



**HAL**  
open science

## 854 and all that: Danish exiles, royal pretenders and returning pirates

Stephen M. Lewis

► **To cite this version:**

Stephen M. Lewis. 854 and all that: Danish exiles, royal pretenders and returning pirates. Guerriers du Nord, Université de Caen Normandie CRAHAM, Mar 2022, Caen, France. hal-04429990

**HAL Id: hal-04429990**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04429990v1>**

Submitted on 31 Jan 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# 854 and all that: Danish exiles, royal pretenders and returning pirates<sup>1</sup>

STEPHEN M. LEWIS <sup>2</sup>

Université de Caen Normandie and Université Bordeaux Montaigne

March 2022

The leaders of many of the Scandinavian incursions into western Europe in the ninth century were exiles and quite often members of a royal family or of royal stock who had been expelled from their home countries by more powerful relatives. They tended to use their time as exiles pillaging and extorting wealth, or selling their services as mercenaries, seemingly with the intention to return home one day with sufficient strength to challenge for power. Many of them never did return, but some of them did, with varying degrees of success. This has long been recognised by many historians<sup>3</sup>. Yet despite all the acknowledgments very little has been written about the several attempts by « exiled » members of Danish « royal families » to return to Denmark and seize some power there<sup>4</sup>.

This paper will examine perhaps the prime, and certainly the best documented, case of such returns to Denmark: that which took place in 854. In this year some relatives of the

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the Université de Caen Normandie on 18 March 2022 during a conference called *Guerriers du Nord*: see <https://www.craham.cnrs.fr/amp/evenement/agenda/guerriers-du-nord/>.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Stephen M. Lewis undertook and defended his doctoral thesis entitled *Vikings in Aquitaine and their connections, ninth to early eleventh centuries* at the Université de Caen Normandie under the direction of Pierre Bauduin. This is available online at <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-03339358v1> and at <https://unicaen.academia.edu/StephenLewis>. He is a member of the *Centre de recherches archéologiques et historiques anciennes et médiévales* (CRAHAM) at the Université de Caen Normandie, and a member of the research centre for *Histoire, civilisation, archéologie et art des mondes anciens et médiévaux* (AUSONIUS) at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne. His research interests include the ‘vikings’ in Aquitaine and elsewhere in Western Europe and trans-Pyrenean matters in the early medieval period.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: N. LUND, « The Danish Empire and the End of the Viking Age », in P. H. SAWYER (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 156-81, at p. 156; E. J. GOLDBERG, *Struggle for Empire, Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817-876*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2006, p. 134, n. 67; J. L. NELSON, « The Frankish Empire », in P. H. SAWYER (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings, op. cit.*, p. 19-47, at p. 41; C. ETCHINGHAM, *Raiders, Reporters and Viking Kings: Church raiding, annals and politics in Viking-Age Ireland and beyond*, forthcoming, chap. 7.4; S. LEBECQ, « Les Vikings en Frise: Chronique d’un échec relatif », in P. BAUDUIN (ed.), *Les fondations scandinaves en Occident*, Caen, Publications de CRAHAM, 2005, p. 97-112, at p. 111-12; H. HARTHAUSEN, *Die Normanneneinfälle im Elb- und Weserlmündungsgebiet mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schlacht von 880*, Hildesheim, August Lax, 1966, p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> An assessment of all these matters in the first half of the ninth century can be found in V. HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation: Dänemark und das Frankenreich im 9. Jahrhundert*, Cologne, Kölner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2011. Also useful is K. L. MAUND, « A Turmoil of Warring Princes: Political Leadership in Ninth-century Denmark », *The Haskins Society Journal*, 6, 1995, p. 29-47.

Danish king Horik I tried to gain control of the Danish kingdom and a veritable civil war ensued. This provided the opportunity for other « piratical » Scandinavian chieftains who had for years been raiding « the territories of the kingdom of the Franks through places which were accessible to them using their ships » to return quickly to Denmark to join in this struggle for power.

In this article what « actually happened »<sup>5</sup> in 854 in Denmark will be explored using the sources we have. Then, by looking both forward and backwards a little, we will consider the context of these events and who the « relatives » of Horik I and the returning « pirates » may have been. Finally, the question of what the consequences of this « civil war » for Denmark itself were, and whether these fights ultimately contributed to, or even spurred, an upsurge in *viking* raiding « overseas » in western Europe, as has often been claimed, will be addressed.

## THE SOURCES FOR 854

According to the Mainz continuator of the East Frankish *Annals of Fulda*<sup>6</sup>:

Northmen who continuously for twenty years had cruelly afflicted with fire and slaughter and pillage the territories of the kingdom of the Franks through places which were accessible to them using their ships, came together from different parts to which they had scattered in their greed for plunder, and returned to their own country. There a struggle had arisen between Horic, king of the Danes, and Gudurm, his brother's son, who up till then had been living a piratical existence after being driven from that kingdom, such that they killed each other in mutual slaughter, and countless common people were killed, and of the royal family/stock no one remained except one boy [*de stirpe vero regia nisi unus puer nullus remaneret*]<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> To borrow Leopold von Ranke's famous phrase.

<sup>6</sup> For who was writing the *Annals of Fulda* at this time, and where, see *The Annals of Fulda. Ninth-Century Histories, Volume 2*, T. REUTER (trans. and ann.), Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2012 [hereafter *AF*], p. 1-14.

<sup>7</sup> My translation here is initially based on that of T. Reuter, *ibid.*, p. 36, but it also takes account of various suggestions of C. Etchingham and P. Bauduin, for which I thank them, as well as my own interpretations. *Annales fuldenses: sive, Annales regni Francorum orientalis*, F. KURZE (ed.), *MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi*, 7, Hanover, Hahn, 1891 [hereafter *AF*], p. 44-45: « Nordmanni, qui continuis XX annis regni Francorum fines per loca navibus accessibilia caedibus et incendiis atque rapinis crudeliter vastabant, congregati de regionibus, per quas praedandi cupiditate dispersi fuerant, in patriam suam reversi sunt. Ibiq[ue] inter Horic regem Danorum et Gudurm filium fratris eius, qui eatenus ab eo regno pulsus piratico more vixit, orta contentione ita se mutua caede mactaverunt, ut vulgus quidem promiscuum innumerabile caderet, de stirpe vero regia nisi unus puer nullus remaneret ».

As will be seen in other sources (see below), the young boy of royal stock who remained was also called Horik (II)<sup>8</sup>. He was very unlikely the son of Horik I or even his nephew. More likely he was of the next generation, possibly a grandson or even a great-nephew of Horik I, but he may « not even have been related to the Godfrid family, unless remotely »<sup>9</sup>.

In the so-called *Annals of Saint-Bertin* Prudentius of Troyes<sup>10</sup> wrote under the year 854: « 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 »<sup>11</sup>.

Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii (Life of Saint Anskar)*, written between 869 and 876, says:

Meanwhile, God's judgment met King Horic; he fell in battle in a predatory (or piratical) invasion of some of his relatives [*quibusdam propinquis*] who were seeking to take his kingdom. All the great people of the country who were once close friends with the Lord Bishop [Anskar] perished with him by the sword. Now Horic the younger seized the realm [...]<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> P. HERRMANN, *Erläuterungen zu den ersten neun Büchern der Dänischen Geschichte des Saxo Grammaticus*, vol. II, « Die Heldensagen des Saxo Grammaticus », Leipzig, W. Engelmann, 1922, p. 69, argues he was eleven at the oldest.

<sup>9</sup> *Adam of Bremen, History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, F. J. TSCHAN (trans.), New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 20, n. 42.

<sup>10</sup> At this time the Spaniard Prudentius, whose real name was Galindo, was no longer working at Charles the Bald's court. See *The Annals of St-Bertin. Ninth-Century Histories, Volume 1*, J. L. NELSON (trans.), Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1991 [hereafter AB], p. 7-9; *eadem*, « The Annals of St Bertin », in M. T. GIBSON and J. L. NELSON (ed.), *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, Aldershot, Variorum, 1990, p. 23-40.

<sup>11</sup> *Annales de Saint-Bertin (avec une introduction et des notes par Léon Levillain)*, F. GRAT, J. VIELLIARD, S. CLEMENCET (ed.), Paris, C. Klincksieck, 1964 [hereafter AB], s.a. 854, p. 70: « Dani intestino inter se proelio dimicantes, adeo tridui concertatione obstinatissima bacchati sunt ut, Orico rege et ceteris cum eo interfectis regibus, pene omnis nobilitas interierit »; trans. Nelson, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> My translation, which can be compared to *Anskar, the apostle of the North. 801-865: translated from the Vita Anskarii by Bishop Rimbert, his fellow missionary and successor*, C. H. ROBINSON (trans.), London, SPG, 1921, p. 100-1: « Meanwhile, it happened by divine judgment that King Horic was killed in war in a disturbance caused by pirates while his relations were attempting to invade his kingdom. Together with him all the chief men of that land, who had formerly been acquaintances and friends of the bishop, perished by the sword. When at length the younger Horic had been established in the kingdom [...] », and *Vie de Saint Anschaire*, J.-B. BRUNET-JAILLY (trans.), Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2011: « Avec lui [= Horik I] tombèrent sous le glaive tous les grands du pays, qu'une amitié ancienne liait à notre seigneur Anschaire. Puis monta sur le trône Horic le Jeune. Et c'est alors que certains des seigneurs qui l'entouraient, et ne connaissaient guère notre évêque, voulurent persuader ce prince de détruire l'église élevée chez eux... ». The original Latin says: « *Inter haec vero divino contigit iudicio, ut pyratum infestatione memoratus Horicus rex, quibusdam propinquis eius regnum ipsius invadere conantibus, bello interemptus sit. Cum quo pariter primores terrae illius, qui olim domino episcopo familiares et amici habebantur, gladio interierunt. Deinde post haec constituto in regno ipsius Horico iunioris [...]* »: *Vita Anskarii auctore Rimberto*, G. WAITZ (ed.) *MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi*, 55, Hanover, Hahn, 1884, chap. 31, p. 63.

Without directly saying so Rimbert's story here and in the next chapter also suggest that those who had supplanted Horik I and the Danish magnates/kings had been absent from the country for some years, or at least from the regions which Horik controlled<sup>13</sup>.

Later, in the 1070s, in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (*History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*), Adam of Bremen used the *Vita Anskarii* and the *Annals of Fulda* (Adam's *Hystoria Francorum/History of the Franks*) in his telling of the events in the early 850s; and regarding 854 he wrote: « [...] "they [the Danes/Northmen] turned their victorious right hands against their own vitals"<sup>14</sup>. For, now disputing with each other, Gudurm, the Northman chief, fought with his uncle, namely Horic, the king of the Danes. So great was the slaughter on both sides that the whole people perished. Of all the royal stock not one remained, save only a boy named Horic »<sup>15</sup>.

The *Annals of Xanten*<sup>16</sup> report Horik I's replacement *s.a.* 856: « The Northmen appointed themselves a new king, related to the previous one and having the same name [that is Horik II], and when the Danes had assembled fresh troops they again attacked the Christians with a naval fleet »<sup>17</sup>.

Bernhard von Simson queried whether 856 should mean 854 or 855, based on his understanding of all the other sources<sup>18</sup>. But whether Horik II was « appointed » as the « new king » in Denmark in 854 or a little later (I would tend to 855), the really important information from the *Annals of Xanten* is the assembly of fresh troops and the resumption of naval attacks on the Christians. These renewed naval attacks were no doubt those led by chieftains called Sidroc and Bjørn, who arrived on the Seine a month apart in 856, or even perhaps in 855 if we are to prefer the evidence of the *Chronicle of Fontenelle* to Prudentius's

---

<sup>13</sup> I thank P. Bauduin for this point.

<sup>14</sup> A quote from Lucan, *Civil War*, I.3.

<sup>15</sup> Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, *op. cit.*, book. 1, xxviii (30), p. 32. *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, B. Schmeidler (ed.), *MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi*, 2, Hanover and Leipzig, Hahn, 1917, lib. I, c. 28, p. 34: « [...] "in sua conversos viscera dextra." Contendentibus namque ad invicem Gudurm [variants Gudurin/Gudurim] principe Nordmannorum, cum patruo (suo), scilicet rege Danorum Horico, tanta caede utrique [variants utimque/utrinque] mactati sunt, ut vulgus omne caderet, de stirpe autem regia nemo omnium remaneret, preter unum puerum, nomine Horicum ».

<sup>16</sup> For where and by whom the *Annals of Xanten* were being written at this time see H. LÖWE, « Studien zu den Annales Xantenses », *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 8, 1951, p. 59-99.

<sup>17</sup> *Annales Xantenses et Annales Vedastini*, B. VON SIMSON (ed.), *MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi*, 12, Hanover and Leipzig, Hahn, 1909, p. 18: « Nordmanni rursus regem sibi constituent, cognatum et convocum priori, et Dani iterum, resumtis viribus, navali evectu Christianos in vaserunt »; trans. S. COUPLAND [hereafter AX].

<sup>18</sup> AX, ed. VON SIMSON, p. 18 and notes.

part of the *Annals of Saint-Bertin*<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, these attacks could have been preceded by a non-violent stay in south-eastern England over the winter of 854-55. We will return to both these matters later.

## WHO WAS GUDURM?

The above cited contemporary or near-contemporary sources are all we really have concerning events in Denmark in 854 and its immediate aftermath<sup>20</sup>, anything else lies in the realm of interpretation and even occasionally, hopefully informed, conjecture.

Let us start with the question of Gudurm's identity. After all, apart from Horik I and his similarly named successor, Gudurm, who was quite definitely Horik I's biological nephew, is the only other person referred to in our sources by name.

By 854 the king of the Danes Horik I was the last remaining son of the former Danish king Godfrid (d. 810)<sup>21</sup>. Horik had several brothers, maybe four or even five<sup>22</sup>. We do not know which of these brothers was the father of Gudurm. According to the Fulda annalist's words, it would appear that Gudurm had only reappeared in Denmark from his piratical existence in 854, but in regard to when he was driven by Horik from the country this is nowhere mentioned. Here we must first look back to some of the complicated events of 850.

---

<sup>19</sup> See AB 856: ed. GRAT, p. 72; *Annales Fontanellenses priores (Chronicon Fontanellense)*, J. LAPORTE (ed. and trans.), in *Mélanges de la Société d'Histoire de Normandie* 15, Rouen and Paris, 1951, p. 63-91 [hereafter *ChrFont*], 855 (*recte* 856?), p. 89-91.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, as mentioned above, Adam of Bremen originally wrote his *History/Gesta* in the 1070s. In his *Gesta Danorum* (written in the early thirteenth century) Saxo Grammaticus also has a typically confusing description of all these events, which does however refer to Rorik (« Erik », « the brother of Harald ») challenging his « namesake » Horik II (« Erik », « a very small child », supposedly a son of « Sivard » a brother of « Erik » (Horik I)), and having for a time gained some power in Denmark. Also of interest is that Saxo has « Guthorm » being « Harald's son », which suggests that Saxo believed that Guthorm/Gudurm was a nephew of Rorik and not of Horik I: see Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes. Books I-IX*, H. E. DAVIDSON (ed.), P. FISHER (trans.), Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 1996, book. 9, p. 292-93.

<sup>21</sup> Or at least that he was the last son of Godfrid who still held power in Denmark, we do not know whether all his brothers really were already dead. For good appraisals of Horik I and his family see HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 201-32, and N. LUND, « Horik den Førstes udenrigspolitik », *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 102. 1, 2002, p. 1-22.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 74; VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, *op. cit.*, p. 404-5; R. MCTURK, « Ragnarr Loðbrók in the Irish Annals », in B. ALMQVIST and D. GREEN (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress, Dublin 15-21 August 1973*, London, Viking Society for Northern Research, 1976, p. 93-123, esp. at p. 100.

Prudentius's contribution to the so-called *Annals of Saint-Bertin* says that in 850: « Horik, king of the Northmen, was attacked by two of his nephews (*nepotes*) and war ensued. The nephews were induced to make peace by partition of the realm »<sup>23</sup>.

Prudentius's *nepotes* could either mean two of Horik's biological nephews (as Nelson and others translate it), or it might just mean close younger relatives also of royal stock<sup>24</sup>. In the former case this could perhaps imply that the two nephews were Gudurm, who we find again trying to challenge or remove Horik in 854, plus another unnamed nephew<sup>25</sup>. The corollary of this would be that it was shortly after 850 when Gudurm had been driven into exile to lead a piratical life. Alternatively, other historians suggest that there were three nephews. For example, Janet Nelson says that two nephews had managed to force Horik to partition his realm (in 850) « apparently to the exclusion of another nephew, Gudurm »<sup>26</sup>. This too is a very reasonable scenario, but the lurking assumption here would also seem to be that it was in 850 that Gudurm had been excluded, although it is not impossible that his exile had started earlier for some unknown reason<sup>27</sup>. But even if the « three nephews » theory is correct, we are still unfortunately left not knowing the names of the two other nephews, but as to their fate it is quite likely that they were two of the « other kings » or two of all the members of « royal stock » killed in the struggle for power in 854.

Yet what if *nepotes* does not mean biological nephews, or not exclusively such? During the nineteenth century and into the early part of the twentieth century, many historians (mostly German) explored such ideas. First there was Georg Klippel and Ernst Dümmler. They both argued that the two *Neffe* (which in German, similar to the Latin *nepos/nepotes* as discussed above, can have a much wider meaning than « nephew/nephews » in English)<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> AB 850: trans. Nelson, p. 69; ed. GRAT, p. 59: « *Orich rex Nordmannorum, impugnantibus sese duobus nepotibus suis, bello impetitur. Quibus partitione regni pacatis* ».

<sup>24</sup> In Carolingian chroniclers' Latin *nepos* can mean « nephew » but also more loosely « descendant » or, sometimes specifically, « grandson »; see S. COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers: Scandinavian warlords and Carolingian kings », *Early Medieval Europe*, 7. 1, 1998, p. 85-114, at p. 106, n. 111. For example, for the sense of « grandson » see the *Royal Frankish Annals* 813: « *Bernhardumque nepotem suum, filium Pipini filii sui, Italiae praefecit et regem appellari iussit* » (« he [Charlemagne] placed Bernhard his grandson, son of Pippin his son, in charge of Italy and ordered that he be called king »); for the sense of « cousin » see Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon*, 892. In annalistic Hiberno-Latin *nepos* typically renders Old/Middle Irish *úa*, which in this period means « grandson », specifically, and only later more loosely « descendant ». I thank C. Etchingham for this point.

<sup>25</sup> This is the opinion of HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 222-23.

<sup>26</sup> NELSON, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, *op. cit.*, p. 69, n. 4. For the same opinion see MAUND, « A Turmoil of Warring Princes », *op. cit.*, p. 38-42; P. BAUDUIN, *Le monde franc et les Vikings VIII<sup>e</sup>-X<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2009, p. 26; *idem*, *Histoire des vikings. Des invasions à la diaspora*, Paris, Tallandier, 2019, p. 126.

<sup>27</sup> See also for 850, HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 219-20.

<sup>28</sup> It can also mean a son of a brother-in-law or sister-in-law; a son of a cousin (male or female), or even a close cousin (first or second) or a grandchild.

of Horik I in 850 were in fact *Guttorm* (Gudurm) and *Heriold*, of which they have only one, whom we tend to call Harald *Klak*<sup>29</sup>. But after they had achieved some royal power in Denmark, they were soon chased away to become *Seerauber* (Sea Raiders/Pirates). Harald was then killed by the magnates who controlled the Danish border region in 852, which he was<sup>30</sup>, whilst Gudurm returned in 854 to try again. This is not the place to re-present or re-evaluate Harald Klak's remarkable life and the circumstances of his death, this has been done extensively elsewhere<sup>31</sup>. But Harald was a former Danish king and a relative (a cousin of one degree or other) of Horik I.

Slightly later, Walther Vogel said that he did not want to enter into a discussion of Dümmler's « combinations » because all this is so unsure, which it is. However, Vogel does himself say that the Frisian-based Rorik [a nephew of Harald Klak and brother of Harald the Younger] and his *Neffe* « the son of Harald, Gottfried » [Godfrid Haraldsson was in fact a cousin of Rorik] appear to have participated in the « civil war » of 850, though he does not really give a full explanation for his view. He even suggests that it is « possible » though not « securely proved » that « the sons of Lodbrok » and even the famous « Hasting » belonged to this army<sup>32</sup>.

---

<sup>29</sup> See G. H. KLIPPEL, *Lebensbeschreibung des Erzbischofs Ansgar, kritisch bearbeitet* (Bremen, A.D. Geisler, 1845), p. 102; E. L. DÜMMLER, *Geschichte des ostfränkischen Reiches*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, Duncker & Humblot, 1887), p. 357-58. The whole idea goes back to F. C. DAHLMANN, *Geschichte von Dänemark*, vol. 1 (Hamburg, Perthes, 1840), p. 47. This idea is also followed by HARTHAUSEN, *Die Normanneneinfälle*, p. 28-29. The naming of this Harald as Harald Klak is so established in historiography that, rather reluctantly, I will follow it here. But this Harald may have been a son of the Danish noble Halfdan mentioned by the *Poeta Saxo* in 807 and in the *Royal Frankish Annals* in 782 (see for example COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*, p. 87-93). But the Harald we are concerned with here, who seems to have been killed in 852, should not really be called *Harald Klak*. This name and the specific identification first appear in Danish tradition in the thirteenth-century *Series ac beviör historia regum Danie a Dan ad Waldemarum II (List and Shorter History of the Kings of Denmark from Dan to Valdemar II)* which say that « *Harald Clac, qui et Herioldus dictus est [...]* », and then make him the father of King Horik I (d. 854), which he was not. The earlier (mid-twelfth-century) *Chronicon Roskildense (Chronicle of Roskilde)* equates « Klak Harald/Clac Harald » with the tenth-century Danish king Harald Bluetooth: « *Mortuo patre, [Haraldus] quinquaginta annos regnavit. Hic Christianus extitit cognomine Blatan sive Clac Harald* ». In Icelandic tradition, the *Ragnarssona þáttur* and *Heimskringla* have, in different ways, « Klakk-Harald » being the father-in-law of the tenth-century Gorm the Old, the « founder » of the Danish « Jelling » dynasty. The question of where and how the byname Clac/Klak/Klakk first arose and how it was transmitted would be an excellent subject for future research.

<sup>30</sup> *AF* 852: ed. KURZE, p. 41-42; COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.* p. 92-93.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*; P. BAUDUIN, « Harald Klak : un modèle d'intégration à l'épreuve ? », in *Journée d'études « Les élites aux frontières »*, Université de Marne-la-Vallée, May 2006; available online at [https://lamop.univ-paris1.fr/fileadmin/lamop/publications/Elites-Frontieres/Frontieres\\_Harald\\_Klak\\_Bauduin\\_2006.pdf](https://lamop.univ-paris1.fr/fileadmin/lamop/publications/Elites-Frontieres/Frontieres_Harald_Klak_Bauduin_2006.pdf); HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, *op. cit.*, p. 128 and n. 1.



Finally, Ferdinand Lot maintained that after his exile in Louis the German's realm, when Horik was attacked by his « parents » in 850<sup>33</sup> Rorik was probably one of them<sup>34</sup>. But Rorik got nothing in his homeland and thus he decided to avenge himself on his former lord Lothar, and: « Il équipa avec des compatriotes une flotte nombreuse, ravagea les côtes de la Frise, qui appartenait tout entière à l'empereur, et, par les bouches du Rhin, remonta jusqu'à Duurstede, dont il s'empara et où il s'installa [...] »<sup>35</sup>.

Although I am not, as yet, convinced by the differing arguments of Klippel/Dümmler, Vogel and Lot, I do think that a closer examination of all the Scandinavian-related events in c.850-52 would be a fascinating and fruitful exercise, which would also have to include taking into account the *Annals of Xanten* which say that in 851: « A huge army gathered on the river Elbe to attack the Saxons and their towns, some of which were besieged, while others were burned. And they greatly plagued the Christians »<sup>36</sup>.

Horik had probably become the sole ruler in Denmark in the very late 820s or after 830, but whether he had killed or sent into exile his remaining brothers (and maybe their own sons and families) is also not known from the sources we have<sup>37</sup>.

It is, however, also interesting to note that in 839 we have the first mention of any *nepos* of Horik. The *Annals of Saint-Bertin* say:

Some pirates attacked part of Frisia and imposed great sufferings on our frontier territories. Also, Horic sent envoys to the Emperor [Louis the Pious]. One of them was a man whose advice he seemed to trust more than anyone else's and always to act on, and with him he sent his own nephew [*cum eo nepotem*]. They brought gifts of precious things native to their country with the object of consolidating the peace and the alliance still more firmly. They had lodged complaints about the Frisians and their troublesome behaviour, so the Emperor [Louis

---

<sup>33</sup> F. Lot's *parents* means here some of his relatives.

<sup>34</sup> F. 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, Librairie Droz, 1970, p. 678-85, at p. 681, and n. 12: « Prudence rapporte que Horic fut attaqué par ses *nepotes*. Ce mot peut s'entendre de neveux – car Horic avait eu des frères – mais aussi de cousins même éloignés. Or Roric et Horic étaient parents », and see p. 679, n. 3, which gives more details and further references for where *nepos* often means cousin.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 681 and n. 13.

<sup>36</sup> AX 851: ed. VON SIMSON, p. 17-18: « *Ingens exercitus congregatus est ad Albiam fluvium contra Saxones et civitates eorum, aliaque obsesse alieque succensae sunt ingi. Et nimium Christianos vexaverunt* »; trans. COUPLAND. VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, *op. cit.*, p. 130-31 and n. 1, suggests a relation with Harald Klak's death in 852, as does DÜMMLER, *Geschichte*, *op. cit.*, p. 357-58, and HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 28-29.

<sup>37</sup> HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 201-2; BAUDUIN, *Histoire des vikings*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

the Pious] despatched able leaders [*duces*], who at an appointed date were to settle these grievances fairly and justly on every point<sup>38</sup>.

We do not know if this *nepos* was Horik's real nephew Gudurm of 854, or one of the two *nepotes* of 850, or even yet another *nepos*<sup>39</sup>. If this *nepos* was Gudurm then his exile and piratical activities must have started after this. But, in fact, the only way we might be able to get even an inkling of Gudurm's piratical career is by a process of elimination regarding all the Scandinavian attacks in the 840s and perhaps even the 830s, which is a task well beyond the concerns of this paper. I would just note that Gudurm seems to have had the same name as the likely Danish « king » Guthrum (OE *Guðrum*)<sup>40</sup>, who is first attested in England at Repton in Derbyshire in 874<sup>41</sup>. Very occasionally this Guthrum in England has been equated with Gudurm in Denmark in 854. Given that on the evidence of the *Annals of Fulda* it seems that Gudurm had died in 854, this equation is very doubtful; although that Gudurm and Guðrum were members of the same family is very conceivable<sup>42</sup>.

---

<sup>38</sup> AB 839: ed. GRAT, p. 34: « *Quidam etiam pyratae in quendam Frisiae partem irruentes non parum incommodi nostris finibus intulerunt. Direxit et Horicus missos ad imperatorum, quendam uidelicet cuius consiliis prae cunctis fidere et omnia agere uidebatur, et cum eo nepotem suum, munera gentilitia deferentes, pacis amicitiaeque artius stabiliusque gratia confirmandae. Quibus hilariter susceptis atque muneratis, quia propter quaedam incommoda super Frisionibus quaerebantur, duces strenui destinati sunt, qui tempore constituto illis de omnibus iustitiam adimplerent* »; trans. NELSON, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, *op. cit.*, p. 404 and n. 1. For the context of this see HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 179-80.

<sup>40</sup> The name of Gorm the Old, the founder of the Jelling dynasty in Denmark is probably cognate, as maybe even is the name of the *principe* « Wurm » present at the siege of Asselt in 882. Whether Rollo's brother called *Gurim* according to Dudo of Saint-Quentin has the same name is also not out of the question, but these ideas deserve a fuller treatment.

<sup>41</sup> It is sometimes suggested, even sometimes stated as a fact, that Guthrum and two other « kings » called Oscytel and Anund arrived in the spring of 871 and that they were those called the « great summer fleet » (*micel sumorlida*) in the *ASC* and by Æthelweard: S. KEYNES, « The Vikings in England, c. 790-1016 », in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, *op. cit.*, p. 48-82, at p. 55; A. P. SMYTH, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles 850-880*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 243. But the use of this rare expression might rather suggest that this force just came for the usual « summer » raiding season and then went home or wintered elsewhere. This is a suggestion also made by S. MCLEOD, *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement in England. The Viking 'Great Army' and Early Settlers, c. 865-900*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014, p. 132; R. ABELS, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, London, Longman, 1998, p. 168-69. McLeod also suggests (p. 169-70 and notes 362, 363) that Guthrum, Oscytel and Anund may have come from Francia and/or Frisia in about 873-874 following events involving Rorik in Frisia and/or the siege of Angers in 873.

<sup>42</sup> It could be objected that the *Annals of Fulda* say that of the « royal stock » only Horik (II) survived. However, that this was really the case has been questioned by E. ASHMAN ROWE, *Vikings in the West: The Legend of Ragnar Loðbrók and his sons*, *Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia*, 18, Vienna, Fassbaender, 2012, p. 124 and n. 411.

## THE ISLE OF SHEPPEY. A PLACE TO REST AND REGROUP?

Of equal importance with Gudurm's identity is that many other Danish chieftains, including other « relatives » of Horik, who had for twenty years been leading a piratical existence and greedily plundering the territories of the kingdom of the Franks through places which were accessible to them using their ships, 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 despite Horik having been killed, this attempt to obtain power and position in Denmark was a failure. Horik I's very young relative, also called Horik (II) soon became king and he remained in power until at least 864<sup>43</sup>. Any surviving « pirates » and any remaining royal pretenders would have then dispersed to rest and regroup somewhere over the winter of 854-55, before, as the *Annals of Xanten* say, assembling fresh troops and again attacking the Christians with a naval fleet. Could some of them had gone to the Thames Estuary?

In 854-55 the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says that « heathen men (*hæþne men*) for the first time settled in Sheppey over winter »<sup>44</sup>, a report taken up by Asser who says that in 855 « a great army of Pagans (*magnus paganorum exercitus*) spent the entire winter in (...) the Isle of Sheppey [*in (...) Scepeige insula*] »<sup>45</sup>. But who were these « heathen men » or « great army of Pagans »? In my opinion it is possible, probable even, that they were some of those who had returned to Denmark in 854 to try to seize wealth and power back home but who had failed and moved on elsewhere to regroup.

---

<sup>43</sup> We only really hear of Horik II's later activities in Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* and in 864 after he sent gifts to Pope Nicholas I; not to forget that in 857 he had been forced by the Frisian-based Rorik to concede some Danish territory to him, for which see below. It is invariably believed that it was sometime between 864 and 873 (when Sigfrid and Halfdan first appear in Frankish records) that Horik II either died or was ousted. On the other hand, there is a long, though very debateable, tradition in Scandinavian historiography that Horik II survived until after 900, based only on a mention in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* of a King Erik of Jutland whose daughter Ragnhild married Harald Finehair and gave birth to Eric Bloodaxe; see for example A. STEINNES, « Gorm og Hardegon », *Afhandlingar til Axel Linvald*, Copenhagen, 1956, p. 327-42, at p. 340-41; for a reply to this idea see C. KRAG, « Ragnhild Eriksdatter », in *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, M. J. SWANTON (trans. and ed.), 3rd edn., London, Phoenix Press, 2000 [hereafter ASC], s.a. 855, p. 66-67. Given the datings in the ASC at this time and the fact that this is the first item under 855 clearly means the Northmen overwintered in 854-55 and not the next winter as some historians once suggested, see, for example, VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, op. cit., p. 147-48.

<sup>45</sup> A. P. SMYTH, *The medieval life of King Alfred the Great: a translation and commentary on the text attributed to Asser*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002, chap. 10, p. 7, and see p. 213 n. 23; S. KEYNES and M. LAPIDGE (ed.), *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred & Other Contemporary Sources*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983, chap. 10, p. 69, but see also, chap. 3, p. 68, and p. 231 n. 14. The island of Sheppey is located off the northern coast of Kent in south-eastern England at the entry to the Thames Estuary

Also under the year 855, there is an intriguing and rather controversial entry in the Northumbrian *Annales Lindisfarnenses et Dunelmenses* (*Annals of Lindisfarne and Durham*) referring to the same event which confirms the information of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Asser, but which also gives the supposed names and origins of the Northmen's leaders: « An army of pagans, namely of Danes and Frisians, led by *duces* Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar, landed on the island of Sheppey »<sup>46</sup>. The *Annals of Lindisfarne and Durham* are a set of earlier Northumbrian annalistic notices which Symeon of Durham added to the margins of a set of Easter tables<sup>47</sup>. Elisabeth Ashman Rowe suggests that this report in these *Annals* « is not contemporary evidence for the presence of Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar at Sheppey »<sup>48</sup>. 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* »<sup>49</sup>.

Given that Asser's *Life of King Alfred* uses the exact same words as the *Annals of Lindisfarne and Durham*, notably *paganorum exercitus* and *in insula Scepeige*<sup>50</sup>, and, following the *ASC*, gives the year of 855, a borrowing from this source seems very likely. The *Annals of Lindisfarne and Durham* ultimately derive from the same tradition transmitted in other Northumbrian histories of the eleventh and twelfth centuries<sup>51</sup>, where we find repeated mentions of Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar from Denmark and Frisia (though usually not all together) being responsible for the attacks in England in the 860s and into the 870s. All these Northumbrian sources as they concern Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar have been thoroughly and very usefully presented and assessed by Elisabeth Ashman Rowe<sup>52</sup>, and in

---

<sup>46</sup> « Die "Annales Lindisfarnenses et Dunelmenses" kritisch untersucht und neu herausgegeben », W. LEVISON (ed.), *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 17, 1961, p. 447-506, s.a. 855 at p. 484: « *Paganorum exercitus, scilicet Dani et Frisones, ducibus Halfdene, Ubba et Inguar aplicunt in insula Scepeige* »; trans. ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, op. cit., p. 80; 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*, D. ROLLASON (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. xlvii. D. Rollason, argues that we should abandon the appellation *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesie* (*History of the Church of Durham*), and therefore in his edition calls it as shown above in this note: see D. ROLLASON with D. GORE and G. FELLOWS-JENSEN, *Sources for York History to AD 1100*, York, York Archaeological Trust, 1998, p. 25-26.

<sup>48</sup> ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80-81.

<sup>50</sup> Note that no MS of the *ASC* uses the word island/isle.

<sup>51</sup> E. VAN HOUTS, « Scandinavian Influence in Norman Literature of the Eleventh Century », *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 6, 1984, p. 107-21, at p. 116.

<sup>52</sup> ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, op. cit..

general I concur with most of her conclusions about transmissions; but this must not distract from the general historical reliability of this whole tradition<sup>53</sup>.

It should be noted, however, that the only place in the whole Northumbrian tradition where Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar are mentioned together is in the *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesie* (*History of the Church of Durham*), written sometime between 1104 and 1115 by a « team of compilers led by Symeon »<sup>54</sup>, but they are included here alongside all the other « kings and dukes » who « were drawn together from all parts - from the Danes, the Frisians and other heathen people (*aliarumque gentium paganarum*) » and had invaded England, such as « Beicsecg, Guthrum, Osketel, Amund, Sidroc, and another duke of the same name, and also Osbern and Frana, together with Harold »<sup>55</sup>, all these latter names only appear in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 870-71<sup>56</sup>. In regard to Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar, David Rollason thinks that the *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesie* is combining the earlier, likely eleventh-century, *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* (*History of St. Cuthbert*)<sup>57</sup>, which mentions both Ubba *dux* of the Frisians and Halfdan *rex* of the Danes<sup>58</sup>, the late-eleventh-century *De miraculis et translationibus Sancti Cuthberti* (*About the miracles and translations of St. Cuthbert*)<sup>59</sup>, which mention the same chieftains and their affiliations with Frisia and

---

<sup>53</sup> For this general reliability see ROLLASON *et al*, *Sources for York History*, *op. cit.*, esp. p. 25-27, 32, 63; MCLEOD, *The Beginning of the Scandinavian Settlement*, *op. cit.*, p. 33-36. See also C. DOWNHAM, « The Chronology of the Last Scandinavian Kings of York, AD 937-954 », *Northern History*, 40, 2003, p. 27-51, at p. 36-38.

<sup>54</sup> See ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 73 and n. 218; *Symeon of Durham. Libellus*, ed. ROLLASON, *op. cit.*, p. xv-xcv, and for the dating p. xlii-xliv.

<sup>55</sup> ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 73-74; *Symeon of Durham. Libellus*, ed. ROLLASON, *op. cit.*, p. 94-97. The inclusion of a chieftain called « Harold » here is most intriguing. It is taken from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (see ASC 871, trans. Swanton, *op. cit.*, p. 71) which mention a « jarl Harald » at the battle at Ashdown in 871. Surely this Harald must have had some familial relationship with Harald Klak and Harald the Younger? The Anglo-Norman Geoffrey Gaimar in his *Estoire des Engleis*, written between 1136 and 1137, adds the « information » that « conte Haralt » was « nevou Halfdane » where « nevou » could either mean nephew or just a close relative, perhaps even a cousin? See *Geffrei Gaimar, Estoire des Engleis/History of the English*, I. Short (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 164 and 164, and Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 86-87. Although we must always be suspicious of some of Gaimar's stories he certainly derived most of his « history » from earlier English writings and oral traditions. If the familial relationship between this jarl Harald and Halfdan was really the case (and why and for what possible reason would Gaimar have just invented this precise and seemingly irrelevant detail?) then it certainly adds credence to the idea that Halfdan was also a member of Harald Klak's extended family.

<sup>56</sup> ASC 870-71, trans. SWANTON, *op. cit.*, p. 70-71, as only partially followed by Asser, *Life of King Alfred* KEYNES and LAPIDGE (ed.), *op. cit.*, chap. 39, p. 79-80.

<sup>57</sup> For an introduction to the *History of St. Cuthbert* and its much-debated dating see ROLLASON *et al*, *Sources for York History*, *op. cit.*, p. 22; *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto: A History of Saint Cuthbert and a Record of his Patrimony*, T. JOHNSON-SOUTH (ed.), Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2002, p. 1-36; ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 60-61.

<sup>58</sup> ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 60-65.

<sup>59</sup> See ROLLASON *et al*, *Sources for York History*, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Whilst acknowledging that this text is hagiographical rather than historical, they refer to the fact that the early chapters or stories drew on the *History of St Cuthbert* and that it is « entirely possible » that these chapters « have preserved authentic information ».

Denmark<sup>60</sup>, and Asser's *Life of King Alfred*<sup>61</sup>. This is all very reasonable. But none of these texts mention Inguar. In fact, the *only* earlier sources where Inguar is mentioned are Æthelweard's late-tenth-century *Chronicon* (*Chronicle of Æthelweard*), Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* (*The Passion of St. Edmund*), written when he was at Ramsey Abbey between 985 and 988, and the *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* (*The Life of St. Oswald*), written by Abbo's pupil Abbot Byrhtferth of Ramsey between 997 and 1002<sup>62</sup>.

Finally, regarding Rowe's suggestion that the *Historia regum Anglorum et Dacorum* (*History of the kings of the English and the Danish*) was also perhaps drawn upon by Symeon of Durham for his « conflated » *Annals of Lindisfarne and Durham*, this is also quite possible. It was in fact Symeon himself who compiled the *Historia regum Anglorum* from multiple sources. But the first five sections, covering the period up to 888, were no doubt compiled/written by Abbot Byrhtferth of Ramsey (who had earlier been a pupil of Abbo of Fleury) around the year 1000, but it is believed that Byrhtferth also had knowledge derived from an earlier set of now lost Northumbrian annals which historians believe to have existed<sup>63</sup>. It is precisely in « Byrhtferth's Northumbrian Chronicle », as Cyril Hart called it, that « King Haldane, Inguar, and Hubba » are said to have together come to Britain (in 866) from *Danubia* (Denmark), « and wintered in the kingdom of the East Angles<sup>64</sup> ».

Overall, therefore, it does seem that the compiler of the *Annals of Lindisfarne and Durham*, who may well have been Symeon of Durham himself<sup>65</sup>, had also used the earlier Northumbrian tradition and the *Historia regum Anglorum* to construct his story of Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar wintering on the island of Sheppey in 855.

---

See also ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 71; Symeon of Durham. *Libellus*, ed. ROLLASON, *op. cit.*, p. lxxv.

<sup>60</sup> ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>61</sup> Symeon of Durham. *Libellus*, ed. ROLLASON, *op. cit.*, p. 96 n. 40.

<sup>62</sup> *Chronicon Æthelweardi/The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, A. CAMPBELL (ed. and trans.), London, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962, IV:2, p. 35; Abbo of Fleury: *Passio Sancti Edmundi*, in *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi: The Garland of Saint Edmund King and Martyr*, F. HERVEY (ed. and trans.), London, John Murray, 1907, p. 19 and 21; *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecwine*, M. LAPIDGE (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, I.4, p. 16-17.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, M. LAPIDGE, « Byrhtferth of Ramsey and the Early Sections of the *Historia regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham », *Anglo-Saxon England 10*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 97-122; P. HUNTER BLAIR, « Some observations on the *Historia Regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham », in N. K. CHADWICK (ed.), *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1963, p. 63-118; Symeon of Durham. *Libellus*, ed. ROLLASON, *op. cit.*, p. xlviiii-xlix; C. Hart, « Byrhtferth's Northumbrian Chronicle », *English Historical Review*, 97, 1982, p. 558-82.

<sup>64</sup> *Historia regum Anglorum*, in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia, Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores*, 75, 2 vols, T. ARNOLD (ed.), London, Longmans & Co., 1882-85, vol. 2, p. 104; ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>65</sup> ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 80; Symeon of Durham. *Libellus*, ed. ROLLASON, *op. cit.*, p. xlvi.

From what we can glean from all the disparate sources we have I suggest that Inguar probably arrived in England in 865<sup>66</sup>, Ubba in late 866 or early 867<sup>67</sup> and Halfdene only in about 870<sup>68</sup>.

But why would Symeon, who knew all of this and much more, have then placed Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar wintering together on Sheppey in 855, even though he could have found the date of 855 in Asser and the *ASC*? Unless such information was contained in a lost set of Northumbrian annals or a lost northern version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* then I am rather at a loss for any answer.

Yet the fact remains that there was a force of Northmen which had over-wintered on Sheppey from 854 to 855, immediately after the events in Denmark in 854. It was clearly commanded by at least one chieftain, and it might well have been 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<sup>69</sup>.

Suspending justifiable scepticism for the moment, we will very briefly consider each of these three in turn to see if any of them could, at least chronologically, have been on Sheppey in 855, and, if so, perhaps also have been amongst the « relatives » of Horik who had returned to Denmark in 854 after having been leading a piratical life before. Much of this is purely conjectural or hypothetical, but is, I think, worthwhile nonetheless.

Firstly, in regard to Halfdan<sup>70</sup>, I have examined him and his life in an earlier work. It is argued there that the « Halfdan king of the Danes » in English records is none other than the

---

<sup>66</sup> F. STENTON, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 246 and n. 2.

<sup>67</sup> S. M. LEWIS, « Rodulf and Ubba. In search of a Frisian-Danish Viking », *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research*, 40, 2016, p. 5-42.

<sup>68</sup> S. M. LEWIS, « Hamlet with the Princes of Denmark: An exploration of the case of Hálfðan “king of the Danes” », 2017, available online at <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01943605>.

<sup>69</sup> VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, *op. cit.*, p. 146-47, believed that all these three chieftains, Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar, were « sons of Ragnar » (Lothbrok), which is very unlikely, but also that it is « probable » that they had participated in the events in Denmark in 854 before coming « again to England and France ». Similarly, J. DE VRIES, « Die historischen Grundlagen der Ragnars-saga loðbrókar », *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 39, 1923, p. 244-74, at p. 257-58, argued that the Northmen on Sheppey then went to the Seine, where they stayed for a few years, which could well be correct (although under whose command?). But he believed, as did Vogel, 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 ». Without necessarily always believing that Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar were all sons of Ragnarr Lothbrok, scholars too numerous to mention have believed the *Annals of Lindisfarne*'s report, including, rather surprisingly, S. LEBECQ, « Les Vikings en Frise », *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>70</sup> I will generally use this form of the name from now on as has become common in English-language historiography. The name literally means « Half Dane ». It is found as Halfdene/Healfdene/Haldane in English sources (both Old English and Latin); in continental Latin sources as Halbdeni/Halpdani/Halpdanus/Haldan and even Halpteni or Alfdeni; in Irish sources as Albann/Alband; in Geoffrey Gaimar's French as

Halfdan who is found in Frankish records as being a joint king of the Danes in Denmark in 873, together with his brother Sigfrid<sup>71</sup>. When exactly Halfdan and his brother Sigfrid took control in Denmark is not known. I have suggested perhaps in the late 860s, and that Halfdan's first appearance in England was likely in *c.*870<sup>72</sup>. But that both Halfdan and Sigfrid had had a possibly « piratical » past before they gained any « royal » status in Denmark is, I would suggest, undoubted. Sigfrid could even have been the chieftain of the same name operating on the Charente in 865<sup>73</sup>. But whether Halfdan's raiding career went back to 854/55 in England is more doubtful and problematic, although it certainly cannot be excluded. 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 or assessed from an examination of his and his brother Sigfrid's family roots and relationships, an issue I hope to examine in a future study.

Secondly, Ubba « *dux* of the Frisians » is certainly a plausible possibility for a chieftain in southern England in 854-855. I have elsewhere argued that Ubba was none other than the Frisian-based chieftain Rodulf, Rorik's nephew, and that he had been in south-eastern Ireland in the early 860s, and perhaps, as Kelly and Maas believe, from as early as the mid-850s<sup>74</sup>. I have also suggested that Rodulf/Ubba was probably born in about 830, plus or minus five years. If this is correct it means that he would certainly have been old enough to have been in southern England in 854-855, and of course possibly in Denmark slightly before. 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 in Frisia<sup>75</sup>. The term *transmarinas* and similar is very 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

---

Haldene/Halfdane; and in much Old Norse literature as Hálfðan (Hálfðanr); see (some of) the mentions of this name as referenced by ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 295, 303.

<sup>71</sup> See LEWIS, « Hamlet with the Princes of Denmark » *op. cit.*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> For this Sigfrid see S. LEWIS, *Vikings in Aquitaine and their connections, ninth to early eleventh centuries*, PhD thesis, Université de Caen Normandie, 2021, chapter 6; available online at <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-03339358v1>, and at <https://unicaen.academia.edu/StephenLewis>.

<sup>74</sup> LEWIS, « Rodulf and Ubba », *op. cit.*; E. KELLY and J. MAAS, « Vikings on the Barrow », *Archaeology Ireland* 9, 1995, p. 30-2; *idem*, « The Vikings and the kingdom of Laois », in P. G. LANE and W. NOLAN (ed.), *Laois History & Society, Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, 1999, p. 123-59, at p. 136.

<sup>75</sup> AX 873: ed. VON SIMSON, p. 32: « ... Ruodoldus [Rodulf] nepos predicti tiranni [Rorik], qui transmarinas regiones plurimas regnumque Francorum undique atque Galliam horribiliter et pene totam Fresiam vastavit ... ».



conceivable that he then moved on to south-east Ireland, before returning to Frisia where he is attested in Frankish sources in 864 and 872. It is also highly likely that Rodulf/Ubba was one of the leaders of the Northmen who arrived on the Seine in late 865 and stayed until 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 by or before the early spring of 867<sup>76</sup>. Overall, therefore, in my opinion it is quite conceivable that Rodulf/Ubba had been one of the returning pirates or even relatives of Horik I who had joined in the civil war in Denmark in 854, and therefore he may well have been on the island of Sheppey over the subsequent winter.

Inguar is a more problematic matter. The view of most historians today is that the Inguar/Inwaere in the 860s in English records was the same person as a Scandinavian « king » of Dublin called Ímar in Irish annals from the late 850s through to his death somewhere in 873<sup>77</sup>, although the very prevalent earlier idea that these were separate people has been revived with great conviction and erudition by Colmán Etchingham<sup>78</sup>. Ímar is first attested in Irish annals in 857 when « Ímar and Amlaíb inflicted a rout on Caitil the Fair and his Norse-Irish in the lands of Munster »<sup>79</sup>, but he could certainly have arrived in Ireland or the British Isles somewhat before this. In addition, Ímar's identity as a « Dane » is highly likely,

---

<sup>76</sup> See LEWIS, « Rodulf and Ubba », *op. cit.*, esp. p. 17-25, 35-36. J. de Vries, *De Wikingen in de lage Landen bij de Zee*, Haarlem, H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1923, p. 198-201 and p. 393, identified part of this 'Frisian' Seine fleet as coming to England and becoming a part of the early Great Army and suggested that Ubba was its leader, although he does not identify Ubba with Rodulf as I do. Other historians also think that a part of this fleet on the Seine in 865-66 then went to England (whether via Frisia or not) to become a part of the early Great Army in England, although they do not specifically mention Ubba; see for example: J. L. NELSON, *Charles the Bald*, Harlow, Longman, 1992, p. 213 and n. 128; *eadem*, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, *op. cit.*, p. 132, n. 12; P. H. SAWYER, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd ed., London, Edward Arnold, 1971, p. 101; *idem*, *Kings and Vikings*, London and New York, Methuen, 1982, p. 90; *idem*, *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire*, A History of Lincolnshire, 3, Lincoln, History of Lincolnshire Committee, 1998, p. 92; MCLEOD, *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement*, *op. cit.*, p. 132; ABELS, *Alfred the Great*, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>77</sup> See for instance A. 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, p. 101-17; *idem*, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles*, *op. cit.*; D. N. DUMVILLE, « Old Dubliners and New Dubliners in Ireland and Britain: A Viking-Age story », *Medieval Dublin* 6, 2004, p. 78-93; C. DOWNHAM, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland. The Dynasty of Ívarr to A.D. 1014*, Edinburgh, Dunedin Academic Press, 2007.

<sup>78</sup> C. ETCHINGHAM, « The location of historical Laithlinn/Lochla(i)nn: Scotland or Scandinavia », in M. Ó FLAITHEARTA (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica, Studia Celtica Upsaliensia*, 6, Uppsala, 2007, p. 11-31; *idem*, « Names for the Vikings in Irish Annals », in J. VIÐAR SIGURÐSSON and T. BOLTON (ed.), *Celtic-Norse Relationships in the Irish Sea in the Middle Ages 800-1200*, The Northern World Series, vol. 65, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2014, p. 23-38; *idem*, *Raiders*, chap. 8. In recent correspondence, and based on his detailed argument that Inwaere/Iguuare and Ímar were not the same person, Etchingham says: « I see Ímar as almost certainly a kinsman of Amlaíb and Auisle, and certainly, like them, a "royal" of Laithlinn who was a Finngall / Nortmannus and so a "Norwegian" and not a "Dane" ».

<sup>79</sup> *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131): Text and Translation.*, S. MAC AIRT, and G. MAC NIOCAILL (ed. and trans.), Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983: AU 857.1.

particularly if he was the Inguar in English sources who first took York in late 866<sup>80</sup>. So, once again, the possibility exists that the Inguar who was said in the *Annals of Lindisfarne* to have been one of the Danish and Frisian chieftains on Sheppey during the winter of 854-855 might well have been the Ímar who arrived in Ireland in, or probably somewhat before, 857<sup>81</sup>.

Ultimately though, like Rowe, I remain very sceptical that Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar were *all together* on Sheppey in 854-855, although, as has been seen, one or more of them could well have been.

### **THE INVOLVEMENT OF RORIK, GODFRID, SIDROC OR OTHERS?**

Could the likely Danish chieftain Sidroc (Old Norse *Sigtryggr*) have been one of the returning « pirates » in 854? Or even the Frisian-based Dane Rorik and his cousin Godfrid Haraldsson, who were themselves members of the exiled rival royal Danish family of Harald Klak?<sup>82</sup>

Let us start with Rorik and Godfrid. 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 likely together with his cousin Godfrid Haraldsson, 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<sup>83</sup>. It seems his cousin Godfrid got nothing and his fleet continued to raid in Flanders, the Artois,

---

<sup>80</sup> For his identification as a « Dane », see ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 127-29 and notes for others of the same opinion. On the other hand, one advantage of Etchingham's decoupling of Inwaere/Iguuare in England from Ímar in Ireland is that Inwaere/Iguuare could certainly have been a Dane whilst Ímar could have been a Norwegian *Finn gall* from *Laithlinn*.

<sup>81</sup> DOWNHAM, *Viking Kings*, *op. cit.*, p. 16, says: « While medieval writers seem to have been as interested as modern historians about Ívarr's origins, it is perhaps wiser to accept that we do not know what these really were ». Alex Woolf argued that: « Ímar was probably a Dane and possibly originated from the Danish colony on the island of Walcheren in the mouth of the River Scheldt »: A. WOOLF, « The Age of Sea-Kings: 900-1300 », *The Argyll Book*, D. OMAND (ed.), 2004, p. 94-109, at p. 95. Later Woolf suggested that « Ubba came specifically from the island of Walcheren which lies in the mouth of the Scheldt »: *idem*, *From Pictland to Alba 789-1070*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 72.

<sup>82</sup> For an introduction to this family see COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*.

<sup>83</sup> *AF* 850: ed. KURZE, p. 39, trans. REUTER, p. 30; *AB* 850: ed. GRAT, p. 59; trans. NELSON, p. 69; *AX* 850: ed. VON SIMSON, p. 17; trans. COUPLAND: « Rorik the Northman, brother of the younger Harald who was mentioned above, who earlier fled from Lothar in dishonour, again attacked Dorestad and deceitfully inflicted many woes upon the Christian populace ». See also COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*, p. 96.

in Frisia, around the mouth of the Rhine and on the river Scheldt into 851<sup>84</sup>, until in October 852 he and a hitherto unknown chieftain called Sidroc sailed up the Seine where the next year (853) the West Frankish king Charles the Bald was forced to pay him a tribute to leave<sup>85</sup>.

Another part of the large Danish-Frisian fleet of 850, under an unnamed leader, decided to head for England where it plundered London and Canterbury but was eventually repulsed in 851 by the West-Saxon king Æthelwulf and his sons Æthelbald and Æthelstan at *Aclea* in Surrey<sup>86</sup>. Bloodied but not defeated, they possibly then moved on to Ireland where they were called « dark heathens » by the Irish<sup>87</sup>.

The present conventional wisdom, if there is one<sup>88</sup>, is that the Frisian-based chieftains Rorik and Godfrid could not have been amongst the many « pirates » or « relatives » returning to Denmark in 854, and therefore (although this is never said) 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 throne in 855, after which, later in the same year, they returned to Dorestad in Frisia and « held sway over most of Frisia »<sup>89</sup>.

---

<sup>84</sup> *AB* 850-51: ed. GRAT, p. 59, 63; trans. NELSON, p. 69, 73; *AF* 850: ed. KURZE, p. 39; trans. REUTER, p. 30; *ChrFont* 850, ed. and trans. LAPORTE, p. 85; trans. Coupland: « A fleet of Danes led by Rorik and Godfrid landed in Lothar's kingdom. Leaving the river Waal almost immediately without any plunder, they attacked the region of Flanders and laid it waste with widespread looting ». S. COUPLAND, *Charles the Bald and the defence of the West Frankish Kingdom against the Viking invasions, 840-877*, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1987, p. 34; *idem*, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*, p. 94 and n. 52, thinks that Godfrid had returned to « Scandinavia » over the winter of 850-51, before turning to the Seine, where he arrived in October 852, but this is just an assumption. It should also be mentioned that Coupland also has Godfrid returning yet again to Scandinavia for the winter of 851-52: COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*, p. 94: « In 851 Godfrid again raided Frisia and around the mouth of the Rhine, then entered the river Schelde and attacked Ghent, and perhaps also the nearby abbey of Drongen (Tronchiennes). Once again Godfrid's fleet then sailed back to Scandinavia for the winter ». I would just say here that I rather doubt all these returns to Scandinavia. VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, *op. cit.*, p. 129, suggested that Godfrid overwintered in Flanders in 850-51; whilst F. LOT, « Roric. Ses incursions en Frise, en Flandre, en Angleterre », *op. cit.*, p. 682, n. 14, thinks that Godfrid was not involved at this stage, but that the part of Rorik's great fleet which had plundered Mempisc, Thérouanne and other coastal districts in 850 then overwintered in Frisia.

<sup>85</sup> *AB* 852-853: ed. GRAT, p. 65-66; trans. NELSON, p. 74-76; *AF* 850 [=852]: ed. KURZE, p. 39-40; trans. REUTER, p. 30; *ChrFont* s.a. 852, ed. and trans. LAPORTE, p. 89. For a full discussion see COUPLAND, *Charles the Bald*, *op. cit.*, p. 33-42.

<sup>86</sup> *AB* 850: ed. GRAT, p. 59; trans. NELSON, p. 59; *ASC* 851 [=850-51]: trans. SWANTON, p. 64-65.

<sup>87</sup> WOOLF, *From Pictland to Alba*, *op. cit.*, p. 72; LEWIS, « Rodulf and Ubba », *op. cit.*, p. 7-8; DE VRIES, *De Wikingen*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>88</sup> See for example, COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*, p. 96, who says that from 850 until 855 Rorik had remained in his benefice of Dorestad; HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 222-24; whilst VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, *op. cit.*, p. 146-48, also thought that Rorik and Godfrid were not involved in 854, although he thought that the « sons of Ragnar » probably were, meaning Halfdene, Ubba and Inguar, but maybe even Björn (supposedly the legendary Bjorn Ironside) as well.

<sup>89</sup> *AB* 855: ed. GRAT, p. 70-71: « *Lotharius totam Fresiam filio Lothario donat unde Roric et Godofridus patriam, id est Daniam, repedant spe potestatis regiae nanciscendae* » [...] « *Roric et Godofridus, nequaquam arridentibus sibi successibus, Dorestado se continent et parte maxima Fresiae potiuntur* »; trans. Nelson, p.

Yet this argument can be questioned. Prudentius's reference to Rorik and Godfrid is in his first entry for 855 and it immediately follows his last report for 854 regarding the « civil war » in Denmark, in which it is notable that he mentions neither Gudurm nor any returning pirates such as found in the *Annals of Fulda*. Could it be that Rorik and Godfrid's attempt to gain « royal power » in Denmark was not separate from events in 854 but rather an integral part of all this? Indeed, if we read the *Annals of Fulda* carefully they clearly suggest that it was *after* « a struggle had arisen between Horic, king of the Danes, and Gudurm, his brother's son », that « Northmen who continuously for twenty years had cruelly afflicted with fire and slaughter and pillage the territories of the kingdom of the Franks [...], came together from different parts to which they had scattered in their greed for plunder, and returned to their own country »; and Rorik and Godfrid, and other members of Harald Klak's family as well, such as Rorik's brother Harald the Younger,<sup>90</sup> plus Harald himself, had certainly done this from at least 834, mainly in and from Frisia<sup>91</sup>.

I suggest, therefore, that Rorik and Godfrid were amongst the returning Northmen of 854 as reported in the *Annals of Fulda* and elsewhere and that they made their *entrée* into Denmark from late 854 and into 855<sup>92</sup>.

One other factor may be of importance. The fights in Denmark in 854 seem to have taken place, or at least started, late in this year, but Prudentius also tells us that earlier in the same year (possibly around June): « Other Danish pirates also laid waste the part of Frisia next door to Saxony », « *Alii quoque pyrate Danorum Fresiam Saxoniae adiacentem populantur* »<sup>93</sup>. In regard to the phrase *Fresiam Saxoniae adiacentem*, this must mean Rüstringen which does border Saxony. The county of Rüstringen in north-eastern Frisia had been given to Godfrid's father Harald by his godfather Louis the Pious in 826. But Harald was killed in 852 « by the magnates who controlled the Danish border region », because he was suspected

---

80-81: « Lothar gave the whole of Frisia to his son Lothar, whereupon Roric and Godefrid headed back to their native Denmark in the hope of gaining royal power » [...] « Roric and Godefrid, on whom success had not smiled, remained based at Dorestad and held sway over most of Frisia ». For which parts of Frisia they held sway over see COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*, p. 96-97; VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>90</sup> We should not forget Rorik's nephew Rodulf (who I equate with Ubba) as discussed earlier.

<sup>91</sup> It is interesting that the Fulda annalist's twenty years of plundering takes us back, if we take it literally, to precisely 834.

<sup>92</sup> This chronology and sequence have also been proposed by S. POLZER, *Die Franken und der Norden. Über die Schwierigkeit der Interpretation von frühmittelalterlichen Quellen zur Geschichte Dänemarks*, M.Phil thesis, University of Vienna, 2008, p. 168, and, less extensively, by D. J. HENSTRA, *Friese graafschappen tussen Zwin en Wezer. Een overzicht van grafelijkheid in middeleeuws Frisia (ca. 700-1200)*, Assen, A.T. Popkema, 2012, p. 59.

<sup>93</sup> *AB* 854: ed. GRAT, p. 69; trans. NELSON, p. 79.

of plotting treachery<sup>94</sup>. In my opinion the most likely Danish pirate who « laid waste the part of Frisia next door to Saxony » was Harald's son Godfrid; perhaps he was trying to regain his father's benefice and/or possibly also seeking revenge on those magnates who had murdered his father<sup>95</sup>. Whether his cousin Rorik had helped is unknowable. But in any case, and as we have seen, late in 854 or early 855 the two cousins had tried to « gain royal power » in « their native Denmark » where Harald had once ruled<sup>96</sup>.

Finally, although it takes us beyond our particular period of interest, in 857 Rorik on his own, without Godfrid who had perhaps recently died, attempted once again to seize some power in Denmark, this time with more success than in 855 (or 854/55 as I suggest). The Fulda annalist says that in 857:

Roric the Northman, who ruled in Dorestad, took a fleet to the lands of the Danes with the agreement of his King Lothar. 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<sup>97</sup>.

Which areas of Denmark Rorik had forced Horik II to concede to him and what followed in the coming few years before Rorik returned to Dorestad (by 862 at the latest) unfortunately cannot be treated here<sup>98</sup>. But unless the brothers and « joint kings » Sigfrid and Halfdan who were already established in Denmark by 873 were members of Harald Klak's family (which is certainly very possible)<sup>99</sup> then Rorik's partially successful attempt in 857 to gain power

---

<sup>94</sup> COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*, p. 92; *AF* 852: ed. KURZE, p. 41-42.

<sup>95</sup> HENSTRA, *Friese graafschappen tussen Zwin en Wezer*, *op. cit.*, p. 59: « This attack must have involved Rüstringen, the only place where by sea Frisia borders Saxony. It seems likely that Godfrid Haraldsson had a hand in this, in an attempt to recapture this territory where his father had ruled », my translation.

<sup>96</sup> N. LUND, « Allies of God or man? The Viking expansion in a European perspective », *Viator*, 20, 1989, p. 45-59, at p. 53, after saying that the leaders of viking attacks were only very rarely « kings of Scandinavian countries », adds: « Very often, however, they were members of the royal family or of rival families who were only waiting for an opportunity to seize power in Denmark or Norway. The annals inform us of one Rurik [Rorik] and one Godfred, nephew and son, respectively, of Harald Klak [...]. No sooner had Horik I, king of Denmark, lost his life in a civil war in 854 than they [Rorik and Godfrid] rushed home to their *patria* hoping to obtain royal power there. The revolt against Horik had been started by his own nephew Gudurm whom he had denied a share in government, thereby forcing him to live *piratico more* ». This is all very correct and the only thing I would add is that Rorik and Godfrid were amongst, and not distinct from, those whom the *Annals of Fulda* tell us, « Had been living a piratical existence after being driven from that kingdom ».

<sup>97</sup> *AF* 857, ed. KURZE, p. 47: « *Roric Nordmannus, qui praeerat Dorestado, cum consensu domini sui Hlutharii regis classem duxit in fines Danorum et consentiente Horico Danorum rege partem regni, quae est inter mare et Egidoram, cum sociis suis possedit* »; trans. REUTER, p. 39.

<sup>98</sup> As regards Rorik in these years and his return to Frisia, compare in the first instance VOGEL, *Die Normannen*, *op. cit.*, p. 158-60, 193-96; HARTHAUSEN, *Die Normanneneinfälle*, *op. cit.*, p. 31; HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 142-43 and notes; COUPLAND, « From poachers to gamekeepers », *op. cit.*, p. 97-98.

<sup>99</sup> That Sigfrid and Halfdan were not members of the *immediate* family of the earlier Danish king Godfrid and his sons (and perhaps the later Horik II from 854) is generally admitted, but this leaves open the possibilities that they were either members of Harald Klak's family or of Reginheri's family.

back home in Denmark was the last attempt by the exiled family of Harald Klak to get back the position they had previously held there.

Before looking at the case of Sidroc, we can probably also exclude any involvement in 854 in Denmark of the Northmen operating along the Loire and in Aquitaine at this time. They were probably still being led by the chieftain Oskar and they were still active in this region throughout 854 and 855. 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. Indeed in 854 Prudentius says that they « stayed on the Loire » and tried to reach Orléans, and by the end of the year they were attacking and burning Angers, before moving on the next year to more southerly Aquitaine where they attacked Bordeaux for a second time<sup>100</sup>.

The only other Scandinavian 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 June or July 853, where with the help of the Breton duke Erispoë he besieged Oskar'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 Oskar, who had bought him off, and then promptly left the Loire « for the Seine », probably in late autumn 853<sup>101</sup>. In fact, Sidroc's fleet only reappears on the Seine in the summer of 856 (or perhaps 855)<sup>102</sup>, 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<sup>103</sup>. Another fleet under a chieftain called Bjørn (*Berno*) then arrived in mid-August<sup>104</sup>. The *Chronicle of Fontenelle* tells us that « they then joined forces and wreaked

---

<sup>100</sup> For Oskar's activities see LEWIS, *Vikings in Aquitaine*, *op. cit.*, chaps. 3 and 4; *AB 854-855*: ed. GRAT, p. 69-70; trans. NELSON, p. 79-80; these attacks are also mentioned elsewhere, for example in *ChrFont*, ed. and trans. LAPORTE, p. 91; *Annales Engolismenses MGH, Scriptores*, 16, G. H. PERTZ (ed.), Hanover, Hahn, 1859, p. 485-87; *Chronicon Aquitanicum, MGH, Scriptores*, 2, G. H. PERTZ (ed.), Hanover, Hahn, 1828, p. 252-53.

<sup>101</sup> For differing views on all these events on the Loire and in Aquitaine (and even on the Seine) in these years, those involved and the chronology, see LEWIS, *Vikings in Aquitaine*, *op. cit.*, chaps. 4 and 5 and Appendix 1.

<sup>102</sup> I combine here the evidence of the *Annals of Saint-Bertin* and the *Chronicle of Fontenelle*. For that Prudentius's dating to 856 for the arrival on the Seine of « other Danish pirates » (with no names given) should be preferred to the chronicler of Fontenelle's 855 (where Sidroc and Godfrid are both named), see COUPLAND, *Charles the Bald*, *op. cit.*, p. 44-45 and notes, where he also references earlier opinions regarding the date.

<sup>103</sup> *AB 856*: ed. GRAT, p. 72; trans. NELSON, p. 82-83; *ChrFont s.a. 855 [=856?]*, ed. and trans. LAPORTE, p. 89-91; trans. COUPLAND: « a very large fleet of Danes entered the river Seine on 18 July, led by the same Sidroc [who had previously been on the Seine in 852-53], and quickly came as far as the castle at Pîtres, which used to be called Petremamalum ».

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, *ChrFont s.a. 855 [=856?]*.

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 year Sidroc left the river »<sup>105</sup>; for where we do not know, but it is quite 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<sup>106</sup>. For our purposes the importance of Sidroc is that having left the Loire in 853 he did not reappear until the summer of 856 (or 855), thus he could very well have been one of the piratical chieftains who returned to Denmark in 854, and thus, at least conceivably, also a leader of the Northmen who camped on the island of Sheppey the following winter (as indeed could have been Bjørn)<sup>107</sup>.

Finally, I have not been able to examine here whether it is conceivable that the events in 854 could have had any connection or link with the raids up the Seine by *Reginheri*, likely an antecedent of the later composite and very legendary Ragnarr Loðbrók, and on Hamburg in 845<sup>108</sup>. Such an examination would be very worthwhile, but it would take us into some very murky waters regarding who the historical Ragnarr was and his possible family relationships with either King Horik I and/or Rorik in Frisia.

## A POSSIBLE IRISH CONNECTION?

It has occasionally been hinted that perhaps the Danish forces in Ireland in the early 850s may have been involved in Denmark in 854. This idea comes from the fact that, as Rowe says, « In 854 and 855, the same two years in which Denmark saw a savage civil war, there are no contemporary entries in the Irish annals dealing with Vikings », and that the « Norwegian »

---

<sup>105</sup> This would be 857 and not 856 if we prefer Prudentius to the chronicler of Fontenelle.

<sup>106</sup> ASC 871: trans. SWANTON, *op. cit.*, p. 70-71; F. LOT, « La Grande invasion normande de 856-862 », *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, 69, 1908, p. 5-62, reprinted in *Recueil des Travaux Historiques de Ferdinand Lot*, vol. 2, p. 713-70, at p. 726, n. 1, followed by COUPLAND, *Charles the Bald*, *op. cit.*, p. 40, n. 83.

<sup>107</sup> COUPLAND, *Charles the Bald*, *op. cit.*, p. 39-40, accepts that Sidroc left the Loire in late 853, and he says: « Sidroc disappeared for two years [from 853 to 855/56], perhaps going to Ireland, or possibly returning to Denmark, where internal dissension attracted many Vikings from abroad at this time ». Regarding Sidroc going to Ireland (based on an erroneous idea of Vogel taken from Steenstrup), I have shown the extreme unlikelihood of this elsewhere: see LEWIS, *Vikings in Aquitaine*, *op. cit.*, Appendix 1.

<sup>108</sup> For which see, in the first instance, N. LUND, « L'an 845 et les relations franco-danoises dans la première moitié du IXe siècle », in BAUDUIN (ed.), *Les fondations scandinaves en Occident*, *op. cit.*, p. 25-36; BAUDUIN, *Le monde franc et les vikings*, *op. cit.*, p. 151-71; HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*, p. 206-17.

Amlaíb (ON Óláfr/Áleifr) may have left Ireland at this time could have been because of « the departure of Danish Vikings for Denmark in 854 and 855 »<sup>109</sup>.

Etchingham says: « Danish Vikings on the Loire in 853 parallel the brief, devastating appearance of primarily Danish *Dubgenti* “Black Heathens” in Ireland in 851-2. *Dubgenti* gained no foothold in Ireland, despite their successes of 851-2, perhaps because they eyed opportunities in Denmark »<sup>110</sup>. Regarding the arrival of the Danish *Dubgenti* in Ireland in 851, he says several times that this was likely a direct result of internal turmoil in Danish royal politics<sup>111</sup>, which it could well have been. But in respect to his hinted-at idea as cited above that the relatively quick departure of these Danes from Ireland may have been because « they eyed opportunities in Denmark », in recent personal correspondence on the matter of 854, Etchingham says: « It is, of course, perfectly possible that some of those returning to Denmark in 854 arrived having been active in Ireland in 851-2 but, unfortunately, we have no evidence either way ».

As was noted earlier, these Danish vikings who had arrived in Ireland in 851 may possibly have been those who had arrived in southern England in 850 from the Low Countries (and thus a part of Rorik’s large fleet/army) who « attacked the island of Britain and the English but were beaten by the English »<sup>112</sup>. But whatever the case may have been the only leader of these Danish *Dubgenti* in Ireland we have any indication of was called Horm (ON Ormr).<sup>113</sup> It could very well be that Horm « as a *Dubgenti* chief », as Etchingham says, had been « ousted

---

<sup>109</sup> ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 125-26. Rowe’s idea here is based on the various ideas of D. Ó CORRÁIN, « High-kings, Vikings and other kings », *Irish Historical Studies*, 21, 1979, p. 283-323; E. PURCELL, « Ninth-century Viking entries in the Irish annals: no forty years’ rest », in J. SHEEHAN, D. Ó CORRÁIN, S. LEWIS-SIMPSON (ed.), *The Viking age: Ireland and the West: papers from the proceedings of the fifteenth Viking Congress, Cork, 18-27 August 2005*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2010, p. 322–37; and F. J. BYRNE, « The Viking Age », in D. Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vol. 1: *Prehistoric and early Ireland*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 609-34. Etchingham (pers. comm.) says that the idea that Amlaíb/Áleifr left Ireland in 854-855 « is merely an *argumentum ex silentio* - he could just as well have been consolidating his grip on the Dublin kingship in ways that did not interest the Irish annalists, in the way that the momentous events of 848-853 had done ».

<sup>110</sup> ETCHINGHAM, *Raiders*, *op. cit.*, chap. 7.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*: chaps 7 and 8.

<sup>112</sup> AB 850: ed. GRAT, p. 59-60; trans. NELSON, p. 69.

<sup>113</sup> For full details see ETCHINGHAM, *Raiders*, *op. cit.*, chap. 7.3.



or excluded from Ireland by Amlaib's royal regime since 853 and three years later killed in Wales »<sup>114</sup>. In fact, there can be little doubt that Horm died in Wales in 856<sup>115</sup>.

Why is all this worthy of note? Primarily it is because of the name Horm/Ormr. The Dutch historian and scholar of Northern and Germanic legends Jan de Vries maintained that this name was a misrepresentation of Gorm, which could be a contracted or hypocoristic form of a name like Guttorm (Gudurm), and that, therefore, we might think of Horik's nephew of 854<sup>116</sup>. Yet de Vries, who also maintained that those Danish « Vikings » who had arrived in Ireland in 851 had come from the Low Countries via southern England and that he apparently died in Wales in 856, ends up by saying that: « I have already remarked that Horm's fleet probably came from Rorik's Frisian region; since it is obvious that the pretender to the Danish throne Guttorm had joined with Harald's family argues very strongly for the fact that Horm and Guttorm are two different names for one viking leader »<sup>117</sup>. I find de Vries's argumentation very difficult to follow here, particularly because he also says: « In 854 Guttorm descended on the Danish coast in the hope of driving Horik out. A battle ensued in which both opponents are killed ». This means that Guttorm/Gudurm was killed in 854, so how then could the *same* leader (Horm/Ormr) have died in Wales in 856?

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF 854

The « civil war » in 854 in Denmark which we have been examining was without any doubt important, but it must be situated within a much longer history. This history not only goes back to 850 when two of Horik I's *nepotes* had challenged his authority, but ultimately

---

<sup>114</sup> ETCHINGHAM, *Raiders, op. cit.*, chap. 7.3. He also says (*ibid.*): « The first Welsh annalistic mention of Vikings reports a raid on Anglesey a *Gentilibus Nigris/gan y Kenedloed Duon* “by the Black Heathens” in 853, perhaps a pointer to their exclusion from Ireland by the arrival of Amlaib in the same year. In 856 Irish annals note that Rotri Mawr map Mermin king of Gwynedd [Rhodri Mawr] killed Horm *toisech* “chief” of the *Dubgenti* ».

<sup>115</sup> See *Annales Cambriae AD 682-954: Texts A-C in parallel*, D. N. DUMVILLE (ed. and trans.), Cambridge, University of Cambridge, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 2002, p. 12-13; *idem*, « Old Dubliners and new Dubliners in Ireland and Britain: a Viking-age story », in *Medieval Dublin 6*, S. DUFFY (ed.), Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2005, p. 78-93, at p. 86; *Brut y Tywysogyon or the Chronicle of the Princes (Red Book of Hergest version)*, T. JONES (ed.), Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1955, p. 8-9; T. M. CHARLES-EDWARDS, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 478-79.

<sup>116</sup> Regarding this equivalence of names, I would tend to agree, (H)orm(r) could well be short for Guthormr. But on a cautionary note, Etchingham (pers. comm.) says: « The Irish annalistic instances (AU for 856 and Frag. Annals §§ 235, 251 and 254) consistently attest to Horm, with no instance of Gorm, and the authority of AU in reflecting the phonology of contemporary Viking-Age Norse names is particularly persuasive. That it represents Ormr may be consistent with the fact that, although initial “H” is not found in Irish, some other Old Norse names in Irish sources have an unhistorical “H” prefixed (see Marstrander, *Bidrag til det Norske sprogs historie in Irland*, p. 104) ».

<sup>117</sup> For all this see DE VRIES, *De Wikingen, op. cit.*, p. 170-77, my translations.

even to the earlier struggles for power in Denmark during the first decades of the ninth century involving his relative Harald Klak and his family.

Within Denmark, the events of 854 and the advent of the young boy Horik II had consequences for that kingdom, particularly regarding the slow and painful early process of the Christianisation of the Danes as described by Rimbart in his *Vita Anskarii*, and regarding a diminution of central Danish regal authority. Niels Lund for example says with reference to both 854 and later events: « It is clear [...] that by the end of the ninth century the power of the Danish kings had been greatly weakened, in part by rivals returning home from successful Viking expeditions: for example, in 854 King Horik I was killed by a nephew who had resorted to piracy after his uncle had driven him into exile »<sup>118</sup>. Whilst Helton also stresses on several occasions this weakening of royal Danish power after 854<sup>119</sup>.

Regarding repercussions elsewhere in western Europe, the historian of Anglo-Saxon England Frank Stenton maintained that the fight in Denmark in 854 in which Horik I 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 »<sup>120</sup>. Stenton did not elaborate on what these effects on England were<sup>121</sup>, but he was clearly hinting at the various contingents of Danish raiders which started to arrive in England from 865. But the suggestion that after 854 « 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 » is based on the idea that Horik I had really managed, or even been in a position, to do this in earlier years, which he had decidedly not.

Janet Nelson also highlighted the importance of these events. After mentioning that the years 853 to 858 « saw an increasing number of Viking raids, not only in Aquitaine and the Loire valley, but via the Seine into Francia itself »<sup>122</sup>; she adds that: « in 854, terrible conflict had torn apart the elite of Denmark: King Horic “and other kings” and “nearly all the

---

<sup>118</sup> LUND, « The Danish Empire », *op. cit.*, p. 156-57.

<sup>119</sup> HELTON, *Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, *op. cit.*

<sup>120</sup> STENTON, *Anglo-Saxon England*, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>121</sup> Stenton had little or nothing to say about how this « affected many countries », and not even much more to say about how this affected England.

<sup>122</sup> For these years see LEWIS, *Vikings in Aquitaine*, *op. cit.*, chaps. 4 and 5.

nobility” were slain. What followed was a marked increase in Viking activity, as warlords with an eye on the power-vacuum back in Denmark amassed booty and bided [*sic* = ‘bid’] for followers »<sup>123</sup>. But the « power-vacuum back in Denmark » after 854 can only really refer to the unsuccessful attempt of Rorik and Godfrid to seize power in Denmark in 855 (or in 854-55), and to Rorik’s somewhat more successful, though temporally limited, attempt in 857 to do the same<sup>124</sup>. Elisabeth Ashman Rowe says, and referring specifically to Rorik’s attempts to gain power in Denmark in 855 and 857: « The window of opportunity for gaining a position of power in Denmark now seems to have closed, and there was a new king and at least one very powerful magnate, and neither would have tolerated rivals, if they could be prevented from arising »<sup>125</sup>. Yet even this can be doubted, as illustrated by the fact the brothers Halfdan and Sigfrid had become joint or co-kings in Denmark by 873 (and probably before this), both of whom had likely led piratical careers in earlier years<sup>126</sup>.

But what really were the consequences outside of Denmark after 854? Was there, as Nelson says, « a marked increase in Viking activity, as warlords with an eye on the power-vacuum back in Denmark amassed booty and bided [*sic*] for followers »? The answer in my opinion is both yes and no.

In terms of « no », there really was no significant upsurge in Scandinavian viking activity after 854, except we might say in England from 865 with the arrival of the first contingents of the so-called « Great Heathen Army », although even this Scandinavian *entrée* into England probably had a Danish or Danish-Frisian provenance<sup>127</sup>. There had already been tremendous large-scale « activity » well before 854, in Frisia, in Francia, in Aquitaine, in the Iberian Peninsula and in Ireland, and it is clear that some (although not necessarily all) of these raids may have been motivated by the desire to amass booty and followers with an eye on a possible return to Scandinavia; although as was stated in the introduction to this article many of the chieftains responsible never did return to Scandinavia whether they had originally wanted to or not. The continuing attacks around western Europe in the few years and even decades after 854, whether by « Danes » or « Norwegians », were really just a continuation of business as usual, sometimes involving some of the same « Danish »

---

<sup>123</sup> NELSON, *Charles the Bald*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>124</sup> I say « temporally limited » because as noted earlier Rorik was back in Frisia by 862 at the very latest.

<sup>125</sup> ROWE, *Vikings in the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>126</sup> See LEWIS, « Hamlet with the Princes of Denmark », *op. cit.*.

<sup>127</sup> See for instance MCLEOD, *The Beginning of the Scandinavian Settlement*, *op. cit.*.

chieftains who had been involved before 854, and also even by some of those who had been involved in the « civil war » in Denmark in 854-855 itself<sup>128</sup>.

In terms of « yes » to Nelson's statement, the fact that after 854 there were still some Scandinavian chieftains who were looking to amass booty and followers possibly « with an eye on the power-vacuum back in Denmark » could be correct. I would refer to the subsequent activities of Sidroc (and possibly Bjørn if he was Danish), and maybe even of the chieftain Weland slightly later<sup>129</sup>.

In addition, and to return to English matters, although it is sometimes suggested that the first arrivals of the so-called « Great Heathen Army » from 865 onwards constituted an attempt at settlement rather than just more raiding, I would doubt this. As mentioned above, the early leaders of this composite army, Inguar, Ubba and Halfdan, were all likely ethnic Danes<sup>130</sup>. They were probably all initially looking to amass booty and wealth, whether with any real hope of returning to Denmark or not. Inguar and Ubba/Rodulf certainly never did manage to return home. Halfdan did, however, gain royal status in Denmark for a while but he soon returned to the British Isles where he was ultimately killed.

In summary regarding the importance of the civil war in 854, these fights did have consequences both inside and outside of Denmark, but these typical ripple effects should not be exaggerated.

---

<sup>128</sup> I refer particularly to Sidroc (and possibly Bjørn), but others are also possible.

<sup>129</sup> For Weland see LEWIS, *Vikings in Aquitaine*, *op. cit.*, chaps. 5 and 6.

<sup>130</sup> In Inguar's case this is most likely if he was not the same person as Ímar in Ireland.