

# Viking Camps

Case Studies and Comparisons

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## Chapter 8

**Hostile in tent: Reconsidering the  
roles of viking encampment  
across the Frankish realm**

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# 8 Hostile in tent

## Reconsidering the roles of viking encampment across the Frankish realm

*Christian Cooijmans*

### Introduction

When old man Phoebus' brightness swiftly climbs inside  
His kindly chariot and drives dark night away,  
And as he goes casts down his eyes upon the town,  
Lo, Satan's raging offspring suddenly burst out  
From camp, weighed greatly down by weapons flashing bright.  
(trans. Adams & Rigg 2004: 30)

So unfolds a turbulent scene outside the walls of Paris on an early morning in late 885, as portrayed by Abbo, monk of St Germain-des-Prés and supposed first-hand witness to the event. Having travelled several hundred kilometres up the river Seine, a sizeable, composite force of vikings would spend the next several months laying siege to the episcopal town, during which it would operate out of a number of nearby encampment sites. Although at times ascribing ominous and obscure qualities to these ephemeral bases – from which smoke and screams seemingly billowed in equal measure (Dass 2007: 60, 72) – Abbo's work nevertheless provides a singular, valuable glimpse into the construction, configuration, and internal conduct of these camps, characterising them as places where both men and women dwelled, where food was prepared, livestock was tended, armaments were produced, and captives were held (Dass 2007: 34, 38–40, 62, 68, 82–86).

In fact, as exemplified by this particular source, some of the most detailed contemporary depictions of viking encampment originate from the Frankish realm, a region which nonetheless remains precariously positioned within the wider comparative investigation of the viking phenomenon. In order to help address this imbalance, the present chapter will assemble and reassess the extant evidence for viking camps across this expansive, embattled territory, providing a more distinct, continental perspective on their establishment, operational parameters, and overall strategic significance.

### Textual and tangible traces

Viking activity in and around the Frankish realm remains primarily attested through contemporary textual accounts, which likewise serve as a foremost

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source of information on associated encampment practices. By and large, the wider region still lacks any telltale, archaeologically attested sites in the character of Repton or Woodstown, which is not to say that no material evidence for encampment is available whatsoever. Around the Breton peninsula, for example, a number of potential sites have been previously put forward. Most notably, the fortified enclosure at Péran (Côtes-d'Armor), which was extensively excavated between 1983 and 1990, remains closely associated with a local viking presence during the first half of the tenth century. The elevated sub-circular site (approx. 160 x 140m), whose prominent destruction layer suggests a violent end to its occupation, has yielded a variety of armaments, tools, and other items which bear a strong resemblance to counterparts identified in Scandinavia and other overseas viking sites (Nicolardot & Guigon 1991; Nicolardot 2002). Other, less securely identified sites include the trapezoidal fortification of Vieux M'Na near Trans-la-Forêt (Ille-et-Vilaine), which is suggested to have been constructed by vikings in 939 as part of a local encounter with a Breton army – itself thought to have occupied the adjacent Camp des Haies. With only the latter enclosure having been subject to any excavation work, however, local finds remain largely restricted to a number of tenth-century pottery fragments (Nissen Jaubert 2001: 167).

Beyond Brittany, the physical vestiges for potential viking encampment have been predominantly artefactual in nature. As a case in point, the discovery of various ninth- or tenth-century (Anglo-)Scandinavian items at Taillebourg (Charente-Maritime) – including weaponry and jewellery – has prompted speculation about the site's status as a frontier post for inland viking endeavour (Dumont et al. 2014: 45–49). Northwards, in Normandy, a mixed silver hoard – thought to have been assembled in England – was also uncovered at Saint-Pierre-des-Fleurs (Eure), and is proposed to have been buried or lost around 895 by vikings encamped along the nearby river Seine (Cardon et al. 2008: 27–28). This find, in particular, has been compared to the two Scandinavian silver hoards from Westerklijf on Wieringen (North Holland, Netherlands), which are respectively dated to c. 850 and c. 880, and are likewise thought to reflect an established viking presence along the Vlie inlet between the North Sea and the Almere (Besteman 1999; 2002. See also Figure 8.1). Elsewhere in the Low Countries, the discovery of various (Anglo-)Scandinavian ornaments and proposed game pieces at Wapse, a former island in the floodplain of the river IJssel (opposite Zutphen, Gelderland), has prompted speculation on the existence of an encampment there during the early 880s (Hadley et al. 2020: 3). In nearby Nijmegen (Gelderland), destruction layers dated to the late Carolingian period have likewise been tentatively linked to a textually attested camp which was established and subsequently set alight over the winter of 880–881 (MacLean 2009: 184; Hendriks et al. 2014: 67). In addition, vikings are suspected to have occupied the erstwhile emporium of Dorestad, in part due to their surmised on-site striking of substandard Carolingian coinage, as well as the local recovery of a ninth-century ship resembling those from the Skuldelev assemblage (Cooijmans 2021b: 23–24). Notably, despite repeated archaeological investigations, distinct material traces of

prominent, documented regional encampments at Louvain (Flemish Brabant), Duisburg (North Rhine-Westphalia), and Asselt (Dutch Limburg) remain unaccounted for (Vandekerchove 1996: 68; Krause 2008: 400; Verhart 2019).

When returning to the written evidence, a broad spectrum of (semi-)contemporary sources is seen to attest to various viking groups establishing encampments across the Frankish territories. By far the most revealing records in this respect are four principal sets of ninth-century annals – the *Annales Bertiniani* (*AB*), *Annales Fuldenses* (*AF*), *Annales Xantenses* (*AX*), and *Annales Vedastini* (*AV*) – as well as supplementary texts like Regino of Prüm’s *Chronicon* (*RP*) and a number of more limited, local historical accounts. In addition, occasional references to these camps are discernible in contemporary works of poetry, hagiography, and personal correspondence. All in all, more than four dozen individual instances of viking encampment are seen to have been recorded across the Frankish realm within living memory of the events themselves (see Table 8.1 and Figure 8.2). Yet this is expected to represent only a fraction of the true figure, as many other instances will have been unobserved, overlooked, consciously omitted, or forgotten through record loss. As a result, any impression formed of the overall distribution and impact of these establishments will inevitably remain an imperfect one.



*Figure 8.1* Viking silver hoard ‘Westerklief I’ (c. 850). Found in Westerklief, Wieringen (North Holland, Netherlands) in 1996.

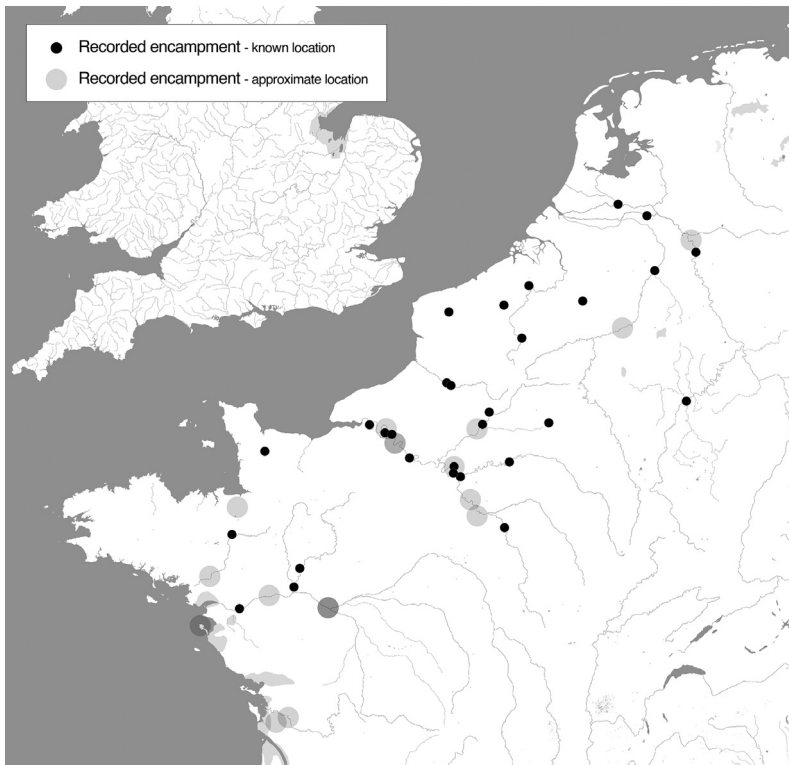
Source: National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (inv. g 1996/11.1–79).

*Table 8.1* Documentary references to viking encampment in the Frankish realm (840–940). Approximate dates and locations are marked with ‘a’. After Cooijmans 2020: 147–148.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Location(s)</i>	<i>Text(s)</i>	
843	Island off Aquitaine (a)	<i>AB</i>	
845	Saintonge (a)	<i>AB</i>	
852	Jeufosse (a)	<i>AFont</i>	Again referenced in 856 ( <i>AB</i> )
853 (a)	St. Florent-le-Vieil (a – river island)	<i>MSB</i>	Possibly referenced again in 857 ( <i>AB</i> )
853	Loire (river island: Biesse)	<i>GSR</i>	Referenced as having been previously established
854	Redon (a)	<i>GSR</i>	
855	Dorestad	<i>AB</i>	Referenced as part of ongoing local presence. Rorik mentioned as ‘rull[ing] in Dorestad’ in 857 ( <i>AF</i> )
856	Pîtres	<i>AFont, CP</i>	
857	Seine (river island: Oissel)	<i>AFont</i>	Besieged by Charles the Bald in 858 ( <i>AB, AFont, LPW, VF</i> ), and by other vikings in 861 ( <i>AB</i> )
859	Camargue (a)	<i>AB</i>	
861	Melun (a – river island)	<i>AB, Lupus</i>	
861	St Maur-des-Fossés	<i>AB</i>	
862	Jumièges	<i>AB</i>	
863	Rhine (a – river island)	<i>AB, AX</i>	Near Xanten and Neuss
864	Loire (a)	<i>AB</i>	Referenced as part of ongoing regional presence. Possibly mentioned again in 865 ( <i>AB</i> ), 866 ( <i>AB</i> ), and 868 ( <i>AB</i> ). River island site besieged by Hugh and Gauzfrid in 871 ( <i>AB</i> )
865	Charente (a)	<i>AB</i>	Referenced as part of ongoing local presence
865	Pîtres (a)	<i>AB</i>	Referenced as part of ongoing local presence
865	Seine (a – river island)	<i>AB</i>	Near St Denis. The monastery itself is also occupied for c. 20 days
866	Seine (a)	<i>AB</i>	Associated with the host previously at St Denis
866	Brissarthe	<i>AB, RP</i>	Ephemeral defensive camp

<i>Year</i>	<i>Location(s)</i>	<i>Text(s)</i>	
873	Angers	<i>AB, RP, AV</i>	Referenced as part of ongoing local occupation
873	Loire (a – river island)	<i>AB</i>	Associated with the host previously at Angers
874	Rennes	<i>RP</i>	Ephemeral defensive camp
879	Ghent	<i>AV, ASC (A), GA</i>	Again mentioned in 881 ( <i>AV</i> )
880	Courtrai	<i>AV</i>	Again presumably mentioned in 881 ( <i>AV</i> )
880	Nijmegen	<i>AF, RP</i>	Mentioned as being burnt down in 881 ( <i>RP</i> )
881	Asselt	<i>AF, AV, ASC (A), GA, RP</i>	Besieged by Charles the Fat in 882 ( <i>AF, AV, RP</i> )
882	Condé-sur-l'Escaut	<i>AV, ASC (A), GA</i>	
882	Avaux	<i>AB</i>	Ephemeral defensive camp
882	Trier	<i>RP</i>	
883	Amiens	<i>AV, RP, ASC (A)</i>	Associated with the host previously at Condé-sur-l'Escaut ( <i>AV</i> ). Mentioned as being burnt down in 884 ( <i>AV</i> )
883	Duisburg	<i>AF, RP</i>	Mentioned as being burnt down in 884 ( <i>RP</i> )
884	Louvain	<i>AV, RP</i>	Associated with part of the host previously at Amiens ( <i>AV</i> ). Again mentioned in 885 ( <i>AV</i> )
885	Hesbaye (a)	<i>AF</i>	Ephemeral defensive camp
885	Seine (a)	<i>AV</i>	Possibly near Rouen
885	Paris	<i>AF, AV, ASC (A), GA, RP, BPU</i>	Although originally established near St. Germain-l'Auxerrois, the camp is moved or expanded to St Germain-des-Prés in 886 ( <i>BPU, AV</i> )
886	Sens	<i>ASC (A), GA, RP</i>	
887	Paris	<i>RP, BPU</i>	
887	Chézy-sur-Marne	<i>AV, ASC (A), GA</i>	
888	Loing (a)	<i>AV</i>	
889	Paris	<i>RP</i>	
889	St Lô	<i>AV</i>	
890	Noyon	<i>AV</i>	
890	Argœuves	<i>AV</i>	

<i>Year</i>	<i>Location(s)</i>	<i>Text(s)</i>	
891	Louvain	<i>AF, AV, RP</i>	Associated with part of the host previously at Noyon ( <i>AV</i> ). Seemingly unrelated to the 884 encampment
891	Amiens	<i>AV</i>	Associated with the host previously at Argœuves
891	St Omer	<i>MSBr</i>	
896	Choisy-au-Bac	<i>AV</i>	
897	Loire (a)	<i>AV</i>	
899	Oise (a)	<i>AV</i>	
923	Neustria (a)	<i>AFL</i>	Multiple <i>munitiones</i> are mentioned
925	Seine (a)	<i>AFL</i>	Referenced as part of ongoing presence
939	Brittany (a)	<i>AFL</i>	



*Figure 8.2* Recorded locations of viking encampment in the Frankish realm (840–940). Base map by Ancient World Mapping Center, UNC-Chapel Hill (CC BY 4.0), with amended coastline.

Source: After Cooijmans 2020: 150.

### Earliest encampment (pre-840s)

Even though early manifestations of viking activity along the Frankish shores and lower river basins had been recorded since around the beginning of the ninth century, explicit references to associated encampment practices would not be made until 843. At this time – in the wake of attacks on the *civitas* of Nantes and adjacent parts of Aquitaine – the *AB* note that a viking host ‘landed on a certain island, brought their households over from the mainland and decided to winter there in something like a permanent settlement’ (trans. Nelson 1991: 56). Even though the exact whereabouts of this particular island remain a matter of discussion, the notion that these vikings would have been accompanied by their households is no less meaningful – *domus* (pl.) being the term used, suggesting the attendance of wider family groups. Not only does the prior, onshore position of these households suggest the establishment of an earlier regional encampment, their presence in and of itself indicates that incoming viking hosts no longer had any immediate need (or intent) to return to their point of origin.

But even before this initial report, small-scale and short-term encampment may have already been an integral aspect of viking endeavour in and around the Bay of Biscay, where associated hostilities are suspected to have taken place as early as 799 (Dümmler 1895: 309). A royal charter issued by Louis the Pious in 819, for example, asserts that the monastery of St Philibert, on the island of Noirmoutier, had been subject to periodic incursions over the preceding period, whilst the *Annales regni Francorum* note that the nearby *vicus* of Bouin – across the Bay of Bourgneuf – was targeted during the following year (Kurze 1895: 153–154; Böhmer et al. 1908: 285). According to a subsequent diploma of Louis, regional attacks like these had turned into an annual affair during the 820s, and have been associated with the implementation of broader politico-military countermeasures across the area (Böhmer et al. 1908: 346–347; Jeanneau 2015: 107–109). As reaching Noirmoutier and its surroundings from either Scandinavia or the Atlantic Archipelago on such a regular basis would have involved substantial and sustained efforts and risks for any ambulant viking force, one or more associated outposts might have already been established in the region during these early decades, albeit not necessarily at Noirmoutier itself, as has been previously proposed (e.g. Davies 1988: 22).

Further north, along the coasts of the Channel and North Sea, analogous, unremarked-upon bases may have also predated the 840s, paralleling encampments that were conceivably established in eastern England during the same period (Downham 2017: 4, 7–8). A series of calculated annual attacks on the *vicus famosus* of Dorestad and other regional centres of commerce in 834–837 might indicate such a fixed position along the lower reaches of the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt delta, for example (Cooijmans 2020: 104–105, 228). The even earlier confiscation of cattle from the coast of Flanders in 820 could also have served to sustain such a nearby coastal camp, as carrying livestock on prolonged overseas journeys would have been an inefficient and potentially perilous exercise (Kurze 1895: 153; Bachrach 1985: 511, 521n18). Preliminary positions like these may have been



rudimentary in their operation and design, allowing limited viking hosts to assemble and accommodate themselves, whilst avoiding detection, scrutiny, and/or hostility from local or regional authorities.

### **Intensified encampment (840s onward)**

#### *Location and distribution*

Following the earliest regional report of viking encampment off the Aquitanian mainland, corresponding instances would become more and more commonly documented across the Frankish realm into the second half of the ninth century. Whereas many such camps were characterised as distinct physical spaces arranged or appropriated for viking occupancy – using terms like *sedes* ('seat') or *castrum* ('fortification') – other sites are less clearly defined, their potential presence being primarily deduced from context. The *AB*, for example, note that a viking host 'laid siege to the town of Bordeaux for a long time' between 847 and 848, a prolonged endeavour which would reasonably have involved the presence of riverside encampments, despite these not being remarked upon by the annalist (trans. Nelson 1991: 65–66). Such established camps are equally conceivable – and equally undisclosed – for the military investment of Meaux in 888, which did entail the local construction of a dam and deployment of siege weapons by the encircling viking force (Pertz 1829a: 204).

When collating the available evidence for viking encampment across the Frankish realm, a number of spatial patterns may be readily recognised. Unsurprisingly, the most elementary of these features is that regional camps would have been almost invariably established alongside or within easy reach of navigable waterways, acting as anchorage or landing sites for ships and fleets. As well as enabling their occupants to promptly break and move camp when desired or required, these coastal, estuarine, and riverine settings may have allowed viking hosts to directly observe, obstruct, and/or obtain control over pre-existing conduits of (inter)regional commerce and communication. For example, vikings establishing their camps along the lower Seine at JEu-fosse, Jumièges, and elsewhere may have been able to affect – adversely or otherwise – riverine transport and trade between Paris, Rouen, and the Channel coast, with comparable influences exerted by those along the Loire, Somme, and other such corridors. A number of these camps even seem to have been purposely positioned at the confluence of multiple rivers, including those at Pîtres (Seine, Eure, and Andelle), Choisy-au-Bac (Aisne and Oise), and Angers (Loire, Sarthe, and Mayenne). In addition, some riverside camps – beyond those found at prominent population centres – would have been situated near overland routeways and river crossings, thereby facilitating more expedient access into their immediate hinterlands. Along the Seine, for example, the camp at Oissel was erected within easy reach of the southbound Roman road from Rouen and its intersection with other regional avenues at Caudebec-lès-Elbeuf (Duval 1984: 7, 9). Further north, similar stopovers at

Louvain would have taken place near a point in the river Dyle where a principal thoroughfare between Tongeren and the North Sea would have crossed it (Vandekerchove 1996: 44). Likewise, the camp at Asselt seems to have been situated at a presumed crossing of the Meuse, connecting two nearby Roman routeways – i.e. Maastricht-Nijmegen and Heerlen-Xanten (Luys 1984: 123; Van der Heijden 2006: 29–31, 33).

Evidently well-acquainted with the socioeconomic landscape of the Frankish realm, vikings seem to have customarily established their encampments in the immediate vicinity of pre-existing aggregates of moveable wealth, including urban centres like Melun, Sens, and Noyon, as well as monastic and clerical communities like St Florent-le-Vieil and Xanten. Even though the proximity of these encampments to domestic population centres is commonly associated with acts of aggression against the latter, nearby regional hubs may have also afforded vikings more amicable opportunities to exchange goods and information. Encamping at Pîtres, for example, would have presented possibilities to visit Paris at short notice, and a contingent of vikings is seen to have made this journey in 865 to order to obtain wine, presumably by purchasing it (Waitz 1883: 79; Halsall 2003: 37). Four years earlier, having vacated its island base at Oissel, another host is also seen to have ‘split up [...] into groups allocated to various ports’ along the length of the lower Seine, seemingly on a nonviolent basis (trans. Nelson 1991: 96). Nevertheless, on various occasions, vikings do seem to have purposefully occupied domestic population centres for their own encampment needs, allowing them to actively take advantage of local defences, food stores, and logistical infrastructure – as may have been the case at St Maur-des-Fossés, St Denis, Angers, Trier, and elsewhere (Cooijmans 2020: 144; 2021a: 193, 195).

In a broader, interregional context, some viking hosts – ostensibly well-aware of ongoing discord between Frankish elites – also elected to establish their encampments along the geopolitical fault lines which cut across the Carolingian Empire. In 863, for example, vikings occupying an island in the Rhine would have positioned themselves in the borderlands of Lotharingia and the eastern Frankish kingdom, whilst a subsequent force, ensconced at Asselt in 881, was located in a similarly liminal space separating the western and eastern Frankish domains. By highlighting that a camp at Louvain in 884 was situated on the frontier between Lotharingia and western Francia, Regino’s *Chronicon* likewise suggests that its occupants actively exploited the mutually exclusive territorial authority of these neighbouring powers, as they ‘wearied both kingdoms with the unremitting infestations of their raids’ (trans. MacLean 2009: 191). Aside from their tactical benefits, peripheral positions like these may have also allowed vikings to more easily exchange goods and information across a wider area without drawing unwanted attention.

### ***Functionality and organisation***

On a fundamental level, a viking camp might be defined as an impermanent onshore space within which one or multiple viking hosts were able to safely

recuperate, rally their membership, and/or raise and (re)allocate their material resources. The terrestrial aspect of this definition is crucial, because even though viking fleets themselves have on occasion been characterised as ‘mobile camps’ (e.g. D’Haenens 1967: 78–79), some of the recurrent, longer-term requirements of these ambulant armed forces could not have reasonably been met whilst remaining waterborne. Aside from the notion that many Frankish waterways may not have been traversable throughout the year to begin with (e.g. Kurze 1891: 81, 94), the occasional need to reprovision and carry out repairs would ultimately also have driven these fleets ashore. Vikings are noted to have spent time repairing their vessels on the banks of both the Seine and Scheldt, for example, and are even described as having constructed new ships in 866 (Pertz 1829a: 199; Waitz 1883: 57, 81). Being shoreside may have also benefitted a crew’s ability to rest, convalesce, formulate strategy, and gather intelligence, whilst presumably reducing its overall energy expenditure. This is suggested by the various contemporary references to viking mariners seeking to ‘settle down’ and ‘rest their bodies’ as they encamped along the Loire, Moselle, and elsewhere (e.g. Waitz 1883: 33; Holder-Egger 1887a: 494; Kurze 1890: 119).

Although a number of seemingly short-lived, rough-and-ready camps – including those at Brissarthe, Avaux, and in the Hesbaye – would have been born out of immediate military threat, most of the attested encampment locations across the region seem to have been more scrupulously selected with particular protective and operational requirements in mind. Crucially, in order to mitigate the inherent vulnerabilities of occupying a fixed location for an extended period of time, viking hosts seem to have prioritised the physical security of their encampments. Commonly characterised for their defensive role by contemporary authors – using established terms like *munitio*, *castrum*, and *firmitas* (Cooijmans 2020: 142) – positions like these seem to have relied on three distinct but often complementary approaches to secure their perimeters.

First and foremost, as seen on the Atlantic Archipelago (e.g. Simpson 2012: 94–95; Hadley & Richards 2016: 32–33), vikings are seen to have actively turned the topography of the local landscape to their advantage by positioning themselves in insular or otherwise poorly accessible environments. The prospect of mounting an effective defence in these secluded sites is demonstrated by Charles the Bald’s inability to oust a resident viking force from the island of Oissel (in the Seine) during the late 850s, for example, whilst another Frankish army found itself unable to overcome the occupants of an analogous base in the Loire in 871, suffering heavy losses in the process (Pertz 1829c: 304; Waitz 1883: 116). By the same token, the presence of local wetlands at the camp at Louvain (891) posed a problem for the beleaguering forces of Arnulf of Carinthia, ‘because with a marsh on one side and the bank of the river on the other there was not room for cavalry to attack’ (trans. Reuter 1992: 122).

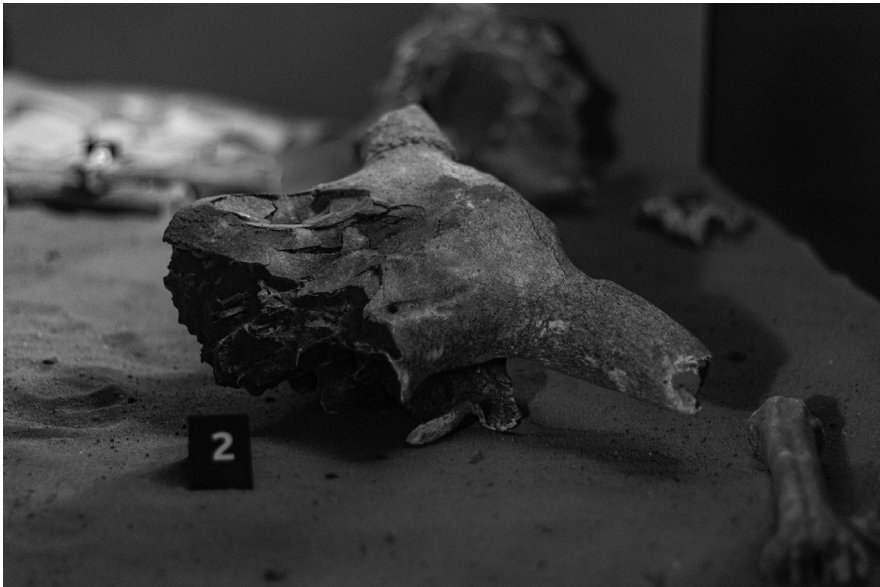
Secondly, as previously pointed out, vikings seem to have actively earmarked existing domestic defences for their encampment needs. This is apparent at the *civitas* of Angers, for example, whose ‘very strong fortifications’ were a

determining factor for its occupation in 873, whilst the ‘wonderful fortifications’ of the Carolingian *palatium* at Nijmegen likewise ‘provided the enemy with a very secure refuge’ later that same decade (trans. MacLean 2009: 168, 184). Other riverside hubs, including Ghent and Duisburg, are also speculated to have played host to viking encampments on this basis (Verhulst 1993: 25; Herrmann 2010: 332).

Although this preference for natural or otherwise appropriable defences suggests the existence of a calculated fortification strategy – balancing maximum security against minimum energy expenditure – vikings *are* seen to have constructed or enhanced their own local safeguards when these were found to be absent or inadequate. The *AF*, for example, note that the site at Asselt was ‘surrounded by a wall’ – presumably purpose-built for the occasion – whilst affirming that those preparing the later camp at Louvain ‘after their fashion surrounded it with a fortified ditch’, hinting at the habitual nature of these proceedings (trans. Reuter 1992: 104, 121). Incoming vikings are suggested to have utilised local building materials for these efforts; the monk Abbo, for example, noted that a camp near St Germain-le-Rond (885) had been fortified by ‘heaping there [a] mound of stones piled up, along with sods of earth’ (trans. Adams & Rigg 2004: 28). Beyond the enclosures themselves, smaller pits – analogous to so-called *trous de loup* – also seem to have been dug and concealed as anti-cavalry traps, one of which was accidentally charged into by the east Frankish *dux* Henry whilst surveying a camp outside Paris on horseback in 886 (Pertz 1829a: 202–203; Kurze 1890: 125–126).

Nevertheless, no matter how high its ramparts, the physical protection of a viking camp would ultimately have been subservient to its occupants’ need to stave off hunger and malnutrition. In order to maintain adequate levels of food security and prevent overreliance on any single supply source, vikings would have been incentivised to diversify their means of securing sustenance using whatever means possible (McLeod 2006; Coijmans 2021a: 191–194). Accordingly, beyond the outright appropriation of accumulated stockpiles (as mentioned earlier), these nutritional requirements may have been met by foraging, fishing, hunting, and trapping around the encampments. Vikings situated outside Paris, for example, were seen to have been ‘well stocked with all things in their fortifications’ in early 885, but were later noted ‘to hunt and sport’ throughout the surrounding region, conceivably to top up their reserves (trans. Reuter 1992: 100). As well as confiscating crops, animals, and their associated products from local farms, estates, and towns (e.g. Figure 8.3), vikings may even have practised agriculture themselves within the context of their own encampments – a notion supported by the charred grains and tilling implements recovered from Péran, as well as references to livestock being tended at St Germain-des-Prés (Nicolardot & Guigon 1991: 136–137; Dass 2007: 62). Camp provisions may have also been supplied as part of regional tribute payments, which saw domestic elites part with considerable amounts of cattle, grain, flour, wine, and cider to appease regionally active viking hosts

(Cooijmans 2020: 162–163). Lastly, food and fodder may have been obtained through amicable exchange, carried out either within or beyond the boundaries of the camps themselves (as discussed below).



*Figure 8.3* Top and side view of a fractured ninth-century bovine skull from Zutphen (Gelderland, Netherlands). This animal, among many others, is speculated to have been haphazardly slaughtered as part of a local viking attack in 882.

Source: Municipal Museum, Zutphen.

Although the internal logistics of viking encampment across Francia were not routinely remarked upon by contemporary authors, the organisational complexity of these sites would presumably have been contingent on their overall life expectancy. From a practical perspective, a camp intended to last only several days, for example, is likely to have relied on portable or make-shift shelters in lieu of more dedicated, durable structures whose establishment would be unduly labour-intensive and time-consuming. With this in mind, the attested construction of *mapalia* ('huts') at a viking encampment on a river island below the monastery of St Florent-le-Vieil around the early 850s might point to a much longer-lasting local presence – one which warranted the time, energy, and material resources required to erect such facilities (Holder-Egger 1887a: 494). Likewise, the means to engage in more substantial carpentry and craft production within a potentially hostile environment may have hinged on the managerial and infrastructural capacity of encampments to support such endeavours. In addition to the abovementioned shipbuilding, for example, vikings are noted to have engineered siege engines – including battering rams and catapults – whilst the manufacturing and maintenance of personal armaments and ammunition is also attested (Pertz 1829a: 204; Dass 2007: 38–40, 46, 76). Campbound production processes like these would have required more than just a physical workspace, and relied on the presence of expertise and equipment, the acquisition and conveyance of raw materials, the facility to locally store and distribute intermediate and end products, and the capacity to coordinate and delegate these responsibilities. Due to their organisational complexity, it stands to reason that operations like these would have taken time to (re)establish and optimise in any new environment, and may have therefore been a prerogative of camps which were founded with the expectation to endure.

### **Campaigns and collaborations**

As well as furnishing the immediate material needs of their occupants, viking encampments across Francia are seen to have played a salient strategic role for affiliated hosts in the field, acting as both literal and figurative anchor points for broader seasonal campaigns. In 881, for example, a viking force operating in the Artois region seems to have departed and returned to the same camp on several occasions, whilst those descending on the monasteries of St Denis (865) and Prüm (882) likewise proceeded to pre-established bases after the fact (Pertz 1829a: 198–199; Waitz 1883: 80; Kurze 1890: 118). In addition, vikings active around the southern Low Countries in 891 are noted to have dispersed and withdrawn to their camp at Noyon when confronted by King Odo and his army (Pertz 1829a: 205). Reports like these not only indicate that such encampments served to strategically bookend viking expeditions, but suggest that they were actively used as fallback or rallying points in case of intermediate setbacks, possibly as part of a predetermined contingency plan. In a similar vein, even though camps may have been emptied and

abandoned upon the departure of their associated viking outfit, there is reason to suspect that at least some of these sites retained an active skeleton force anticipating its return. Having been subdued at Saucourt-en-Vimeu in 881, for instance, the survivors of a sizeable viking host reported the news of their defeat to their camp – implying it had remained operational in their absence (Pertz 1829a: 199). Potentially playing host to garrisons and/or groups of non-combatants, the ongoing occupation of venues like these raises the distinct possibility for them having served as regional support stations for active viking hosts – able to send out supplies and intelligence, take in wounded and captives, and safeguard non-belligerents, surplus stocks, and appropriated moveable wealth.

On a number of ninth-century occasions, specific viking groups are also reported to have set up several successive camps over the course of only a few years. The host installing itself at Louvain in 884, for example, had reportedly already been in residence at Condé (882) and Amiens (883), both seemingly short-lived stopovers (Pertz 1829a: 199–201). Likewise, the viking leader Hasting and his entourage, seated at Argœuves on the Somme in 890, are noted to have broken camp during the following year so as to establish themselves at Amiens, less than 10km upriver (Pertz 1829a: 205). Although these examples are liable to reinforce the impression that viking encampments fulfilled their function for only short periods before being abandoned by their occupying force, a number of reservations might be put forward to nuance this notion. Although few grounds exist to doubt the overall historicity of recorded viking camps across the region, the perception that many such successive establishments would have been made by the same groups might – to some extent – be attributable to the narrative choices and constraints faced by contemporary chroniclers. Attached to royal courts, monastic houses, and other institutions, authors like these would not always have been privy to the finer details of news arriving from far afield, forcing them to consolidate information that may have been incomplete, handed-down, and difficult to verify – including, potentially, the appearance of various viking camps in close chronological succession. Other options likewise warrant consideration, such as the possibility that consecutive camps were not mutually exclusive in their operation and occupancy. As the overall continuity between such sites remains poorly understood, the likelihood of multiple camps being in service concurrently over a more extended period – possibly even as joint ventures between different viking groups – should not be summarily dismissed.

On a number of occasions, autonomous viking hosts in and around Francia are noted to have congregated, cooperated, and actively pooled their human and material resources, often in order to reach otherwise unobtainable objectives. Uniting their forces on the Seine during the mid-850s, for example, allowed the combined companies of *duces* Sigtrygg and Bjorn to range as far south as the forest of Perche, whilst other viking groups – arriving from the Seine region and the Iberian Peninsula, respectively – also appear to have joined their efforts around Brittany in 862 (Pertz 1829c: 304; Waitz 1883: 57).

A closer examination of the contemporary record suggests that various viking encampments would have been established and operated in similarly collaborative circumstances. In 866, before going their separate ways, multiple fleets seem to have sojourned along the lower Seine as a composite host, whilst the force anchored at Asselt in 881–882 likewise constituted the collective adherents of at least four viking leaders, identified as Godfrid, Sigfrid, Gorm, and Hals (Waitz 1883: 81–82, 153; Kurze 1891: 107–108). Two years later, multiple groups also appear to have departed a communal camp at Amiens, whereas others still were evidently encamped en masse during their siege of Paris in 885–86 – led by Sinric, Sigfrid, and others (Pertz 1829a: 201; Dass 2007: 30, 66, 74). In addition to this mutual occupation, some venues seem to have been intermittently called upon by unassociated companies over more extended periods of time. Having already hosted the combined forces of Sigtrygg and Godfrid in 852, for example, the site of Jeufosse was observed to have been occupied a second time only four years later (Pertz 1829c: 304; Waitz 1883: 46–47). Louvain is likewise noted to have been the site of viking encampments in both 884 and 891, whilst the numismatic evidence from Wieringen suggests a recurrent local presence to have stretched across several decades (Pertz 1829a: 201, 205; Besteman 2002: 73, see also ‘Textual and Tangible Traces’ above).

These attested instances of collective and recurrent encampment serve to dispel the impression that individual viking camps were – by default – established in a sequential and single-use fashion, only to be altogether abandoned whenever greener pastures beckoned. Instead, they intimate that the overall utility of these sites would have reached beyond the interests of individual parties, as multiple viking groups – on their own or in partnership – sought to avail themselves of their defensive and logistic assets over a prolonged period of time. Supporting this premise is a conspicuous entry from the *AB*, which, for the year 868, refers to a pre-existing encampment on the Loire as a *diversorium*, a term carrying the distinct meaning of ‘lodging place’ or ‘inn’ – i.e. an established venue providing accommodation and other services to passing travellers (Waitz 1883: 91).

In light of the preceding evidence, it may be proposed that some regional encampments, particularly those situated along principal riverine corridors, would have acted as gateway hubs or staging posts to various groups of viking mariners aiming to make their way further upstream, downstream, or inland. A broader, interconnected hierarchy of such establishments, sited within manageable sailing distance of one another, may have even formed over time – as previously pondered for the late ninth-century lower Seine (Le Maho 2003: 244–247; 2014: 59–62) and alluded to across the Atlantic Archipelago (e.g. Downham 2010: 104; Hadley & Richards 2018: 8–10). In this cooperative capacity, encampments may have offered incoming viking hosts the ability to rest and restock, to enact repairs and crew changes, to socialise, share news, rumours, and directions, and to coordinate ensuing expeditions. As strategic footholds, they may also have served as venues for viking hosts to



muster and merge their respective forces, to withdraw to after campaigns, and to apportion any potential spoils. Sites like these may even have been host to political negotiations, as is suggested by the attendance of a Frankish mediator – i.e. ‘the Dane Sigfrid, a Christian and faithful subject of the king’ – at the encampment of Amiens in 883 (Pertz 1829a: 200; trans. author). Lastly but no less importantly, assembly points like these would have presented opportunities for economic exchange, and may have been referred to when vikings sought to ‘hold a market’ on an island in the Loire following their defeat at Angers in 873 (trans. Nelson 1991: 185). Although these commercial dealings may have been confined to viking communities themselves, there is reason to suspect that external agents would also have taken part in these proceedings. In 882, for example, Frankish forces entered the enclosure at Asselt with the pronounced purpose of engaging in trade with its viking occupants, a course of action neither condemned nor even considered unusual by the *AF* annalist (Kurze 1891: 98). The expectation that Frankish parties might engage in these economic exchanges, and their ability to do so, suggests that regional vikings may have welcomed domestic merchants into their midst on a more regular basis, with encampments acting as (semi-)permeable ports of call along established routes of trade and communication. As well as potentially allowing appropriated goods to return to domestic circulation, such encounters may have enabled vikings to procure otherwise poorly accessible merchandise, including weaponry and other materiel. Transactions like these, occurring outside the customary channels of economic conduct, may have been among those targeted by Charles the Bald in his *Edictum Pistense* of 864, which unequivocally prohibited armaments or horses to be made available to vikings under any circumstance, on pain of death (Boretius & Krause 1897b: 321).

## Conclusion

[...] [the Northmen], who had occupied the banks of the Scheldt, raged uncontrollably, because a most agreeable anchorage site – whether to pass the winter or to avoid the peril of warfare – had made them stay there continuously.

(Pertz 1841: 62; trans. author)

In pointing to prior viking antagonism in and around the southern Low Countries, the tenth-century author Folcuin, in his *Gesta abbatum Lobien-sium*, reiterated what many Viking Age authors on the Continent had previously – albeit less categorically – considered to be the two primary grounds for viking encampment: to weather the winter and to provide protection from external threats. Both of these principles have retained considerable currency, and the former – in particular – continues to resonate in present-day scholarship, which still often sweepingly characterises such sites as ‘winter camps’ or variations thereof. Although many regional bases *did* evidently shelter their occupants against inclement weather and domestic hostility, the habitual use

of limitative labels like these risks perpetuating a reductive, partial picture of the overall functions fulfilled by these types of camps. By way of example, it should be underlined that various viking encampments across the Frankish realm would not have been solely occupied during the colder season. The camps established at Oissel (857) and Asselt (881), for instance, were observed to have been active in summer, whilst a shorter anchorage at Trier (882) would only have taken place around Easter – i.e. 5–8 April (Waitz 1883: 50; Kurze 1890: 119; 1891: 108). Likewise, these encampments would have represented much more than mere ramparts for vikings to bide their time behind, as they offered opportunities to regroup, recuperate, and perform repairs; to build up rations and other reserves; to conduct reconnaissance; and to engage in commerce and craft production. Some may have even operated as pluralistic and cooperative hubs, providing a setting for assorted viking groups to assemble, associate, exchange information, and orchestrate joint endeavours.

By and large, viking encampments established in Francia seem to have been carefully planned and highly organised spaces, whose continued operation would have revolved around the collective, coordinated efforts and expertise of their occupants. As some of these regional camps appear to have accommodated viking groups over the course of years or even decades, questions remain as to whether such sites were typically set up with the expectation of being temporary, or, if given the chance, would have been able to develop into more robust, durable enclaves of viking endeavour – as in the case of some of their Irish counterparts, for example. Pending more systematic archaeological studies of suspected encampment sites, however, considerations like these cannot, as of yet, be addressed to a satisfactory standard. Nevertheless, until such time, the combined corpus of available evidence already alludes to a highly intricate and dynamic landscape of viking encampment, which would have played a principal part in keeping the viking phenomenon afloat and afoot across the Frankish realm.

## Abbreviations

Scholarly editions listed. English translations listed where available.

AB	<i>Annales Bertiniani</i> (Annals of St Bertin): Waitz 1883; Nelson 1991.
AF	<i>Annales Fuldenses</i> (Annals of Fulda): Kurze 1891; Reuter 1992.
AFL	<i>Flodoardi annales</i> (Annals of Flodoard of Rheims): Pertz 1839; Fanning & Bachrach 2004.
AFont	<i>Annales Fontanellenses</i> (Annals of Fontenelle): Pertz 1829c; Cooijmans 2022.
ASC (A)	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Parker Manuscript: Bately 1986; Swanton 1996.
AV	<i>Annales Vedastini</i> (Annals of St. Vaast): Pertz 1829a.

- AX *Annales Xantenses* (Annals of Xanten): Pertz 1829b.
- BPU *Abbonis bella Parisiaca urbis* (Abbo's Wars of the *Urbs* of Paris): Adams & Rigg 2004; Dass 2007.
- CP *Capitula Pistensia* (Capitulary of Pîtres, 862): Boretius & Krause 1897a.
- GA *Asserii gesta Ælfredi* (Asser's Deeds of Alfred): Pauli 1881; Smyth 2002.
- GSR *Gesta sanctorum Rotonensium* (Deeds of the Saints of Redon): Brett 1989.
- Lupus *Lupi abbatis Ferrariensis epistolae* (Letters of Abbot Lupus of Ferrières): Dümmler 1925; Regenos 1966.
- LPW *Libellus proclamationis adversus Wenilonem* (Proclamation against Wenilo, 859): Boretius & Krause 1897c.
- MSB *Adrevaldi miracula sancti Benedicti* (Adrevald's Miracles of St. Benedict): Holder-Egger 1887a.
- MSBr *Miracula sancti Bertini* (Miracles of St. Bertin): Holder-Egger 1887b.
- RP *Reginonis Prumiensis chronicon* (Chronicle of Regino of Prüm): Kurze 1890; MacLean 2009.
- VF *Hildegari vita Faronis episcopi Meldensis* (Hildegard's Life of Bishop Faro of Meaux): Krusch & Levison 1910.
- MGH *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*  
 Capit. *Capitularia regum Francorum*  
 Epp. *Epistolae*  
 SS *Scriptores*  
 SRG *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi*  
 SRM *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*

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