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## THE CAROLINGIAN ARMY AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE VIKINGS

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There have been many previous studies of the Carolingian army, but none examining the ninth-century armies which faced the Viking invasions. Earlier works have tended to focus on the age of expansion in the eighth century, particularly the capitularies and campaigns of Charlemagne.<sup>1</sup> Yet the armies which fought Charlemagne's offensive campaigns differed significantly from those which defended the Empire against the Vikings in terms of their composition, size, armament and purpose. The present study will thus begin by considering the different types of defensive force which opposed the invasions: the host, the coast guard and the *lantweri*. The royal army has naturally been the focus of previous studies, but against the Viking incursions the initial line of defense was the coastal guard, both at sea and on land. Another form of resistance was that offered under the *lantweri*, the defense of the realm in case of invasion, which was obviously of primary importance against the Vikings, but which has been accorded scant attention in the past. The article will then turn to three more general issues: the size of the Frankish armies which fought the raiders, the leadership and muster of those armies, and the particular role played by the cavalry. The final three sections will address the range of military tactics employed against the Northmen: the strategy of containment, by which the Franks attempted to confine Scandinavian fleets to the rivers; siege warfare; and finally pitched battle. Throughout the study a more fundamental question will also be kept in view, namely, why it was that the all-conquering war machine of Charlemagne's time apparently found itself unable to deal with the Scandinavian incursions barely half a century later.

After a long period in which the only interest shown in Carolingian military matters was in the form of short survey articles, two significant recent books have turned the spotlight on warfare in the Carolingian period. The first, by Bernard Bachrach, considers the Frankish military in considerable depth, though again it concerns itself primarily with the eighth rather than the ninth century.<sup>2</sup> The second is Guy Halsall's important survey of warfare and society in the early medieval period, including discussion of the ninth century and paying particular attention to the Viking raids.<sup>3</sup> However, the fact that Halsall discusses a 450-year period across the whole of Western Europe allows the present study to go into detail where he uses a

<sup>1</sup>So, for example, an article about the Carolingian army by F.-L. Ganshof contained such a preponderance of references to the reign of Charlemagne that the English translation was entitled "Charlemagne's Army": "L'armée sous les carolingiens" in *Ordinamenti militari in occidente nell'alto medioevo*, 2 vols., *Settimane* 15 (1968) 1.109-130, trans. in F.-L. Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions under Charlemagne* (New York 1970) 57-68.

<sup>2</sup>Bernard S. Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire* (Philadelphia 2001).

<sup>3</sup>G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450-900* (London 2003).

broader brush; and the conclusions reached here will frequently complement those in his work. As for earlier studies of the Carolingian army, a valuable detailed survey can be found in a bibliographical article by France published in 2001, though as was noted earlier, the great majority of these sources concentrate on the era of Charlemagne.<sup>4</sup> The occasional references to the struggle against the Vikings in these previous works tend to be brief and relatively superficial.<sup>5</sup> One incident which has received unusually close attention is a battle between Franks and Vikings at the Dyle in 891, whose significance for the role of cavalry will be discussed below, but this is a rare exception.<sup>6</sup> The present study is consequently long overdue. It should be emphasized that this article will focus exclusively on the armies which opposed the Viking invasions; broader defensive strategies employed by the Franks, such as the fortification of bridges, the payment of tributes and the hiring of Viking leaders as mercenaries, have all been discussed elsewhere, as has the role of the church in resisting the invasions.<sup>7</sup>

#### MILITARY SERVICE (1): COASTAL DEFENSE<sup>8</sup>

The first reference to defensive measures taken specifically against sea-borne raiders from Scandinavia dates from 800, when Charlemagne ordered a fleet to be stationed on the North Sea coast against "pirates."<sup>9</sup> Ten years later further measures were taken, and in 811 the emperor inspected ships of the newly constructed fleet at Ghent and Boulogne.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, there is no record of a North Sea fleet ever having seen action, and in 820 it was the shore-based guards who repelled an attempted Viking raid on Flanders and the Seine mouth.<sup>11</sup> A North Sea fleet was not mentioned again until 837, when Louis the Pious ordered the construction of ships in Frisia to counter repeated Viking raids on the region around Dorestad.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>4</sup>J. France, "Recent writing on medieval warfare: from the fall of Rome to c. 1300," *The Journal of Military History* 65 (April 2001) 441–473, esp. at 445–450.

<sup>5</sup>Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare* (n. 2 above) mentions them just five times in his index; see also C. Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., (London 1924) 1.101–107; F. Lot, *L'Art militaire et les armées au moyen âge en Europe et dans le proche Orient*, 2 vols., (Paris 1946) 1.105–111; J. F. Verbruggen, "L'art militaire dans l'empire carolingien (714–1000)," *Revue belge d'histoire militaire* 23.4 (1979) 289–310, at 302–306; 23.5 (1980) 393–412, at 406–407; P. Contamine, "L'espace carolingien: dilatation, dislocation, invasion" in P. Contamine, ed., *Histoire militaire de la France*, 4 vols. (Paris 1992–1994) 1.36–42.

<sup>6</sup>See below, "The role of the cavalry."

<sup>7</sup>S. Coupland, "The fortified bridges of Charles the Bald," *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991) 1–12; "The Frankish tribute payments to the Vikings and their consequences," *Francia* 26/1 (1999) 57–75; "From poachers to gamekeepers: Scandinavian warlords and Carolingian kings," *Early Medieval Europe* 7.1 (1998) 85–114; "The rod of God's wrath or the people of God's wrath? The Carolingians' theology of the Viking invasions," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1991) 535–554, esp. 547–553. For the construction of fortifications against the Vikings, see F. Vercauteren, "Comment s'est-on défendu, au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle dans l'empire franc contre les invasions normandes?" *Annales du XXX<sup>e</sup> congrès de la Fédération archéologique et historique de Belgique* (1935–1936) 117–132; R. M. van Heeringen, P. A. Henderikx and A. Mars, eds., *Vroeg-Middeleeuwse ringwalburgen in Zeeland* (Goes and Amersfoort 1995); and S. Coupland, "Charles the Bald and the Defence of the West of Frankish Kingdom Against the Viking Invasions, 840–877" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University 1987) 167–186.

<sup>8</sup>See also H. Sproemberg, "Die Seepolitik Karls des Grossen" in *Beiträge zur belgisch-niederländischen Geschichte* (Berlin 1959) 1–29; and John Haywood, *Dark Age Naval Power* (London and New York 1991) 118–130, both of which concentrate on the first quarter of the ninth century.

<sup>9</sup>*Annales Regni Francorum* [ARF] 800 and 800 (revision): ed. F. Kurze, MGH *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum* (hereafter MGH SSrG) (Hanover 1895) 110–111.

<sup>10</sup>*Capitulare missorum Aquisgranense primum* c. 16: MGH *Capitularia regum Francorum* (hereafter MGH Cap.) 1.153; ARF 811 (n. 9) 135.

<sup>11</sup>ARF 820 (n. 9 above) 153.

<sup>12</sup>*Annales Bertiniani* [AB] 837: ed. F. Grat, J. Vielliard, and S. Clémencet, *Annales de Saint-Bertin*

This implies that the existing coastal defenses, which had been reorganized in 835 and again in early 837,<sup>13</sup> did not include a fleet at that time. Although the ships were definitely built,<sup>14</sup> there is no reference to them actually being deployed against the Viking raids, and the lack of an attack in 838 was said to be due to a storm which sank part of a Scandinavian fleet on its way south.<sup>15</sup> There is indeed no indication that any Carolingian ruler ever used a naval force at sea against Scandinavian attack, in contrast to the explicit references to the deployment of Carolingian fleets against Arab raiders in the south<sup>16</sup> and also to the naval victories won by Kings Ethelred and Alfred against the Vikings on the other side of the Channel.<sup>17</sup>

On land, it was the coast guard which had the dual function of keeping watch for sea-borne raiders and defending the shore if such raiders attempted to land. Although no one text describes how the system functioned, a number of details can be gleaned from various sources. For instance, in 800 all the North Sea ports and river mouths navigable to ships were guarded by detachments of troops.<sup>18</sup> Where such guards might come from is revealed in a letter of Einhard, abbot of St.-Bavo in Ghent, in which he reported that the abbey's men had been unable to attend the autumn assembly of 832 because they were serving in the coast guard. Einhard complained that it was unfair to fine these men for failure to perform their military service when they were defending the coast at the emperor's command.<sup>19</sup> The maintenance of the coastal defense was evidently the responsibility of the aristocracy, for in 865 Pope Nicholas I wrote that "the majority of the bishops and other royal vassals are guarding the coast day and night against sea-borne raiders," in this case undoubtedly from Scandinavia.<sup>20</sup> If danger threatened, everyone living along the coast had to turn out to support the regular guards. Free Franks who failed to respond faced a fine of twenty *solidi*, while the unfree would pay half this sum and receive a flogging.<sup>21</sup> To sound the alarm, some sort of signaling network was employed, though it is unclear whether it involved beacons, flags, bells, or some other means of communication.<sup>22</sup>

The potential effectiveness of the system was illustrated in 820, when thirteen Danish ships tried to plunder the coast of Flanders. They were repelled, managing to steal only a few cattle, and so sailed on to the mouth of the Seine, where they met even stiffer resistance from the coast guard, losing five of their men in a skirmish. In the end they were forced to travel as far as Bouin in Aquitaine to find a

(Paris 1964) 22; ed. and trans. J. L. Nelson, *The Annals of St.-Bertin* (Manchester 1991) 37.

<sup>13</sup>AB 835, 837 (n. 12): Grat 18, 21; Nelson 33, 37.

<sup>14</sup>*Annales Fuldenses* [AF] 838, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SSRG (Hanover 1891) 28; T. Reuter, ed. and trans., *The Annals of Fulda* (Manchester 1992) 15.

<sup>15</sup>AB 838 (n. 12 above): Grat 24; Nelson 39.

<sup>16</sup>Haywood, *Dark Age Naval Power* (n. 8 above) 113–116.

<sup>17</sup>*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 851, 875, 882, 885, 896: D. Whitelock, D. C. Douglas and S. I. Tucker, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London 1961) 43, 48, 50, 51, 57–58.

<sup>18</sup>ARF 800 (n. 9 above) 110; Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* c. 17, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SSRG (Hanover 1895) 21.

<sup>19</sup>*Einhardi epistolae* no. 23: MGH Epist. Karol. Aevi 5.121; trans. in P. E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier* (Ontario 1998) 139.

<sup>20</sup>*Nicolai I epistolae* no. 38: MGH Epist. Karol. Aevi 6.309.

<sup>21</sup>*Capitulare missorum specialia* (802) c. 13: MGH Cap. 1.100–101.

<sup>22</sup>Nithard, *Historiarum libri IIII* 3.3: P. Lauer, ed., *Nithard: Histoire des fils de Louis le Pieux* (Paris 1926) 94. The word *signum* can have all these meanings: J. F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus* (Leiden 1976) 971.

site which was sufficiently poorly defended for them to pillage.<sup>23</sup> Yet by the late 830s the increasingly successful Scandinavian raids on Frisia and Aquitaine indicate that the system was breaking down, and after 840 Viking fleets apparently penetrated Frankish rivers at will, with repeated raids on the Seine, Loire, and elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> A monk at Noirmoutier, Ermentarius, blamed the civil war: "Their disagreement gives strength to foreigners ... the defense of the shores of the ocean is abandoned."<sup>25</sup> Another monastic chronicler, this time on the Seine, blamed the cowardice of the magnates, who "prepared to flee rather than to resist, being absolutely terror-struck."<sup>26</sup> A third factor, not mentioned by contemporaries, was the increased size of the Viking fleets. Whereas earlier raiders had operated in small groups—such as the thirteen vessels of 820 or the nine which raided Noirmoutier in 835—a fleet which attacked Nantes in 843 numbered sixty-seven ships, and two years later 120 ships entered the Seine.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, in 854 Charles the Bald issued a capitulary decreeing that the coastal defense should be deployed with the usual vigilance,<sup>28</sup> and the papal letter cited earlier proves that some kind of defense was still being offered in the 860s. The Flemings also repelled an attempted Viking landing on their coast in 864,<sup>29</sup> but the regularity and apparent ease with which the Vikings entered Frankish rivers suggests that—as Ermentarius of Noirmoutier claimed—the coastal guard was largely inoperative or ineffectual, so that increasingly the fight had to be taken to the Vikings on land.

#### MILITARY SERVICE (2): THE *LANTWERI*<sup>30</sup>

If a Scandinavian fleet overcame any resistance offered by the coast guard and entered Frankish territory, the king might muster the royal host to oppose them. Mobilization of the army could be cumbersome and slow, however, and it has been claimed that this was one of the reasons for the Vikings' success.<sup>31</sup> What this argument overlooks is that there was a second, much more rapid type of mobilization, specifically intended to counter invasion. This was the *lantweri*, when "all shall come to the defense of the fatherland, without any excuse."<sup>32</sup> The distinction between the usual situation and the *lantweri*, "that is, the defense of the

<sup>23</sup> ARF 820 (n. 9 above) 153–154.

<sup>24</sup> The raids in the 840s are discussed exhaustively in Coupland, "Charles the Bald" (n. 7 above) 7–32.

<sup>25</sup> Ermentarius, *De translationibus et miraculis sancti Filiberti*, preface to bk. 2, in R. Poupardin, ed., *Monuments de l'histoire des abbayes de Saint-Philibert* (Paris 1905) 60.

<sup>26</sup> *Translatio sancti Germani Parisiensis* c. 3: *Analecta Bollandiana* 2 (1883) 72.

<sup>27</sup> ARF 820 (n. 9 above) 153; Ermentarius, preface to bk. 2, 2.11 (n. 25 above) 59, 66–67; AB 845 (n. 12 above): Grat 49, Nelson 60. See further S. Coupland, "The Vikings in Francia and Anglo-Saxon England to 911" in R. McKitterick, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History* 2 (Cambridge 1995) 190–201, at 194.

<sup>28</sup> *Capitulare missorum Attiniacense* c. 2: MGH Cap. 2.277.

<sup>29</sup> AB 864 (n. 12 above): Grat 113, Nelson 118.

<sup>30</sup> Mentioned briefly, without discussion, by Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare* (n. 2 above) 53–54; Contamine, "Espace carolingien" (n. 5 above) 399–400; and T. Reuter, "The End of Carolingian Military Expansion" in P. Godman and R. Collins, eds., *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious* (Oxford 1990) 391–405; idem, "The recruitment of armies in the Early Middle Ages: what can we know?" in *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in a European Perspective, AD 1–1300* (Copenhagen 1997) 32–37, at 34–35.

<sup>31</sup> A claim made, e.g., by Oman (n. 5 above) 1.101; H. Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte*, 7 vols. (Berlin 1900–1936) 3.76; A. d'Haenens, *Les Invasions normandes, une catastrophe?* (Paris 1970) 55.

<sup>32</sup> *Edictum Pistense* (864) c. 27: MGH Cap. 2.322.

fatherland,"<sup>33</sup> is most clearly expressed in Charles the Bald's proclamation at Meerssen in 847: "It is our wish that a man serving any one of us [sc. Charles, Lothar I, or Louis the German] ... shall join the army with his lord or perform his other duties, unless, God forbid, an invasion of the land should occur, which is called *lantweri*, in which case all the people of that land shall turn out together to repel it."<sup>34</sup> The *lantweri* thus involved the conscription of the entire Frankish population, both those who regularly served in the host and those who were usually exempt. Even those who were normally forbidden from bearing weapons on penitential grounds were permitted to take up arms against pagan invaders; at times like these every able-bodied fighting man was expected to turn out.<sup>35</sup> Another example of the way in which the customary criteria for conscription were ignored under the *lantweri* can be found in the Capitulary of Quierzy of 877. In the decree, provision was made for any royal vassal who might wish to relinquish his benefice to his heir on the king's death, declaring that the only duty required of such a man would be to turn out in defense of the realm.<sup>36</sup>

The procedures to be followed in the event of invasion were laid down in detail in a capitulary of 865.<sup>37</sup> The *missi* in charge of the region under attack were responsible for assembling an army to oppose the invaders. The local bishops, abbots, and abbesses were instructed to send their full complement of troops, fully equipped and led by a standard-bearer, while counts and royal vassals were to command their contingents in person. Although the capitulary referred to the defense of Burgundy against hostile incursions from neighboring lands, similar steps were almost certainly taken when any local army was raised to resist the Vikings. It has been suggested that the aristocracy were less motivated to defend their own kingdom than when taking part in potentially profitable foreign campaigns,<sup>38</sup> but the fact that these men were defending their own territories and ultimately their own properties seems to me to outweigh such considerations. Likewise, although such forces were undoubtedly less well equipped than the regular army, since many of the common people were too poor to afford much more than a spear or bow,<sup>39</sup> the fact that the men were defending their own region with their local leaders means that their morale and loyalty may have been as high as or even higher than that of the royal host. It would also have been possible to mobilize such troops much more quickly than the regular army.

Many of the recorded instances of opposition to the Vikings almost certainly represented examples of the *lantweri*, even if the term was not used in contemporary accounts. For instance, in 869 the Loire Vikings were defeated by the *Transsequanani*, that is, the men from between the Seine and the Loire, under the command of

<sup>33</sup>This definition is found in an otherwise unknown capitulary included in Paris, BN lat. 10758 and 4628A, reproduced in MGH Cap. 2.71, note.

<sup>34</sup>*Hlotharii, Hludowici et Karoli conventus apud Marsnam primus, Adnuntiatio Karoli c. 5*: MGH Cap. 2.71.

<sup>35</sup>K. J. Leyser, "Warfare in the Western European Middle Ages: The Moral Debate" in K. J. Leyser, *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: The Gregorian Revolution and Beyond* (London 1994) 189–203, at 197. Cf. Coupland, "Rod of God's wrath" (n. 7 above) 547–548.

<sup>36</sup>*Capitulare Carisiacense c. 10*: MGH Cap. 2.358.

<sup>37</sup>*Capitulare Tusiense in Burgundiam directum c. 13*: MGH Cap. 2.331.

<sup>38</sup>Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 134, cf. 90–91.

<sup>39</sup>S. Coupland, "Carolingian arms and armor in the ninth century," *Viator* 21 (1990) 30, 42, 46–47, 48–49.

the local counts, Hugh and Gauzfrid.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in 880 Abbot Gauzlin of St Denis "sent word to the people on the other side of the Scheldt that they should come on an appointed day, and with one group on each bank of the river, they would between them annihilate the Northmen."<sup>41</sup> In areas where royal authority was weak, local resistance might be organized independently. This seems to have been the case in 867, when the Viking chieftain Rorik was driven out of Frisia by the local inhabitants, as a result of which Lothar called up the host to defend the kingdom against Rorik's expected return.<sup>42</sup> Local initiatives were not always so successful, however. In 880 Gauzlin's army not only failed to achieve any success, but only just managed to escape by fleeing in disgrace, and a great many of them were captured or killed. The potential weakness of these local forces was even more forcefully brought out in 882, when the inhabitants of the region around Prüm banded together to try to drive off a Viking army. As Regino commented, because they were "not so much unarmed as lacking any military discipline," they were slaughtered by the Northmen "not like human beings but like brute beasts."<sup>43</sup> In 859 it was the common people between the Seine and the Loire who were massacred, not on this occasion by Scandinavians, whom they had actually defeated in battle, but by the local Frankish magnates. The reason was that exasperation with their leaders' failure to offer resistance had led the local people to form a sworn association (*coniuratio*) to fight the Vikings, and such armed groups were seen as too dangerous to the authority of the establishment to leave unchecked.<sup>44</sup>

#### MILITARY SERVICE (3): THE HOST<sup>45</sup>

It is clear from contemporary sources that the entire army of the kingdom, the royal host, was called up to fight the Vikings on numerous occasions. To give two early examples, in 845 Charles the Bald "ordered that the whole army of his kingdom should, once summoned, mass together to fight," and in 852 Charles and Lothar I besieged the Vikings at Jeufosse "with their entire army."<sup>46</sup> Arrangements for conscription were largely unchanged from earlier in the century, as is evident from the repetition of earlier capitularies.<sup>47</sup> Every man who could afford to go on campaign was ordered to join the army, and those owning a horse had to bring a mount as well. The less well-off had to pool their resources, enabling one man to serve with the help of up to four others, while the poorest free men were exempt from conscription. Even so, a point which has been insufficiently appreciated in the past is that even these *pauperi* played their part in financing the army's campaigns through the payment of the army tax, the *hostilitium*. A number of references in ninth-century texts suggest that this tax was levied on those who owned property worth less than one pound.

The first indication is in the Edict of Pitres of 864, in a decree about the *heriban-*

<sup>40</sup>AB 869 (n. 12 above): Grat 166, Nelson 163.

<sup>41</sup>*Annales Vedastini* [AV] 880, ed. B. de Simson, MGH SSrG (Hanover and Leipzig 1909) 47, 48.

<sup>42</sup>AB 867 (n. 12 above): Grat 137, Nelson 139–140.

<sup>43</sup>Regino of Prüm, *Chronicle* 882, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SSrG (Hanover 1890) 118.

<sup>44</sup>AB 859 (n. 12 above): Grat 80, Nelson 89. See J. L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London 1992) 194.

<sup>45</sup>A fuller discussion of the question of military service can be found, with references to the secondary literature, in Coupland, "Charles the Bald" (n. 7 above) 85–93; see also Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 93–101.

<sup>46</sup>*Translatio sancti Germani* c. 12 (n. 26 above) 78; AB 852 (n. 12 above): Grat 65, Nelson 75.

<sup>47</sup>E.g., *Praeceptum pro Hispanis* (844) c. 1 (MGH Cap. 2.259) repeats a capitulary of 815: MGH



*num.* Originally a fine on those who failed to perform their military service, this came to signify a payment in lieu.<sup>48</sup> The full *heribannum* was a fine of sixty *solidi*, but the Edict of Pîtres repeated a system of graded penalties which required individuals owning property worth more than one pound to pay according to their means.<sup>49</sup> Those free men who were even poorer than this were apparently exempt, suggesting that they were not required to serve in the host. Secondly, a tribute payment to the Vikings in 866 differentiated between those who paid the *heribannum* and those who farmed free *mansi*, suggesting that the latter did not serve in the army;<sup>50</sup> and an Italian capitulary of the same year similarly distinguished between those who could afford to serve in the host, either independently or with assistance, and “the poor,” who were required to defend the coast and country, or, if they owned less than ten *solidi*, exempted from any duties whatsoever.<sup>51</sup> Ninth-century polyptychs likewise record that differing military obligations were required of tenants according to their means. The wealthy few served in the host, as for example those at St. Maur-des-Fossés who owed “the *heribannum* for two oxen, twenty *solidi*.”<sup>52</sup> The vast majority of free tenants, however, paid a tax to the army, the *hostilitium*, evidently instead of serving in the host themselves. The maximum appears to have been four *solidi*, just below the smallest amount levied under the *heribannum*, five *solidi*.<sup>53</sup> Given that the latter sum was exacted from men owning property worth only one pound, the obvious conclusion is that those who paid the *hostilitium* possessed even less than that. The overwhelming majority of free tenants on the great ecclesiastical estates were consequently too poor to serve in the host, even with the assistance of others, but paid the army tax instead.

One other aspect of the *hostilitium* is significant in the present context. Records from the early ninth century indicate that the tax was originally paid in oxen and carts,<sup>54</sup> and its primary function was evidently to provide the army supply train.<sup>55</sup> Even at the beginning of the century, however, the payment could be in cash rather than in kind,<sup>56</sup> and this had apparently become the norm by the time of the Viking invasions. Even so, the carts and oxen which Charles the Bald sent to the fortification work at Pont-de-l’Arche in the 860s were presumably provided through the collection of the *hostilitium*.<sup>57</sup>

According to the Edict of Pîtres, the *hostilitium* was not the only duty imposed upon those free Franks “who cannot join the army.” They were also required to work on the construction of new fortifications, bridges and swamp crossings, and to

Cap. 1.261; *Edictum Pistense* (864) c. 27 (MGH Cap. 2.321) reproduces one of 829: MGH Cap. 2.7.

<sup>48</sup>See, e.g., *Capitulare Bononiense* (811) cc. 1–2: MGH Cap. 1.166; Niermeyer (n. 22 above) 481.

<sup>49</sup>*Edictum Pistense* c. 27: MGH Cap. 2.322.

<sup>50</sup>*AB* 866 (n. 12 above): Grat 126, Nelson 130. See Coupland, “Tribute payments” (n. 7 above) 62–64.

<sup>51</sup>*Constitutio de expeditione Beneventana* c. 1: MGH Cap. 2.94.

<sup>52</sup>C. 6: B. Guérard, ed., *Polyptyque de l’abbé Irminon*, 2 vols. (Paris 1845) 2.284.

<sup>53</sup>Coupland, “Tribute payments” (n. 7 above) 64.

<sup>54</sup>F.-L. Ganshof, ed., “Le polyptyque de l’abbaye de Saint-Bertin (844–859),” *Mémoires de l’institut national de France, Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 45 (1975) 57–200, at 80, 81, 82 (twice) 83, 84, 85, and St. Maur-des-Fossés: Guérard (n. 52 above) 2.285 (c. 9).

<sup>55</sup>A. Longnon, ed., *Polyptyque de l’abbaye de Saint-Germain des Prés*, 2 vols. (Paris 1886–1895) 1.121–123; J. Durlat, “Le polyptyque d’Irminon et l’impôt pour l’armée,” *Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes* 141 (1983) 185, 197; see also Niermeyer (n. 22 above) 504.

<sup>56</sup>Longnon (n. 55) 1.122.

<sup>57</sup>*AB* 869 (n. 12 above): Grat 153, Nelson 153–154; cf. *AB* 862, 866 (carts alone): Grat 91, 127, Nelson 100, 131.

perform guard duty in forts and border regions.<sup>58</sup> Charles the Bald emphasized that these duties were required “following ancient practice and that of other nations” (*iuxta antiquam et aliarum gentium consuetudinem*). The reference to “other nations” probably refers to the Anglo-Saxons, while “ancient practice” may refer to established Frankish custom—a charter for Metz cathedral of 775 described the duties of the church’s free tenants as military service, guard duty and work on bridges—or possibly to late Roman precedents.<sup>59</sup> At this time, 864, the king was undoubtedly keen to assemble sufficient manpower to continue the important defensive works at Pont-de-l’Arche,<sup>60</sup> while the bridges and swamp crossings served to increase the army’s mobility against the Viking raiders.

#### THE SIZE OF ARMIES

The size of Carolingian armies has long been a subject for debate, with the discussion typically focusing on the size of the expansionist forces of Charlemagne in the late eighth century. On the assumption that the Carolingian administration was too primitive to raise large forces, Delbrück offered the guesstimate of 5000 to 6000 troops in any one army, though this figure appears to have been plucked from thin air.<sup>61</sup> It has been roundly rejected by Bachrach, whose own estimate of “a total mobilization of armies for expeditionary operations on all fronts in the 100,000 range” would nevertheless have few supporters.<sup>62</sup> Verbruggen proposed that Charlemagne’s armies might have contained 2500 to 3000 cavalry and between 6000 and 10,000 infantry, a figure followed by Contamine, though again neither offered any real justification for these figures.<sup>63</sup> A minimalist view has been put forward by Reuter, proposing armies “numbered in two or at most three figures,” though he did emphasize the difficulty if not impossibility of assessing the size of any one particular army.<sup>64</sup>

These variations are due in large measure to the paucity of figures in contemporary sources, and the likely unreliability even of those that are reported. From the ninth century I am aware of only two authors who specified the number of troops in a Frankish army, Regino of Prüm and Abbo of St. Germain. Regino stated that Charles the Bald had over 50,000 men at Andernach in 876, but the qualifying phrase “so people say” (*ut ferunt*) and Regino’s unreliability about events earlier in the century raise considerable doubts about the accuracy of his report.<sup>65</sup> Figures

<sup>58</sup>*Edictum Pistense* c. 27; MGH Cap. 2.321–322. For other instances of *civitas* meaning “fortification” see, e.g., ARF 809, 817 (n. 9 above) 129, 147.

<sup>59</sup>C. Gillmor, “Charles the Bald and the small free farmers, 862–869” in Anne Nørgård Jørgensen and Birthe L. Clausen, eds., *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in a European Perspective, AD 1–1300* (Copenhagen 1997) 38–47, at 39–40; J. L. Nelson, “Translating Images of Authority: the Christian Roman Emperors in the Carolingian World” in M. M. MacKenzie and C. Roueché, eds., *Images of Authority: Papers Presented to Joyce Reynolds on the Occasion of her 70th Birthday* (Cambridge 1989) 194–205, at 197.

<sup>60</sup>Coupland, “Fortified bridges” (n. 7 above) 4–6; C. Gillmor, “The logistics of fortified bridge building on the Seine under Charles the Bald,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 11 (1988) 87–106, at 99–106.

<sup>61</sup>Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst* (n. 31 above) 3.16.

<sup>62</sup>B. S. Bachrach, “Early Medieval Military Demography: Some Observations on the Methods of Hans Delbrück” in D. J. Kagay and L. J. A. Villalon, *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge 1999) 3–20; *Early Carolingian Warfare* (n. 2 above) 58.

<sup>63</sup>J. F. Verbruggen, “L’armée et la stratégie de Charlemagne” in W. Braunfels, ed., *Karl der Grosse, Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, 4 vols. (Düsseldorf 1965) 1.420–436; Contamine, “Espace carolingien” (n. 5 above) 30.

<sup>64</sup>Reuter, “Recruitment of armies” (n. 30 above) 36.

<sup>65</sup>Regino 874, 876 (n. 43 above) 107, 112. On Regino’s unreliability see at nn. 79, 135, and 136 be-

given by Abbo in his poem about the siege of Paris are scarcely more credible, including the claim that a Frankish army of just 1000 men defeated 19,000 Vikings at Montfaucon in 888.<sup>66</sup> Although no concrete evidence exists to contradict Abbo's figure, throughout his work the Franks are said to have overcome massively superior odds: in the most extreme case a force of at most 200 Franks is supposed to have resisted a force of 40,000 Vikings.<sup>67</sup>

This highlights the hyperbole in many contemporary accounts. For instance, Hildegarius of Meaux described the army which Charles the Bald mobilized against a Viking incursion in 845 in the following terms: "We can but marvel at how large an army the kingdom fruitlessly brought there with its king, Charles: the earth could scarcely sustain it, and overshadowed the sky under its covering, though we do not know how many there were."<sup>68</sup> Given that the Viking fleet in question numbered 120 ships, it is likely that the Frankish force was a sizeable one, but hardly of the magnitude suggested by Hildegarius. As Halsall has recently underlined, reflection shows that medieval clerics are unlikely to be reliable guides as to the true size of contemporary armies, for even if they had the testimony of eyewitnesses, the numbers involved were too large, their ability to estimate too poor, and their concern for precise accuracy too limited.<sup>69</sup>

Given this dearth of trustworthy material, some authors have tried a more deductive approach. Ferdinand Lot drew on nineteenth-century census figures to assess the potential number of West Frankish troops from the area of Francia he regarded as loyal to the king, but unfortunately his unsupported assumptions about the criteria for conscription and the equivalence of the rural population in the ninth and nineteenth centuries render his conclusions worthless.<sup>70</sup> Karl Ferdinand Werner consequently put forward two other methods for estimating the size of Carolingian armies.<sup>71</sup> The first was to multiply the number of districts (*pagi*) by an estimated minimum of fifty horsemen per district; the second to assume that each royal vassal could have mustered at least twenty mounted followers, a figure amply supported by contemporary sources. These calculations were not intended to determine the size of any particular army, but rather to give a ball-park estimate of the kind of numbers involved. If we apply Werner's calculations to the supposedly vast army assembled in 845, they suggest that Charles the Bald had a potential pool of 7500 to 13,000 horsemen, not including footsoldiers.<sup>72</sup> Given that not all the available troops would

low; also S. Coupland, "The Vikings on the Continent in Myth and History," *History* 88 (2003) 187–203, at 193–194, 199–200, 202.

<sup>66</sup>Abbo, *Bella Parisiacae urbis* 2, lines 492–493, 496–497: H. Waquet, ed., *Abbon: Le siège de Paris par les Normands* (Paris 1964) 102, 104.

<sup>67</sup>Abbo 1, lines 114–115 (n. 66) 24. This figure is also quoted in N. P. Brooks, "England in the Ninth Century: the Crucible of Defeat," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., vol. 29 (1979) 1–20, at 4, who judged Abbo "in a class of his own as an exaggerator": 6. Wallace-Hadrill was unwilling to believe that Abbo was "simply employing a literary device to highlight their heroism" but it seems to me that in this instance at least that is precisely what Abbo was doing: J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Vikings in Francia* (Reading 1975) 5.

<sup>68</sup>*Vita Faronis* c. 122: MGH SS rer. Mer. 5.200.

<sup>69</sup>Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 120–124.

<sup>70</sup>Lot, *Art militaire* (n. 5 above) 1.94–98.

<sup>71</sup>K. F. Werner, "Heeresorganisation und Kriegführung im deutschen Königreich des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts" in *Ordinamenti militari* (n. 1 above) 2.791–843, at 813–822.

<sup>72</sup>Based on ca.150 West Frankish *pagi* or some 650 royal vassals, i.e., 150 counts, 300 *vassi dominici* (following Werner, who doubled the number of counts), 70 bishops, and an estimated 130 abbots.

have mustered on any given occasion, the West Frankish army would have been smaller than this.

A further pointer to the scale of Frankish armies is the size of the Viking forces they opposed. Again contemporary figures must be handled with caution: for example, when the Viking leader Rodulf was killed on Oostergo in 873, were 500 Danes killed with him, as the *Annals of St. Bertin* and *Annals of Xanten* reported, or 800, as the *Annals of Fulda* claimed?<sup>73</sup> The correct answer is undoubtedly "a large number," probably several hundred; we cannot be more specific than that, nor should we try to be. Although Sawyer proposed in 1971 that even the Scandinavian "Great Army" consisted of no more than a thousand men, this has since been demonstrated to have been an underestimate, and a more likely figure is that the armies contained thousands, rather than hundreds, of men.<sup>74</sup> This is consistent with most contemporary reports of Viking fleet sizes, casualty figures, and references to raiding parties such as those on the Seine in 865 numbering 200 and 500 men, or at St. Omer in 891 consisting of 550 men.<sup>75</sup> The figures on the Frankish side are likely to have been similar: armies numbering in their thousands, but not tens of thousands, a conclusion also reached by Halsall looking at a broader range of evidence.<sup>76</sup> At the same time it is important to bear in mind that the Frankish armies which opposed the Vikings were not always the entire host, but individual squadrons (*scaræ*) which presumably numbered only in the hundreds. For instance, in 868 Charles the Bald sent his son Carloman into Neustria with a single squadron, and in 871 it was only the Neustrians whom Gauzfrid and Hugh the Abbot led against a Viking camp on the Loire.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, one ninth-century text which has been overlooked in previous discussions provides valuable support to these conclusions. In a detailed account of the battle of Saucourt in 881, the *Annals of St. Vaast* described how a few Northmen attacked the Franks, "and killed many of them, namely up to a hundred men."<sup>78</sup> Whether *plures* is understood as relative to the size of the army or as an absolute, the implication is clearly that the army was sufficiently small for the loss of a hundred men to have made a noticeable difference. It therefore seems highly unlikely that such an army could have killed eight or nine thousand Vikings, as claimed by Regino and the Fulda annalist respectively.<sup>79</sup>

#### LEADERSHIP AND COMMAND

The overall commander of the Carolingian army was the king; he gave the order to mobilize the host, and on major campaigns led the army in person. For example, Charles the Bald defeated a Viking army besieging Bordeaux in 848, capturing nine enemy ships and killing their crews, and eight years later the same king won a re-

<sup>73</sup>AB 873 (n. 12 above): Grat 193, Nelson 184; *Annales Xantenses* [AX] 873, ed. B. de Simson, MGH SSrG (Hanover and Leipzig 1909) 32–33; AF 873 (n. 14 above): Kurze 80, Reuter 72.

<sup>74</sup>Coupland, "Vikings in Francia and Anglo-Saxon England" (n. 27 above) 194–195 engages with earlier discussions by P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd ed. (London 1971) 128; and Brooks (n. 67 above) 4–11.

<sup>75</sup>AB 865 (n. 12 above): Grat 123, Nelson 127; *Miracula sancti Bertini* c. 6: MGH Scriptores 15.1.512.

<sup>76</sup>Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 123–133; see also T. Reuter, "Carolingian and Ottonian warfare" in M. Keen, ed., *Medieval Warfare: A History* (Oxford 1999) 13–35, at 28–30.

<sup>77</sup>AB 868, 871 (n. 12 above): Grat 151, 181, Nelson 152, 174.

<sup>78</sup>AV 881 (n. 41 above) 50.

<sup>79</sup>AF 881 (n. 14 above): Kurze 96, Reuter 90; Regino 883 [sic] (n. 43 above) 120.

sounding victory over the Northmen in the forest of Perche.<sup>80</sup> There was evidently an expectation that in times of crisis the ruler should take on this significant role, so that when Paris was besieged by the Great Army in 886, Count Odo left the town to plead that Charles the Fat should bring the host to their rescue.<sup>81</sup> Although Charles did assemble an army and eventually assume personal command, it was his inability to defeat the Vikings which reportedly led to his deposition shortly afterwards.<sup>82</sup> By the same token, it was undoubtedly Odo's heroic resistance at Paris which made him the popular favorite to succeed to the throne of the western kingdom.

Although the king was the supreme army commander, conscription, mobilization, and command were organized on a regional basis by the magnates. The first step was the creation of lists recording how many men in each district were liable for conscription. The Edict of Pitres repeated the demand for such rolls to be maintained, and Hincmar of Rheims is known to have supplied just such a list for Count Theoderic's campaign against the Vikings in 882.<sup>83</sup> The magnates were subsequently responsible for mustering their followers and leading them to the place of assembly. Thus Abbot Odo of Ferrières wrote in 840 that illness had forced him to dispatch his men with the local count.<sup>84</sup> They also commanded squadrons in the field: a capitulary of Lothar I from 846 reveals that each squadron was led by between two and four *missi*,<sup>85</sup> though it appears that many squadrons which opposed the Vikings were commanded by just one *missus*, accompanied by one or more other magnates. For instance, in 854 the Vikings on the Loire were prevented from attacking Orléans by Bishops Burchard of Chartres, a royal *missus*,<sup>86</sup> and Agius of Orléans.<sup>87</sup> To give another example, a squadron sent against the Vikings on the Seine in 866 was commanded by Robert, *missus* in charge of western Neustria, and Odo, count of Troyes.<sup>88</sup>

The same capitulary of Lothar I from 846 reveals that the second important group in the military chain of command consisted of the standard-bearers. It listed between three and six per *scara*, all of them royal vassals, several of them counts.<sup>89</sup> Standard-bearers were clearly officers of high rank, although subordinate to the *missi*. One of the functions of standards was to act as symbols of authority, so that to capture the enemy's banners was proof of victory. Robert the Strong proudly presented standards captured from the Vikings to Charles the Bald in 865, and Adrevald wrote that in 843 Lambert had failed to carry off Rainald's victory standards (*victricia*

<sup>80</sup>AB 848 (n. 12 above): Grat 55, Nelson 65; *Annales Fontanellenses* [AFont] 848, 855: J. Laporte, ed., "Les premières annales de Fontanelle," *Mélanges de la Société de l'histoire de Normandie*, XVe série (Rouen and Paris 1951) 63–91, at 81, 91; *Tertium missaticum ad Francos et Aquitanos directum* c. 3: MGH Cap. 2.285.

<sup>81</sup>AV 886 (n. 41 above) 60. On military command as an essential attribute of the monarchy, see Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 25–30; K. J. Leyser, "Early Medieval Canon Law and the Beginnings of Knighthood" in L. Fenske, W. Rösener and T. Zotz, eds., *Institutionen, Kultur und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen 1984) 549–566, esp. 560.

<sup>82</sup>AV 887 (n. 41 above) 64.

<sup>83</sup>Edictum Pistense c. 27: MGH Cap. 2.321; Flodoard, *Historia Remensis ecclesiae* 3.26: MGH Scriptores 13.545; for the dating, see AB 882 (n. 12 above): Grat 246, Nelson 223.

<sup>84</sup>Lupus of Ferrières, letter 15: L. Levillain, ed., *Loup de Ferrières: Correspondance*, 2 vols. (Paris 1964) 1.94.

<sup>85</sup>Hlotharii capitulare de expeditione contra Sarracenos facienda: MGH Cap. 2.67–68.

<sup>86</sup>Capitulare missorum Silvicense, list of *missi*, c. 9: MGH Cap. 2.276.

<sup>87</sup>AB 854 (n. 12 above): Grat 69, Nelson 79.

<sup>88</sup>AB 866 (n. 12 above): Grat 125, Nelson 129.

<sup>89</sup>As n. 85 above.

*signa*).<sup>90</sup> That they also served a tactical purpose, by giving signals to the army, is evident not only from the term *signum* itself, but also from the recurrent use of phrases such as *levatis vexillis* or *erectis vexillis* to indicate the army's departure,<sup>91</sup> and from the comments of Hrabanus Maurus that soldiers should use their position in relation to the standards to keep in formation.<sup>92</sup> No contemporary text describes the appearance of a standard,<sup>93</sup> though manuscript illuminations depict simple three-tailed banners and a dragon.<sup>94</sup> The latter probably consisted of a metal head attached to a cloth windsock, to judge from a comparable Roman standard found in Germany.<sup>95</sup> Horns were also used to give commands, such as setting the army in motion or summoning aid in battle,<sup>96</sup> and are likewise pictured in contemporary manuscripts.<sup>97</sup>

Although the king was commander-in-chief of the army, he was utterly reliant on the magnates who controlled the military organization beneath him. Therein lay a major weakness, for if the magnates failed to fulfill their obligations, not only was the king's authority undermined, but also the kingdom left defenseless. This was precisely the charge leveled against Bishop Hincmar of Laon in 871 when he retained men who, it was argued, should have been fighting the Northmen.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, the loyalty and determination of the common soldiers frequently depended on their lord, and if he were killed, they would often give up the fight. Several instances of this are recorded, such as in 885, when "as soon as they came to join battle, it so happened that Duke Rainald of Maine perished with a few others, and as a result they all turned back in deep despondency, having achieved nothing of any use."<sup>99</sup> Similarly, if the magnates withdrew their support, the king would be left powerless. This occurred in 858, when the blockade of a Viking camp on the Seine had to be abandoned because many of Charles the Bald's leading men defected to his brother Louis, who had invaded the West Frankish realm.<sup>100</sup>

These factors must be taken into account in the ongoing debate about the degree to which the Carolingian army (and indeed the Carolingian state) was centralized

<sup>90</sup>AB 865 (n. 12 above): Grat 122, Nelson 127; *Miracula sancti Benedicti* c. 33: MGH Scriptores 15.1.493. See also Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 199–200.

<sup>91</sup>E.g., AB 876 (n. 12 above): Grat 208, Nelson 196; Regino 891 (n. 43 above) 137; or Hincmar, *De fide Carolo regi servanda*; *Patrologia Latina* 125, col. 963; compare also Ludwigslied 1. 27: *Huob her gundfanon úf*: W. Braune and E.A. Ebbinghaus, *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, 16th ed. (Tübingen 1979) 137.

<sup>92</sup>Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare* (n. 2 above) 97, 189, citing *De procinctu Romanarum miliciae*, c. XIII.

<sup>93</sup>It has been suggested that the *amictum / auribus inmodicis croceum* carried by two *signiferi* was an oriflamme, but the meaning of the phrase is unclear: Abbo 1, lines 153–155 (n. 66 above) 26–28, esp. 28, n. 1.

<sup>94</sup>A. Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser*, 4 vols. (Berlin 1914–1926) 1, pl. XIX and XX; or *Psalterium aureum* 140–141: F. Mutherich and J. E. Gaehde, *Carolingian Painting* (London 1977) pl. 46–47.

<sup>95</sup>R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, 3 vols. (London 1975–1983) 2, fig. 312.

<sup>96</sup>Ermold the Black, *Carmen in honorem Hludowici* line 1589: E. Faral, ed., *Ermold le Noir: Poème sur Louis le Pieux et épîtres au roi Pépin* (Paris 1964) 122; Abbo 1, lines 91–92; 2, lines 234–235, 511–518 (n. 66 above) 22, 82–84, 104.

<sup>97</sup>*Der Stuttgarter Bilderpsalter*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart 1965–1968) 1, fol. 88r; San Paolo Bible, fol. 59v: C.R. Dodwell, *Painting in Europe, 800–1200* (Harmondsworth 1971) pl. 43.

<sup>98</sup>*Concilium Tullense I apud Saponarias, Epistola synodalis ad Wenilonem; Concilium Duziacense I*: J.-D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum collectio* 15, col. 530; 16, col. 662.

<sup>99</sup>AV 885 (n. 41 above) 57; see also AV 886, 62; Regino 867 (n. 43 above) 93; AF 882 (n. 14 above): Kurze 97, Reuter 91.

<sup>100</sup>*Libellus proclamationis adversus Wenilonem* c. 5: MGH Cap. 2.451.

and controlled.<sup>101</sup> On the one hand Carolingian monarchs such as Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, and Charles the Bald clearly pursued an *imitatio imperii*, not least in the appearance of the royal guards;<sup>102</sup> and the apparatus of state, including the arrangements for equipping, mobilizing and directing the host, represented significantly more than the leadership of a loose confederation of magnates' warbands. On the other hand, as Charles the Bald found to his cost in 858, the Frankish rulers' leadership of the army was completely dependent on the magnates. They could and did let their royal masters down, sometimes through negligence, sometimes through weakness and sometimes through their own deliberate fault.

When royal concerns and aristocratic interest coincided, the Franks could offer a potent defense against the Scandinavian raiders; when they differed, as often as not it was the Vikings who benefited. As a result, the Franks' internal conflicts repeatedly gave the Northmen a window of opportunity. This was not just the view of the monk Ermentarius; the St. Vaast annalist explained the devastating arrival of the Great Army from England in 879 as follows: "While they were quarrelling amongst themselves, the Northmen who were situated across the sea heard about their discord and crossed the sea."<sup>103</sup> Finally, another harmful consequence of the Frankish internecine struggles noted by contemporaries was the fact that the deaths of the flower of the Frankish nobility in the civil war and its aftermath deprived the land of some of its ablest defenders, men who would otherwise have offered stout resistance to the Vikings.<sup>104</sup>

#### THE ROLE OF THE CAVALRY

There is widespread agreement among historians that cavalry formed an important element in Carolingian armies, though disagreement over whether horsemen outnumbered infantry, or vice-versa.<sup>105</sup> A passage relating to a battle against the Vikings has been central to the debate and much misunderstood, and so deserves close consideration.<sup>106</sup> At Louvain in 891, a Scandinavian camp was protected on one side by the river Dyle and on the other by a swamp. King Arnulf therefore hesitated to advance, because the situation gave the cavalry no chance to attack, and because *Francis pedetemptim certare inusitatum est*.<sup>107</sup> This was long held to indicate that the Franks no longer used infantry,<sup>108</sup> but that is clearly incorrect: for

<sup>101</sup>The *Problemstellung* is usefully summarized in Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 89–101.

<sup>102</sup>Coupland, "Carolingian arms and armor" (n. 39 above) 41; Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare* (n. 2 above) 70–71, 86.

<sup>103</sup>N. 25 above; *AV* 879 (n. 41 above) 44.

<sup>104</sup>*Miracula sancti Benedicti* c. 33; MGH *Scriptores* 15.1.494; *Andreae Bergomatis Historia*, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum* 221; Regino 841 (n. 43 above) 75.

<sup>105</sup>Ganshof, "Charlemagne's Army" (n. 1 above) 66; Lot, *Art militaire* (n. 5 above) 1.92–93; Oman (n. 5 above) 1.103–105; B. S. Bachrach, "Charlemagne's Cavalry: Myth and Reality," *Military Affairs* 47 (1983) 181–187; J. France, "The Military History of the Carolingian Period," *Revue belge d'histoire militaire* 26 (1985) 81–99; Verbruggen, "Art militaire" (n. 5 above) 295–297, 304–310.

<sup>106</sup>B. S. Bachrach, "Charles Martel, Mounted Shock Combat, the Stirrup, and Feudalism," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 7 (1970) 47–75, at 50–53; J. France, "La guerre dans la France féodale à la fin du IXe et au Xe siècle," *Revue belge d'histoire militaire* 23 (1979) 177–198, at 191–192; Verbruggen, "Art militaire" (n. 5 above) 305; Reuter, "Carolingian and Ottonian warfare" (n. 76 above) 30; Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 186–188.

<sup>107</sup>*AF* 891 (n. 14 above); Kurze 119–120; Reuter 122.

<sup>108</sup>See, e.g., L. White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford 1962) 3; Lot, *Art militaire* (n. 5 above) 94; J. F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages* (Amsterdam, New York and Oxford 1977) 96.

instance, foot-soldiers defended the monastery of St. Bertin in 891 and infantry were deployed in Conrad's army in 906.<sup>109</sup> Reuter, believing he was following Bachrach, translated as "the Franks are not used to fighting while advancing step by step."<sup>110</sup> Bachrach has since explicitly contradicted this interpretation, however, setting out his own understanding of the passage as rather that "in this context ... the *Franci* were unaccustomed to advancing slowly over very rough terrain under a barrage of enemy missiles."<sup>111</sup> This may have been true, but it is hardly a plausible translation of the Latin text, which makes no mention of missiles or terrain. The more straightforward and likely interpretation is that these particular Franks (compare *primores Francorum*—"leaders of the Franks"—in the same sentence) were unused to fighting on foot, a fact which was amply demonstrated by subsequent events.<sup>112</sup> In other words, this text indicates that there were Carolingian troops in the late ninth century who fought only on horseback, but not that Carolingian armies consisted exclusively of such men.

The composition of ninth-century Frankish forces is seldom described; a rare exception is a reference to the army at Paris in 845 as consisting of *equitum et peditem*.<sup>113</sup> The general impression is nonetheless that the host was predominantly mounted, as at Louvain in 891.<sup>114</sup> For instance, when in 835 a Viking attack on Noirmoutier was repulsed by the local count, Rainald of Herbauges, it was reported that the Frankish casualties included "very many horses killed and several horsemen wounded."<sup>115</sup> Or when the Vikings launched a counter attack on King Louis III at Saucourt in 881, it was said that the Franks would have fled "had not the king swiftly dismounted from his horse to give his men courage and a point of resistance."<sup>116</sup> Evidently the king, and presumably also at least some of his men, were fighting on horseback. This is consistent with reports of engagements which did not involve the Vikings: Nithard stressed the importance of horses in the armies of the civil war, and the battle of Andernach in 876 evidently included cavalry, since Charles's troops were described as trying to spur their horses into the battle.<sup>117</sup> It is also consistent with the contemporary pictorial evidence, since several Carolingian manuscripts depict pitched battles on horseback, including the Stuttgart Psalter and San Paolo Bible.<sup>118</sup> These illustrations can be taken as reliable indicators of

<sup>109</sup>*Miracula sancti Bertini* c. 7; MGH *Scriptores* 15.1.512; Regino 906 (n. 43 above) 151.

<sup>110</sup>Reuter (n. 14 above) 122, citing Bachrach, "Charles Martel" (n. 106 above) 51–53.

<sup>111</sup>Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare* (n. 2 above) 320 n. 108, in which he states clearly: "There is no reason to suggest on the basis of this text that the *Franci* were unaccustomed to advancing in a 'step by step' fashion."

<sup>112</sup>Coupland, "Charles the Bald" (n. 7 above) 105. See also Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 186–188.

<sup>113</sup>Audradus Modicus, *Liber revelationum*: L. Traube, "O Roma nobilis: Philologische Untersuchungen aus dem Mittelalter," *Abhandlungen der bayrischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-philologische Klasse* 19 (1892) 297–395, at 380.

<sup>114</sup>References to the presence of horses are not necessarily significant, since troops may have dismounted to fight, and the army's baggage was usually transported on horseback: *AF* 896 (n. 14 above): Kurze 127, Reuter 132.

<sup>115</sup>Ermentarius 2.11 (n. 25 above) 66–67.

<sup>116</sup>*AV* 881 (n. 41 above) 50.

<sup>117</sup>Nithard 2.6, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 3.6 (n. 22 above) 56, 60, 66, 72, 112; *AF* 876 (n. 14 above): Kurze 89, Reuter 81.

<sup>118</sup>*Der Stuttgarter Bilderpsalter*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart 1965–1968) 1, fol. 71v; J. E. Gaehde, "The Pictorial Sources of the Illustrations to the Books of Kings, Proverbs, Judith and Maccabees in the Carolingian Bible of San Paolo Fuori Le Mura in Rome," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 9 (1975) 359–389, pl. 75, 100 (fol. 83r, 243v); A. Boinet, *La Miniature carolingienne* (Paris 1913) pl. 124 (fol. 59v).



contemporary conditions because they include ninth-century Frankish military equipment, even if their composition may have been influenced by antique iconography.<sup>119</sup> The significance of horses in resistance to the Vikings is underlined by the provisions in the Edict of Pîtres for all Franks with the means to own horses to bring them on campaign, and the warning to state officials not to hinder such men, although these could of course have been for mobility as much as for combat.<sup>120</sup>

The proportion of cavalry would undoubtedly have been higher in the royal host than in local forces raised under the *lantweri* given the high cost of horses: up to twenty or even forty *solidi* in the mid-ninth century.<sup>121</sup> For example, when a Viking army landed between Bordeaux and Saintes in 845 and Count Siguin of Bordeaux raised a local army to resist them, the ensuing battle was fought on foot (*pedestri ... proelio*). It was a disaster for the Aquitanians: Siguin was captured and killed, and after suffering heavy casualties the remainder of the army fled.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, when the common people at Prüm turned out to fight the Northmen in 882, there were no horsemen, but "a countless mass of foot-soldiers, gathered together from the fields and villages into a single unit."<sup>123</sup> Here, too, the result was a massacre, and even though on this occasion the lack of military discipline and armor were doubtless also contributory factors, such defeats as these help to explain why Carolingian rulers concentrated on raising a well-armed, well-trained fighting force containing a significant proportion of cavalry.

#### STRATEGY AND TACTICS (1): CONTAINMENT

When Viking fleets began to penetrate ever deeper into the West Frankish river system in the 840s, Charles the Bald had to develop tactics to stop them. He adopted a policy of containment, lining the banks with troops to restrict the invaders to the rivers. This was first employed on the Seine in 845, but failed when the Northmen unexpectedly landed on the south bank and put the Frankish troops to flight. Realizing that the Vikings could not be expelled by force, the king agreed to pay a tribute.<sup>124</sup> This highlights the fundamental weaknesses of the strategy: the soldiers on the banks were unable to reach the enemy but were themselves vulnerable to attack, and the tactic was dependent on the discipline, courage and loyalty of the Frankish forces, who were not always equal to the task.

Nevertheless, Charles adopted the same strategy against a Danish fleet which camped on an island on the Seine in 852.<sup>125</sup> Once again his plans were frustrated, because the Franks evidently lacked the right sort of ships to launch an assault on the island. Although river craft were employed in military operations, they invariably acted as ferries, not as springboards for attack, since they had a deeper draught than the Viking longships and so could not land on the flat, sloping shores

<sup>119</sup>Coupland, "Carolingian arms and armor" (n. 39 above) 31–50.

<sup>120</sup>*Edictum Pistense* c. 26: MGH Cap. 2.321.

<sup>121</sup>20 *solidi*: *Gesta sanctorum Rotonensium* 1.7: C. Brett, trans. and ed., *The Monks of Redon: Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium and Vita Conuuoionis* (Woodbridge 1989) 128–129; L. A. J. W. Sloet, ed., *Oorkondenboek der grafschappen Gelre en Zutphen* (The Hague 1872–1876) 43; 40 *solidi*: *Miracula sancti Vedasti* 1.5: MGH Scriptores 15.1.398.

<sup>122</sup>Lupus letter 44: Levillain (n. 84 above) 1.186; cf. *Annales Engolismenses* 845: MGH Scriptores 16.486.

<sup>123</sup>Regino 882 (n. 43 above) 118.

<sup>124</sup>*Vita Faronis* c. 122: MGH SS rer. Mer. 5.200; *Translatio sancti Germani* c. 12 (n. 26 above) 78; Coupland, "Tribute payments" (n. 7 above) 59–60.

<sup>125</sup>AB 852, 853 (n. 12 above): Grat 65, 66, Nelson 75.

of islands.<sup>126</sup> Faced with the inability of his troops to mount an assault, Charles subsequently abandoned the siege and paid a tribute to one of the Viking leaders.<sup>127</sup>

In 854 Bishops Burchard and Agius nonetheless proved that the strategy of containment could be made to work with the help of river vessels. They prevented the Vikings from advancing up the Loire "by making ready against them ships and soldiers": presumably the ships blocked the river while the troops lined the banks.<sup>128</sup> It was perhaps this episode which inspired Charles the Bald and Lothar II to deploy a river fleet "the like of which had never before been seen in our land" when another Viking band camped on an island at Oissel in 858.<sup>129</sup> The ships were presumably moored in midstream to prevent the Vikings' passage up- or downriver, while the army blockaded the island from the shore. Yet as was mentioned earlier, the siege had to be abandoned when Louis the German invaded the West Frankish kingdom, and in the subsequent debacle, the entire fleet fell into the Vikings' hands.<sup>130</sup> Only two other attempts to attack Viking island bases are recorded, both similarly ending in failure. In 864 Lothar II fitted out ships to launch an assault on an island on the Rhine, but his men refused to attack, and seven years later Hugh the Abbot and Count Gauzfrid of Le Mans tried to capture an island camp on the Loire, but made little headway and suffered heavy losses.<sup>131</sup> The Vikings' island camps appear to have been virtually impregnable.

Despite its repeated failures, Charles the Bald nonetheless still believed in the strategy of containment, and in 862 he at last found a defensive tactic which could enforce it effectively. He managed to trap a Viking fleet by blocking a bridge across the Marne at Isles-lès-Villenoy and deploying troops along the banks as usual. The Vikings were forced to come to terms, and the king subsequently pressed ahead with the fortification of a bridge at Pont-de-l'Arche to try to achieve the permanent exclusion of the Vikings from the upper Seine.<sup>132</sup> The inherent weaknesses of containment were again exposed in 865, however, when a fresh fleet entered the Seine. First the guards failed to turn up on time and then the raiders fell on one of the Frankish detachments, which turned and fled.<sup>133</sup> This is the last occasion on which the strategy is known to have been pursued; Charles's successors appear to have abandoned it. It had seemed inherently sound, and had indeed succeeded on one notable occasion, but consistently failed because of the inability of the Frankish troops to land on the Vikings' island bases and their consequent vulnerability to surprise attack.

#### STRATEGY AND TACTICS (2): INVESTMENT

The Franks were past masters in the art of siege warfare, and Bachrach in particular has underlined the central role played by the engineers in the Carolingian army under Pippin the Short and Charlemagne.<sup>134</sup> Yet the Vikings' mobility, coupled

<sup>126</sup>B. Almgren, "Vikingatåg och vikingaskepp," *Tor* 8 (1962) 192.

<sup>127</sup>Coupland, "Poachers" (n. 7 above) 94–95, and "Tribute payments" (n. 7 above) 60.

<sup>128</sup>*AB* 854 (n. 12 above): Grat 69, Nelson 79.

<sup>129</sup>*Vita Faronis* c. 125: MGH SS rer. Mer. 5.201.

<sup>130</sup>*Vita Faronis* c. 125: MGH SS rer. Mer. 5.201; *AB* 858 (n. 12 above): Grat 78, Nelson 88.

<sup>131</sup>*AX* 864 (n. 73 above) 21; *AB* 871 (n. 12 above): Grat 181, Nelson 174.

<sup>132</sup>Coupland, "Fortified bridges" (n. 7 above) 2–6.

<sup>133</sup>*AB* 865, 866 (n. 12 above): Grat 123, 125; Nelson 127, 129–130.

<sup>134</sup>Bachrach, "Charlemagne's Cavalry" (n. 105 above) 181–187; "Charles Martel" (n. 106 above)

with their habit of keeping to their ships or camping on islands, meant that they rarely allowed themselves to be trapped by the Franks. In fact, during the whole period of the Scandinavian invasions there are only three occasions when Viking armies are known to have been besieged: at Angers in 873, Asselt in 880, and a small fortress in the Hesbaye in 885.<sup>135</sup>

In any siege, the attackers' first priority was to surround the enemy, sometimes throwing up a rampart around the site as well, as is attested at Angers in 873. They would then seek to stop all food and water reaching the beleaguered garrison, a tactic which is said to have proved decisive in the Hesbaye, where the Franks had reportedly captured the Scandinavians' supplies before the blockade began. A protracted investment could, however, also create logistical problems for the besieging army, and Regino claimed that the Franks at Angers began to run out of food, as well as being stricken by sickness. Even though the historicity of Regino's account is dubious, as we shall see, clearly such situations did occur in contemporary sieges.

Apart from undertaking a direct assault, the assailants might try to undermine the walls, scale the ramparts on ladders, or burn down the stronghold. Siege engines could also be employed, though not apparently at any of the places where the Vikings were besieged; in all three cases it appears that the Franks settled in to starve their opponents into submission. At Angers this was successful: the Scandinavian leaders commended themselves to Charles the Bald and promised to leave the kingdom as soon as the winter was over. This is the version of events reported in the contemporary *Annals of St. Bertin*, and it is not only quite different from the account in the later *Chronicle* of Regino of Prüm, but also significantly more reliable. As well as claiming that the Franks used siege engines, Regino alleged that Charles the Bald took a tribute from the Vikings and asserted that the deciding factor in the Frankish victory was a Breton plan to divert the Maine by the digging of a channel "of amazing depth and width," leaving the longships high and dry. If the second detail is implausible, the third is impossible. The river was nearly 100 meters wide at Angers, rendering the task beyond the capability of the army in the time available. By way of comparison, the *fossa Carolina* dug in Bavaria in 793 was only some 30m wide, 1500m long and 6m deep, yet it has been calculated that it would have taken a work-force of 4700 men ten weeks to excavate.<sup>136</sup> Less dramatic but much more plausible is Hincmar's report that the Northmen were simply worn down by the length of the siege, a claim which is given added weight by the likelihood that Hincmar was himself present at the siege.<sup>137</sup> Once the Vikings had agreed to leave the town, the king ordered the fortification of

47–75; and most recently *Early Carolingian Warfare* (n. 2 above) 102–118.

<sup>135</sup>Angers: *AB* 873 (n. 12 above); *Grat* 193–195, *Nelson* 183–185; *Regino* 873 (n. 43 above) 105–107; *Asselt*: *AF* 882 (n. 14 above); *Kurze* 98–99, 107–109; *Reuter* 92–93, 104–106; *AB* 882 (n. 12 above); *Grat* 247–248, *Nelson* 224–225; *Hesbaye*: *AF* 885 (n. 14 above); *Kurze* 102, *Reuter* 97. Although Regino described a purported siege at Brissarthe in 866, his account cannot be trusted: *Regino* 867 [sic] (n. 43 above) 92–93. (1) The encounter is wrongly dated to 867; (2) Regino makes no mention of details in other, more reliable sources, such as the presence of Bretons, the context of a raid on Le Mans, or the fact that the raiders were mounted; (3) he states that the Franks intended to use siege engines, even though they had intercepted the Vikings with no expectation of a siege; (4) he names the Viking commander as Hasting, a notorious leader by the time Regino was writing, but not otherwise attested on the Continent before 882.

<sup>136</sup>H. H. Hofmann, 'Fossa Carolina' in Braunsfels, ed., *Karl der Grosse* (n. 63 above) 1.446.

<sup>137</sup>*Nelson*, *Annals of St.-Bertin* (n. 12 above) 185 n. 17.

the bridge over the Loire at Les Ponts-de-Cé to prevent them from returning upriver.<sup>138</sup>

As for the siege at Asselt, our understanding of events is complicated by the fact that conflicting accounts are given in the two continuations of the *Annals of Fulda*. They at least agree on the outcome of the siege—one of the Viking leaders, Godfrid, commended himself to Charles the Fat, while the rest left on payment of a tribute—but differ significantly over why it was lifted. One version claims that the stronghold was about to surrender, and attributes the deal to bribery, treachery and weakness, but the author is deeply hostile to those counselors who brokered the agreement. The other, which is more likely to be reliable,<sup>139</sup> reports that the presence of large numbers of putrefying corpses (it was July) spread not only disgust but also sickness among the besieging army. This is not only highly plausible but also perhaps paralleled at Angers, as we have seen. Even so, it did nothing for the emperor's reputation.

In sum, the Franks suffered the frustration of having an army which was skilled in siegecraft, but fighting an enemy which hardly ever allowed itself to be trapped.<sup>140</sup> When it did come to a siege, the Franks apparently held the upper hand, in that two of the three occasions on which Viking forces were besieged were clear Frankish victories. This was the case at Angers, where the Scandinavian leaders were forced to come to terms, and in the Hesbaye, where the Northmen fled by night. The third, the siege of Asselt, was seen at the time as a capitulation by Charles the Fat, but did result in Godfrid's commendation, which was a proven and effective method of turning an enemy into an ally.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, we have seen that the emperor's failure to press home the siege was probably due to the spread of sickness among his troops, a common hazard of siege warfare, especially in the summer.

### STRATEGY AND TACTICS (3): ENGAGEMENT<sup>142</sup>

*Nemine resistente*: "resisted by no-one"; the phrase echoes as a plaintive litany through an array of ninth-century clerical sources describing the Viking raids.<sup>143</sup> Yet it should not be thought that the Franks fought shy of engaging the Vikings in battle. The description of Charles the Bald in the *Annals of Xanten* as "suffering frequent onslaughts from the pagans, continually offering them tribute, and never emerging victorious in battle" owes more to political rhetoric than historical reality.<sup>144</sup> Time and again Frankish armies and Carolingian rulers (including Charles the Bald) came against the Vikings in battle, sometimes suffering defeat, but sometimes emerging victorious. Any roll of honor would include Noirmoutier (835), the Dordogne (848), Poitiers (855 and 868), le Perche (856), the Charente (865), the Loire (862, 865 and 869), Oostergo (873), West Frisia (876), Saucourt (881), Avaux

<sup>138</sup>Coupland, "Fortified Bridges" (n. 7 above) 9–10.

<sup>139</sup>Coupland, "Myth and History" (n. 65 above) 198–199.

<sup>140</sup>The present discussion has been kept short for this reason.

<sup>141</sup>Coupland, "Poachers" (n. 7 above) 108–114.

<sup>142</sup>See also Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) chap. 9, "Battle."

<sup>143</sup>The phrase or an equivalent is found in the *Annals of St. Bertin*, *Annals of Fulda*, *Annals of St. Vaast*, *Chronicle of Nantes*, *Life of St. Faro*, *Miracles of St. Benedict*, *Miracles of St. Germanus*, *Miracles of St. Remacius*, *Translation of St. Philibert* and works by Abbo and Audradus Modicus.

<sup>144</sup>AX 869 (n. 73 above) 27; Coupland, "Tribute payments" (n. 7 above) 71–72.

(882), Montfaucon and the river Aisne (888), Louvain (891), and le Vimeu (898).<sup>145</sup> These victories were, moreover, won by a variety of Frankish forces. In 848, 856, 881, and 882 it was the king leading the host who was victorious; in 835, 862, 865, and 869 a local count, possibly under the auspices of the *lantweri*; while at Poitiers in 855 and 868, on the Charente in 865 and in Frisia in 873 and 876 it was the local populace who were defending their territory. These military successes serve as a reminder that the weaknesses of the Frankish military machine and the failings of locally raised forces should not be overestimated.

This list of triumphs over Viking armies would also undoubtedly be longer were it not for the raiders' frequent avoidance of battle. For example, on the Seine in 841 "Wulfard, a royal vassal, opposed them with an army, but the pagans were not at all prepared to fight."<sup>146</sup> The Vikings' aim was to acquire plunder, not to win battles, so why risk their lives and loot in combat when a tactical retreat would preserve both? As a result, they generally sought to pillage poorly defended targets and withdraw without risking casualties, particularly in the earlier incursions. Thus when a warband was intercepted at Vardes in 852, they fled into the woods to escape the Frankish horsemen, who could not pursue them among the trees.<sup>147</sup> The same tactic was used by the Great Army in 891 when they were attacked by Odo at Wallers, and the annalist adds that the Northmen had been deliberately traveling through inaccessible areas (*in via loca*).<sup>148</sup> What was more, if Viking forces were defeated they often simply withdrew and regrouped. The lament uttered by the St. Vaast annalist after Carloman's victory at Avaux applied to many similar situations: "When battle commenced, the Franks emerged victorious, but this engagement did nothing to subdue the Northmen."<sup>149</sup>

Contemporary sources reveal regrettably little about the tactics employed by the Franks against the Vikings, though one vital factor was intelligence. Scouts were seen as extremely important in keeping abreast of the enemy's movements and trying to predict their intentions.<sup>150</sup> Thus when Louis III defeated a Viking army at Saucourt in 881, it was after "he sent out scouts, who reported that they were coming back laden with plunder."<sup>151</sup> Twenty-five years earlier, Charles the Bald's successful attack on a Viking warband in the forest of Perche followed his muster of the Franks at Neaufles, where, Hincmar wrote, "we were keeping watch against the Northmen's incursion."<sup>152</sup> Equally useful was misinformation, to mislead or trick the enemy. For example, in 873 Charles the Bald was planning to attack the Vikings at Angers, but announced a campaign into Brittany in order to lull them into a false sense of security.<sup>153</sup>

Virtually nothing is recorded about Carolingian battle tactics against the Vi-

<sup>145</sup> See at nn. 40, 66, 73, 80, and 115 above, n. 168 below; also *AB* 848, 855, 862, 868 (n. 12 above); *Grat* 55, 71, 89, 166, Nelson 65, 81, 99, 152; *AF* 876, 891 (n. 14 above); *Kurze* 86, 119–121, *Reuter* 79, 121–123; *AV* 881, 882, 888, 891, 898 (n. 41 above) 50–51, 53, 65, 70, 80.

<sup>146</sup> *AFont* 841 (n. 80 above) 75.

<sup>147</sup> *AFont* 851 (n. 80 above) 89; see also *Regino* 892 (n. 43 above) 138.

<sup>148</sup> *AV* 891, cf. 898 (n. 41 above) 69, 80. See also at n. 163 below.

<sup>149</sup> *AV* 882 (n. 41 above) 53.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. *Bachrach, Early Carolingian Warfare* (n. 2 above) 188–189; *Halsall, Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 147–148, 157.

<sup>151</sup> *AV* 881 (n. 41 above) 50.

<sup>152</sup> *AFont* 855 [sic] (n. 80 above) 91; *Flodoard, Historia Remensis ecclesiae* 3.16; *MGH Scriptores* 13.506; *Hincmari Epistolae* no. 131; *MGH Epistolae* 8.1.72.

<sup>153</sup> *AB* 873 (n. 12 above); *Grat* 192, Nelson 183.

kings, though presumably they were similar to those employed against other opponents in other campaigns. These could include dawn attacks, ambush, feigned retreat, and attacking from two or three directions in order to stretch the enemy forces and probe for weak points.<sup>154</sup> The latter maneuver seems to have been used at Fontenoy during the Frankish civil war, and had also been favored by Charlemagne and Louis the Pious in the earlier expansionist campaigns.<sup>155</sup> The Frankish cavalry evidently charged at speed in close order, as is described in Regino's account of a battle fought between Franks and Bretons in 851.<sup>156</sup> Although Regino is not always reliable on earlier events, in this instance his account is corroborated by Ermold the Black, who personally campaigned in Brittany, and by Nithard's description of Frankish military games fought in 842.<sup>157</sup> Regino records that the Franks were drawn up *en masse* (*in unum conglobati*) and unlike the Bretons, who were armed with light throwing spears, held onto their lances, using them as thrusting weapons, as well as fighting hand to hand with drawn swords. The Bretons advanced towards the Frankish line hurling their javelins, then fell back in an attempt to lure their opponents to break ranks and pursue them. This underlines the Franks' preference for fighting in close order, in contrast to the wheeling, darting Breton cavalry, and King Odo's command to his men to keep close together as they charged at Montfaucon in 888 suggests the same tactic was still being employed against the Vikings.<sup>158</sup> By contrast, though it is possible that ninth-century Carolingian armies sometimes fought in a wedge formation or phalanx, the use of the term *cuneus* by contemporary authors should not necessarily be interpreted in that sense. By this time the term could simply denote a body of troops, including units which were not in battle formation, or even in a wholly non-military context to describe a crowd of church-goers.<sup>159</sup>

Although the Carolingian armies were well armed, highly mobile and very experienced in mounted warfare, the Vikings quickly developed effective tactics against them. As we have seen, warbands tended to return to their ships or camp on islands where the Franks could not reach them. The rare defeat at Noirmoutier in 835 was only possible because the tide had gone out, allowing Rainald and his horsemen to cross a causeway from the mainland. On land, the Vikings learned to use the local terrain to their advantage. To avoid encountering Frankish troops they kept to *invia loca*, inaccessible regions,<sup>160</sup> including forest and marshland:

<sup>154</sup>Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 188–191, 195–196, 204–206; Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare* (n. 2 above) chap. 5, "Battlefield Tactics."

<sup>155</sup>Nithard 2.10 (n. 22 above) 76–78; Verbruggen, *Art of Warfare* (n. 108 above) 280–282; Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 147.

<sup>156</sup>Regino 860 (n. 43 above) 78–79 (*recte* 851: see *AFont* 851 [n. 80 above] 87; *Annales Engolismenses* 851: MGH *Scriptores* 16.486). See also Halsall, *Warfare and Society* (n. 3 above) 194–197.

<sup>157</sup>Ermold lines 1494, 1680–1683 (n. 96 above) 114, 128; Nithard 3.6 (n. 22 above) 110–112. Cf. J.-C. Cassard, "La guerre des Bretons armoricains au haut moyen âge," *Revue historique* 557 (1986) 3–27.

<sup>158</sup>*ARF* (revision) 782 (n. 9 above) 63; Abbo 2, line 507 (n. 66 above) 104.

<sup>159</sup>*AB* 864, 869 (n. 12 above): Grat 116, 165, Nelson 121 ("companies"), 162 ("formations"); Ermentarius 2.2 (n. 25 above) 63. A passage in Richer (I.9) sometimes cited as evidence that the wedge formation was still employed in the late ninth century is unreliable: R. Latouche, ed., *Richer: Histoire de France (888–995)*, 2 vols. (Paris 1930–1937) 1.24 and n. 1; see ix–xi of the same work and Lot, *Art militaire* (n. 5 above) 1.102.

<sup>160</sup>As n. 148 above.

the Vikings at Louvain camped with a swamp on one side and the Dyle on the other precisely to preclude a mounted attack. On land, Viking armies regularly surrounded their camps with a rampart topped by a palisade, and perhaps ditches as well.<sup>161</sup> The effectiveness of the latter was proved at Paris in 886, where the commander of the army sent to break the siege, Duke Henry, rode into just such a ditch. His horse fell and threw him, whereupon a group of Danes hiding nearby jumped out and killed him.<sup>162</sup> Here again we see how the resourceful Scandinavians repeatedly found ways of blunting the edge of the Carolingian war machine.

#### SUMMARY

This article set out to consider why the Frankish armies which had proved so effective against other opponents under Pippin III and Charlemagne were apparently ineffectual against the Vikings in the ninth century. The last section in particular has highlighted the fact that this is largely a misconception. Carolingian armies won numerous victories against the Vikings, but to their frustration found that military success alone was insufficient to deal with the Scandinavian menace. The Northmen would simply retreat, regroup and later return. What was more, they were masters of the avoidance of battle, not only through their choice of territory through which to travel and the location of their camps, but also through their willingness to beat a strategic retreat. This was equally true in 841, when Wulfard found his opponents on the Seine unwilling to fight, and fifty years later, when "King Odo caught up with [the Northmen] at Wallers, but not in the way that he wanted, for, having abandoned their loot, they escaped by scattering through the woods, and so regained their camp."<sup>163</sup> The reason for this behavior is clear, namely that the Vikings were not an invading army seeking territory to conquer, but a series of fast-moving warbands, each hungry for loot. Normandy was not conquered by Rollo as Saxony was by Charlemagne, but granted by Charles the Simple much as tracts of Frisia had been given in benefice to other Scandinavian chiefs by Frankish rulers before him, perhaps even including Charlemagne.<sup>164</sup> This made it particularly difficult for the Carolingians to crush the raiders, for defeat in battle might remove them in the short term, but only some kind of agreement offered the hope of lasting exclusion. That is why Frankish rulers ended up offering benefices in exchange for conversion and commendation, or, like their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, paying tribute in exchange for a promise of departure.<sup>165</sup>

We have also considered the possibility that weaknesses in the Carolingian military organization might have undermined the defense of Francia and benefited the Viking attackers. Previous authors have suggested that the mobilization of the army was too slow to deal with these fast-moving raiders and that the lack of booty might have lessened the resolve of the Frankish nobility.<sup>166</sup> We have concluded that both these explanations lack substance, since under the provisions of the *lantweri* local armies could have been raised relatively quickly, motivated to defend not simply the

<sup>161</sup> AF 891 (n. 14 above): Kurze 119–120 (*sepibus more eorum municione septa securi consederunt*) Reuter 121; Regino 891 (n. 43 above) 138 (*ligno et terrae congerie more solito se communiunt*).

<sup>162</sup> *AV* 886 (n. 41 above) 61; Regino 887 (n. 43 above) 126.

<sup>163</sup> As nn. 146 and 148 above.

<sup>164</sup> Coupland, "Poachers" (n. 7 above) esp. 87–88.

<sup>165</sup> Coupland, "Tribute payments" (n. 7 above) 68–69, 72.

<sup>166</sup> See at nn. 31 and 38 above.

kingdom, but also their own homes and families. Some of these armies were admittedly poorly trained, armed and equipped, and paid the penalty for their shortcomings,<sup>167</sup> but others were more than equal to the task. Their zeal and potential effectiveness was exemplified in 865, when Robert the Strong led one local force which "killed more than 500 of the Northmen who were based on the Loire, without loss to his own side," and an army of Aquitanians "battled with the Northmen who were camped on the Charente under Sigfrid, and killed around 400 of them, while the rest fled back to their ships."<sup>168</sup> The principal weakness of the Frankish forces which has been identified here was the lack of assault ships which could attack the Vikings' island bases, leaving the initiative always with the Scandinavians and the Franks vulnerable to surprise attack.

Ninth-century authors offered other reasons for the Franks' inability to overcome the Vikings. One blamed the cowardice of the army's commanders,<sup>169</sup> but this almost certainly reflected the strongly held view of the clerical writers of the day that it was the duty of the laity to defend the church and the kingdom by defeating and expelling the pagan enemy.<sup>170</sup> There is ample evidence of resistance to the Vikings by the aristocracy, several of whom gave their lives in the defense of the realm.<sup>171</sup> Other contemporaries, such as Ermentarius and the St. Vaast annalist, saw the problem as the Franks' internal divisions.<sup>172</sup> This was clearly a factor which contributed to the Vikings' success, and here there is a significant difference between the reign of Charlemagne and the later ninth century. Charlemagne of course faced internal dissent and had to win over his magnates with gifts of wealth or prestige. Yet he never risked a rival Frankish ruler invading his kingdom while on campaign, as happened to Charles the Bald and Lothar II in 858,<sup>173</sup> nor suffered incursions from pagan enemies while he was seeking to consolidate his grip on the throne, as happened to Charles the Bald in the early 840s. Worse, contemporaries reported that those enemies had been encouraged to attack the West Frankish kingdom by Lothar I, initially as a way of weakening the position of his father, Louis the Pious, and later in support of his dream of empire during the civil war.<sup>174</sup> In the memorable phrase of Gwyn Jones, "It must have appeared to Charles [the Bald] as though he was a man with a wolf at his throat and a wasp in his hair, and in this menagerie of menace the Danes were the wasp."<sup>175</sup>

In short, it appears that it was Frankish politics and Scandinavian tactics, including their choice of island bases, which represented the most significant obstacles to the Carolingian armies in their struggles against the Vikings, rather than any innate weakness in their military structures or strategies.

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<sup>167</sup>See at nn. 39, 43, and 121 above.

<sup>168</sup>*AB* 865 (n. 12 above): Grat 122, 124; Nelson 127, 128.

<sup>169</sup>See at n. 26 above.

<sup>170</sup>Coupland, "Rod of God's wrath" (n. 7 above) 547–549; "Tribute payments" (n. 7 above) 71.

<sup>171</sup>E.g., at nn. 40, 77, 99, 115, and 122 above.

<sup>172</sup>See at nn. 25 and 103 above.

<sup>173</sup>See at n. 100 above.

<sup>174</sup>See Coupland, "Poachers" (n. 7 above) 90–91.

<sup>175</sup>G. Jones, *A History of the Vikings* (London 1968) 213.