

Before They Were Vikings: Scandinavia and the Franks up to the death of  
Louis the Pious

By

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## **Abstract**

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Using textual and archaeological evidence to examine patterns of interaction and relationship between Francia and Scandinavia from 700-840 this dissertation demonstrates that the Viking attacks of the ninth century were not a sudden rupture of relations between Scandinavia and the wider world, nor a demonstration of unbridled violence. Rather, the attacks were part of an ongoing narrative of commerce, diplomacy, and strife between the Frankish Empire and its northern neighbors which began long before the Viking Age.

Coin finds and excavations, accounts of merchants bearing luxury goods between trade sites, and stories of Frankish slaves taken from their homes connect Francia and Scandinavia across the North Sea. Chapter One of this dissertation focuses on these long lasting commercial links. At the heart of this trade lay Frisia, home of the emporium of Dorestad. Dorestad's location as the cross roads between the North Sea and the heart of the Frankish Empire allowed Frankish, Frisian, and Scandinavian merchants to carry goods back and forth across the North Sea while at the same time facilitating the movement of ideas and cultural exchange. Annalists gathered information from these merchants, kings used them for diplomatic communication, and missionaries traveled with them. The steady growth of economic activity facilitated contact and communication between Franks and Scandinavians of all stations over several centuries.

Chapter Two describes the political, diplomatic and military relationship between Scandinavia and Frankia until the death of Charlemagne in 814. It examines the first Frankish contacts with the North, the growing influence and impact that this contact had on Scandinavia and the North Sea area, and the ways in which these two peoples forged new diplomatic and political relationships. By the end of Charlemagne's life, the Danes had moved from a shadowy people on the margins of Frankish consciousness to key players in the works of Frankish historians and poets. Both Frankish sources and archaeological evidence from Scandinavia demonstrate that Danish leaders, in large part

due to increased contact with their powerful southern neighbors, became intent not only on wielding wider power in Scandinavia but on challenging Carolingian supremacy over the North Sea area at large.

Beginning with the death of Charlemagne, Chapter Three examines the heightened intensity of relations between Francia and Scandinavia until the death of Louis the Pious in 840. In an effort to cement Frankish hegemony over northern Europe Louis attempted to bring Scandinavia firmly under Frankish control through diplomacy and missionary work. These efforts created new opportunities for interaction and engagement as Franks, Danes, and Swedes travelled back and forth across the North Sea. Though Louis' work failed to last beyond his death, the raids and later interactions between Franks and Scandinavians were directly shaped by the policies of Louis and Charlemagne.

When we look at the networks of trade forming across the North Sea in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, and at the growth of political and social meetings on the borders of Frisia, Saxony, and the Jutland Peninsula, we come away with a narrative of communication and contact that is far more vibrant and complex than our primary sources reveal at first glance. The relationship between Scandinavia and Francia during this time actively informs the conflict that follows. During the raids and strife of the ninth century, the conquering Franks became victims; in their quest for the wealth and power of their southern neighbors, the disparate and diverse Scandinavian tribes became, for lack of a better word, Vikings.

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