian attacks on the Byzantine Empire may even have helped the Ottonian rulers to make Byzantium acknowledge their claims on the Western imperial throne when they defeated Hungarians, and surely helped the Germans gain strong footholds in Northern Italy. These Viking and Magyar attacks gave rise to the heavily armoured cavalry and fort systems and associated new land tenure systems. Both pagan cultures had wide and flourishing trade systems that boosted European economy. Lastly from the eleventh century on, both territories taken up Western Christianity, eagerly joining crusades that also helped Western European expansion.

I have offered a possible matrix for assessing the question of the pagan success stating that their unprecedented victories were connected to the internal wars of the Frankish Empire and Northern Italy. An important factor was the pagans' mobility and military intelligence, which was connected to the developed system of hosting guests and travellers and to trading activity. Both peripheral cultures were perfectly aware of the political situations of their rich neighbour and took advantage of the situation of divided loyalties.

Pagan worldviews also played a crucial role in the process of military victories and later in the expansion of Christianity. Behind the attacks there were various spiritual driving forces. First the constant need for wealth to support the newly emerging social layer, a new war aristocracy that was expected to show off its wealth by the strong needs for social display in both societies. Secondly, probably the personal outlook of people in both societies was strongly deterministic. They had only one chance to establish fame – the only everlasting thing in the universe – and that was the short time spent in this world. Fame could be created not only by war but by outwitting the enemy or organising great feasts.

Pagan social structure also played a role in the success. Contrary to the commonplace belief, neither of the pagan societies was static and democratic. Their social structure was dynamic, where the social elevation was connected to one's military skills and personal charisma. There was no place for those who did not recognise the rule of someone who was born in a higher social stratum. It was a great advantage that, unlike the Christian society, pagan societies were formed predominantly by free, armed men who were either eager or obliged to take part in constant military actions to gain a new place in their own society or simply to survive.

Despite inherent drama, the least important factor was the weaponry, the military technologies or the numbers of the invaders. Although the sources mostly give exaggerated pictures about pagan swarms, it seems likely that none of the peripheral pagan cultures had such a large population that could outnumber the Christians. None of the pagan cultures had superior weaponry to the Christians, in fact the Frankish army was more versatile than any pagan forces. The Scandinavians mostly used the same weapons as the Franks did. The Hungarian weaponry was different, but as I have shown, these differences were caused only by different military

strategies, otherwise neither the famous reflex bows nor the sabres were better or stronger than the simple Frankish longbows or swords.

Viking ships and Hungarian horses were perfect tools in these victories. Their travelling speed and mobility were the only factors what brought pagans into a better position than their victims. As I have shown, with Viking ships even the farthest coastal regions of the empire were within eight days of travel. With the tarpan horses the Hungarians could reach the territory of the whole empire within thirty-forty days, which meant fifty to sixty kilometres of travel each day. This was very quick compared to the speed of the Frankish army. The whole territory of Western Europe was well within the action radius of the pagans.

The main contribution to knowledge that I have made in this study is that I have shown that classical stereotypical perceptions of the pagans and explanations of their success are unsatisfactory. I have shown that even though the first phase of attacks caused destruction in Western Europe, in long term it served the revival and emergence of strong and extroverted countries. I have shown that weaponry or numbers were unimportant in military success. The key notions were intelligence and mobility. I stressed intelligence as this factor so far has not get credit because its methods are hard to authenticate. The methods are deeply rooted in the social structure and habits of the pagan societies. Another contribution to knowledge is that under social conditions I have shown that world view and social structure were more important than overpopulation which was taken so far as the main social factor of the pagan attacks.

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Appendix

1. Map of the main territories of Norway and Denmark in the Ninth century.



2. Detailed map of Norway in the Ninth century.³⁵⁰

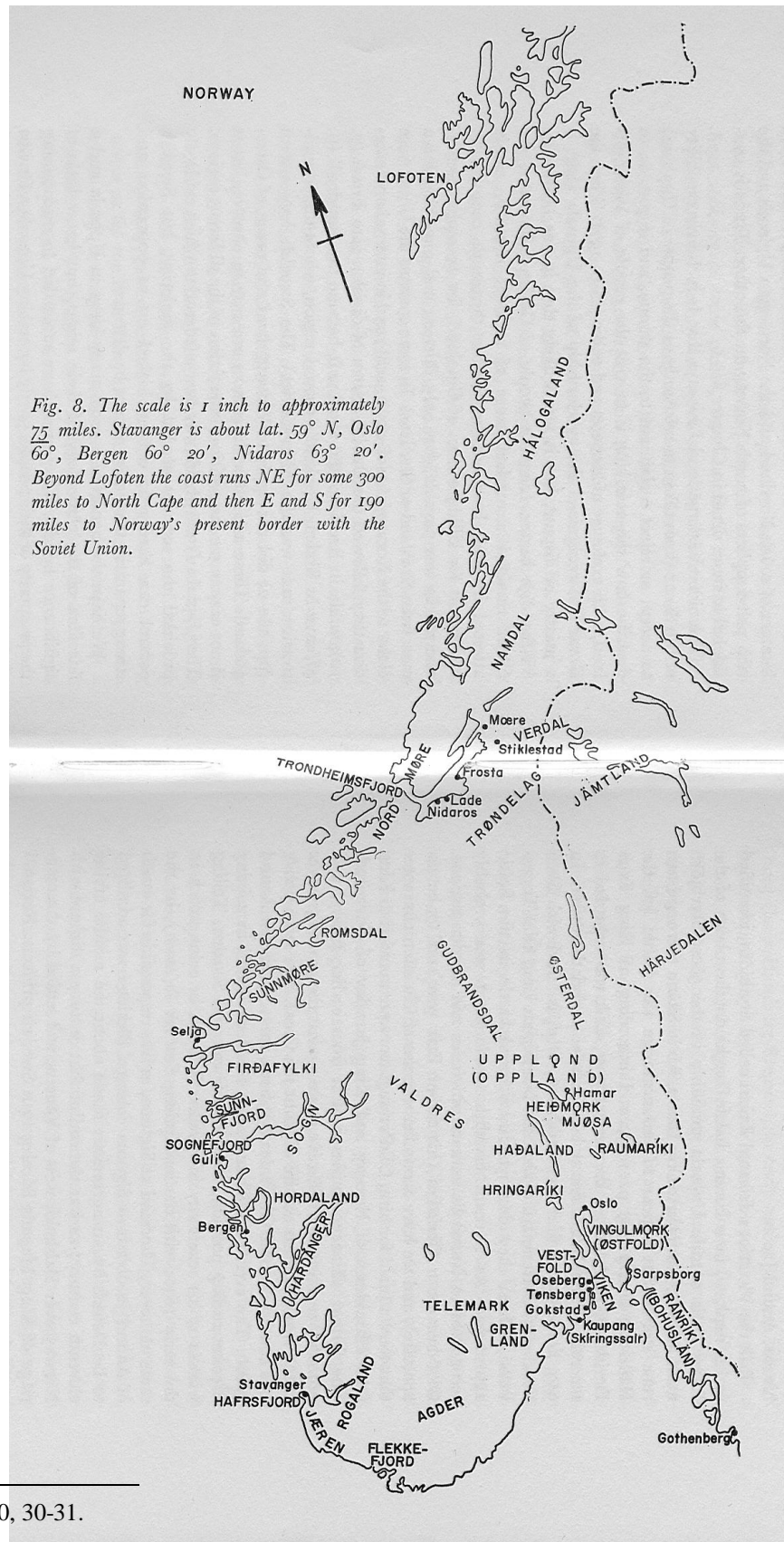
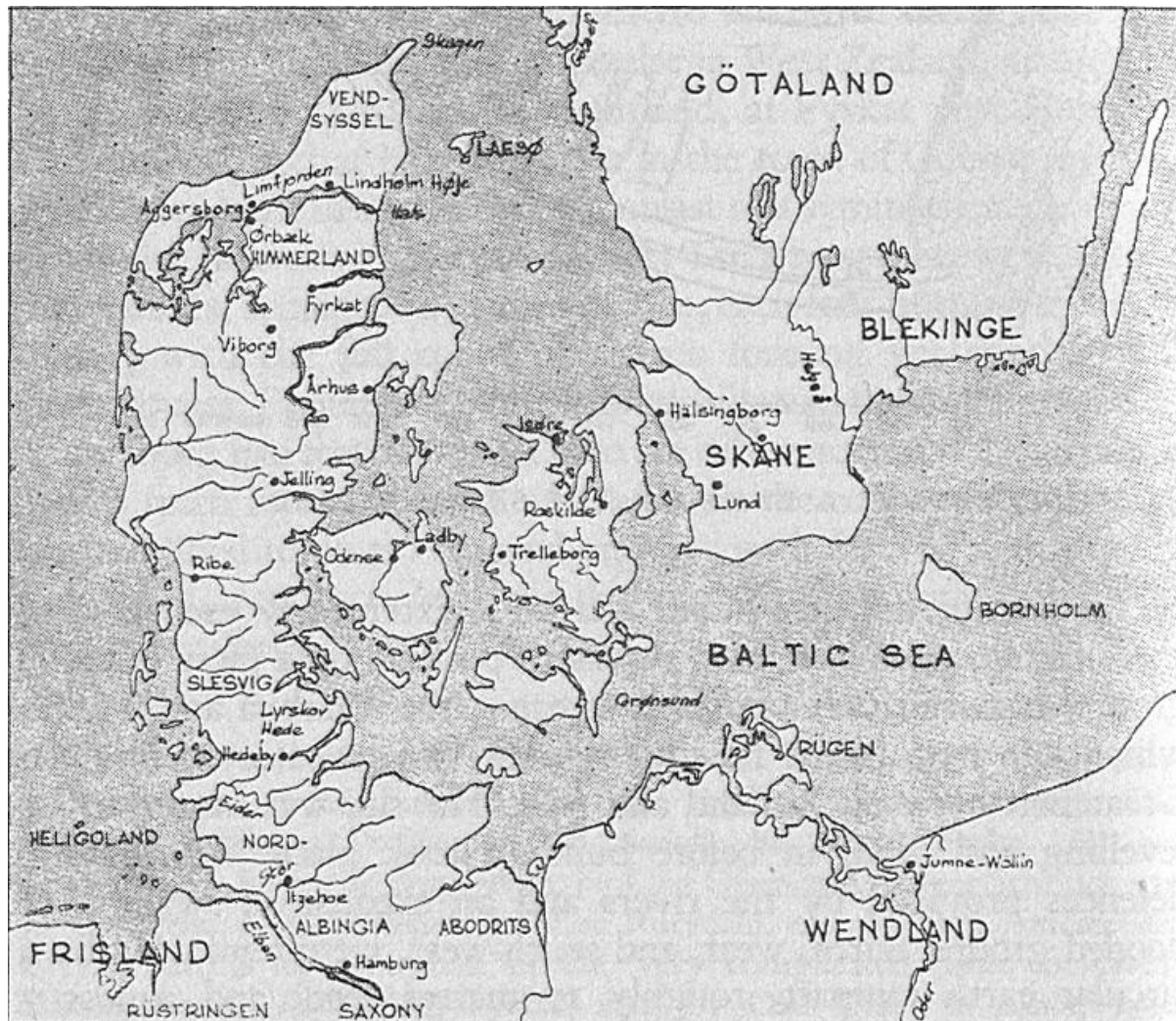


Fig. 8. The scale is 1 inch to approximately 75 miles. Stavanger is about lat. 59° N, Oslo 60° , Bergen $60^{\circ} 20'$, Nidaros $63^{\circ} 20'$. Beyond Lofoten the coast runs NE for some 300 miles to North Cape and then E and S for 190 miles to Norway's present border with the Soviet Union.

³⁵⁰ Foote-Wilson 1970, 30-31.

3. Detailed map of Denmark in the Ninth century.³⁵¹



³⁵¹ Jones 2001, 362.

4. Map of the main dwelling places of the Hungarians in the Ninth and Tenth centuries.



5. Perspectives from Scandinavia towards Western Europe.



