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► **To cite this version:**

Stephen M. Lewis. Hamlet with the Princes of Denmark: An exploration of the case of Hálfðan ‘king of the Danes’. 2017. hal-01943605

HAL Id: hal-01943605

<https://hal.science/hal-01943605v1>

Preprint submitted on 4 Dec 2018

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Hamlet with the Princes of Denmark: An exploration of the case of Hálfðan ‘king of the Danes’

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As their military fortunes waxed and waned, the Scandinavian armies would move back and forth across the Channel with some regularity [...] appearing under different names and in different constellations in different places – Neil Price¹

Little is known about the power of the Danish kings in the second half of the ninth century when several Viking forces ravaged Frankia and Britain – Niels Lund²

The Anglo-Saxon scholar Patrick Wormald once pointed out: ‘It is strange that, while students of other Germanic peoples have been obsessed with the identity and office of their leaders, Viking scholars have said very little of such things – a literal case of Hamlet without princes of Denmark!’³ The reason for this state of affairs is two-fold. First, there is a dearth of reliable historical, linguistic and archaeological evidence regarding the origins of the so-called ‘great army’ in England, except that it does seem, and is generally believed, that they were predominantly Danes - which of course does not at all mean that they all they came directly from Denmark itself, nor that ‘Danes’ only came from the confines of modern Denmark. Clare Downham is surely right in saying that ‘the political history of vikings has proved controversial due to a lack of consensus as to what constitutes reliable evidence’.⁴ Second, the long and fascinating, but perhaps ultimately unhealthy, obsession with the legendary Ragnarr loðbrók and his litany of supposed sons has distracted attention from what we might learn from a close and separate examination of some of the named leaders of the ‘great army’ in England, without any inferences being drawn from later Northern sagas about their dubious familial relationships to one another.⁵

This article explores the case of one such ‘Prince of Denmark’ called Hálfðan ‘king of the Danes’. His life as best we can reconstruct it reveals much that is of great significance for our understanding of the Viking Age, not only in England but in Denmark and the Frankish realm as well.

First, Hálfðan’s career clearly demonstrates the fluid and changing nature of the leadership of large or so-called ‘great’ armies in England and Francia in the second half of the ninth century. These armies never were unified, monolithic forces. Simon Coupland puts it as

¹ Neil Price, ‘Pirates of the North Sea? The Viking Ship as Political Space’ in *Comparative Perspectives on Past Colonisation, Maritime Interaction and Cultural Integration*, ed. Lene Melheim, Håkon Glørstad, Zanette Tsigaridas Glørstad, (Sheffield 2016) 149-176 at 163.

² Niels Lund, ‘The Danish Empire and the End of the Viking Age’ in *The Oxford in illustrated history of the Vikings*, ed. P. H. Sawyer (Oxford 1997) 156-181 at 156.

³ Patrick C. Wormald, ‘Viking Studies: Whence and Whither?’ in *The Vikings*, ed. R. T. Farrell (London and Chichester 1982) 128-56 at 144.

⁴ Clare Downham, ‘Vikings in England’ in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink with Neil Price (London 2008) 341-49 at 341.

⁵ For an excellent analysis of these matters see Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Vikings in the West: The Legend of Ragnar Loðbrók and his sons*, *Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia* 18 (Vienna 2012).

follows: ‘Viking armies were continually changing in their composition, leadership and location. New elements arrived as old elements left, and the theatre of operations could change from year to year.’¹ Second, Hálfðan’s case illustrates the fact that ‘vikings’ were almost by definition ‘international’ and continually raided, literally, overseas. This seems rather obvious, but, as Neil Price says, ‘because we tend to view the period through the written record of the Vikings’ victims [...] it is easy to overlook the fact that different ‘army’ names are sometimes alternative labels for the same force operating in different places’.² In Simon Keynes’s words: ‘The question always arises whether a particular raid recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* originated in Scandinavia, or whether it originated among the Vikings established on the Continent or among those based in Ireland; for one has to bear in mind that the activities of the Vikings in Ireland, in England, and on the Continent, were complementary aspects of a single phenomenon, and that one raid might have been part of a larger pattern.’ Keynes then adds: ‘It follows that we cannot begin to understand the course and the conduct of the raids in England without continual reference to continental and Irish annals (notably the so-called *Annals of St-Bertin*, the *Annals of St-Vaast*, and the *Annals of Ulster*).’³ As will be seen, this is certainly true of Hálfðan; he moved back and forth between England and Denmark, but he also raided in northern Britain and possibly in north-west Wales, before dying in Ireland in 877. Third, while it has long been recognised that ‘some of leaders of Viking expeditions were exiles, often members of royal families ousted from their homeland by more powerful rivals’,⁴ it is not as often recognised that ‘kings’ from Denmark and elsewhere were also sometimes vikings, both before and sometimes after they had achieved any royal status at home. It will be argued that the Hálfðan who was an important leader of the Danish army in England, and called a ‘king of the Danes’, was the same man as Hálfðan the joint king of Denmark in 873. He might have only been a landed king in Denmark for a short time, but he certainly had a raiding career both before and after this time. Fourth, in Hálfðan we can observe some of the complex relations between Danish ‘vikings’, of both the ‘poacher’ or ‘gamekeeper’ variety,⁵ in Britain, Denmark, Frisia and Ireland, as well as the immense importance of their interactions with the descendants of Charlemagne - in Hálfðan’s case with Charlemagne’s grandson Louis the German. Finally, if Hálfðan (*Healfdene*) in England and Hálfðan (*Halbdeni*), a joint king in Denmark in 873, were one and the same person, as I will suggest they were, this casts considerable doubt on the contention that the Hálfðan of the early ‘great army’ in England was a family member of the Irish-based so-called ‘dynasty of Ívarr’, as it is often contended that he was.⁶

Some of Hálfðan’s life as explored in this article is clear, some is of necessity interpretation. But history cannot be written without interpretation, whatever Leopold von Ranke said but did not actually practice. Most, though admittedly not all, of the evidence used can be regarded as reliable, it is the interpretation that can be debated. Here, as elsewhere,

¹ Simon Coupland, ‘The Vikings in Francia and Anglo-Saxon England to 911’ in *The New Cambridge Medieval History Volume. 2: c.700–c.900*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge 1995) 190-201 at 195.

² Neil Price, ‘Ship-Men and Slaughter-Wolves. Pirate Politics in the Viking Age’ in *Persistent Piracy: Maritime Violence and State-Formation in Global Historical Perspective*, ed. Stefan Eklöf Amirel and Leos Müller (Basingstoke 2014) 51-68 at 58

³ Simon Keynes, ‘The Vikings in England, c. 790-1016’ in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, ed. Peter Sawyer (Oxford 1997) 48-82 at 51.

⁴ Lund, ‘The Danish Empire’ 156

⁵ I am referring here to Simon Coupland’s terms in his ‘From poachers to gamekeepers: Scandinavian warlords and Carolingian kings’, *Early Medieval Europe* (1998) 85-114; an article which discusses the exiled Danes in Frisia.

⁶ For the ‘dynasty of Ívarr’ theory see in particular: Alfred. P. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles 850-880* (Oxford 1977); *idem.*, *Scandinavian York and Dublin. The History and Archaeology of Two Related Viking Kingdoms* (Dublin 1987); Clare Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland. The Dynasty of Ívarr to A.D. 1014* (Edinburgh 2007).

what needs to be tested is what Janet Nelson called in relation to Alfred Smyth's work the lurking assumptions.¹ I hope readers will do just that. But ultimately, as Lund says: 'That sources on which so much depends are so open to interpretation and reinterpretation is what makes the study of the Viking period so fascinating.'²

The early 'great army' and the arrival of Hálfðan in England

In the autumn of 865 the first contingent of the Danish 'great army' in England landed in East Anglia 'from the north'.³ It was an army that first defeated the Northumbrians, Mercians and East Angles and then, a little later and under fresh leadership, was to go on to give King Alfred of Wessex so much trouble. Yet despite the importance of these Northmen for English history and despite the fact that their movements and activities have long been the subject of scholarly scrutiny, the composite nature of the army and the identity and origins of its changing leadership has received scant attention.⁴ But for four years after 865, even though the West Saxon chroniclers knew of the Scandinavian army's movements, and reported some of them, they were either unaware of the identity of its leaders or, perhaps more likely, were not too concerned, probably for the simple reason that during these years the Danes did not pose any direct threat to Wessex itself.⁵ As a consequence until the beginning of 871 we must rely on later Northumbrian sources⁶ and the tenth-century West Saxon ealdorman Æthelweard for any information regarding the chieftains involved. Æthelweard's *Chronicon* is the only source we have which mentions the name of the Danish leader in 865:

Enimuero Eðered successit in regnum post obitum fratris sui Æðelbyrhti. In eodem anno adueta sunt classes tyranni Iguares ab aquilone in terram Anglorum, hiemaueruntque inter Orientales Anglos [...] Scilicet post annum ipse exercitus, relicta orientali parte, transfretatusque est fluuium Humbre in Nordhymbriorum prouinciam ad Euoracam urbem.⁷

(Æthelred succeeded to the kingdom after the death of his brother Æthelbyrht. In the same year, the fleets of the tyrant Inwær arrived in the land of the English from the north,⁸ and they wintered among the East Angles. [...] After a year, that army, leaving the eastern area, was transported across the River Humber into the province of the Northumbrians, and to the city of York.)⁹

¹ Janet L. Nelson, 'England and the Continent in the ninth century: The Vikings and Others', *Transactions of the RHS* 13 (2003) 1-28 at 24.

² Niels Lund, 'Allies of God or man? The Viking expansion in a European perspective', *Viator* 20 (1989) 45-59 at 59.

³ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles [ASC]*, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (London 2000) s.a. 866; *Chronicon Æthelwardi. The Chronicle of Æthelweard [CA]*, ed. and trans. Alistair Campbell (London 1962) IV: 2, 35; although there could well have been some connection between them and the 'heathen raiding army' reported by the ASC in Kent in 864/865.

⁴ A good exception being Shane McLeod, *The Beginning of the Scandinavian Settlement in England: The Viking 'Great Army' and Early Settlers, c. 865-900* (Turnhout 2014).

⁵ Of course, if the Danes in Kent in 864 were part of the later 'great army' then it could be argued they had already threatened Wessex.

⁶ For the general reliability of these Northumbrian sources see: David Rollason, D. Gore and G. Fellows-Jensen, *Sources for York History to AD1100*, York Archaeological Trust (York 1998) esp. 25-27, 32, 63; McLeod, *The Beginning of the Scandinavian Settlement in England* 33-36. See also Clare Downham, 'The Chronology of the Last Scandinavian Kings of York, AD 937-954', *Northern History* 40.1 (2003) 27-51 at 36-8

⁷ CA, IV: 2, 35; Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 53.

⁸ This is more likely to mean from Scandinavia than from Ireland.

⁹ CA, IV: 2, 35; Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 53.

Frank Stenton said that ‘the form Igwares proves that the statement comes from an Old English source, and there is no reason to doubt that Æthelweard derived it from the very early manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which was the basis of his work’.¹ But we sometimes find interpretations regarding who the leaders of the Northmen who first took York in late 866 were, interpretations that are not always supported by any evidence. This is true of Ubba, the *dux* of the Frisians, as well as the subject of this paper, Hálfðan, who, as we will see, was often called a ‘king of the Danes’. It is likely that Ubba was one of the leaders of the Northmen on the Seine from late 865 to the summer of 866, and that after returning to Frisia for a short while he then moved on to England where he probably arrived at York in the early spring of 867.² But whereas with Ubba it is at least possible that he was with Inguar when he first captured York in November 866, and certain that he was one of the leaders of the Danish army that defeated the Northumbrian kings Ælle and Osberht at York in March 867,³ the same cannot be said of Hálfðan, who is called Healfdene or similar in English sources. He only appears by name in England in early 871.⁴ The available surviving sources give no hint that Hálfðan was at York in 866 or 867, or even that he was yet in England at all. Thus, Keynes’ suggestion that ‘Ivar’ (that is Inguar/Inwær) might have joined with Hálfðan sometime after the arrival of the army in England in 865 and then assumed joint leadership of the Danish army can be probably be rejected.⁵ The reverse is much more likely to have been the case: that Hálfðan came to England later. In fact, by the time we know that Hálfðan had arrived in England (possibly in 870) Inguar was either dead or he had returned to Ireland, and there is no evidence that the two men ever even met.⁶

Having defeated and exacted tribute from the Northumbrians, the Mercians and the East Angles in the first four years of their presence in England, and having killed the East-Anglian king Edmund in late 869, the Danish army moved from East Anglia towards Wessex, their one undefeated English enemy.⁷ Yet who was the Danish army’s leader following Inguar’s and Ubba’s disappearance? The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says: ‘Here the raiding army came to Reading in Wessex, and 3 days afterwards 2 jarls rode up country; then Ealdorman Æthelwulf met them on Englefield and fought against them and took the

¹ Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 3rd ed. (London 1971) 246 n. 2.

² Stephen Lewis, ‘Rodulf and Ubba. In Search of a Frisian-Danish Viking’, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research* 40 (London 2016) 5-42 at 15-7. For the same view see Nelson, *AB* 866, 132 n. 12, 213 n. 128; P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd ed. (1971) 101; *idem.*, *Kings and Vikings* (London and New York 1982) 90; *idem.*, *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire, A History of Lincolnshire*, 3 (Lincoln 1998) 92; Jan de Vries, *De Wikingen in de lage Landen bij de Zee* (Haarlem 1923) 198-201. 393; McLeod, *Beginning of the Scandinavian Settlement in England* 132; Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London 1998) 114.

³ For the capture of York and the defeat of the Northumbrians, see *inter alia* ASC 866-867; *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. and trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth 1983) c. 27, 76; *A History of Saint Cuthbert and a Record of his Patrimony [HSC]*, ed. and trans. Ted Johnson-South (Edinburgh 2002) c. 10, 50-51; Roger of Wendover, *Rogeri de Wendover, Chronica, sive Flores Historiarum* 1, ed. Henry O. Coxe (London 1841) 298; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 247-8.

⁴ ASC s.a. 870.

⁵ Keynes, ‘The Vikings in England’ 54.

⁶ Æthelweard (*CA*, IV: 2, 36) says that after killing king Edmund in late 869 Inguar (‘[I]gjuar’) died ‘in the same year’, probably meaning in 870.

⁷ Tony Sharp has suggested to me that the attack on Wessex in 871 was ‘tit for tat’ after King Æthelred and his brother Alfred had come to support the Mercian King Burgred at the siege of Nottingham in 868. Before any fighting took place Burgred had decided to ‘make peace with’ the Northmen and Æthelred and Alfred had then, according to Asser, ‘returned home with their forces’. ‘Made peace with’ probably meant making a payment but could have included allowing the Northmen to travel unhindered across Mercian territory to Thetford in East Anglia. According to the *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesie* (*Symeon of Durham*, II.6, 98 and 99) the leader of the army here was Inguar. The twelfth-century Anglo-Norman Geoffrey Gaimar (2209, 157) says Ubba was with Inguar at Nottingham, and also in East Anglia when King Edmund was killed.

victory.’¹ Neither here nor in Æthelweard’s similar but fuller account is any name given for the leaders of the ‘raiding army’. This fight at Englefield, situated ten miles west of Reading in Berkshire, took place on 31 December 870. It was a victory for the Mercian ealdorman of Berkshire Æthelwulf over just a small part of the Danish army. Four days later, at the start of January 871, the Danes met the West Saxons and the Mercians at Reading: ‘King Æthelred and Alfred, his brother, led a great army there to Reading, and fought against the raiding-army; and great slaughter was made there on either side, and Ealdorman Æthelwulf was killed, and the Danish had possession of the place of slaughter.’² Æthelweard also confirms that the Danes were the ‘victors’ of this second battle but he adds that ‘the body of the ealdorman mentioned above was carried away secretly, and was taken into Mercia, to the place called *Northworthig*, but in the Danish language Derby’.³ After Reading, the confrontations between the Danes and the English continued. Another four days later the battle of Ashdown took place somewhere on the Berkshire Downs. Here Asser tells us that the future Alfred the Great began the battle alone ‘because his brother Æthelred was hearing mass and refused to leave before the priest had finished’.⁴ Æthelweard states: ‘King Æthelred with Alfred, his brother, renewed the fight against the whole pagan force in Ashdown, and losses occurred on a great scale on either side. Afterwards, however, King Æthelred won the crown of victory.’⁵ Of most interest for present purposes is that both the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Æthelweard⁶ give the names of the Danish chieftains for the very first time:

And 4 days later King Athelred and Alfred, his brother, fought against the whole raiding-army on Ashdown, and they were two bands: in one were Bagsecg and Halfdan (*Healfdene*), the heathen kings, and in the other were the jarls. And then the king Æthelred fought against the kings’ forces, and there the king Bagsecg was killed; and Alfred, his brother, [fought] against the jarls’ force, and there Jarl Sidroc the Old was killed and Sidroc the Young and Jarl Osbern, and Jarl Fraena and Jarl Harald; and both the raiding armies were put to flight, and there were many thousands killed; and the fighting went on till night.⁷

This is the first time that Hálfðan/Healfdene, called a ‘heathen king’ here, is mentioned with a reliable date in any English record. He and the shadowy king Bagsecg, who died in this fight, were clearly of higher status than all the other jarls mentioned. Perhaps Bagsecg was a new arrival bringing reinforcements from Denmark or elsewhere? It is even conceivable that he was Inguar’s successor. Unfortunately, we will probably never know who he was. It is also very noticeable that in this whole long list of chieftains Ubba is nowhere mentioned, which certainly suggests he had left the army in England by this time, which is an early illustration of the comings and goings of the Northmen of the ‘great army’. We do not know exactly when Hálfðan came to England, although it is quite possible that he and Bagsecg had already arrived sometime in 870. But I make no apology for repeating the fact that there is no evidence whatsoever that Hálfðan had ever been to York before his appearance in Berkshire in early 871, or anywhere else in England for that matter. It must thus be said that all the

¹ ASC 871, MSS BCDE add ‘one of the jarls, whose name was Sidroc, was killed there’. Soon thereafter two other jarls called Sidroc are mentioned, with both the older and younger being killed, thus whether there were three or two Sidrocs is unclear.

² ASC E 871.

³ CA, IV: 2, 37.

⁴ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great* c. 37, 79; ASC ed. Swanton, 71, n. 11.

⁵ CA, IV: 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ ASC 871.

evidence suggests that it is highly unlikely that he was involved in the Danish army's activities during its first few years in England.

Further battles followed, at Basing and Merton, where the 'Danes' won on both occasions.¹ Yet despite their victories, after all the battles in Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and finally in Wessex, and after so many deaths of kings, jarls and simple warriors, the Danish army was by now no doubt considerably weakened. It was at this time, in the spring of 871, that some (more?) reinforcements did finally come. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says simply: 'And after this fight [at Merton] a great summer-fleet came to Reading [...] and afterwards, after Easter, King Æthelred died.'² Æthelweard says that: 'An innumerable summer army arrived at Reading, and opened hostilities vigorously against the army of the West Saxons. And the ones who had long been ravaging in that area were at hand to help them.'³ So another force had come to reinforce the Danish army. No source says why, how or from where these reinforcements came, but given that these events took place around the Thames it is very likely that they had arrived in their ships along this river. It is sometimes suggested,⁴ even sometimes stated as a fact, that the reinforcements of 871 were led by chieftains called Guthrum, Oscytel and Anund, who we only hear of later at Repton in Derbyshire in 874.⁵ There is no evidence for this. The arrival of this new warband took place in the early spring of 871. The fact that the Anglo-Saxon chronicler uses the rare expression 'great summer fleet' (*micel sumorlida*) might, however, rather suggest that this force just came for the usual 'summer' raiding season and then went home or wintered elsewhere.⁶ Whatever the case, combining their forces the Danes continued to fight the West Saxons of the new and young King Alfred. We are told in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* there were 'nine national fights'⁷ fought that year 'to the south of the Thames', in which nine jarls were killed, as well as one king. Eventually the West Saxons had to buy off (euphemistically 'made peace with') the Danes, who departed for London where they yet again demanded and received tribute payments from the Mercians.⁸ Æthelweard says that the Danes 'laid out a camp near London, but the Mercians settled with them an agreement in treaty-form, and fixed cash payments'⁹ 'castra metati sunt ob ambitu Lundoniae urbis'. This is confirmed by a charter 'in which the bishop of Worcester records the sale of land in Warwickshire to a Mercian king's thegn on account of the immense tribute taken by the heathen when they sat in London'.¹⁰

The next year, 872, the Danes in or near London heard about a revolt in Northumbria against their client-king Ecgberht, who together with Archbishop Wulfhere 'were compelled

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ CA, IV: 3.

⁴ Keynes, 'The Vikings in England' 55; Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings* 243.

⁵ ASC 874

⁶ A suggestion also made by McLeod (*The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement* 168-9), who also suggests (169-70 and n. 362, 363) that Guthrum, Oscytel and Anund might have come from Francia and/or Frisia in about 873-874 following events involving Rorik in Frisia (see later) and the siege of Angers; I tend to agree.

⁷ 'folcgefeoh't which might better be rendered as 'people-fights' or 'general engagements'.

⁸ ASC 870-872; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 250-1.

⁹ CA, IV: 3. It will be noticed that the ASC says the Scandinavian army went to London ('Her for se here to Lundenbyrig from Readingum'), whereas Æthelweard wrote, using Campbell's translation, that they 'laid out a camp near London' ('castra metati sunt ob ambitu Lundoniae urbis'). The meaning of this might be more that they 'went around' or 'encircled' ('besieged') London, and that this was where they were when the Mercians had bought them off. Although we should not put too much faith in Æthelweard, it might still be queried if the Danish *here* ever did occupy London itself in 871-872; or were the Northmen just bought off while threatening it?

¹⁰ Stenton, *Anglo Saxon England* 250-1; P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London 1968) no. 533

to find refuge with Burgred, king of Mercia'.¹ The Danes hurried to 'Northumbria' to settle matters then quickly moved on to Torksey in Lincolnshire (*Lindsey*).² The events that followed can be traced in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but Æthelweard's Latin version is almost identical. Leaving Torksey the Danes moved further up the River Trent to Repton in 873 and expelled the Mercian king Burgred, who fled to Rome.³ They then 'ravaged the fields of Mercia' and installed Ceolwulf as their new 'client-king'.⁴ The West Saxon chronicler disparagingly, and rather typically, called Ceolwulf a 'foolish king's thegn', who had sworn the Danes oaths and granted hostages, promising that Mercia 'should be ready for them whichever day they might want it'. He himself would be 'ready with all who would follow him, at the service of the raiding-army'.⁵ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*⁶ tells us what followed. This is Æthelweard's almost identical version:

After a year [in 874] the barbarians divided up the kingdom for themselves into two shares. A leader of the barbarians by name Healfdene took the area of the Northumbrians. There he made encampments in winter time near the river called Tyne, and there they ravaged the country all round and made war quite often on the Picts and the Strathclyde Britons. Oscytel, Guthrum and Annuth (these were three kings of theirs) went from Repton to the place called Cambridge, and were encamped there twelve months.⁷

Having overwintered in 873-874 on the banks of the Trent at Repton in Mercian Derbyshire, the army had split, with Hálfðan going to the Tyne in Northumbria and Guthrum and the other, probably more recently arrived, Danes going south to Cambridge in East Anglia to continue the fight with the one remaining undefeated English kingdom – that of Alfred's Wessex.

We have no firm idea who was leading the Danish army between when it had moved to (or near to?) Mercian London in the autumn of 871 and when it split at Repton in 874. We can only assume that all the surviving leaders named in the battles of 871, including Hálfðan, initially went to London. We do not even know if when the Danes briefly returned⁸ to Northumbria in 872 any of them had stayed behind in London,⁹ nor who led them to Northumbria and then on to Torksey and Repton. Henry of Huntingdon says it was '*Haldene*'

¹ ASC 872; *Historia regum Anglorum, Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia, Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores* 75, 2 vols, ed. Thomas Arnold, Rolls Series (London 1882-1885) vol. 1, 55, 225, vol. 2, 110; Roger of Wendover, *Rogeri de Wendover, Chronica, sive Flores Historiarum* 1, ed. Henry O. Coxe (London 1841) 323-4; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 251; Peter Sawyer, *Scandinavians and the English in the Viking Age*, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 5 (Cambridge 1994) 9-10.

² ASC 872-73. Lindsey itself was probably seen as being in Northumbria.

³ ASC 873-874.

⁴ ASC E 873. Ceolwulf is not mentioned in MS A but he is in all other MSS and by Asser.

⁵ ASC 874; CA, IV: 3.

⁶ ASC 874.

⁷ CA, IV: 3.

⁸ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 251, suggests they only stayed in Northumbria for a few weeks and that the army 'withdrew from the north because it did not wish to spend an unprofitable year fighting for the reduction of a land already plundered'.

⁹ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 250 and n. 2. Numismatic evidence suggests that from about 875 the Northmen were not in control of London, see M. Blackburn, 'The London Mint in the Reign of Alfred' in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, ed. M. Blackburn and D. N. Dumville (Woodbridge 1998) 105-23 at 120, 120-23. A few coins bearing the name *Halfdan* seem to have been minted for a chieftain of that name of a later date, see Gareth Williams, 'Coins and Currency in Viking England AD 865-954' in *Early Medieval Monetary History: Studies in Memory of Mark Blackburn*, ed. Rory Naismith, Martin Allen, Elina Screen (Abingdon 2014) 13-38. Even if they were struck in London for 'our' Hálfðan (as is sometimes suggested) this would not preclude him having returned for a time to Denmark. The whole issue of the Northmen's control or otherwise of London in the 870s and 880s remains a much-debated question.

who ‘led the same army to Lindsey and Torksey’ in the second year of Alfred (i.e. 872). He also says that in Alfred’s third year (873-74) the army overwintered at Repton (with no leader mentioned) and there confederated with three other kings, ‘*Godrun, Oscetin et Anwend*’, and became irresistible.¹ Henry clearly borrows all this from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but he has assumed it was Hálfðan who led the army to Torksey, which the *Chronicle* does not say. This might well be true, but it does not preclude Hálfðan visiting Denmark for a short period in 873-74, perhaps leaving his army in England as will be discussed later.

In terms of the title given to Hálfðan, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* the invaders are simply called the ‘army’ or ‘raiding army’ (*here*) in the first four or five years of their presence in England. The chronicler obviously had little information about them or their origin, or he did not care because they were not (yet) threatening Wessex,² and hence we never hear anything of Inguar or Hálfðan. But in 871, when the ‘raiding army’ did appear in Wessex, we hear of only two ‘kings’ of the ‘Danes’, as they are now repeatedly called: Healfdene and the mysterious Bagsecg; that is until we start to hear of ‘king’ Guthrum and others some years later. All the other named ‘Danes’ were called jarls. Healfdene was clearly a leader of some importance and rank. In the Northumbrian *Historia de sancto Cuthberto* (History of St. Cuthbert), which was written in either Chester-le-Street or Durham in the tenth or eleventh century,³ after being told that it was Ubba, *dux* of the Frisians, who had come to York in early 867 and then killed king Ælle,⁴ later it is reported that it was ‘Halfdan, king of the Danes’ (‘Haldene rex Danorum’) who arrived on the Tyne in 874-875,⁵ and then later another distinction is made between *dux* Ubba and ‘Healfdena rex Denorum’.⁶ The eleventh-century *De miraculis et translationibus Sancti Cuthberti* (About the miracles and translations of St. Cuthbert) talks of the ‘scourge of the English people’ being ‘Frisians and Danes’ led by ‘Ubba, duke of the Frisians’ and ‘Haldene, king of the Danes’ (‘Ubba duce Frisonum et Halfdene rege Danorum’).⁷ In the twelfth-century *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesie* (History of the Church of Durham), when listing the various kings and chieftains (‘*regibus ac ducibus*’) of the ‘Danes and Frisians’ who had invaded England from 865 to 871 ‘Halfdene’ is named first,⁸ and when referring to his move to the River Tyne in 874 he is called ‘*Halfdene rex Danorum*’.⁹ While, yet again in Northumbria in the same source, he is also called ‘King Halfdan’, the leader ‘of the army of the Danes’. Finally, the *Historia regum Anglorum et Dacorum* (History of the kings of the English and the Danish), when referring to the advent of the Danes in England, calls the leader ‘Haldano’ *rex*, while ‘Inguar’ and ‘Hubba’ are simply ‘*ducibus*’ (chieftains/leaders),¹⁰ and then, when telling of his move from Repton to York in 875, he is called ‘the pagan king Halfdene’. Clearly these later Northumbrian sources had better knowledge of Healfdene/Hálfðan than the contemporary Anglo-Saxon chronicler,

¹ *Henrici Archidiaconi Huntendunensis, Historia Anglorum. The History of the English by Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon. From A.C. 55 to A.D. 1154*, ed. Thomas Arnold (London 1879) 145

² Although perhaps after the abortive siege of Nottingham Alfred might have felt Wessex was next on the list?

³ See H. E. Craster, ‘The patrimony of St Cuthbert’, *English Historical Review* 69 (1954) 177-99; *A History of Saint Cuthbert and a Record of his Patrimony [HSC]*, ed. and trans. Ted Johnson-South (Edinburgh 2002) 1-36; *Symeon of Durham. Libellus de exordio atque procursu istius, hoc est Dunhelmensis, ecclesie: Tract on the origins and progress of this the Church of Durham*, ed. David Rollason (Oxford, 2000) lxxiii.

⁴ *HSC*, c. 10, 50-51.

⁵ *HSC*, c. 12, 50-53.

⁶ *HSC*, c. 14, 52-53.

⁷ *Symeonis Monachi* 1, ed. Arnold, 229.

⁸ *Symeon of Durham*, ed. Rollason, II.6, 94-97.

⁹ *Symeon of Durham*, ed. Rollason, II.6, 98-101.

¹⁰ *Symeonis Monachi* 2, ed. Arnold, s.a. 866, 104; *The Church Historians of England 3.2: The Historical Works of Simeon of Durham*, ed. and trans. Joseph Stevenson (London 1855) 487-8.

knowledge probably derived from an earlier set of now lost Northumbrian annals which historians believe to have existed.¹

In summary, from what we can tell from all the available sources, Hálfðan/Healfdene, 'king of the Danes', probably only arrived in England in 870. It is of course possible that he had arrived slightly earlier, maybe even in 869 or 868, but during these years we hear of no new arrivals or of the Danish army splitting. In fact, the only chieftains we hear of in any source prior to 871 are Inguar/Inwær, who first took York in late 866 and who led an army into East Anglia in 869 where he killed King Edmund, and Ubba, who according to Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*² stayed behind in York when Inguar left, but according to Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* was with Inguar when Edmund was martyred.³ But whatever the case Ubba had certainly left England in 869-870.

The Danish king Halbdeni/Hálfðan

As noted at the beginning, it has long been known, as Lund puts it, that 'some of leaders of Viking expeditions were exiles, often members of royal families ousted from their homeland by more powerful rivals.'⁴ This is certainly true of some Frisian-based Danes who will be discussed a little more below. In addition, to quote Lund again, 'in the first half of the ninth century reigning Danish kings were more deeply involved in the raids on Frankia than has previously been realized'.⁵ Does the case of Hálfðan provide evidence that this was perhaps true later in the ninth century as well? We have seen that after 871 there is not a single mention of Healfdene/ Hálfðan in England in any Anglo-Saxon source, either contemporary or late, until he reappears at Repton in 874, where the Danish army split, and from where he proceeded to Northumbria. Where had he been? Could he perhaps have gone back to Denmark for at least some of this time? And if so why? Rory McTurk says:

Healfdene, a brother of Inwære according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, may be identified with one Halbdeni, mentioned as a brother of the Danish king Sigifridus (cf. Sigurðr) in the *Annales Fuldenses* for 873, and presented as himself ruling in Denmark in that year, one of the years in which Healfdene is not mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and may be assumed to have been absent from England.⁶

¹ See, for example: Michael Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth of Ramsey and the Early Sections of the *Historia regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham' in *Anglo-Saxon England 10* (Cambridge 1982) 97-122; Peter Hunter Blair, 'Some observations on the *Historia Regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham' in *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*, ed. N. K. Chadwick (Cambridge 1963) 63-118; *Symeon of Durham*, ed. Rollason, xlviix-lxix; Cyril Hart, 'Byrhtferth's Northumbrian Chronicle', *English Historical Review* 97 (1982) 558-82.

² *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi: The garland of Saint Edmund King and Martyr*, ed. Francis Hervey (London 1907) 19, 21.

³ *Geffrei Gaimar. Estoire des Engleis (History of the English)*, ed. and trans. Ian Short (Oxford 2009) 159

⁴ Lund, 'The Danish Empire' 156.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Rory McTurk, 'Review of Elizabeth Ashman Rowe's Vikings in the West: The Legend of Ragnar Lodbrok and his sons', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research* 37 (London 2013) 94-99. See also the same view in: *idem.*, 'Ragnarr Loðbrók in the Irish Annals' in *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress, Dublin 15-21 August 1973*, ed. Bo Almquist and David Green, *Viking Society for Northern Research* (London 1976) 93-123 at 115-8; *idem.*, 'Kings and kingship in Viking Northumbria' in *The Fantastic in Old Norse Icelandic Literature, Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference*, Durham and York, 6th-12th August 2006, ed. John S. McKinnell *et al* (Durham 2006) 681-688 at 681; *idem.*, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues, Medium Aevum Monographs* 15 (Oxford 1991) 44; *idem.*, 'Male or Female initiation. The Strange Case of Ragnars Saga' in *Reflections of Old Norse Myths, Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1, eds. Hermann Pernille, Jens Peter Schjødt, and Rasmus Trandum Kristensen (Turnhout 2007) 53-74 at 60.

This is not a new suggestion, Gustav Storm, Jan de Vries, Walther Vogel and Hartmut Harthausen argued the same; de Vries even offered an interesting geopolitical context.¹ The grounds for the identification the Danish king Hálfðan (*Halbdeni*) with Hálfðan (*Healfdene*), the ‘king of the Danes’ in England, if they are ever spelled out, are three-fold: First, the names are unmistakably identical;² second, they were both called kings of the Danes; and third, the English Hálfðan is missing from English records in both 872 and 873, and thus he could conceivably have returned to Denmark for at least some of this time. Those historians who maintain that the two Hálfðans were not one and the same person rarely give any reasons. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe does suggest that ‘a Danish king who spent entire years away from his realm while raiding in England would be in danger of losing his throne’, and thus *Halbdeni* probably cannot be identified with the Healfdene in England.³ Lund, while accepting that Hálfðan’s brother ‘king’ Sigfrid was probably identical with the Sigfrid who was a leader of the continental ‘great army’ in the 880s and who took part in the assault on Paris in 885-6, says the identity of the two Hálfðans in Denmark and England ‘is very unlikely’,⁴ but gives no justification for this dismissal. Smyth asserted that ‘while several Anglo-Danish Vikings [...] did enjoy careers on the Frankish as well as on the English side of the Channel, the Anglo-Danish Hálfðan does not fit into this class’.⁵ The only justification for this view was that Hálfðan, like his brother Sigfrid, was ‘clearly a Scandinavian-based ruler negotiating a perpetual peace’ with the Carolingians which pertained to his Danish territories north of the Eider’.⁶ As we will see, this is true as far as it goes, but Smyth’s implication is that ‘Scandinavian-based’ rulers never went outside Scandinavia, which is blatantly not true. Smyth continued: ‘Such Danish rulers, based in their home territories can be distinguished in Carolingian sources from their contemporaries, who led destructive forays and colonizing expeditions overseas’,⁷ which is also often not the case. Smyth’s conclusion being that the ‘Danish Healfdene’ in England ‘is most unlikely ever to have been involved in landlocked territorial dealings along the border between the Continental Danish homeland and Saxony’,⁸ which is just a rhetorical flourish to drag us into seeing Danish kings as ‘landlocked’, which they undoubtedly never were.⁹

I suggest that when we understand the geopolitical situation and the power relationships at this time between the Frankish kings, the new Danish kings Hálfðan and Sigfrid and the exiled Danes in Frisia, particularly a certain Rorik, then a joint Danish king called Hálfðan (even if he were not yet a ‘landed’ king in that realm) could certainly have gone to England to

¹ Gustav Storm, *Kritiske Bidrag til Vikingetidens Historie (I. Ragnar Lodbrok og Gange-Rolf)* (Oslo 1878) 86; Jan de Vries, *De Wikingen in de lage Landen* 223-6; *idem.*, ‘Die historischen Grundlagen der Ragnars-saga loðbrókar’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 39 (1923) 244-74 at 263-7; Walther Vogel, *Die Normannen und das fränkische Reich bis zur Gründung der Normandie (799-911)* (Heidelberg, 1906) 411-12; Hartmut Harthausen, *Die Normanneneinfälle im Elb- und Weserlmündungsgebiet mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schlacht von 880* (Hildesheim 1966) 58-60.

² They are clearly identical; see Gillian Fellows-Jensen, *The Vikings and their victims: The verdict of the names*, *Viking Society for Northern Research* (London 1995).

³ Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 143-4.

⁴ Neils Lund, ‘Scandinavia, c. 700–1066’, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History 2: c. 700–c. 900*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge 1995) 202-27 at 211.

⁵ Alfred P. Smyth, *Alfred the Great* (Oxford 1995) 61-2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Smyth was bound to reject the identification because he had previously gone to great lengths to contend that Inguar/Ímar was a son of Ragnarr loðbrók and that they came from the Danish islands and not Jutland, and as he maintained Hálfðan was Inguar/ Ímar’s biological brother he must have come from there as well (see Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings*).

join the Danish army there and, what is more, would also have had a reason to return to Denmark even if only for some time in 873.

Rorik and the exiled Danes in Frisia

It should be explained who the Northman Rorik was, and what relationship he had with both Danish and Frankish kings. Rorik was an important Frisian-based Danish leader in the second and third quarters of the ninth century. He was a member of the family of two former joint kings of Denmark: the brothers Harald Klak and Hemming Hálfðansson. In fact, Rorik was Harald Klak's nephew and quite possibly therefore Hemming's son, but he was certainly the grandson of someone called Hálfðan.¹ Harald and his brothers Reginfrid and Hemming had been ousted from the Danish throne in 813 by their relatives, the sons of the previous Danish king Godfrid. The brothers tried to regain their position the next year but failed, and Reginfrid was killed in the fighting. Harald Klak then went to the new Frankish emperor Louis the Pious (Charlemagne's son) to ask for help. Louis sent him to Saxony to 'wait for the proper time when he would be able to give him the help which Heriold had requested'.² In 819 with Louis's support Harald did eventually manage to reclaim a share of the Danish kingdom, which he held for a number of years.³ But after having been baptized in 826 in Mainz, with Louis the Pious standing as his godfather, Harald was expelled from Denmark the next year by the 'sons of Godfrid' and, after making another attempt to return in 828,⁴ he was finally forced to give up his pretensions to the Danish throne and then possibly retreated to his benefice of Rüstingen in north-eastern Frisia granted to him by Louis the Pious 'so that he would be able to find refuge there with his possessions if he ever were in danger'.⁵

For the next half century there was constant tension and rivalry between the Danish kings, 'the sons of Godfrid', and the younger members of the family of the exiled former royals Harald Klak and his brother Hemming Hálfðansson. These involved Harald Klak's son Godfrid, his nephews Harald the Younger and his brother Rorik, plus the younger Harald's son Rodulf.

It would take us too far from the subject of this paper to explore all the activities of these exiled Danes in Frisia and elsewhere from the 830s through to the 870s, as well as their relationships with the constantly warring Frankish kings.⁶ These Frisian-based Danes are,

¹ It is probable, but not certain, that this Hálfðan had been the envoy called *Halptani* sent by the Danish king Sigfrid to Charlemagne's court in 782 and the *dux Alfdeni* who commended himself to Charlemagne in 807, as mentioned by the Saxon Poet. See *Carolingian Chronicles, Royal Frankish Annals and Nithard's Histories* [RFA], trans. Bernhard Walter Scholz (Ann Arbor 1972) 782, 59; *Annales regni Francorum, inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829: qui dicuntur Annales laurissenses maiores et Einhardi* [ARF], MGH, SRG 5, ed. Friedrich Kurze (Hanover 1895) 782, 60; *Poeta Saxo. Annales de gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, MGH, SS 1, ed. G. H. Pertz (Hanover 1826) 263; Coupland, 'From poachers to gamekeepers' 87-8; Volker Helton, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation: Dänemark und das Frankenreich im 9. Jahrhundert* (Cologne 2011) 110-11.

² RFA 814: 97-9; ARF 814: 141.

³ RFA 819: Scholz 106, ARF 819: Kurze 152.

⁴ RFA 828: Scholz 123-4, ARF 828: Kurze 175.

⁵ RFA 826-827: Scholz 119-22; ARF 826-827: Kurze 169-70. That he retreated to Rüstingen was proposed by Coupland, 'From poachers to gamekeepers' 92; other alternatives could be suggested.

⁶ For Rorik and the exiled royal Danes in Frisia in general see *inter alia*: Helton, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*; K. L. Maund, "'A Turmoil of Warring Princes': Political Leadership in ninth-Century Denmark', *Haskins Society Journal* 6 (1995) 29-47; Pierre Bauduin, *Le monde franc et les Vikings VIII^e - X^e siècle* (Paris 2009); Stéphane Lebecq, 'Les Vikings en Frise. Chronique d'un échec relatif' in *Hommes, mers et terres du Nord début du Moyen Âge, volume 1, Peuples, cultures, territoires* (Villeneuve d'Ascq 2011) 151-68; Coupland 'From poachers to gamekeepers'; Vogel, *Die Normannen*; de Vries, *De Wikingen in de lage Landen*; D. P. Blok, 'De Wikingen in Friesland', *Naamkunde* 10 (1978) 25-47; W. C. Braat, 'Les Vikings au Pays de Frise' in *Annales de Normandie* (1954) 219-27; Sandra Polzer, *Die Franken und der Norden. Über die Schwierigkeit der Interpretation von frühmittelalterlichen Quellen zur Geschichte Dänemarks*, unpublished M.Phil thesis

however, perhaps the best example of ‘royal’ Scandinavians also being some of the biggest raiders. However, it is important to note that Harald Klak’s nephew Rorik tried on at least two occasions to wrest control of Denmark by force. In 855, a year after the death of Danish king Horik I, the last remaining ‘son of Godfrid’, Rorik and his cousin Godfrid ‘headed back to Denmark in the hope of gaining royal power’, an attempt which we know was unsuccessful because latter in the year Prudentius of Troyes tells us ‘Roric and Godefrid, on whom success had not smiled, remained based at Dorestad and held sway over most of Frisia’.¹ In 857, this time seemingly on his own, ‘Roric the Northman, who ruled in Dorestad, took a fleet to the lands of the Danes with the agreement of Horic, king of the Danes, he and his comrades occupied the part of the Kingdom which lies between the sea and the Eider’² This was probably the coastal province between the Eider and the Elbe called Ditmarsh.³ How long he held on to this limited region in southern Denmark is not known; yet by 863 at the latest Rorik was back in Frisia.⁴ But by 867 local Frisian inhabitants called *Cokingi* had driven Rorik out of Frisia and Lothar feared he would return ‘bringing some Danes to help him’.⁵ De Vries’s theory⁶ is that Ubba *dux* of the Frisians, who I identify with Rorik’s nephew Rodulf, had depleted Rorik’s forces in Frisia when he went to England, and this left Rorik too weak to resist the native *Cokingi*. McLeod makes a similar point: ‘It may be worth considering the recorded expulsion of Roric from Frisia, in 867. If any of Roric’s followers decided to sail to England they could have joined the great army in York in the first half of 867, perhaps explaining the notice of a Frisian leader in York in the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto*.’⁷ We do not know where Rorik went and precisely when he returned,⁸ but, as we will see, he had recovered at least part of his influence in Frisian territory by the start of 870.

The Frankish geopolitical context 869-873

As far as we know after 857 there were no further attempts made by any Danish pretenders to seize the Danish throne. The young king Horik II seems to have still been the king of Danish

University of Vienna (Vienna 2008); Pierre Bauduin, ‘Harald Klak : un modèle d’intégration à l’épreuve?’ in *Les actes de la Journée d’études, Les élites aux frontières*, Université de Marne-la-Vallée (2006); I. N. Woods, ‘Christians and pagans in ninth-century Scandinavia’ in *The Christianisation of Scandinavia*, ed. B. Sawyer, P. Sawyer and I. N. Woods (Alingsås 1987) 36-68; Dirk Henstra, *Friese graafschappen tussen Zwin en Wezer. Een overzicht van grafelijkheid in middeleeuws Frisia (ca. 700-1200)* (Assen 2012); Ferdinand Lot ‘Roric. Ses incursions en Frise, en Flandre, en Angleterre, à Rouen (850-851)’ in *Recueil des Travaux Historiques de Ferdinand Lot*, vol. 2 (Geneva and Paris 1970) 678-85.

¹ *Annales Bertiniani, Annales de Saint-Bertin* [AB Grat], ed. Félix Grat, Jeanne Vielliard and Suzanne Clémencet (Paris 1964) 855, 70; *Annals of St-Bertin: Ninth-Century Histories*, vol. 1 [AB Nelson], trans. Janet L. Nelson (Manchester 1992) 855, 80; *Annales fuldenses: sive, Annales regni Francorum orientalis* [AF Kurze], MGH SRG 7, ed. Friedrich Kurze (Hanover 1891) 855, 47; *Annals of Fulda: Ninth-Century Histories*, vol. 2 [AF Reuter], trans. Timothy Reuter (Manchester 2012) 855, 39.

² AF 857: Kurze 47, Reuter 39.

³ Vilhelm La Cour *et al*, ed., *Sønderjyllands Historie fremstillet for det danske folk* (1930) 243.

⁴ AB 863: Grat 95-6, Nelson 104.

⁵ AB 867: Grat 137, Nelson 139-40.

⁶ De Vries, *De Wikingen in de lage Landen* 200-3.

⁷ McLeod, *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement* 138.

⁸ He was still away from Frisia in 868.

Jutland¹ in 864 when he sent presents to Pope Nicholas II.² Yet sometime between 864 and 873, when we first hear of the new Danish kings Sigfrid and Hálfðan in the *Annals of Fulda*,³ Horik II had either died or had been removed from power.⁴ It is rather strange that there is no mention of Horik's death in any source whatsoever.⁵ Thus when exactly the new Danish kings Sigfrid and Hálfðan had taken over is unclear, as are the circumstances of how this happened. For reasons that will become clearer later, my own view is that the takeover might have taken place in around 871-872, possibly therefore when Hálfðan was still in England.

In 869 the whole geopolitical situation and power relationships in the Frankish world suddenly changed when the king of the Middle Kingdom Lothar II⁶ died on 8 August on his way back from Italy. His death was to have a profound effect over the next few years on both Rorik in Frisia and on the Danish kings.

Lothar II's death led to yet another division of the Frankish empire of Louis the Pious, which propelled Rorik into the heart of the rivalries between the West Frankish king Charles the Bald and his half-brother Louis the German, the East Frankish king. These rivalries were concerned with who would inherit their nephew Lothar's realm - which was now becoming known as Lotharingia.⁷ Following Lothar's death, Charles had moved quickly to have himself crowned Emperor at Metz on 5 September 869, and he claimed all Lotharingia as his own.⁸ He tried to rally Lothar's nobles to his cause. Charles then spent Christmas at Charlemagne's capital of Aachen, but in early January 870 he went to hold discussions with Rorik at the royal palace of Nijmegen. Charles bound Rorik to him by a treaty: *quem sibi foedere copulavit*,⁹ before returning to Aachen. It was no doubt Charles's hope to consolidate his position in the Frisian part of Lotharingia controlled by Rorik and in return he recognized Rorik's authority there.¹⁰ But, having regained his health, the now almost seventy-year-old Louis the German told Charles to quit Aachen and Lothar's former kingdom or he would drive him out - Charles

¹ For some of the issues regarding what 'Denmark' was at this time see *inter alia*: Niels Lund, "'Denemearc', 'tanmarkar but' and 'tanmaurk ala'" in *Peoples and Places in Northern Europe 500-1600. Essays in honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. Ian Wood and Niels Lund (Woodbridge 1991) 161-9; Sandra Polzer, *Die Franken und der Norden*; Ildar Garipzanov, 'Frontier Identities: Carolingian Frontier and the *gens Danorum*' in *Franks, Northmen and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, eds. I. Garipzanov, P. Geary, Przemysław Urbańczyk (Turnhout 2008) 113-44.

² For Pope Nicholas's reply to Horik see *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* 4, ed. E. Dümmler *et al*, *MGH, Epp.* 6 (Berlin 1925) 263. Also see Vogel, *Die Normannen* 193-4.

³ *AF* 873: Kurze 78-9, Reuter 70-1.

⁴ We know little about Horik II's reign except from Rimbert's *Life of Saint Anskar: Vita Anskarii auctore Rimberto*, ed. Georg Waitz, *MGH, SRG* 55 (Hanover 1884) c. 31, 63, c. 32, 63-4, and from Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum (History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen)*, trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York 2002) [*History of the Archbishops*] bk. 1, xxviii (30) 32, bk. 1, xxix (31) 32). Adam also says that in the 870s besides Sigfrid and Hálfðan 'there were also other kings over the Danes and Northmen, who at the time harassed Gaul with piratical incursions' (bk.1, xxxvi (38) 36).

⁵ There is some very weak evidence that Horik II had not died before 873, which I cannot explore here.

⁶ Lothar II was the son of Lothar I, the oldest son of Louis the Pious.

⁷ For these events see *inter alia*: Janet L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London 1992) 221-3; Eric J. Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire. Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817-876* (Ithaca and London 2006) 295-308; *AB*: Nelson 156-65.

⁸ *AB* 869: Nelson 157-62. In September 868, before their nephew Lothar's death, Charles and Louis had agreed in Metz to divide Lothar's kingdom between them on his death. See Nelson, *Charles the Bald* 218-9; Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire* 294 and n. 119.

⁹ *AB* 870: Grat 168, Nelson 165.

¹⁰ See Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 182; Coupland 'From poachers to gamekeepers' 99; De Vries, *De Wikingen in de lage Landen* 201-4. It is possible that it was only now that Rorik came back to Frisia and Charles had regranted him the territory he had held before being expelled by the *Cokingi*, in return for which Rorik would have been expected to assist Charles (militarily if necessary) to keep the Lotharingian nobles loyal to him. This would not have been the first time Charles had used the Northmen in his fights with his brothers.

left. Eventually the partition of Lotharingia was agreed by the treaty of Meerssen on 8 August 870.¹

For Rorik the problem was that the partition line ran straight through his Frisian territory; with Louis the German getting two thirds of Frisia and Charles the Bald one third. Thus, theoretically at least, Rorik became a vassal of, and owed allegiance to, both the rival brothers. Nevertheless, it appears that Rorik chose to be loyal to Charles and remained so throughout 871. But despite the treaty of Meerssen relations between Louis and Charles remained tense and anything but friendly; and both were to have to face rebellions by their sons, who went to their respective uncles for support. Charles's son Carloman rebelled in 869 following Lothar's death, and Louis's younger sons Charles the Fat and Louis the Younger rebelled in 870/early 871.² Both rebellions being caused by the sons' justifiable fears of being excluded from positions and lands they thought they should receive in Lotharingia on Lothar's death. Charles had incarcerated Carloman (again) in late 870 at Senlis and ordered Carloman's accomplices 'to be bound by a solemn oath of fidelity, each of them in his own county, and Charles allowed them to live in his kingdom on condition that each received a lord, whomever he wished, from amongst the king's faithful men'.³ Janet Nelson says 'Charles could have no real security as long as Carloman remained a potential contender for a Lotharingian realm'.⁴ It is in this context we must view the next meeting Charles the Bald and Rorik had in February 872 at Moustier-sur-Sambre, in Namur province. On this occasion Rorik was accompanied by his nephew Rodulf.⁵ Nelson has persuasively argued that at this meeting Charles hoped to prevent an alliance between the 'Northmen' Rorik and Rodulf, and Charles's rebellious son Carloman.⁶ It is very likely that Charles did receive a promise from Rorik regarding his continuing fealty because when they met again in October 872 at Maastricht Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, who was writing the so-called *Annals of Saint-Bertin* at this time, says that Charles 'gave a gracious reception to Roric who had proved loyal to him'.⁷ Rodulf was at this meeting too, but in contrast to his warm welcome for Rorik Charles 'dismissed' Rodulf 'empty-handed, because he had been plotting acts of treachery and pitching his demands too high'. Not only that, but 'Charles prepared his faithful men for defence against Rodulf's treacherous attacks'.⁸ There was clearly an 'open breach between Charles and Rodulf'.⁹ I have discussed elsewhere the identity and activities of the Northman Rodulf, the son of the younger Harald and Rorik's nephew,¹⁰ a man 'who had often raided Charles's kingdom with pillage and arson'¹¹ and 'who had inflicted many evils on Charles's realm'.¹² As mentioned earlier, at the meeting with Charles in October 872, Hincmar says that Rodulf had been plotting acts of treachery, which most likely means he had indeed supported

¹ AB 870: Grat 171, Nelson 167-70. AF 870: Kurze 71, Reuter 62 and n. 5. See also Nelson, *Charles the Bald* 224; Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire* 297-8.

² AF 871: Kurze 72-3, Reuter 64; AB 871: Grat 181-2, Nelson 170. For details and the context of these rebellions see: Janet L. Nelson, 'A tale of two princes: politics, text and ideology in a Carolingian annal', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 10 (1988) 105-41; Nelson, *Charles the Bald* 226-31; Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire* 306-9.

³ AB 872: Grat 184, Nelson 176-7.

⁴ Nelson, *Charles the Bald* 222.

⁵ AB 872: Grat 184, Nelson 177. Rodulf had possibly quite recently returned from Ireland (and/or England?), see below.

⁶ Nelson, 'A tale of two princes' 113; Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 184.

⁷ AB 872: Grat 188, Nelson 180.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Nelson, 'A tale of two princes' 113.

¹⁰ Lewis, 'Rodulf and Ubba'.

¹¹ AF 873: Kurze 80, Reuter 72.

¹² AB 873: Grat 193, Nelson 184.

Carloman's rebellion.¹ Additionally, we are told that Rodulf had pitched his demands too high, which clearly suggests either too high a payment (*locarium*) or, more likely in this instance, extravagant demands for an extensive Frankish-granted benefice, probably in Frisia. That Rodulf wanted a large territory of his own in Frisia is very clear, because in the next year, just as Charles had suspected, Rodulf tried to grab a territory in Oostergo in eastern Frisia, where he was killed in the attempt.²

Rorik had remained faithful to Charles the Bald throughout 872, but for some reason the next year he decided to switch his allegiance to Louis the German.

It is remarkable and unprecedented that in 873 there were no less than five events (including four agreements) involving the Franks and the Northmen, all reported at length in various Frankish annals. One was an agreement between Charles the Bald and the Northmen he was besieging at Angers.³ The others all concerned Frisia and Denmark. At the end of April 873, emissaries of the new joint king of Denmark Sigfrid came to meet with Louis the German at Bürstadt near Worms. The East Frankish *Annals of Fulda*, which were being written at this time by members of Louis's royal chapel,⁴ reported:

The envoys of Sigfrid (*Sigifridus*), the king of the Danes, also came there, seeking to make peace over the border disputes between themselves and the Saxons and so that merchants of each kingdom might come and go in peace to the other, bringing merchandise to buy and sell; the king promised that for his part these terms would be kept.⁵

Most probably Saxon merchants had been troubled in going about their business along the River Eider, which separated Frankish Saxony from Danish Jutland at the time, and thus after these matters had been discussed in a royal tribunal Louis had asked the Danes to send emissaries to him to resolve these matters.⁶ What is important is that this seems to have been a perfectly normal meeting for a Frankish king who wanted to settle issues that had gone unattended while he had been concerned with the problems caused by his rebellious sons Charles III 'the Fat' and Louis the Younger. It was a matter of commerce and there is no suggestion of any oaths of fealty being made on Sigfrid's behalf by his envoys. What might also be implied is that Sigfrid had only managed to take power in Denmark relatively recently, and probably held sway in those parts of southern Jutland neighbouring Saxony. He clearly had a border with the Saxons. Perhaps being newly 'enthroned' he was still struggling to find or impose a *modus vivendi* with his new Saxon neighbours? My suspicion is that Sigfrid had only taken over or grabbed royal power in Denmark relatively recently, perhaps in about 871-872, but we will never know for sure.

¹ Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 184; Nelson, 'A tale of two princes' 113; Coupland, 'From poachers to gamekeepers' 102.

² *AB* 873: Grat 193, Nelson 184; *AF* 873: 80-1, Reuter 72; *Annales Xantenses* [AX], *MGH*, SRG 12, ed. Bernard von Simson (Hanover 1909) 873, 32-3; Lewis, 'Rodulf and Ubba' 11-12.

³ *AB* 873: Grat 192-95, Nelson 183; *Annales Vedastini* [AV], *MGH*, SRG 12, ed. Bernard von Simson (Hanover 1909) 873, 40; Regino of Prüm tells a rather different story to Hincmar, see *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe. The chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*, ed. and trans. Simon MacLean (Manchester 2009) 168-9. For a good analysis of the siege of Angers see Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 187-97.

⁴ Heinz Löwe, ed., *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter / Wattenbach-Levison VI: Die Karolinger vom Vertrag von Verdun bis zum Herrschaftsantritt der Herrscher aus dem sächsischen Hause. Das ostfränkische Reich* (Weimar 1990) 682-7; *AF*: Reuter 9. From 869 these annals were being written shortly after the events, see *AF*, Reuter 4-5.

⁵ *AF* 873: Kurze 80-1, Reuter 70.

⁶ Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 174.

The *Annals of Fulda* then report that at the beginning of June 873¹ Louis sailed down the Rhine from Mainz to Aachen where he ‘had a secret meeting with his own men and took Roric, who came under the security of hostages, under his lordship’.² The *Annals of Xanten*³ tell the same story of this meeting: ‘In the same way [i.e. asking for protection] Rorik came to him, the scourge of Christendom, having nevertheless put many hostages on board his ship first. The outcome was that he became the king's subject, and was bound by oath to offer him unswerving loyalty.’⁴

There are two rather remarkable things about this meeting. First, Rorik obviously had some real fears about meeting with Louis and clearly did not trust him. He had not risked coming overland but rather came by ship, but even more tellingly he did not actually meet Louis before he had been given hostages as surety for his own safety. Second, this was a secret meeting. It will be remembered that only the year before Rorik had twice met with Louis's brother Charles the Bald and sworn his fealty to him, but now here he was putting himself under Louis's ‘lordship’ and offering his ‘unswerving loyalty’. It is perhaps understandable why there was some secrecy about the meeting and why Rorik was fearful: he was changing his allegiance from Charles to Louis and neither he nor Louis was likely keen that the news should get out. It is noticeable that Charles's faithful supporter Archbishop Hincmar says nothing about Rorik's switch of allegiance; perhaps because he had heard nothing. As already mentioned, as recently as October 872 Hincmar had written that Rorik ‘had proved loyal’ to Charles. Hincmar had not always been so trusting of Rorik however, and he was always alert to any possibility of his duplicity. A decade before, in 863, Hincmar suspected that Rorik might have been complicit with the Northmen who had raided up the river Rhine to Cologne, deep into Lothar's kingdom, in January, as reported by Hincmar himself in the *Annals of Saint-Bertin*;⁵ a raid which was quite likely led by Rorik's nephew Rodulf.⁶ Hincmar wrote to Hunger, the Bishop of Utrecht, saying he suspected that Rorik had encouraged the raid and if this turned out to be the case the bishop was to impose a suitable penance on Rorik. He also wrote to Rorik himself warning him ‘to give neither counsel nor assistance to the pagans against the Christians’.⁷ In addition, Hincmar wrote that these ‘Danes’ had ‘followed Roric's advice and withdrew by the same way they had come,’ i.e. back through Frisia.⁸ Charles the Bald and Hincmar were usually very well informed about the activities of the Northmen. Hincmar tells us that in 873, at precisely the time when Charles was at Angers besieging other Northmen there, Charles received the news that Rorik's nephew Rodulf, ‘who had inflicted many evils on Charles's realm’, had died while trying to wrest land for himself in northern Frisia ‘in the realm of Louis’.⁹ If Hincmar had heard about Rorik's desertion, either directly or from his king, he would probably have had something very damning to say about it.

¹ Louis issued *diplomata* in Aachen between June 10 and 13; see Reuter, *The Annals of Fulda* 70 n.10

² *AF* 873: Kurze 78, Reuter 70.

³ The *Annals of Xanten* for 861-873 were written up in 870-876 by a cleric of the church of Cologne, probably originating from Worms; see: Heinz Löwe, ‘Studien zu den Annales Xantenses’, *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 8 (1951) 59-99 at 61 and 75-8; F. W. Oediger, ‘Noch einmal die ‘Annales Xantenses’’, *Annalen des Historischen Vereins für den Niederrhein* 157 (1955) 181-90.

⁴ *AX* 873: von Simson 32, trans. Coupland. Also see Coupland, ‘From poachers to gamekeepers’ 99

⁵ *AB* 863: Grat 95-6, Nelson 104; see also *AX* 864: von Simson 20-1.

⁶ See Lewis, ‘Rodulf and Ubba’ 10, 12-14; Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 112 n. 5; De Vries, *De Wikingen in de lage Landen* 192-3; Vogel, *Die Normannen* 196; Eamonn Kelly and John Maas, ‘The Vikings and the kingdom of Laois’, in *Laois History & Society, Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. Pádraig G. Lane and William Nolan (1999) 123-59 at 136.

⁷ Flodoard, *Historia Remensis ecclesiae* 3.23 and 3.26, *MGH, SS* 13, ed. J. Heller and Georg Waitz (Hanover 1881) 541, 529.

⁸ *AB* 863: Grat 95-6, Nelson 104.

⁹ *AB* 873: Grat 193, Nelson 184.

It can be assumed that the Danish king Sigfrid was soon made aware of the agreement between Louis the German and Rorik, the most prominent and powerful member of the exiled royal Danes in Frisia who were long-standing pretenders to the Danish throne. He was quite likely unsettled by the news. After all, Rorik had already tried to grab the Danish throne from Horik II on at least two occasions, in 855 and 857. If Rorik was now Louis the German's man and had his support, or at the very least had his friendship, then he could be a 'redoubtable rival' for Sigfrid.¹ It is in this political context that we must view the next meeting Louis held at Metz in August 873 with envoys sent by Sigfrid's brother and joint-king Hálfðan, which the *Annals of Fulda* report immediately after the meeting with Rorik. This meeting had a quite different tenor to that held in April. It is important to quote the full report given by the Fulda annalist:

Then in the month of August, as he [Louis] held a general assembly at Metz, Halbden (*Halbdeni*), the brother of King Siegfried (*Sigifridus*), also sent his messengers to the king asking the same things which his brother had asked, namely, that the king should send his ambassadors to the River Eider, which separates Danes and Saxons, and that they should meet them there and ratify a perpetual peace [*pax omni tempore*] on both sides. These same messengers also offered the king a sword with a golden hilt as a gift, and pleaded with him that he should deign to treat their lords, the aforementioned kings, as if they were his sons, while they for their part would venerate him as a father all the days of their life. They also swore on their weapons, according to the custom of that people, that henceforth no one from their lords' kingdom would disturb the king's kingdom, nor inflict damage on anyone in it. The king accepted all these promises gratefully and promised that he would do what was asked. After the messengers had returned to their own country the king went through Alsace to Strasbourg.²

The first meeting at Worms in April had simply been a Danish embassy sent to resolve some commercial frontier issues, but the second, just four months later, was, as Pierre Bauduin aptly expresses it, 'a demonstration of quasi filial fidelity towards Louis, accompanied by a request for perpetual peace'.³ Bauduin discusses in some depth the great significance and meaning of the gift of the gold-hilted sword.⁴ But what is quite apparent is that the Fulda annalist is showing the Danish kings in a position of weakness. Not only were Sigfrid and Hálfðan literally begging to pay homage to Louis as if they were his sons, but they were also asking for a 'perpetual peace', which implied that they should come to each other's aid.⁵ Bauduin says: 'Under the cover of a symbolic adoption, Hálfðan and his brother might hope to place themselves under Louis's protection.'⁶ There seems little doubt that Sigfrid and

¹ Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 185.

² *AF* 873: Kurze 80-1, Reuter 71. It might be assumed, and I assume it too in this article, that Hálfðan was in 'Denmark' when he sent his and his brother's emissaries to Charles the Bald. But this is not clear. It is not out of the question that he was still in England. In any case, this proposed meeting with Charles's 'ambassadors' on the River Eider never seems to have taken place.

³ Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 185.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 174-9. The meeting with Hálfðan's envoys also offered the Saint-Gallen monk Notker the Stammerer, who might actually have been present (see Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 176), a pretext to present a more developed anecdote praising Louis the German's power but also reflecting the importance of this meeting, see: *Gesta Karoli Magni* in *Notker der Stammler, Taten Kaiser Karls des Grossen*, ed. H. E. Haefele, *MGH, SRG* 12 (Berlin 1959) II, 18, at 88-9; *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. The Lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan and the Astronomer*, trans. Thomas F. X. Noble (Pennsylvania 2009) 114-5.

⁵ For what was expected of the parties making such a 'perpetual peace' see Margret Wielers, *Zwischenstaatliche Beziehungsformen in frühen Mittelalter (Pax, Foedus, Amicitia, Fraturnitas)* (Munich 1959) esp. 19-24; Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 175.

⁶ Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 175.

Hálfðan were seeking Louis's protection because they feared the exiled Frisian-Dane Rorik, who had now put himself under Louis's lordship and thereby reinforced his position *vis-a-vis* his Danish compatriots but bitter rivals. Sigfrid and Hálfðan might also have feared that Rorik could relaunch his political ambitions in Denmark.¹ It is certainly true, as Rowe says, that the meeting in August 'gives the impression of a certain insecurity on Halbdeni's part',² but she goes on to say that 'it is only after Sigifridus has made the trading agreement with Louis that Halbdeni sends his own envoys to the king to ask for the same conditions, as if he were afraid to be shut out of negotiations'. Yet it is also abundantly clear that this meeting was much more than a repetition of a border trade agreement, and that Hálfðan's envoys had come to offer submission to Louis the German on behalf of *both* Hálfðan and Sigfrid, who were referred to by their envoys as 'their lords, the aforementioned kings'.

There was a fifth event regarding the Northmen in 873 which has already been alluded to. In June, at exactly the same time Rorik was meeting with Louis the German in Aachen, his nephew Rodulf tried to grab a territory in Oostergo in eastern Middle Frisia (around Dokkum), where he was killed in the attempt.³ As we have already seen, during the second meeting in 872 between Charles the Bald and Rorik and Rodulf, Charles had refused Rodulf's exorbitant demands and feared that he would make treacherous attacks. These fears had now proved to be justified, although Rodulf's attack in 873 was on Louis's realm and not on Charles's. Rorik had at various times been a semi-loyal gamekeeper for different Frankish kings, but his nephew Rodulf was an unrepentant viking. As far as we can tell, Rorik and his nephew had a very fraught relationship. But was it a coincidence that while Rorik was switching his allegiance to Louis the German at Aachen his nephew was attacking Louis's realm? Was he trying to compromise Rorik as de Vries suggested he might have been?⁴ We cannot know, although it certainly could not have helped Rorik's credibility or trustworthiness in Louis's eyes, and it is noticeable that the Xanten annalist called Rorik a 'tyrant' even as he was submitting himself to Louis.

There is little doubt that all these meetings and events in 873 were connected. They were all manifestations of the shifting geopolitical and power relationships between the Frisian-based Dane Rorik, the new Danish kings Sigfrid and Hálfðan, and the rival Frankish kings and half-brothers Louis the German and Charles the Bald. Rorik's change of allegiance to Louis had unsettled the new Danish kings. These shifting relationships provide a context for Hálfðan's return from England – even if only briefly in 873 as de Vries believed.⁵ Until Rorik's switch of allegiance to Louis the German in early June 873 there was no reason for King Sigfrid to be concerned about his position in Denmark, a kingdom that was in the sphere of influence of the East Frankish king Louis, while the Frisian-based Danes had until then been vassals of the West Frankish king Charles, who had no real interest in who was on the throne of Denmark (or more particularly who held sway in Danish Jutland) unless he was attacked by them. Until Rorik's change of sides, Sigfrid's brother Hálfðan would also have had no cause to fear that by raiding in England he might lose his throne as Rowe suggests. Indeed, it is quite possible that when Hálfðan went to England Sigfrid had yet to grab the Danish throne. However, after Rorik's change of allegiance it is not improbable that Hálfðan returned from England to Denmark to support his brother in obtaining Louis's support and protection in a domestic situation that was 'not too rosy'.⁶ Hálfðan could then have returned

¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

² Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 144.

³ This part of Frisia was not part of Rorik's territory. For details of Rodulf's death see Lewis, 'Rodulf and Ubba' 11-2.

⁴ De Vries, *De Wikingen in de lage Landen* 213.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 224-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

to England, perhaps in late 873 or early 874, in any case in plenty of time to be with the Danish army at Repton in the summer of 874.¹

After 873 we hear nothing more of Rorik in the Frankish annals and it is unfortunate that we also hear nothing more of political events in the Danish world itself for a long time to come. Thus, we cannot know whether Rorik actually ever did make a renewed bid for the Danish throne. Maybe, as de Vries suggested, Rorik went back to his watery places in Frisia and lived there peacefully with no further significant role in the future relationships between the different parts of the Frankish realm.² Rorik died sometime before 882. We know this because according to the *Annals of Saint-Vaast* in that year another ‘King Godfrid’, who with Hálfðan’s brother ‘King Sigfrid’, had been one of the two early leaders of the great army in Flanders and northern Francia since its arrival from England in 879,³ was granted by Charles III ‘the Frisian kingdom which Rorik the Dane had previously ruled’.⁴ Archbishop Hincmar said he received ‘Frisia and the other regions Roric had held’.⁵

Hálfðan in northern sources

It is striking that Hálfðan gets almost no mention in early Scandinavian or Northern sources, and none in much later Icelandic sagas. Besides the confusing tales of various Hálfðans in Saxo Grammaticus’s *History of the Danes*, the exception to this is Adam of Bremen, the director of the cathedral school of Bremen. Writing in 1072-76, Adam says:

The Northmen proceeded to take vengeance on the whole empire for the blow they had received in Frisia. With their kings, Sigefrid and Gotafrid, they invaded Gaul by way of the Rhine and the Meuse and the Scheldt rivers, slaughtering Christians in woeful carnage, and, attacking King Charles himself, made sport of our people. To England they also sent one of their number, Halfdan, and when he was killed by the Angles, the Danes put Gudrod in his place. The latter conquered Northumbria. And from that time Frisia and England are said to have been subject to the Danes. This is written in the *Gesta* of the Angles.⁶

¹ One could validly ask why if Hálfðan had returned to try and secure his and his brother’s position there with Louis the German he had then returned to England?

² *Ibid.*, 213.

³ ASC 879; AV 879: von Simson 44; ASC 879. See Vogel (*Die Normannen* 260-359) for the subsequent activities and leadership of this ‘great army’ on the Continent. That ‘King Sigfrid’ of 873 was the later ‘king’ Sigfrid of the Continental ‘great army’, who led the Northmen during the attack on Paris in 885-886, is accepted by most historians, see, for example, Niels Lund, ‘Scandinavia, c. 700–1066’, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History* 2: c. 700–c. 900, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge 1995) 202-27 at 211; de Vries, *De Wikingen in de lage Landen* 269; Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 143 and n. 479, 148; Harthausen, *Die Normanneneinfälle* 59-60; Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 205 n. 1; Vogel, *Die Normannen* 411-2. Although almost all historians state it as a fact, it is not absolutely clear if Sigfrid or Godfrid had been in England in 878-879, but it is quite possible, I would say probable, that at least one of them had been; for chronological reasons regarding their activities I would favour it having been Godfrid.

⁴ AV 882: von Simson 51.

⁵ AB 882: Grat 248, Nelson 224-5. See also AF 882: Kurze 99, Reuter 93. The fact that here Godfrid is called ‘King Godfrid’ and the *Annals of Saint-Vaast* called him ‘Godefridus rex Danorum’ in 880 (AV 880: von Simson 47) led Coupland (‘From poachers to gamekeepers’ 108) to suggest that he was a ‘member of the Danish royal house’. Given his name this is possible, but it is also equally possible, given his name as well, that he was a relative of Rorik and the family of Harald Klak, after all Rorik was sometimes called a ‘king’ as well (see Coupland, ‘From poachers to gamekeepers’ 98 and n. 77 and n. 78, 100).

⁶ Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops* bk. 1, xxxix (41), 38.

The ‘blow’ the Northmen had received was in 884 at Norden (on the marshy coast of East Frisia) where they ‘were defeated and many of them killed’.¹ Adam quoted from a no longer extant letter from ‘Bovo, the Abbot of Corvey’ (879-90) telling of the great losses the Northmen suffered there, and that Bishop Rimbert was there and encouraged the Frisians.² The mention of *Sigefrid* and *Gotafrid* invading ‘Gaul’ (as vengeance) would likely have been derived from the *Annals of Fulda*, from which Adam regularly borrowed. The information on Hálfðan being killed by the Angles and Gudrod taking his place in Northumbria no doubt comes (rather garbled) from the *Historia regum Anglorum*.³ But this was not the source for the reference to the Northmen sending Hálfðan ‘one of their number’ to England, nor the two references to Frisia, particularly the one, in connection with Hálfðan/Gudrod, which says ‘from that time Frisia and England are said to have been subject to the Danes’. Although Adam does not really add anything new to our understanding of Hálfðan here, the oblique linking of Hálfðan with the Northmen in Frisia in 884 and with Sigfrid and Godfrid, plus the explicit linking of Northumbria/England with Frisia, might perhaps suggest that Adam had some memory or information about the undoubted connections between Northumbria and Frisia?

Perhaps the reason for Hálfðan’s near absence in Northern records is that after an early piratical career in France and England (and Frisia?) he only fleetingly appeared on the Danish stage in 873 when he and his brother held some ‘royal’ power in Denmark.

Hálfðan’s earlier life?

Whether or not the two Hálfðans were the same person, the Danish king *Halbdeni* and his brother *Sigifridus* obviously had an earlier life.⁴ They did not appear out of thin air even though the Frankish annals make no mention of either of them, at least as Danish kings, before 873. Similarly, we hear nothing of Healfdene before he first appears in English records in Wessex in early 871, by when he was already an important Danish chieftain because English sources called him a ‘king’ of the Danish army, indeed also a ‘king of the Danes’, rather than a *jarl* or *dux*, as they did all the other early leaders of the army with the exception of the mysterious king Bagsecg. There is one possible exception to this absence of Hálfðan from any record before 871. In 854-855 the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says that ‘the heathen

¹ *AF* 884: Reuter 96

² Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops* bk.1, xxxix (41), 38-39; Reuter, *AF*, 96 n. 8. It was not Godfrid who suffered this defeat, and Sigfrid’s involvement is debateable. For the complicated events of 884 see Vogel, *Die Normannen* 300-2; Harthausen, *Die Normannische einfälle* 46-9.

³ Unlike the author of the slightly later *Chronicle of Roskilde*, Adam did not have a copy of Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum* (see Michael H. Gelting, ‘Henry of Huntingdon, the Roskilde Chronicle, and the English Connection in Twelfth-Century Denmark’, in *Historical and Intellectual Culture in the Long Twelfth Century: The Scandinavian Connection*, ed. Mia Münster-Swendsen, Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm, Sigbjørn Olsen Sønnesyn (Durham 2016) 104-18).

⁴ If the two Hálfðans were not the same person then, in my view, it seems the only alternative is that the ‘English’ Hálfðan was connected with, and/or related to, the family of the exiled Danes in Frisia (which included Rorik and Ubba). After all the father of the earliest (formerly royal) Danish exiles in Frisia, the brothers Harald Klak and Hemming Hálfðansson, was actually called Hálfðan! Thus, a later ‘Hálfðan’ in this family would not be unusual, although we have no evidence that such a separate person existed. Telling against this might be that *Healfdene* in England was called ‘king of the Danes’ while Ubba was called ‘*dux* of the Frisians’. Nevertheless, it is not out of the question that the ‘Danish’ kings Hálfðan and Sigfrid were in fact members of Harald’s and Hemming’s family and had somehow successfully succeeded in gaining the Danish ‘throne’ after Rorik and his cousin Godfrid had failed in the 850s. If this were so then we are *de facto* back to the situation of there being just one Hálfðan.

men for the first time settled in Sheppey over winter',¹ a report repeated by Asser, who says that 'a great Viking army stayed for the entire winter on the Isle of Sheppey'.² Also under the year 855 there is an intriguing and highly controversial entry in the Northumbrian *Annals of Lindisfarne* referring to the same event which confirms the information of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser, but which also gives the supposed names of the Northmen's leaders: 'Paganorum exercitus, scilicet Dani et Frisones, ducibus Halfdene, Ubba et Inguar applicunt in insula Scepeige.', 'An army of pagans, that is Danes and Frisians, with *duces* Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar, landed on the island of Sheppey.'³ The *Annals of Lindisfarne* are a set of earlier Northumbrian annalistic notices which Symeon of Durham added to the margins of a set of Easter tables.⁴ Rowe suggests that this report in the *Annals of Lindisfarne* 'is not contemporary evidence for the presence of Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar at Sheppey'.⁵ Other historians have also been very sceptical, and we certainly must be very cautious about the names of the leaders involved. Rowe thinks that the report is 'a retrospective conflation of sources: the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notice for 855, Asser's *De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi*, and the same sources used for the list of Viking leaders in the *Historia regum* and *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesie*'.⁶ Nevertheless, it needs to be mentioned that the *Annals of Lindisfarne* repeatedly give information and dates that can be confirmed elsewhere. Regarding conflations, when Northumbrian sources report specific and dateable events they usually mention just one leader. For instance, when telling of Ubba arriving at York in the spring of 867,⁷ or Healfdene going to the Tyne after the army split at Repton in 874,⁸ or Inguar leaving York and then killing King Edmund in East Anglia in late 869.⁹

The *Annals of Lindisfarne* ultimately derive from the same tradition transmitted in other Northumbrian histories,¹⁰ where we do certainly find obvious conflations, such as the long list contained in chapter 6 of the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto* of every conceivable Danish chieftain of the Scandinavian army in England over the course of many years, including *Halfdene, Inguar* and *Hubba*, but also the names of many of the leaders who came later as well.¹¹ This list was clearly partially taken from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 871, although it is very noticeable that we find Inguar and Ubba here while the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not mention either of them. Also, there is a clearly retrospective notice in the *Historia regum Anglorum* saying that 'king' *Haldane* and *Inguar* and *Hubba* had come to England from the 'Danube', i.e. from Denmark.¹² It is thus entirely possible that the report contained in the *Annals of Lindisfarne* of Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar landing on the island of Sheppey in late 854 is such a conflation of people. However, regarding Rowe's suggestion that the conflation extended to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, this is much less clear. Healfdene is only mentioned by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* from 871, and by Asser

¹ ASC s.a. 855. Given the dating in the ASC at this time and the fact that this is the first item under 855 clearly means the Northmen overwintered in 854-855 and not the next winter as some historians once suggested, see, for example, Vogel, *Die Normannen* 147-8.

² Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, c. 10, 69, but see also, c. 3, 68 and 231 n. 14.

³ 'Die "Annales Lindisfarnenses et Dunelmenses"', ed. Wilhelm Levison, *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 17 (1961) 447-506, s.a. 855 at 484.

⁴ Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 80; *Symeon of Durham*, ed. Rollason, xlvi.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 80-1.

⁷ HSC, c. 10, 50-1.

⁸ HSC, c. 12, 50-3; *History of the Church of Durham, Symeon of Durham*, ed. Rollason, II. 6, 98-101; *Historia regum, Symeonis Monachi* 2, ed. Arnold, 82; *Historia regum, The Church Historians*, ed. Stevenson, 475

⁹ *History of the Church of Durham, Symeon of Durham*, ed. Rollason, II. 6, 98, 99.

¹⁰ Elisabeth van Houts, 'Scandinavian Influence in Norman Literature of the Eleventh Century' in *Anglo-Norman Studies* 6 (1984) 107-21 at 116.

¹¹ HSC, c. 6, 94-6; HSC, *Symeonis Monachi* 1, ed. Arnold, 54.

¹² *Historia regum, Symeonis Monachi* 2, ed. Arnold, 104; *The Church Historians*, ed. Stevenson, 487-8.

from 875.¹ Ubba is never mentioned by either of them, and Inguar is only mentioned in passing, and in a very oblique and impenetrable way, by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser in 878 after he is dead;² the only relatively early mention of him being in Æthelweard's *Chronicon*. Finally, nowhere in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or Asser's *Life* are any two or more of these three army leaders ever mentioned as being together, which makes it somewhat difficult to understand how the original writer of the Northumbrian annals contained in the *Annals of Lindisfarne* could have derived or conflated information from these particular sources.

Yet the fact remains that there was a force of Northmen that over-wintered on Sheppey from 854 to 855. It was clearly commanded by at least one chieftain, and it might well be that the leader or leaders of this force included one or more of the 'chieftains/leaders' Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar, although this can never be proved. What we can do, however, is look at the most likely context for the arrival of the Northmen on Sheppey in late 854 and where they might have come from.

854 – An example of returning pirates and royal pretenders

Niels Lund reminds us 'some of the leaders of Viking expeditions were exiles, often members of royal families ousted from their homelands by more powerful rivals'.³ One prime example of this is 854. It was mentioned earlier that in 854 the Danish king Horik I had been killed in a civil war. Stenton said that the battle in Denmark in which Horik fell was 'a turning point in the history of the Danish people' and 'also a significant event in the general history of Europe'. He continued: 'After Horik's fall there was no longer a king in Denmark who could even attempt to hold his people back from a prospect of exciting and profitable adventure. Indirectly, the collapse of the Danish kingdom affected many countries, but it is in England that the consequences are most clearly seen.'⁴ According to the East Frankish *Annals of Fulda*:

The Northmen who for twenty years continuously had cruelly afflicted with fire and slaughter and pillage those places on the borders of Francia which were accessible by ship, came together from the different parts to which they had scattered in their greed for plunder, and returned to their own country. There a civil war had begun between Horic, king of the Danes, and Gudurm, his brother's son, who up till then had been driven by Horic from the country and had lived a piratical existence. The two parties so wore each other down with killing that countless common people were killed, and of the royal family no one remained except one small boy.⁵

In the *Annals of Saint-Bertin* Prudentius says: 'The Danes fought among themselves in a civil war. They battled like madmen in a terribly stubborn conflict lasting three days. When King Horic and other kings with him had been slain, almost the entire nobility perished too.'⁶ Rimbart's *Life of Saint Anskar* says that 'King Horic was killed in war in a disturbance caused

¹ Very interestingly Asser does not mention Healfdene in 871, although he does mention all the other Northman found in the ASC.

² ASC 878; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great* c. 54, 83-4.

³ Lund, 'The Danish Empire' 156.

⁴ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 242. Actually, the testimony of the Fulda annalist for 854 is that for at least twenty years previously Danish Vikings had been on the rampage in the Frankish realms, without any sign of a restraining royal Danish hand, and with the suspicion that Horik was himself implicated, as were other Danish royals. I thank Etchingham for this observation.

⁵ AF 854: Kurze 44-5, Reuter 36.

⁶ AB 854: Grat 70, Nelson 80.

by pirates while his relations were attempting to invade his kingdom’¹ The *Annals of Xanten* under the year 855 say: ‘The Northmen appointed themselves a new king, related to the previous one and having the same name [i.e. Horik II], and when the Danes had assembled fresh troops they again attacked the Christians with a naval fleet.’² Although it is not categorically stated in any source, the Latin of the Fulda annal does imply that Horik’s nephew *Gudurm* was also killed in this bloody civil war, as was Horik I himself. Of more importance is that many other Danish pirates, including other ‘relations’ of Horik, who had for twenty years been leading a piratical existence and greedily plundering around the coasts of Francia ‘accessible by ship’ had ‘come together from different parts’ and returned to Denmark, no doubt seeking to find position and wealth back home at a time when Horik’s position was looking fragile. Yet in spite of having killed Horik, this attempt to grab power and position in Denmark was a failure and the remaining ‘pirates’ and royal pretenders would have then dispersed to overwinter somewhere in 854-855, before, as the *Annals of Xanten* say, assembling fresh troops and again attacking the Christians with a naval fleet. I think it highly possible, probable even, that the Northmen on Sheppey over the winter of 854-855 were some of those who had returned to Denmark in 854 from their piratical activities overseas to try to grab wealth and power back home, but who had failed and moved on elsewhere.

Without going back twenty years, we can perhaps briefly look at the few years before 854 to suggest who this disparate group of Northmen might have been, as well as where they had been. Space does not permit a detailed appraisal of the activities and movements of all the Northmen active immediately before 854 and in 855 itself, but we can proceed by elimination.

Firstly, in 850 the Frisian-based Dane Rorik, who had been in exile for a few years in Saxony in Louis the German’s realm following some supposed disloyalty to Lothar I, collected a great fleet and army and together with his cousin Godfrid, Harald Klak’s son, had raided and captured the important, though by now declining, Frisian *emporium* of Dorestad. Lothar had no choice but to grant the town to Rorik, which he had held before with his brother Harald in the time of Louis the Pious.³ His cousin Godfrid got nothing and his fleet continued to raid in Flanders, the Artois, in Frisia, around the mouth of the Rhine and on the river Scheldt;⁴ until in October 852 he sailed up the Seine where the next year the West Frankish king Charles the Bald was forced to pay him a tribute to leave.⁵ Another part of the large Danish-Frisian fleet of 850, under an unnamed leader, decided to head for England where they plundered London and Canterbury but were eventually repulsed in 851 by the West-Saxon king Æthelwulf and his sons Æthelbald and Æthelstan.⁶ Bloodied but not defeated, they then likely moved on to Ireland where they were called ‘dark heathens’ by the Irish.⁷ The conventional wisdom (if there is one) is that the Frisian-based Rorik and Godfrid could not have been amongst the many ‘pirates’ returning to Denmark in 854, and therefore they were also probably not the leaders of the Scandinavian force camped on Sheppey over the following winter. This is because they made their own unsuccessful attempt on the Danish

¹ *Vita Anskarii auctore Rimberto*, ed. Georg Waitz, *MGH, SRG 55* (Hanover 1884) 63; *Anskar, the apostle of the North. 801-865: translated from the Vita Anskarii by Bishop Rimbert, his fellow missionary and successor*, trans. Charles H. Robinson (London 1921) 100-1. Adam of Bremen used the *Vita Anskarii* in his telling of the events (*History of the Archbishops* bk. 1, xxviii (30), 32).

² AX 855: von Simson 18, trans. Coupland.

³ AF 850: Kurze 39, Reuter 30; AB 850: Grat 59, Nelson 69; AX 850: von Simson, 17; Coupland, ‘From poachers to gamekeepers’ 96.

⁴ AB 850-851: Grat 59, 63, Nelson, 69, 73; AF 850: Kurze 39, Reuter 30; *Annales Fontanellenses priores (Chronicon Fontanellense)* [*ChronFont*], *Mélanges de la Société d’Histoire de Normandie* 15, ed. Jean Laporte (Rouen and Paris 1951) 65-90, s.a. 850 at 85, trans. Coupland.

⁵ AB 852-853: Grat 65-6, Nelson 74-6; AF 850=852: Kurze 39-40, Reuter 30; *ChronFont* s.a. 852, 89, trans. Coupland.

⁶ AB 850: Grat 59, Nelson 59; ASC 851=850.

⁷ Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba* 72; Lewis, ‘Rodulf and Ubba’ 7-8.

throne in 855, after which in the same year they returned to Dorestad in Frisia and ‘held sway over most of Frisia’.¹ While this argument is not totalling convincing, I do tend to agree.

Secondly, we can probably also exclude the Northmen of the Loire and in Aquitaine, probably being led by Ásgeirr, who were still operating in this region throughout 854 and 855.² We can trace their movements with some accuracy, and there was just not enough time for them to have returned to Denmark in 854, and even less for them to have wintered on Sheppey thereafter. In fact, in 854 Prudentius says they ‘stayed on the Loire’ and tried to reach Orléans, and by the end of the year they were attacking and burning Angers,³ before moving on the next year to more southerly Aquitaine where they captured Bordeaux for a second time.⁴

Thirdly, the only other fleet we know of which was operating in France at this time was led by a chieftain called Sidroc (ON Sigtryggr). Sidroc first appears in the records in 852 when, together with Godfrid Haraldsson, he raided up the Seine before leaving for the Loire in 853,⁵ where, with the help of the Breton duke Erispoë, he besieged Ásgeirr’s Northmen already established on the island of *Betia* on the Loire, facing Nantes. After a bloody but inconclusive siege of the island, Sidroc deserted Erispoë, came to an agreement with Ásgeirr, who bought him off, and then promptly left the Loire ‘for the Seine’,⁶ probably in late autumn 853.⁷ In fact Sidroc’s fleet only reappears on the Seine in July of 856,⁸ where it ‘ravaged and plundered the *civitates*, monasteries and *villae* on both sides of the river’, before passing the winter on the Seine at Jeufosse.⁹ Another fleet under a chieftain called Bjørn (*Berno*) then arrived in mid-August.¹⁰ The *Chronicle of Fontenelle* tells us that ‘they then joined forces and wreaked great devastation and destruction as far as the forest of le Perche, where King Charles opposed them with the army, and cut them down with great slaughter’, and then ‘the following

¹ AB 855: Grat 70-1, Nelson 80-1. For which parts of Frisia they held sway over see: Coupland, ‘From poachers to gamekeepers’ 96-7; Vogel, *Die Normannen* 147.

² For Ásgeirr’s activities see: Coupland, ‘Charles the Bald and the defence of the West Frankish kingdom against the Viking Invasions, 840-877’, unpublished Ph.D dissertation (Cambridge University 1987); Stephen M. Lewis, ‘Aquitanian Viking Connections: The 840s and the Question of the Mullaghboden Silver Coins’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 15 (2019); *idem.*, ‘Return to Aquitaine and the Loire, 852-857’, in *Les connexions des vikings en Aquitaine, IXe -XIe siècle*, unpublished doctoral thesis (in progress) (University of Caen Normandy).

³ AB 854-855: Grat 69-70, Nelson 79-80.

⁴ *ChronFont* 91; AB 855: Grat 70, Nelson 80; *Annales Engolismenses* [AA], MGH, SS 16, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz (Hanover 1859) 485-7; *Chronicon Aquitanicum* [CA], MGH, SS 2, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz (Hanover 1828) 252-3. See also Frédéric Boutouille, ‘Par peur des Normands. Les Vikings à Bordeaux et la mémoire de leurs incursions. État des sources’, *Revue Archéologique de Bordeaux, Société archéologique de Bordeaux* (2008).

⁵ AB 852 and 853: Grat 65-6, Nelson 75-6; *ChronFont* 89.

⁶ *The Monks of Redon. Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium and Vita Conuuoionis*, ed. and trans. Caroline Brett, *Studies in Celtic History* 10 (Woodbridge 1989) 214-9; L. de Heinemann, ed., *Gesta Conwoionis abbatis Rotonensis* III.9: MGH, SS 15.1 (Hanover 1887) 458-9.

⁷ For differing views on all these events on the Loire and in Aquitaine in these years, those involved and their chronology, see *inter alia* Coupland, *Charles the Bald and the defence of the West Frankish kingdom*; Ferdinand Lot, ‘Sidroc sur la Loire. Les Normands en Bretagne, en Aquitaine, en Gascogne (853-857)’ in *Recueil des Travaux*, vol. 2, 691=704; *idem.*, ‘Godfried et Sidroc sur la Seine (852-853) in *Recueil des Travaux*, vol. 2, 686-90; *idem.*, ‘La soi-disant prise de Nantes par les Normands en 853. Critique des sources’ in *Recueil des Travaux*, vol. 2, 705-12. Lot believed Sidroc stayed on the Loire for three years after 853, a view which Coupland and the present author reject. See also Vogel, *Die Normannen* 147-53, and *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Redon en Bretagne*, ed. M. Aurélien de Courson (Paris 1863) XXXVII-XXXVIII, which is followed very closely by Neil S. Price in *The Vikings in Brittany, Viking Society for Northern Research* (London 1989) 1-122 at 27.

⁸ *ChronFont* s.a. 855=856, 89-91 ‘a very large fleet of Danes entered the river Seine on 18 July, led by the same Sidroc’, trans. Coupland.

⁹ AB 856: Grat 72, Nelson 82-3; *ChronFont* 90-91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

year [857] Sidroc left the river',¹ for where we do not know, but it is possible that this Sidroc was one of the jarls called Sidroc who died in England fighting the English at the very end of 870 and in 871, maybe even as Ferdinand Lot thought the 'Jarl Sidroc the Old' who died at the battle of Ashdown.² For our purposes the importance of Sidroc is that having left the Loire in 853 he did not reappear until the summer of 856; thus he could very well have been one of the 'pirates' who returned to Denmark in 854 from 'those places on the borders of Francia which were accessible by ship', and thus conceivably also a leader of the Northmen who camped on Sheppey the following winter (as indeed could have been Bjørn).

The reason for this digression on other Scandinavian chieftains operating in France and Frisia in the early to mid-850s is this: There were clearly many Danish royal pretenders and 'pirates' who returned to Denmark in 854 to try to benefit from the chaos caused by Horik's nephew Gudurm's grab for power; Sidroc (and Bjørn) could have been amongst them, but who were the others? If, as I suggest, the Northmen on Sheppey from late 854 until the next year were one group of these returning pirates then there is at least a possibility that one or more of the 'Danish and Frisian' chieftains Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar were actually involved, as the *Annals of Lindisfarne* say. Ubba 'dux of the Frisians' is certainly a possibility.³ As already mentioned, I have elsewhere argued that Ubba was none other than Rorik's nephew Rodulf, and that he had been in south-eastern Ireland in the early 860s, and perhaps, as Kelly and Maas believe, as early as the mid-850s.⁴ I have also suggested that Rodulf/Ubba was probably born in about 830, plus or minus five years. If so, this means that he would certainly have been old enough to have been in England in 854. We also know that prior to his death in Frisia in 873 Rodulf had 'wasted' many regions over the sea ('transmarinas regiones plurimas [...] vastavit'), as well as everywhere in the kingdom of the Franks, plus in 'Gaul' and Frisia.⁵ The term *transmarinas* is frequently used in Frankish records in the ninth and tenth centuries and it invariably means the British Isles. Rodulf was in fact the epitome of a much-travelled viking. If Rodulf/Ubba had actually been on Sheppey in 854-855 it is at least conceivable that he then moved on to south-east Ireland. Inguar is a more problematic matter. The view of most historians today is that the Inguar of the English records was the same person as a Scandinavian 'king' of Dublin called Ímar in Irish annals in the late 850s through to his death somewhere in 873,⁶ although the support for this identification is quite weak. Ímar is first attested in Irish records in 857 when 'Ímar and Amlaíb inflicted a rout on Caitil the Fair and his Norse-Irish in the lands of Munster',⁷ but he could certainly have arrived in the British Isles somewhat before this. In addition, Ímar's identity as a 'Dane' is highly likely, particularly if he was the Inguar in English sources who first took York in late 866. So once again the possibility exists that the Inguar who was said by the *Annals of Lindisfarne* to have been one of the Danish and Frisian chieftains on Sheppey during the winter of 854 might well have been the Ímar who arrived in Ireland in, or probably somewhat

¹ This would be 857 not 856.

² ASC 871. For viking activity during this period in France see *inter alia* Ferdinand Lot, 'La Grande invasion normande de 856-862', *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes* 69 (1908) 5-62; *idem.*, 'La Loire, l'Aquitaine et la Seine de 862 à 866', *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes* 76 (1915) 473-510; Vogel, *Die Normannen* xx. For the possible identity of Sidroc see Lot, 'La Grande invasion' 726 n. 1.

³ In 'Die historischen Grundlagen' (257-8) De Vries argued that the Northmen on Sheppey then went to the Seine, where they stayed for a few years, which could well be correct. But he believed the report in the *Annals of Lindisfarne* that these Northmen were led by Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar, who according to him were (of course) sons of 'Loðbrók'.

⁴ Eamonn Kelly and John Maas, 'Vikings on the Barrow', *Archaeology Ireland* 9 (1995) 30-2; *idem.*, 'The Vikings and the kingdom of Laois' in *Laois History & Society, Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. Pádraig G. Lane and William Nolan (1999) 123-59 at 136.

⁵ AX 873: von Simson 32.

⁶ AU 873.3.

⁷ AU 857.1.

before, 857. Finally, what about Hálfðan, the subject of this study? Could he have been one of the chieftains who came to Sheppey in late 854? If the two Hálfðans in Denmark and England were one and the same person, as I argue they were, then to some extent the question of whether he might have been on Sheppey turns on his likely date of birth, which can only be surmised from an examination of his and his brother Sigfrid's family roots and relationships, an issue I hope to examine in a future study. Ultimately, I am sceptical that 'Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar' were together on Sheppey in 854-855, although one or more of them could well have been. I do not think we will ever know the truth. However, I suggest it reasonably obvious that Hálfðan (and Sigfrid) must have had a piratical career before his appearance in England, perhaps sometime in 870, after which all English sources present him as a very important leader, although his repeated designation as a 'king' of the Danes does not necessarily mean that he (yet?) held a landed realm in Denmark.

Hálfðan's last years in England

Attention can now be turned to Hálfðan's last years in England. Here we are on only slightly firmer ground. Whether it is accepted or not that the Danish king Hálfðan (*Halbdeni*) who sent emissaries to Louis the German was the same person as Hálfðan (*Healfdene*) the 'king of the Danes' in England, or even whether Hálfðan had gone back to Denmark, perhaps only briefly in 873, to support his brother Sigfrid, we do know that the Hálfðan of the Danish army in England was at Repton in 874 when the army divided. Hálfðan took his forces to Northumbria. Now of little interest to the West Saxon chroniclers, they established their first Northumbrian base on the River Tyne.¹ Their ravages of the north of England during 875 became notorious. The *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesie* says that after the monks on Lindisfarne had taken the relics of Saint Cuthbert away

there soon followed a dreadful destruction of that place [Lindisfarne] and of the whole kingdom of the Northumbrian, the army of the Danes led by King Halfdan ravaging cruelly everywhere. Putting monasteries and churches to the flames wherever they passed, they killed servants and handmaidens of God whom they first subjected to mockery, and, to put it briefly, spread fire and slaughter from the eastern shore to the western.²

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* also tells us that in 875 Hálfðan's Danes 'raided among the Picts and among the Strathclyde Britons'; a subject which I will examine more later. Then in 876 'Halfdan divided up the land of Northumbria; and they were ploughing and providing for themselves'.³ This is usually taken as the Danes settling down in Yorkshire and the first foundation of Scandinavian York.⁴ It is also almost, but not quite, the last we hear of Hálfðan/Healfdene in England. The early Northumbrian *Historia de sancto Cuthberto* says: 'But soon the wrath of God and of the holy confessor fell upon him [Healfdene]. For he began to rave and to reek so badly that his whole army drove him from its midst and he was chased across the sea and was never seen again.'⁵ The later *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesie* says that

the impious king Halfdan paid by the judgement of God the penalty of the cruelty which he had inflicted on the saint's own church and on other places of the saints. For as insanity afflicted his mind so the direst torment afflicted his body, from which there rose such an intolerable stench that he was rendered odious to his whole army. So, held in contempt and

¹ ASC 875=874.

² *Symeon of Durham*, ed. Rollason, 105.

³ ASC 876.

⁴ See Nicholas Higham, *The Kingdom of Northumbria AD 350-1100* (Stroud 1993) 179-81.

⁵ *HSC*, c. 12, 52-3

driven out by all, he fled with only three ships from the Tyne, and soon after perished with all his men.¹

These Northumbrian reports of Hálfðan's reeking and being driven away, if they are noted at all, are usually dismissed as hagiography. They may well be.² De Vries suggested that perhaps Hálfðan had been trying to carry through his settlement plans in Yorkshire with too much vigour and that his warriors, who were used to plundering and war, were not happy with it and so they removed him.³ This is an interesting idea but nothing more. Rowe suggested just the opposite - that it was Healfdene who wanted to continue raiding while his followers wanted to settle down.⁴ But we might ask why should both the author/compiler of the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto* and Symeon of Durham, when rewriting the story in the *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesie*, make up such a tale? Perhaps Hálfðan had indeed contracted a disease that made him go mad and smell? Why else would he suddenly abandon his newly won kingdom? There are many other reports of such afflictions striking down Scandinavian and other leaders in the ninth century, not least being that which seems to have killed the historical Northman *Reginheri* (Ragnarr) after he had returned from attacking Paris in 845.⁵ Even more telling is the illness which afflicted the Northmen on the Seine in 865. Archbishop Hincmar wrote in the so-called *Annals of Saint-Bertin* that

the Northmen who had sacked St-Denis became ill with various ailments. Some went mad, some were covered in sores, some discharged their guts with a watery flow through their arses: and so they died. After dispatching troops to keep guard against those Northmen, Charles returned to Senlis to celebrate Christmas.⁶

Hálfðan's death in Ireland

Whatever the circumstances, Hálfðan did actually leave Northumbria shortly after 876. Where had he gone? Had he perhaps gone to Wales and Devon or to Ireland, or both? I will look at his probable death in Ireland first.

In 875 the *Annals of Ulster* report that: 'The Picts encountered the dark foreigners in battle, and a great slaughter of the Picts resulted.'⁷ There can be little doubt that this 'slaughter' is the same as the report of an attack on the Picts by the Northumbrian-based Hálfðan found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 875 which, as mentioned earlier, says that Hálfðan's Danes 'raided among the Picts and among the Strathclyde Britons'. As Etchingtham has demonstrated,⁸ 'dark' or 'black' foreigners/heathens (*Dubgaill/Dubgenti*) was a term used by

¹ Symeon of Durham, ed. Rollason, II. 13, 121 and 123. This is inserted in a place discussing the year 883, but regarding Healfdene the wording clearly refers to prior events in *circa* 876-877.

² See, for example: Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings* 260; Wormald, 'Viking Studies' 143; de Vries, 'Die historischen Grundlagen' 264.

³ De Vries, 'Die historischen Grundlagen' 264.

⁴ Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 146; see also Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great* 19-20 and Downham, *Viking Kings* 70.

⁵ For Reginheri and his death, and 845 in general, see *inter alia* Vogel, *Die Normannen* 100-17; Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 23-32, 151; Niels Lund, 'L'an 845 et les relations franco-danoises dans la première moitié du IXe siècle' in *Les fondations scandinaves en Occident et les débuts du duché de Normandie, Colloque du Centre culturel International de Cerisy-la-Salle et de l'Université de Caen Basse-Normandie*, ed. Pierre Bauduin (2005) 25-36; Bauduin, *Le monde franc* 151-72.

⁶ AB 865, Nelson 128-9.

⁷ AU 875.3.

⁸ Colmán Etchingtham, 'Names for the Vikings in Irish Annals' in *Celtic-Norse Relationships in the Irish Sea in the Middle Ages 800-1200*, ed. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Timothy Bolton. *The Northern World Series* vol. 65 (Leiden and Boston 2014) 23-38. A fuller version of this article will appear in his forthcoming monograph

Irish annalists to describe a group of Northmen of primarily Danish origin who intruded into Ireland in the early 850s.¹ The term was needed to distinguish between these new arrivals and the resident ‘foreigners’ who had been in Ireland for many years, and who were then for a short while called ‘fair’ foreigners/heathens (*Finnngenti*).² A strong argument in favour of this interpretation is the use of words for Scandinavians in or from Ireland in the reliable *Annals of Ulster*. Between 870 and 888 there are six cases where some sort of ethnic designation is given to the leaders of Irish-based Scandinavians Amlaíb and Ímar or to their immediate successors. In five of these six cases they are referred to simply as *Nordmanni* (Northmen). In 870 Amlaíb and Ímar were called *duo reges Norddmannorum* when they attacked Dumbarton and their forces *Norddmannis*; in 873 when Ímar died he was called *Imhar, rex Nordmannorum*; in 875 when Oistín (Amlaíb’s son) was killed he was called the son of Amlaíb *rex Norddmannorum*;³ in 881 when Bárith the son of Ímar died he was called *tirannus magnus Norddmannorum*, and in 888 when Sichfrith, another of Ímar’s sons, died he was called *Sichfrith m. Imair, rex Nordmannorum*. And then in the middle of all this, in 877, we find the death of *Albann, dux na n-Dubgenti* (dux of the black/dark heathens). If *Albann* was Dublin Ímar’s brother, as Smyth and Downham contend, why is he not called a ‘Northman’ as well? Or, on the other hand, why was Ímar, or any of the other Irish Scandinavian leaders in these decades, never called a black/dark foreigner or a black/dark heathen?

The term black/dark was also used in both Irish and Welsh sources to describe the primarily Danish forces that had taken York in late 866 and killed the two Northumbrian kings in early 867, as well as for other Danes active in England and Wales. Regarding the events in York, the *Annals of Ulster* say: ‘The dark foreigners won a battle over the northern Saxons at York, in which fell Aelle, king of the northern Saxons.’⁴ The Welsh *Annales Cambriae* report simply: ‘The city of York was laid waste; that is the battle with the black gentiles (*dub gint*).’⁵ Hálfðan of Northumbria was certainly a Dane active in England and thus his forces would have naturally been called black/dark foreigners by the Irish. A large fleet of black heathens (*Dubgennti*) had arrived in Ireland in 851,⁶ probably led by a chieftain called Horm.⁷ As mentioned earlier, they possibly came from Frisia by way of southern England.⁸ The next year these black heathens (*Dubgenti*) defeated the resident fair heathens (*Finnngenti*) in a three-day naval battle at Carlingford Lough in Co. Down.⁹ But in 853 the *Annals of Ulster* tell us that ‘Amlaíb, son of the king of *Laithlind*, came to Ireland, and the foreigners of

provisionally entitled *Raiders, Reporters and Viking Kings: Irish Annals and the Dynamics and Politics of Church Raiding, 794-1014*.

¹ Actually, there were other Danes in Ireland in the early 860s (and maybe before), and yet again briefly in 870, as the case of Rodulf/Ubba shows.

² For what is now perhaps the conventional wisdom, see, for example: Alfred P. Smyth, ‘The Black Foreigners of York and the White Foreigners of Dublin’, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society of Northern Research* 19 (1974-1977) 101-17; *idem.*, *Scandinavian Kings*; David N. Dumville, ‘Old Dubliners and New Dubliners in Ireland and Britain: A Viking-Age story’ in *Medieval Dublin* 6 (2004) 78-93; Downham, *Viking Kings*; Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*.

³ The Irish annalist never recorded Amlaíb’s death. He may simply not have known if he was as yet dead, since he had simply disappeared off the Irish annalistic radar in the spring of 872.

⁴ *AU* 867.7: ‘Bellum for Saxanu Tuaisceirt i Cair Ebhroc re n-Dubghallaib, in quo cecidit Alli, rex Saxan Aquilonalium’.

⁵ *Annales Cambriae, A.D. 682-954: Texts A-C in Parallel*, ed. and trans. D. N. Dumville (Cambridge 2002) s.a. 867.

⁶ *AU* 851.3; *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland [FAI]* §233, 89, ed. and trans. Joan N. Radner (Dublin 1978).

⁷ *FAI* §235, 92-3.

⁸ See *AB* 850: Grat 59, Nelson 69; *ASC* 850-851; Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba* 72; Lewis, ‘Rodulf and Ubba’ 7-8.

⁹ *AU* 852.3; *FAI* §235, s.a. 852, 91-5.

Ireland submitted to him, and he took tribute from the Irish'.¹ Horm's black heathens were then 'ousted or excluded from Ireland by Amlaíb's royal regime [...] and suffered a final misfortune across the Irish Sea',² or, as Ó Corráin simply puts it, 'the Danes were finally driven off'.³

After the black heathens/foreigners' removal from Ireland in 853 the distinction between black/dark and fair foreigners or heathens was no longer needed in Ireland and the Irish annalists reverted to simply calling the Scandinavians in Ireland 'foreigners', as they had in earlier times, or often just 'Northmen'. It is noticeable that with two significant exceptions, which I will discuss below, no Irish source uses the terms black/dark or fair foreigners/heathens when describing Scandinavians in Ireland between 852, when the black/fair foreigners had defeated the resident fair foreigners, and 917, when the Northman Ragnall, whose power base had hitherto been outside Ireland, arrived in south-east Ireland,⁴ a period of sixty-five years. But the Irish and the Welsh did continue to use the term black/dark for Northmen operating outside Ireland in the island of Britain; such as the 'black heathens' (*gentiles nigri*) who raided Anglesey in 853, as reported by the Latin *Annales Cambriae*,⁵ a raid probably undertaken by Horm; and then again regarding Horm's death in Wales in 856, which was reported in the *Annals of Ulster* as follows: 'Horm, chief of the black heathens (*toesech na n-Dubgennti*) was killed by Rhodri son of Mervyn, king of Wales.'⁶ To this we can add the already mentioned reports in the *Annals of Ulster* and *Annales Cambriae* of the defeat at York of the Northumbrians by the 'black foreigners' in the spring of 867. Finally, with regard to the black foreigners' slaughter of the Picts in 875, the *Annals of Ulster* say: 'The Picts encountered the dark foreigners in battle, and a great slaughter of the Picts resulted', '*Congressio Pictorum fri Dubghallu & strages magna Pictorum facta est.*'⁷

In regard to the two exceptions in the sixty-five-year gap in the use of the terms 'black/dark' or 'fair' in Ireland, both are instructive. First, in 870 the *Annals of Ulster* tell us that 'Mael Sechnaill son of Niall, one of the two kings of southern Brega, was treacherously killed by Ulf the black/dark foreigner'.⁸ The *Annals of Ulster* are the best preserved redaction of the so-called *Chronicle of Ireland*.⁹ During this period they were probably being composed by an annalist in Brega, precisely where this fight happened.¹⁰ Ulf was clearly a Danish intruder and could possibly have been the Frisian-Dane Rodulf, who I have suggested elsewhere might be equated with Ubba *dux* of the Frisians in England. This might be supported by the fact that the *Annals of Xanten*, which when reporting Rodulf's death in eastern Frisia in 873, say he had 'wreaked terrible havoc in many areas across the sea (*transmarinas regiones plurimas*) as well as all over the Frankish Empire and Gaul and in nearly all of Frisia'. But the same annals also say, s.a. 871, that in late 870 'the heathen also laid waste almost all of Ireland (*Hibernia*) and returned with many spoils, and they inflicted many woes upon the human race throughout the watery areas of Francia and Gaul' – which

¹ AU 853.2.

² Etchingham, *Raiders, Reporters and Viking Kings*.

³ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Ireland, Wales, Man, and the Hebrides' in *The Oxford illustrated history of the Vikings*, ed. P. H. Sawyer (Oxford 1997) 83-109 at 90.

⁴ AU 917.2. For these events in Ireland in and around 917 see Colmán Etchingham, 'The Battle of Cenn Fúait, 917: Location and Military Significance', *Peritia* 21 (2010) 208-32.

⁵ *Annales Cambriae* s.a. 853. This corresponds with the later *Kenedloed Duon* ('black pagans') in the vernacular *Brut y Tywysogyon [BT]* (*Brut y Tywysogyon or the Chronicle of the Princes (red Book of Hergest version*, ed. T. Jones (Cardiff 1955)).

⁶ AU 856.6.

⁷ AU 867.7, 875.3.

⁸ AU 870.7: 'Mael Sechnaill m. Neill, leth-ri Deisceirt Breg, interfectus est dolose o Ulf Dubgall.'

⁹ Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 36.

¹⁰ Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, ed. and trans. *The Chronicle of Ireland* (Liverpool 2006) 9-24.

does seem on the face of it to provide a link with Ulf (Rodulf?).¹ The same annals also report under 868 (=867): ‘Once again the heathen brutally devastated Ireland (*Hibernia*) and Frisia.’² The main difficulty with these two Xanten annals is that neither in 867 nor in 870 (nor around these dates) is there any evidence at all for any Viking-related ‘devastation’ or ‘laying waste’ in Ireland. My very tentative and rather speculative suggestion is that by *Hibernia* the annalist was actually referring to Humbria (as in Northumbria or even Southumbria) and not to Ireland. This might not be so wild an idea as it seems. In several later Danish sources the term *Hybernia/Hybernorum* etc. is often used for Northumbrian-related events in the mid-ninth century.³ If this is correct then, unlike with Ireland, these Xanten annals would make complete sense for Northumbria. Ubba and Inguar were certainly devastating Northumbria in 867; and in late 869 to early 870 Inguar was in East Anglia martyring king Edmund. As we have seen, Ubba may have been with him or may have stayed behind in Northumbria. But both of them disappear from English records in 870. Could the Xanten annal for 867 be referring to the devastation of Northumbria, and the one for (late) 870 be referring to Ubba’s return to the ‘watery places’, which could well mean Frisia? I admit this is just a conjecture,⁴ but if true it does not necessarily exclude Ubba/Rodulf having made a brief trip to Brega in Ireland in 870 before returning to Frisia.⁵

Second, and of more importance for this investigation of Hálfðan, is a notice of the death of a certain *Albann*. In 877 the *Annals of Ulster* report: ‘A skirmish at Loch Cuan [Strangford Lough] between the fair heathens [*Finngenti*] and the black/dark heathens [*Dubgenti*], in which Albann, king [*dux*] of the black/dark heathens [*Dubgenti*], fell.’⁶ Actually the translation ‘king’ to denote Albann’s status in MacAirt and MacNiocaill’s edition of the *Annals of Ulster* is wrong. The Irish text says ‘*dux na n-Dubgenti*’. It is almost invariably assumed that *Albann* is to be identified as the Danish chieftain in England called Healfdene/Hálfðan. Downham states: ‘After a brief sojourn in England, Hálfðan led a campaign against “Fair Foreigners” based at Strangford Lough on the north-east coast of Ireland, where he was killed in 877.’⁷ Albann’s death can also be related to the death in 875 of Oistín, a ‘king of the Northmen’. Oistín (probably ON Eysteinn) was the son of the now dead

¹ AX 871=870, von Simson 30; trans. Coupland: ‘Pagani quoque tunc totam pene Hiberniam vastantes cum spolis multis sunt reverse et per aquosa loca Francia atque Galliae humano genere multas miserias intulerent.’

² AX 868=867, von Simson 26; trans. Coupland: ‘Pagani quoque iterum Hiberniam atque Fresiam crudeliter vastaverunt.’

³ For example in the *Annales Ryenses: Annales Danici medii aevi*, ed. E. Jørgensen (Copenhagen 1920) 67; *MGH, Scriptores* vol. 16, ed. J. M. Lappenberg (Leipzig reprint 1925) xvi, 397) and Hamsfort’s *Danish Chronology: Cornelii Hamsforti Series Regum Daniae a Dano ad Fridericum II*, in *Scriptores Rerum Danicarum Medii Aevi*, ed. J. Langebek (Copenhagen 1772) i. 36.

⁴ De Vries suggested the same in 1923 (see *De Wikingen in de lage Landen* 201, 393; ‘Die historischen Grundlagen’ 251-3). In his efforts to place ‘Ragnarr’ in Ireland, and using the same sources, Smyth rather unconvincingly argued the case that these sources were indeed talking of Ireland (*Scandinavian Kings* 95-100). This is a huge subject which I cannot explore here, but it should be remembered, and is of some significance, that the *Annals of Xanten* s.a. 845 are a contemporary and reliable source for how ‘Ragnar’ died: ‘the robbers were struck down by a terrible plague, in which the leader of the wretches, named Ragnar, who had robbed both Christians and holy places, was struck dead by the Lord’, trans. Coupland.

⁵ If the Xanten annalist knew he had come from Ireland this might even explain his *Hibernia*? Another possibility is that it was Ulf/Rodulf who was responsible for leading the ‘summer fleet’ on the Thames in 871. He only reappears in the record in January 872 when he met Charles the Bald in the company of his uncle Rorik. The Xanten annals run one year ahead from 854 to 872 and thus some parts of the 871 annal refer to events in 870. But there is no separate annal between 871=870 and 872, when the one-year slippage seems to have been corrected. Thus, the report *at the end* of the 871 annal of some Northmen returning ‘with many spoils’ and inflicting ‘many woes upon the human race throughout the watery areas of Francia and Gaul’ could very well be reporting the return of the ‘summer fleet’ of 871? It also would not exclude Rorik having been responsible as he is not heard of in 871, although he is the year before and again in January 872. Of course, this is speculation.

⁶ AU 877.5.

⁷ Downham, *Viking Kings* 24.

former Scandinavian ‘king’ of Dublin called Amlaíb (ON Óláfr), who had arrived in Ireland in 853 from ‘*Laithlinn*’ and to whom ‘the foreigners of Ireland’ had submitted.¹ The *Annals of Ulster* say that ‘Oistín, the son of the king of the Northmen Amlaíb’ was ‘deceitfully killed’ by a certain Albann [*ab Alband*].² Oistín had become a joint-king of the Dublin Northmen after the deaths of both his father Amlaíb and of the other major Scandinavian king of Dublin called Ímar.³ No location is given in the annal for Oistín’s death. Ó Corráin rightly notes that ‘the annal gives no indication whatever as to where this event occurred and it is rash to conclude that it can only have happened in Ireland’.⁴ This is important for our investigation because if Albann is Hálfdan we need to ascertain if Hálfdan had ever visited Ireland or had any connection with Ireland before his death there in 877.

The Dublin-based Scandinavian ‘kings’ Amlaíb, Ímar and Auisle had been raiding, and quite possibly already settling, in Pictland and in the heartland of the Strathclyde Britons (at Dumbarton) for a number of years before Hálfdan is first heard of there in 875 - as we have seen fighting the Picts and the Strathclyde Britons. Woolf discusses these events in some detail.⁵ Regarding Oistín’s death, he argues that Oistín was killed by Hálfdan ‘presumably when under truce’. Woolf concludes that the ‘evidence relating to Healfdene’s movements would make Pictavia or Northumbria a more likely venue’ for Oistín’s death than Ireland.⁶ Etchingam now prefers Scotland/North Britain to Ireland as the location of Oistín’s death.⁷ On the other hand Downham, following Smyth, sees Albann/Hálfdan killing Oistín in Ireland: ‘Nevertheless, divisions were beginning to appear among the leaders of the “Dark Foreigners”. A son of Óláfr [Amlaíb], called Eysteinn [Oistín], was killed by Hálfdan brother of Ívarr [Ímar], who had recently arrived from Britain, perhaps in a bid to win power in Ireland.’⁸ We might never be able to know whether Albann killed Oistín, a son of the now deceased/departed Dublin Scandinavian king Amlaíb, in Scotland/North Britain or in Ireland. I favour Woolf’s view of a Scottish/Northumbrian location. It does rather stretch credulity to imagine the ‘Northumbrian’ Hálfdan, having harried the Picts and Strathclyde Britons, then in the very same year jumping across to Ireland in a quick ‘bid for power’ and then, after killing Oistín, immediately returning to York where he then proceeds to share out his conquered land among his followers, before once again hopping back to Ireland in 877. Where did he get the ships to go to Ireland? In all probability Hálfdan had come across country from Northumbria to Pictland and Strathclyde in 875, with his fleet remaining on the Tyne or further up the north-east coast of Britain, possibly in the Firth of Forth. Smyth says that Hálfdan’s ‘shortest route from his base on the Tyne to Strathclyde and its citadel at Dumbarton was by sea to the Firth of Forth and hence across the narrow stretch of land to the Clyde.’⁹ But even if so there can be little question of the Danes dragging their ships overland all the way to the Clyde. So how did Hálfdan get to and from Ireland? Finally, any suggestion of a ‘bid for power’ in Ireland is perhaps just wishful thinking. We might also ask why Hálfdan would want to do this anyway, having just conquered or taken over a new kingdom for himself in northern

¹ AU 853.2: ‘Amlaíb, son of the king of *Laithlind*, came to Ireland, and the foreigners of Ireland submitted to him, and he took tribute from the Irish’, ‘Amhlaim m. righ Laithlinde do tuidhecht a n-Erinn coro giallsat Gaill Erenn dó, & cis o Goidhelaib’.

² AU 875.4.

³ Downham, *Viking Kings* 24.

⁴ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, ‘High kings, Vikings and other kings’, *Irish Historical Studies* 21.83 (1977-8) 283-323 at 320.

⁵ Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba* 106-17.

⁶ Woolf, *ibid.* 113, says that after the ‘battle of Dollar’ in 875 the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* says that ‘*Normanni* were in Pictland for a whole year’ and ‘that we know that he (Healfdene) was back in Northumbria in 876’, thus it ‘leaves no time for Healfdene to get to Dublin’.

⁷ Pers. comm.

⁸ Downham, *Viking Kings* 24.

⁹ Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings* 258.

England. In summary, there is no evidence that Hálfðan ever went to Ireland before 877, and certainly no hint in the extant sources that he was related in any way to the ruling Scandinavian ‘dynasty’ there.

Before we continue, can we really be sure that *Albann* in Ireland was the same person as *Healfdene* in England? Most modern historians and linguists accept the identification, although. Ó Corráin says the identification is ‘not at all clear’.¹ Smyth simply says that ‘Halfdan did not confine his raiding to the east coast of Northumbria and Scotland. His activities ranged right across northern Britain and the Irish sea to Dublin’.² His evidence for this activity across the Irish sea in ‘Dublin’ is obviously the report in the *Annals of Ulster* of Oistín being killed by *Alband* (who he just calls Hálfðan) in 875, according to him in Ireland, which he then uses as evidence to state that ‘Hálfðan arrived off the Irish coast in 875 to challenge the Norwegian leaders’.³ And then, regarding Albann’s death in 877, Smyth says: ‘Finally, he died in a desperate attempt to prevent the conquests of Ívarr on either side of the Irish Sea from slipping from his grasp.’⁴ Smyth repeats this view on multiple occasions using slightly different words, but he never gives any justification. It is a circular argument. Smyth assumes an identity and then uses it as a piece of evidence for that identity and for his proffered interpretation. McTurk says only: ‘There is no objection to the equation of Albann with Healfdene.’⁵ Wormald attempted no justification at all,⁶ while Downham assumes the identity of Albann and Hálfðan throughout.

On linguistic grounds, it does seem that the names Albann and Hálfðan are the same.⁷ Woolf says that *Alband* is likely to be a Gaelic attempt at representing the name *Healfdene*.⁸ If the names are the same then although it is just conceivable there were two Hálfðans at this time I think we must conclude that ‘our’ Hálfðan did indeed die in Ireland in 877. Besides the names, to my mind the single piece of information we have that most supports the identity of Albann and Hálfðan is that on his death the Irish annalist called him a ‘black heathen’ which as Etchingham has shown is a term applied to ‘Danes’ operating in Ireland and later in England and Wales too.

It is explicit in the *Annals of Ulster* that Albann (Hálfðan) was a *dux* of the ‘black/dark heathens’ and died in a naval fight at Strangford Lough on the north-east coast of Ireland, and that he was killed by the ‘fair heathens’, who were certainly earlier established Scandinavians in Ireland. Downham speculates that Albann/Hálfðan was ‘perhaps seeking to win the position there which Ívarr had once held’, and that ‘he never received the same level of recognition among the vikings of Ireland as he had held in England’.⁹ This does rather beg the question of why he should have expected the same level of recognition when, the debatable place of Oistín’s killing aside, there is absolutely no mention of Albann/Hálfðan in Ireland before his death, nor of any connection whatsoever with Ireland.

It seems that by 877, after Oistín’s death, Ímar’s son Bárith had become the king of the Scandinavians of Dublin.¹⁰ Etchingham argues that Bárith’s Dublin forces were the ‘fair heathens’ who killed Albann¹¹ If and only if it was Bárith’s men who killed Albann/Hálfðan

¹ Ó Corráin, ‘High kings’ 323.

² *Ibid.* 258.

³ *Ibid.* 259.

⁴ *Ibid.* 266.

⁵ McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 43.

⁶ Wormald, *Viking Studies* 141-3.

⁷ I thank Colmán Etchingham and Russell Poole for various discussions on this linguistic point.

⁸ Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba* 113.

⁹ Downham, *Viking Kings* 71

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24

¹¹ The *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, ed. Todd, §25, says the leader of the *Finngeinti* who killed *Albann* was *Bárith*; see Colmán Etchingham, ‘The location of historical Laithlinn/Lochla(i)nn: Scotland or Scandinavia’ in

then they were, following the ‘dynasty of Ívarr’ theory, which holds (among other things) that Hálfðan was Ímar’s brother, killing Bárith’s own uncle – certainly not an unheard-of occurrence in the ninth century. One plausible interpretation of all these events in 875-877 is proposed by Etchingham. Having noted that the mention of the ‘fair heathens’ (*Finngenti*) who killed Albann at Strangford Lough in 877 was ‘the only instance of *Finngenti* in the mainstream annals after 852’, he says:

It [the term *Finngenti*] is used to distinguish adversaries of Hálfðanr – the man who had killed Oistín, son of King Amlaíb of Dublin, two years earlier – from his supporters, the *Dubgenti*. The *Finngenti*, therefore, in killing Hálfðanr, are surely avenging agents of Oistín and therefore, it would seem, of the Dublin regime.¹

Perhaps so, although I tend to think this revenge was purely a happy by-product of killing Hálfðan at Strangford Lough.

After moving to the Tyne in Northumbria to winter in 874, Hálfðan had then raided the Picts and the Strathclyde Britons in the course of the next year. His motive was probably booty and tribute, and perhaps also to secure his new northern lands from potential rivals. The Picts and the Strathclyde Britons would both have been that. After this raid he returned to Northumbria in 876 to divide up his lands between his followers. Why then did he suddenly leave northern England at the height of his powers? Was it, as Etchingham suggests, another challenge to the interests of the Scandinavians of Ireland - in Scotland and in Ireland itself – following a short-lived ‘Danish’ challenge in the early 850s? Recently Etchingham has suggested that ‘perhaps his [Hálfðan’s] intervention in Strathclyde and Pictland in 875 and Ireland in that year² and in 877 reflect a desire to challenge the hegemony of the *Laithlinn* dynasty of Amlaíb/Áleifr and Ímar/Ívarr in both – as the *Dubgenti/Dubgaill* had done in Ireland in 851-2’.³ This is certainly quite possible, and if Albann and Hálfðan are identical it makes some sense, although it really must be remembered that, unlike with Amlaíb, nowhere is Ímar ever said to have been from *Laithlinn* (whether that was in Norway, Scotland and the Isles or elsewhere).⁴ Indeed Smyth’s and many others’ opinion is that Inguar/Ímar was a ‘Dane’ and not a brother of Amlaíb. In my view this is much more likely to be the case.⁵

Downham holds a different view. She assumes that the ‘fair heathens’ who killed Albann at Strangford Lough in 877 were not the Dublin-based Scandinavians, now probably led by Bárith, Ímar’s son (supposedly, according to her, one of the black/dark heathens), but were

Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica, Studia Celtica Upsaliensia 6, ed. Mícheál Ó Flaithhearta, *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis* (Uppsala 2007) 11–31 at xx; *idem.*, “Laithlinn, ‘Fair Foreigners’ and ‘Dark Foreigners’: the identity and provenance of Vikings in ninth-century Ireland” in *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West. Papers from the Proceedings of the 15th Viking Congress, Cork, 18-27 August 2005*, ed. John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (Dublin 2010) 81-8 at 87.

¹ Etchingham, *Raiders, Reporters and Viking Kings*.

² Etchingham has subsequently changed his mind about the possibility of Hálfðan having possibly been in Ireland in 875.

³ Pers. comm.

⁴ For the arguments for *Laithlinn* being in Norway see Etchingham ‘The location of historical Laithlinn/Lochla(i)nn’; *idem.*, “Laithlinn, ‘Fair Foreigners’ and ‘Dark Foreigners’”; M. A. Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland, Settlement, Trade and Urbanization* (Dublin 2008) 68-9; David Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea. Conflict and Assimilation AD 790-1050* (Stroud 2012) 36-7. For Scotland and the Isles, see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, ‘The Vikings in Scotland and Ireland in the Ninth Century’, *Peritia* 12 (1998) 296-339.

⁵ For a discussion of the unlikely ‘brotherly’ relationship between Amlaíb and Ímar see Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 127-30. Almost all historians accept that the bulk, but certainly not all, of the ‘great army’ in England were ‘Danese’, including Inguar. However, if the prevailing conventional wisdom equating Inguar (certainly a Dane) and Ímar is not correct then all bets are off. There would then be less reason to discount the biological relationship between Ímar and Amlaíb (and even Auisle). In addition, as we will see later when discussing events in Devon in 878, the non-identity of Ímar and Inguar would also resolve another horny problem.

some other fair heathens/foreigners based at Strangford Lough itself. She says, ‘this event highlights the continued existence of viking groups other than the ‘Dark Foreigners’ within Ireland’.¹

But perhaps these contrasting views are not as oppositional as they seem. Space does not permit a full exploration here; but in a nutshell: Amlaíb came from *Laithlinn* in 853, very probably to support the earlier fair foreigners in Ireland who had been attacked by Horm’s recently arrived Danish black/dark heathens. Ímar came later (from somewhere), probably a little before 857, and joined forces with Amlaíb for a while. It is most unlikely that the two were brothers or that Ímar originated in *Laithlinn*. After Amlaíb’s departure from Ireland in about 872, Ímar was left in charge of all the remaining Dublin Northmen for a short time until his own death in 873, when he is called ‘Ímar, king of the Northmen of all Ireland and Britain’, ‘Imhar, rex Nordmannorum totius Hibernie & Brittanie, uitam finiuit.’² Amlaíb’s son Oistín, who was naturally also a *Laithlinn* ‘fair foreigner’, perhaps ruled Dublin jointly with Ímar’s son Bárith until he was killed by Albann/Hálfdan in 875, possibly in northern Britain. Ímar’s son Bárith thereafter seems to have led the Dublin Northmen until his own death on a raid in County Meath in 881.³ Thus perhaps the fair foreigners at Strangford Lough who killed Albann/Hálfdan were in fact a remaining group of Amlaíb’s and Oistín’s ‘Laithlinn’ fair foreigners who were based there, as Downham suggests they were, but they were also likely to have avenged Oistín’s murder by killing the Danish black/dark foreigner Albann/Hálfdan when he appeared on the lough in 877, as maintained by Etchingham. The only thing it is necessary to accept to bring these opposing views together is that Ímar was neither Amlaíb’s brother nor came from *Laithlinn*, wherever that was. Whether he was ‘Danish’ or not is another question.⁴ Smyth certainly believed he was, as did Sawyer and Byrne.⁵ Given that Ímar’s successors did rule Dublin in later years, Byrne said ‘the basically Norwegian settlement of Dublin [would be] ruled by a Danish dynasty’.⁶ Rowe concludes her analysis of these matters by saying ‘in the late 850s Ímar/Inwære was a Danish Viking leader’.⁷ If Ímar was the same man as Inguar in England, as most historians today believe, then I think Byrne’s comment is probably right.

To summarize: until his death the Danish ‘king’ Hálfdan who was active in England had had no provable connection with Ireland or had any familial connection with the ruling Scandinavian ‘dynasty’ in Ireland. He had been one of the main leaders of the Danish army in England in 871, and possibly during one very brief period the only king. Later he had secured

¹ Downham, *Viking Kings* 24.

² *AU* 873.3. That Ímar was called a ‘king of the Northmen of all Ireland and Britain’ does not mean that he ruled a kingdom in England. Nicholas Higham says that ‘king of the Norsemen of all Ireland and Britain’ implies ‘a political and military “overkingship” of the Viking settlements and war-bands throughout the Irish Sea basin’ (*The Kingdom of Northumbria* 178). Ó Corráin believes that Ímar’s given title when he died means that he was ‘overlord of the Vikings in Ireland and in Scotland, including Pictland and Strathclyde, and possibly Wales’ (‘Ireland, Wales, Man, and the Hebrides’ 90), while Etchingham (pers. comm.) proposes that ‘Ímar’s title in 873 can be understood as claiming overlordship of all the Vikings of Ireland and north Britain/Scotland’.

³ Downham, *Viking Kings* 24, 28, 247.

⁴ Because the Irish annals call Ímar a Northman and never a black/dark heathen/ foreigner does not logically mean that he was not a ‘Dane’. If he was the same man as Inguar in England then he probably was, if the two were different people he might have been anything.

⁵ Francis John Byrne, ‘Review of The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic Speaking Peoples’, *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies held in Dublin, 6-10 July 1959, Irish Historical Studies* 13 (1963) 269-71; *idem.*, ‘The Viking Age’ in *A New History of Ireland: Pre-historic and Early Ireland* 1, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford 2005) 609-34; Peter Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England* (London 1978) 115; Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Byrne, ‘Review of the Impact’.

⁷ Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 127, see also 136.

for himself a new kingdom in Northumbria, and then, whether because of illness, expulsion or ambition he suddenly left.

Wales and Devon, 877-878

Finally, we should explore one other interesting possibility. This is that before his death in Ireland Hálfðan had raided the island of Anglesey in north-west Wales. Perhaps this could provide a more plausible reason for Hálfðan being in Ireland in 877 than the ‘bid for power’ suggestion. The *Annals of Ulster* for 877 say: ‘Rhodri son of Merfyn, king of the Britons, came in flight from the dark [black] foreigners to Ireland.’¹ This event probably took place in Anglesey where the Welsh *Annales Cambriae* refer to a ‘Sunday Battle’.² Then the next year the *Annals of Ulster* tell us that: ‘Rhodri son of Merfyn, king of the Britons, was killed by the Saxons.’³ The *Annales Cambriae* report the same.⁴ Where had the black foreigners who attacked the Gwynedd king Rhodri Mawr on Anglesey, and forced him to flee to Ireland, come from? And who were they? They could have come from England, whether Mercia or Northumbria, or they could have come from Ireland. An Irish origin makes little sense. The *Annals of Ulster* explicitly say that these Northmen were black foreigners. With regard to Rhodri’s flight to Ireland in 877, if Downham’s identification of the family ‘dynasty’ of the Scandinavian kings in Dublin with the dark/black heathens/foreigners were correct then if Rhodri had fled to Dublin he would have been fleeing black foreigners in Wales to find safety with the same group in Ireland. However, the *Annals of Ulster* do not say where in Ireland Rhodri fled to, it could well have been to the fair heathens/foreigners based on Strangford Lough; to those very fair heathens who were to kill Albann/Hálfðan there the same year. Regarding the ‘fighting between the Fair Heathens and Dark Heathens in Strangford Lough’, Charles-Edwards says ‘the latter could have been Rhodri’s enemies while the rival Vikings, the *Finngeinti* or ‘Fair Heathens’, were his and his father’s allies or overlords’.⁵ On balance I think we can probably exclude Ireland as the origin of the black/dark foreigners on Anglesey in 877.⁶

Turning our attention to England, it is also most unlikely that it was Guthrum’s Danes who attacked Rhodri. In 877 Guthrum’s Danes had moved from Wessex to Gloucester in south-western Mercia, and divided Mercia between themselves and their client-king Ceolwulf.⁷ Ceolwulf almost certainly retained the western part of Mercia bordering Wales.⁸ Guthrum’s Danes were fully occupied with their on-going fight with King Alfred and I think there can be no doubt that they did not make an overland foray across all of Wales to Anglesey in this year.

If Rhodri Mawr had not been attacked by Northmen from Ireland or by Guthrum’s Danes from south-western Mercia then one can at least float the idea that perhaps he had been attacked by Danish black/dark foreigners from Northumbria - perhaps even those of Hálfðan himself. Hálfðan had left Northumbria shortly after 876 in the obscure circumstances

¹ AU 877.3: ‘Ruaidhri m. Muirminn, rex Brittonum, du tuidhecht docum n-Erenn for teiched re Dubghallaibh.’

² ‘Gueith Diu Sul in Mon’, *Annales Cambriae A.D. 682-954: Texts A-C in parallel*, ed. and trans. D. N. Dumville (Cambridge 2002) s.a. 876–877; Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064* (Oxford 2014) 487; Downham, *Viking Kings* 204.

³ AU 878.1.

⁴ *Annales Cambriae* s.a. 877=878: ‘Ruaidhri m. Muirminn, rex Brittonum a Saxonibus interemptus.’

⁵ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons* 478-9.

⁶ Charles-Edwards, *ibid.* 487-8, suggests an English origin for these black foreigners.

⁷ ASC 877; Keynes, ‘The Vikings in England’ 56. It was probably western Mercia that was divided here as the Northmen were already in control of eastern Mercia.

⁸ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons* 488; David N. Dumville, ‘Brittany and the “Armes Prydein Vawr”’, *Études celtiques* 20 (1983) 145-59 at 157.

discussed earlier – either because he had contracted a disease and gone mad and stank, or perhaps even, as de Vries conjectured, because he had been forced out by his followers who wanted to carry on raiding, although I find this less convincing. Hálfðan was a Dane and would thus certainly warrant the name black foreigner in the Irish annals. A possible scenario is thus as follows: After leaving Northumbria, Hálfðan and his remaining followers had come by ship¹ to Anglesey, fought Rhodri in the ‘Sunday Battle’ and compelled him to flee to Ireland, possibly to Strangford Lough, which lies just west of Anglesey.² Hálfðan could then have pursued Rhodri to Ireland but had the misfortune to meet the resident fair foreigners on Strangford Lough and been defeated and killed by them in a naval engagement, as reported in the *Annals of Ulster*.³ The following year, 878, with Hálfðan now dead, Rhodri would have felt safe enough to return to Wales,⁴ but unluckily he was then killed by the English, probably those of the Mercian king Ceolwulf.⁵ Such a reconstruction has a certain coherence, and, in my opinion, it makes more sense than that Hálfðan had gone to Ireland in some sort of bid for power, particularly as Hálfðan had no known connection with Ireland before 877. This is only a possible scenario for consideration.

Before we leave Wales, we should mention another seemingly larger group of Northmen in Wales in 877-878. It is also important in our investigation of Hálfðan. In early 878 the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says: ‘That same winter [877/78] a brother of Inwær and Healfdene (*Inwæres broðor 7 Healfdenes*) was in Wessex in Devonshire with 23 ships, and he was killed there and 800 men with him and 40 men of his war-band.’⁶ Asser says that the Danes had come from *Demetia* (i.e. Dyfed in South Wales) and that it was ‘the king’s thegns’ who won the victory and he names the place of the battle as *Cynuit* (probably Countisbury in Devon).⁷ As Wormald pointed out, *Inwæres broðor 7 Healfdenes* is ‘certainly a strange phrase’.⁸ Later English sources differ from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in stating who the Danish leader or leaders who died in Devon was or were. The *Historia regum Anglorum*, whose first sections are nowadays contended to have been written by Byrhtferth of Ramsey in the late tenth or early eleventh century, but which were based on earlier Northumbrian annals,⁹ says they were ‘Inguar and Healfdene’, ‘*Inguar et Healfdene*’,¹⁰ which if true would mean Healfdene and Inguar were not Albann or Ímar in Ireland. Æthelweard, who Anglo-Saxon scholars maintain used an older version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, says it was ‘Healfdene, the brother of the tyrant Inwær’, ‘*Healfdene Inguuares tryanni frater*’, who died;¹¹ which would mean that Healfdene and Albann were not the same person, but would not necessarily exclude the English Inguar being the same person as the Irish Ímar. Finally, Henry of Huntingdon says the Danish chieftain who died was ‘a brother of king Haldane’,

¹ Wendy Davies, *Patterns of power in early Wales* (Oxford 1990) 56, thinks these dark foreigners came overland. Etchingham agrees, see ‘North Wales, Ireland and the Isles: the Insular Viking Zone’, *Peritia* 15 (2001) 145-87 at 164.

² Rhodri Mawr had killed the earlier ‘black heathen’ chieftain Horm (*Ormr*) in 856 (*AU* 856.6) but it was long before and I would not suggest any element of revenge here.

³ De Vries suggested this many years ago (‘Die historischen Grundlagen’ 261). Although we might ask what the motivation would have been for him to pursue Rhodri to Ireland?

⁴ He might of course have returned in late 877.

⁵ See Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons* 488; Etchingham, ‘North Wales, Ireland and the Isles’ 164; T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Wales and Mercia, 613–918’ in *Mercia, An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, eds. Brown and Farr (London and New York 2001) 101. Another option worth exploring is that it was Æthelred of Mercia who killed Rhodri.

⁶ *ASC* 878.

⁷ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great* c. 54, 83-4.

⁸ Wormald, ‘Viking Studies’ 143; De Vries, ‘Die historischen Grundlagen’ 272.

⁹ Hart, ‘Byrhtferth’s Northumbrian Chronicle’ 558-82; Lapidge, ‘Byrhtferth of Ramsey’ 97-122.

¹⁰ *Historia regum, Symeonis Monachi* 2, ed. Arnold, 83.

¹¹ *CA*, IV: 3, 42-3.

‘*frater regis Haldane*’, with no mention of Inguar at all,¹ and if Healfdene is to be equated with the joint Danish king Hálfðan, as I argue he must be, his only known brother was Sigfrid, although he certainly may have had more. Unfortunately, I doubt we will ever know who this ‘brother’ really was.

Whatever the case, there is no reason to assume that the black foreigners who had attacked Rhodri in Anglesey in 877 were the same Northmen as those who had arrived in Devon from Dyfed in early 878. What is clear is that *Albann* had been killed in 877, and if he was Hálfðan then he could not have led the Danes to defeat at Countisbury or been in Dyfed before.² Yet the fact is that all English sources refer in one way or another to Inguar and/or Hálfðan, who they would have known of from their earlier activities in Northumbria. They make no connection with Ireland. In fact, all English annalists and chroniclers in the ninth century never mention Ireland at all in connection with the Danes of the so-called ‘great army’ - not once. Clearly, therefore, the Danes who came to Devon from Dyfed in early 878 were closely associated with Northumbria and there is no support for the conjecture that ‘this attack may have been led from Ireland’.³ Given the connection with Northumbria made in all our sources perhaps we should look there for the origin of these Danes. Certainly, it is likely that the Danish fleet, which Asser says came to Dyfed and Devon, came either to support Guthrum’s Danes in a sort of pincer movement against Alfred’s West Saxons, or at least to benefit from the expected collapse of Wessex, which was definitely on the cards at the time. We also know that in 893 Northumbrian-based Danes, under a chieftain called *Sigeferð* (Sigfrid, ON Sigfrøðr),⁴ did come to the south and west of Britain to support their more southerly Danish *confrères* who had arrived in two fleets from the Continent in 892.⁵ Æthelweard says that *Sigeferð* came ‘from the land of the Northumbrians’ and that ‘he ravaged twice along the coast on that one expedition’⁶ This fleet actually sailed down to the English Channel and past Exeter before ‘40’ of its ships rounded the Cornish peninsula and ‘besieged a fortification in [north] Devonshire’.⁷

After 876 the next ‘king’ of the Danes of Northumbria we hear of is a certain *Guthfrith* (Godfrid/Godfred/Gudred, ON Guðrøðr), whose rule in Northumbria is usually dated to around 880 and who, according to Æthelweard’s *Chronicon*, died in 895.⁸ If these dates are

¹ *Henrici Archidiaconi Huntendunensis*, ed. Arnold, 147. Henry (*ibid.*) also very interestingly says that in Alfred’s seventh year (878) King *Healfdene* reigned in Northumbria, and his brother in East Anglia, while the three other kings already mentioned (‘*Godrun, Oscetin et Anwend*’) reigned with Ceolwulf, ‘the king they had appointed’, in Mercia, the country around London and Essex. Who did Henry think Healfdene’s brother who ruled in East Anglia in 878 was?

² Assuming the identity of *Albann* and Healfdene, the only way Hálfðan could have been at Countisbury is if he had not actually died at Strangford Lough in 877. Given the general reliability of the *Annals of Ulster* this may be unlikely.

³ Downham, *Viking Kings* 71.

⁴ CA 893, IV: 3, 50.

⁵ ASC 894=893; Downham, *Viking Kings* 72.

⁶ CA, 893, IV: 3, 50; Smyth, *Alfred the Great* 123.

⁷ ASC 894=893; Smyth, Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great* 123; Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings* 32-4.

⁸ CA, IV: 3, 51. See also, HSC c. 13, 52-53. The *Historia regum Anglorum* places *Guthred*’s death in 894 (*Symeonis Monachi*, vol. 2, 92; *The Church Historians*, 3.2, 67). As mentioned earlier, taking his information from the *Historia regum*, Adam of Bremen mentions that *Gudred* had ‘taken Halfdan’s (*Halpdani/Haldani/Haldan*) place’ in Northumbria after Halfdan had been killed by the ‘Angles’; but he also says that ‘from that time Frisia and England are said to have been subject to the Danes’, which is an interesting statement given the many mentions of Frisia in Northumbrian sources. Adam also says that *Gudred* had three Northumbrian sons called *Aulaf* (var. *Analaph*, ON Óláfr), *Sigeric* (var. *Sigerih, Sigthric, Sigtrich*, ON Sigtryggr) and Reginold (OI Ragnall, ON Rögnvaldr). (*Adam of Bremen. History of the Archbishops*, bk. 1, xxxix (41) 39, bk. 2, 25/22, 70; *Adam of Bremen, Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, 3rd ed., ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, MGH SRG 2 (Hanover 1917) bk. 1, xxxviii (41) 43, bk. 2, xxv (22) 84)).

correct, the Danish chieftain who died at Countisbury cannot have been him.¹ Yet after Hálfðan's departure from Northumbria someone must have taken command of the Danes who had stayed. This might have been the unnamed 'brother' of Inguar and Healfdene mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, or just 'the brother' of Healfdene as Henry of Huntingdon would have it.² This might partly explain why the Anglo-Saxon annalist did not know the identity of the chieftain killed although he clearly knew of some connection between him and the Northumbrian-connected Danes Inguar and Healfdene/Hálfðan. This 'brother' need not necessarily have been a real biological brother of either Inguar or Healfdene, he could conceivably have been a 'blood-brother' or 'brother in arms'. Rowe says that 'no historian of Anglo-Saxon England has questioned the annalist's assertion of fraternity between Inwære and Healfdene, and none has suggested that they were sworn-brothers rather than relatives by blood'.³ Perhaps they should.⁴ Scandinavian fleets and armies were formed from *liðs*, which were 'brotherhoods' or 'bands of brothers', and "members were given epithets like 'fellow', 'brother'".⁵ They could vary in size from small flotillas to very large forces and drew in people from a variety of geographic and even linguistic backgrounds.⁶ The whole subject of the meaning of 'brother' in English, Irish and Frankish annals, as well as in later Scandinavian chronicles and sagas, is worthy of further study.⁷ The Latin word *nepos*, which we find used repeatedly in Frankish annals, can sometimes refer to a true biological nephew but it can also mean a cousin or grandson, or another close relation,⁸ or even a foster son. Whatever the precise meaning of 'brother' in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it is at least conceivable that the Danes defeated by the English in Devon had come from Northumbria. This is of course just one possible scenario. But it is worth remembering that, as far as I am aware, no modern historian has ever offered another interpretation, except for following Geoffrey Gaimar in saying the chieftain involved was Ubba. But even if it was Ubba who had come to Devon (and I think not), Ubba was himself a Northumbrian-connected Dane. The Danes in Devon certainly existed and they came from somewhere, and it is perhaps beholden on those who might not agree with a Northumbrian origin to provide a more convincing explanation.

A short aside about Hálfðan's brother Sigfrid

¹ Peter Hunter Blair, 'Olaf the White and the Three fragments of Irish annals' *Viking-Tidsskrift for norrøn arkeologi* 3 (1939) 1-35, argued that *Guthfrith* took over from Hálfðan soon after he had left, and possibly as early as 877; yet even if this is so he could not have died at Countisbury in early 878. For Guðrøðr see also Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba* 78-85; Downham, *Viking Kings* 75-8.

² Sigfrid is the only named brother of Hálfðan.

³ Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 48.

⁴ See Blair, 'Olaf the White' 6, and Rowe, *Vikings in the West* 129 and n. 421, for the possible meaning of 'band of brothers' or 'brothers-in-arms' regarding the statement of the *FAI* (§347, 126-7) that the Dublin-based chieftains (called 'kings') Amláib, Ímar and Auisle were brothers.

⁵ Lund, 'Allies of God or man?', 52-5

⁶ There is now an abundance of research on these viking 'brotherhoods', see, for example, Ben Raffield, 'Bands of brothers: A re-appraisal of the Viking Great Army and its implications for the Scandinavian colonization of England', *Early Medieval Europe* 24 (3) (2016) 308-37; Ben Raffield, Claire Greenlow, Neil Price and Mark Collard, 'In-group identification, identity fusion and the formation of Viking warbands', *World Archaeology* 48/1 (2016) 35-50; Niels Lund, 'The Armies of Swein Forkbeard and Cnut, leding or lið', *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986) 105-26.

⁷ The whole debate about the supposed brother of Inguar and Healfdene would become moot if Inguar in England and Ímar in Ireland were not the same person; a view that was prevalent in the past and is, perhaps, starting to be reconsidered. If so this would open up the possibility (taking the *ASC* entry for 878 at its face value) that Inguar and Healfdene might really have been brothers, although who their other 'brother' then was would still be a mystery.

⁸ See for example Coupland, 'From poachers to gamekeepers' 106.

Because the focus of this study has been on Hálfðan, little attention has been given to his brother Sigfrid, who deserves a much fuller discussion than I can give here. A few words will have to suffice, although a detailed study would add a lot to our understanding of another of Wormald's elusive 'Princes of Denmark'. After Sigfrid is mentioned in the *Annals of Fulda* as being a king of the Danes ruling in southern Jutland,¹ he next appears in Frankish records as being one of two Danish 'kings' leading the early great army in Flanders and northern Francia after it had arrived from England in 879.² The other Danish 'king' was called Godfrid, who, after being bought off by Charles III in 882 at the siege of *Asclohal/Asselt* (near Roermond in the Meuse valley) with a grant of 'Frisia and the other regions that Roric had held',³ had been murdered by the Franks in 885.⁴ At the same siege Sigfrid and his associate, a jarl called Gorm,⁵ had been bought off with gold and silver, but according to Archbishop Hincmar had been given 'permission to stay so that they could go on ravaging a part of his cousin's kingdom as they had done before'. There is much more to tell of what Sigfrid subsequently did, but in 885-886 he was the most powerful leader of the large force which attacked and besieged Paris. After leaving for a while,⁶ he returned to the Seine and continued his plundering for some time until he moved on to 'Frisia' in 887, where according to the *Annals of Saint-Vaast* he was killed.⁷ The continental 'great army' of 879-892 was no more a single army than was the so-called 'great army' in England. It was in fact 'an agglomeration of many smaller warbands with their own leaders, which could split apart or swarm together at will to form a bigger force'.⁸ Although it is often assumed as fact, we cannot know for sure if Sigfrid 'king of the Danes', as he is called in Frankish sources in the 880s, was a leader or one of the leaders of the Northmen who arrived in Fulham in 878 and/or which then left England for

¹ In many later Danish king lists and chronicles Sigfrid appears as a/the next king in Denmark after Horik II.

² Its activities also extended to the Rhine and the Moselle. We can follow the movements, activities and leadership of this continental great army from 879 to 892 (when the last part of it returned to England) in the *Annals of Saint-Vaast*, *Annals of Saint-Bertin* and *Annals of Fulda*, and in other contemporary or near-contemporary Frankish sources such as Regino of Prüm's *Chronicon: Regino of Prüm (Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi, MGH, SRG*, ed. Friedrich Kurze (Hanover 1890); Maclean, *History and Politics*, and Abbo of Saint-Germain's, *Bellis Parisiaca Urbis (Le Siège de Paris par les Normands, Les classiques de l'Histoire de France au Moyen Âge*, ed. and trans. H. Waquet (Paris 1942)); plus in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (and Asser's *Life of King Alfred*) - which derived their information from a continental source. For an overview see Vogel, *Die Normannen* 260-372; A.D'Haenens, *Les invasions normandes en Belgique au IXe siècle: la phénomène et sa répercussion dans l'historiographie* (Louvain 1967) 45-61.

³ *AB* 882: Grat 248, Nelson 225. See also, *AV* 882: von Simson 51; *AF* 882: Kurze 99, Reuter 93. For the siege of Asselt see Bauduin, *Le Monde Franc* 199-223; Simon MacLean, 'Charles the Fat and the Viking Great Army. The Military Explanation for the End of the Carolingian Empire', *War Studies Journal* 3 (1998) 74-95. Vogel, *Die Normannen* 290-94. For the identification of *Asclohal* as Asselt see D'Haenens, *Les invasions normandes* 312-5; *AF*, Reuter 92 n. 7; Lebecq, 'Les Vikings en Frise' 107.

⁴ This Godfrid should not be confused with Godfrid Haraldsson, Roric's cousin, but as he was granted Roric's lands in 882 he was probably a close relation. See Bauduin, *Le Monde Franc* 199-223; Wood, 'Christians and pagans' 44; *AB*, Nelson 225 n. 12. For the circumstances of his death see *AF* (1) 885: Reuter 97; *AF* (2) 885: Reuter 111; *AV* 885: von Simson 55; Regino of Prüm: *Reginonis abbatis* 885, 123-4; Maclean, *History and Politics* 191-4; Bauduin, *Le Monde Franc* 199-223

⁵ *AF* 882 (Bavarian continuation), Reuter 105, says that with 'kings' Sigfrid and Godfrid at Asselt there were two 'princes' called *Wurm* (the Gorm of Hincmar) and *Hals*.

⁶ He had possibly attacked Bayeux while he was away; see Harthausen, *Die Normanneneinfälle* 59-60; Vogel, *Die Normannen* 411-12.

⁷ *AV* 887: von Simson 63. As Godfrid had recently been murdered was this an attempt on Sigfrid's part to take over his territories at a time when Charles the Fat was dying? See Henstra, *Friese graafschappen* 63. It is also quite possible that Sigfrid was responsible for a major attack on Saxony in 880, see Harthausen, *Die Normanneneinfälle* 34-60

⁸ MacLean, 'Charles the Fat and the Viking Great Army' 76.

Flanders in 879, it is possible but unknowable.¹ However, what is clear is that by the 880s Sigfrid had returned to viking ways and, as Lund puts it, he must ‘in the meantime [since 873] have lost whatever position he had in Denmark’² This view is supported by the fact that when he arrived at Paris in 885 Abbo of Saint-Germain describes him as ‘Sigfrid, king, but in name only, but he was in command of his troops’,³ which does imply, as Lund says, that he was a ‘king without any land’.⁴ What we can therefore suggest is that, whether before or after his brother Hálfðan’s death in 877, Sigfrid does seem at some point to have lost his royal status in Denmark and gone back to opportunistic raiding, just possibly in England in 878-879, but much more certainly after 879/880 in northern Francia.

Finally, regarding Sigfrid’s earlier piratical life, it is also possible that he was the chieftain of that name (‘Sigeфриdus’) who was leading the Northmen on the River Charente in Aquitaine in the mid-860s.⁵ A question I will not be able to explore here.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Shane McLeod, Simon Coupland, Russell Poole, Rory McTurk, Colmán Etchingham, Clare Downham, Pierre Bauduin, Johanna Maria van Winter, John Quanrud and Tony Sharp for reading and offering many helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. Needless to say, any errors of fact or interpretation remain my own.

¹ If he was in England it could be highly significant regarding the fate of his brother Hálfðan. For a very interesting and original analysis of the Fulham Scandinavians see John Baker and Stuart Brooks, ‘Fulham 878-79: A New Consideration of Viking Manoeuvres’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 8 (2012) 23-52.

² Lund, ‘Scandinavia, c. 700-1066’ 211.

³ Abbo, *Bellis Parisiacae Urbis*, 8.

⁴ Lund, ‘Scandinavia, c. 700-1066’ 211.

⁵ *AB* 865, Nelson 128; Vogel, *Die Normannen* 211. For more on the vikings on the Loire and in Aquitaine in the 860s see *inter alia* Lot, ‘La Loire, l’Aquitaine et la Seine’; Coupland, ‘Charles the Bald and the defence of the West Frankish Kingdom’; Jean Renaud, *Les Vikings de la Charente à l’assaut de l’Aquitaine* (Pau 2003); Émile Mabille, ‘Les invasions normandes dans la Loire et les pérégrinations du corps de saint Martin [premier article]’, *Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes* 30 (1869) 149-94.