

---

**Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte**

Herausgegeben vom Deutschen Historischen Institut Paris

(Institut historique allemand)

Band 26/1 (1999)

DOI: 10.11588/fr.1999.1.47294

---

Rechtshinweis

Bitte beachten Sie, dass das Digitalisat urheberrechtlich geschützt ist. Erlaubt ist aber das Lesen, das Ausdrucken des Textes, das Herunterladen, das Speichern der Daten auf einem eigenen Datenträger soweit die vorgenannten Handlungen ausschließlich zu privaten und nicht-kommerziellen Zwecken erfolgen. Eine darüber hinausgehende unerlaubte Verwendung, Reproduktion oder Weitergabe einzelner Inhalte oder Bilder können sowohl zivil- als auch strafrechtlich verfolgt werden.

SIMON COUPLAND

## THE FRANKISH TRIBUTE PAYMENTS TO THE VIKINGS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES<sup>1</sup>

»They ransom with tributes what they should defend with arms, and the kingdom of the Christians is laid waste«<sup>2</sup>. – »Ransom and tribute have now not only made men poor, but also stripped churches which once were rich«<sup>3</sup>. – »The kingdom, which is being ransomed, should be freed from this undeserved tribute«<sup>4</sup>.

Comments such as these from ninth-century Frankish writers show how unpopular the payment of tribute to the Viking invaders could be<sup>5</sup>. As Carolingian rulers handed over thousands of pounds of silver to Scandinavian warbands to persuade them to leave Frankish territory, angry voices were raised in protest, arguing that the kingdom was being impoverished and disgraced<sup>6</sup>. Modern historians have not only echoed these complaints, but added a second charge, namely that the payment of tribute was actually counterproductive, since it merely encouraged the same or other Vikings to return for more. So for example Albert d'Haenens declared: »The effectiveness of paying Danegeld as a means of ending the attacks was practically nil. Far from making the incursions cease, tribute payment included within itself a cumulative effect which could only add to the victims' confusion and the attackers' greed«<sup>7</sup>. And Donald Logan commented, »To consider tribute a defensive weapon is like considering a ransom payment to be a life insurance premium«<sup>8</sup>.

1 This article is largely based on my unpublished PhD dissertation, *Charles the Bald and the Defence of the West Frankish Kingdom Against the Viking Invasions, 840–877*, Cambridge University 1987.

2 *Quod defendere debuerant armis, tributis redimunt, ac christianorum pessum datur regnum*. Ermentarius, *De translationibus et miraculis sancti Filiberti*: René POUPARDIN (ed.), *Monuments de l'histoire des abbayes de Saint-Philibert*, Paris 1905, p. 62.

3 Letter of 877 from Hincmar to Louis the Stammerer: MIGNE PL 125, cols 987–988. The Latin text is quoted below at n. 66.

4 *Epistola synodi Carisiacensis ad Hludowicum regem Germaniae directa*, c. 6: MGH Capit. II, 1897, p. 430. The Latin is quoted at n. 29 below.

5 I will avoid the inappropriate and misleading term »Danegeld« to refer to the tribute payments, since the term is never found with this meaning in contemporary Frankish or Anglo-Saxon sources (a point acknowledged by Einar JORANSON, despite the title of his book, *The Danegeld in France*, Rock Island 1923, on p. 23). The term was used only in England from the eleventh century, and denoted taxes levied by the king, initially to pay the Danish army quartered in England, and later simply to fill the royal coffers. Such taxes were never levied on the Continent.

6 See also Bishop Hildegarius's lament in 845, quoted at n. 25 below.

7 L'efficacité du paiement du Danegeld fut pratiquement nulle en tant que procédé d'élimination des agressions. Bien loin de faire cesser les incursions, le tribut contenait en lui-même un effet cumulatif qui ne pouvait qu'ajouter au désarroi des victimes et à la cupidité des agresseurs. Albert d'HAENENS, *Les Invasions normandes, une catastrophe?*, Paris 1970, p. 43.

8 Donald LOGAN, *The Vikings in History*, London 1983, p. 121.



It is the aim of this article to consider the truth of these charges by attempting to assess the military, political and economic consequences of the tribute payments. To what extent were they strategically flawed, attracting further attacks? Were they exploited by the magnates, thus hastening the rise of feudalism, as has been claimed? And how far did they weaken the Frankish economy and undermine royal control of the coinage<sup>9</sup>? These are the kind of issues which need to be addressed.

In contrast to many other aspects of the Viking invasions, the tribute payments have been the subject of a number of previous treatments. By far the fullest and most influential work on the topic is Joranson's dissertation, *The Danegeld in France*, now over sixty years old, but still widely quoted<sup>10</sup>. As will become clear below, the present article will not only offer a significantly different version of the events surrounding the tributes (including one which Joranson overlooked), but also disagree radically with Joranson's conclusions regarding the implications of the payments. Apart from Joranson, two other scholars have devoted articles to specific aspects of the tributes. Lot examined the provisions for the collection of the tribute of 877 in the light of the demographic information in the Polyptych of St Germain-des-Prés, reaching the conclusion that both this tribute and that of 866 were raised from church estates alone<sup>11</sup>. Grierson discussed the proliferation of West Frankish mints after 864, attributing this trend to the need to coin extra silver to pay the tributes<sup>12</sup>. Both articles will be considered in detail at the appropriate points below<sup>13</sup>.

Two important general points deserve to be made before we go on to consider specific payments in more detail. The first is perhaps obvious but is all too rarely acknowledged, that is, that the payment of tribute to a superior military force was a long-established and widespread custom. On the one hand, victorious armies could demand tribute from a defeated people, either as a one-off payment or as an annual contribution<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, individual communities might pay a ransom to escape destruction by an enemy. In 837, for instance, the inhabitants of Dorestad and

9 See e.g. Marc BLOCH, *La Société féodale*, vol. 1, Paris 1939, p. 43–44, echoed by Paul ZUMTHOR, *Charles le Chauve*, Paris 1981, p. 151.

10 As n. 5.

11 Ferdinand LOT, *Les tributs aux normands et l'église de France au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes* 85 (1924) p. 58–78 (reprinted in *Id.*, *Recueil des travaux historiques*, vol. 3, Paris 1973, p. 699–719).

12 Philip GRIERSON, *The Gratia Dei Rex coinage of Charles the Bald*, in: Margaret GIBSON and Janet NELSON (eds), *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, second edition, Aldershot 1990, p. 52–64.

13 Many general works about the Viking invasions have also included significant discussions of the tribute payments, including LOGAN (as n. 8) p. 121–123; d'HAENENS (as n. 7) p. 40–43; Emile LESNE, *Histoire de la propriété ecclésiastique en France*, vol. II-2, 1926, p. 425–432; Janet NELSON, *Charles the Bald*, London 1992, p. 28–29, 152–154, 213, 250–251.

14 One-off payments: e.g. from the Dalmatians to Louis the German in 856; the Obodrites and Frisians to Godfrid of Denmark: *Annales Fuldenses* [AF] 856, ed. Friedrich KURZE, *MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol.*, 1891, p. 47; *Annales Regni Francorum* [ARF] 808, 810: ed. Friedrich KURZE, *MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol.*, 1895, p. 125, 131. Annual tributes: e.g. from the Beneventans and Bretons: ARF 814: p. 141; *Annales Bertiniani* [AB] 864: Félix GRAT, Jeanne VIELLIARD and Suzanne CLÉMENCET (eds), *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, Paris 1964, p. 113. On the significance of tribute taking in this period, see Timothy REUTER, *Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire*, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fifth Series*, vol. 35 (1985) p. 75–94; Niels LUND, *Allies of God or Man? The Viking Expansion in a European Perspective*, in: *Viator* 20 (1989) p. 54–56.



Walcheren paid a tribute to a Scandinavian fleet, in 841 the monks of St Wandrille ransomed their abbey from Vikings for six pounds of silver, and in 842 the buildings at Quentovic were spared for an unspecified sum<sup>15</sup>. This practice was not, of course, a new one: for example, Gregory of Tours described how Aix-en-Provence was ransomed for twenty-two pounds of silver circa 574, and that when King Gundobad of Burgundy was besieged by Clovis at Avignon, he paid the Frankish ruler a tribute to leave the region<sup>16</sup>. As for the ninth century, other peoples also paid tributes to Viking armies, including the Anglo-Saxons and the inhabitants of Apulia in Kur-land<sup>17</sup>. It is clear, then, that the ransoms paid to the Vikings by the Frankish rulers followed a well-established pattern.

Following on from this is a second important point, that Vikings were themselves willing to pay tribute if they saw no other way out of a tight spot. Thus a fleet besieged by other Vikings on the Loire in 853 gave their opponents *aurum et argentum plurimum*, while an army besieged on the Seine in 862 gave six thousand pounds of gold and silver to be allowed to leave<sup>18</sup>. In another instance, a group of raiders in Frisia surrendered all their booty as a ransom when they were trapped by a local army in 873<sup>19</sup>.

In order to keep the article to a reasonable length, we will concentrate on the tributes paid in one particular region, the West Frankish kingdom, over a limited period, the reign of Charles the Bald (840–877). One reason for this is that the tributes paid by Charles the Bald have by far the best contemporary documentation; another is that Charles's policy of tribute payment has been more widely discussed (and criticised) than any other ruler's.

### The Tribute Payments

The first recorded royal tribute paid to Scandinavian invaders was made in 845, when Charles the Bald's army fled before a Viking attack outside Paris<sup>20</sup>. As Prudentius related, it was when Charles saw that his men could not possibly overcome the enemy (*praevalere suos nullatenus posse perspiceret*) that he offered to pay a tribute, amounting to seven thousand pounds of silver<sup>21</sup>. This does not necessarily mean that the entire sum was paid in silver, for by the ninth century the silver pound had become an abstract currency unit, by which all other goods could be

15 AB (as n. 14) 837, 842: p. 21, 42; AF (as n. 14) 837: p. 28; Annales Fontanellenses [AFont] 841: Jean LAPORTE (ed.), *Les premières annales de Fontanelle*, in: *Mélanges de la Société de l'histoire de Normandie*, XV<sup>e</sup> série, Rouen and Paris 1951, p. 75.

16 *Historiarum libri decem* IV.44, II.32: MGH SS rer. Mer. I-1, 1937–1951, p. 179, p. 80.

17 See e.g. the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entries for 865 and 866: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Dorothy WHITELOCK, David DOUGLAS and Susie TUCKER, London 1961, p. 45; *Vita Anskarii* c. 30, ed. Georg WAITZ, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol., Hanover 1884, p. 62.

18 *Gesta Conwoionis abbatis Rotonensis* III.9: MGH SS XV-1, 1887, p. 458–459; AB (as n. 14) 862: p. 86 (discussed at greater length below).

19 AF (as n. 14) 873: p. 81.

20 *Translatio sancti Germani Parisiensis* c. 12, in: *Analecta Bollandiana* 2 (1883) p. 78–79. For a fuller discussion of events, see my dissertation, *Charles the Bald* (as n. 1) p. 20–24.

21 AB (as n. 14) 845: p. 49.



valued<sup>22</sup>. In this instance, other contemporary texts reported that part of the tribute was paid in gold<sup>23</sup>.

The accounts of the tribute given by the Fulda annalist, Audradus Modicus and particularly Paschasius Radbertus all suggest that a tax was levied to raise the sum, although we know nothing about the nature of the tax or the identity of those who were asked to contribute<sup>24</sup>. The strong criticism expressed by Hildegarius, Bishop of Meaux, who claimed that the payment of tribute had led to ruin and destruction, ignominy and shame (*ad ruinam et ad interitum, ... ad confusionem et ignominiam*) reveals that not all of the King's magnates were in favour of the measure<sup>25</sup>. It may also indicate that the church had to make a significant contribution to the sum, but nothing more can be stated with any certainty about this tribute<sup>26</sup>.

After this initial payment in 845, Charles the Bald resorted to two further tributes in the 850s, although neither was to ransom the entire kingdom, or to pay off an entire army. The first was in 853, when Charles paid a Scandinavian chieftain named Godfrid an unspecified sum to leave the Seine with his fleet<sup>27</sup>. The fact that the size of the payment was not recorded in any contemporary text, nor any reference made to contributions being solicited from other quarters, suggests that the sum was not particularly large. A comparable instance in which the figure was reported was the payment of sixty pounds of silver to a Viking leader named Sigfrid at the siege of Paris in 886<sup>28</sup>.

22 See, for instance, *Capitulum missorum in Theodonis villa datum secundum, generale c. 19*: MGH Capit. I, 1883, p. 125.

23 *Annales Xantenses [AX] 845*: ed. Bernhard von Simson, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol., 1909, p. 14; Hildegarius, *Vita Faronis c. 122*: MGH SS rer. Mer. V, 1910, p. 200.

24 *Tam ab ipso [rege] quam incolis terrae accepta pecunia copiosa*, AF (as n. 14) 845: p. 35; *Dederunt rex et populus Normannis pecuniam multam*, Audradus Modicus, *Liber revelationum*: Ludwig Traube, *O Roma nobilis: Philologische Untersuchungen aus dem Mittelalter*, in: *Abhandl. der Kgl. Bayer. Akad. der Wiss., I. Kl. XIX. Bd. 2. Abt.* (1891) p. 380; *[Piratae] census plurimum asportare*, Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Lamentationes Ieremiae*, book I, littera Lamed: Migne PL 120, col. 1220.

25 *Vita Faronis* (as n. 23) c. 122: p. 200.

26 It is true that three highly significant claims are made by Aimoin of St Germain in his *Miracula sancti Germani*, but his text is not to be regarded as reliable. These claims are: 1. that it was the Vikings who first suggested the payment of a ransom; 2. that the magnates were bribed to accept it; 3. that Ragnar claimed to have subjected the entire Frankish kingdom to tribute (*Miracula sancti Germani* I.10, I.12: *Acta Sanctorum Maii VI*, p. 799). These claims are unsupported by other sources, and are probably explained by the background to the work. Aimoin recorded in his preface that he was charged by the Abbot of St Germain-des-Prés to conflate two existing reports of the events of 845 (p. 797). One of these texts was evidently the *Translatio sancti Germani* (as n. 20, p. 69–98), in which the anonymous author suppressed all reference to the tribute payment, instead attributing the Vikings' withdrawal to the merits of his patron, St Germanus, who struck the invaders down with sickness. Evidently the second work used by Aimoin contained a report of the tribute, and the idiosyncratic features of his final text reflect the author's difficulties in reconciling the two sources. In the circumstances, it is apparent that these features cannot be trusted if they are unsubstantiated by the testimony of other contemporary accounts.

27 Simon Coupland, *From poachers to gamekeepers: Scandinavian Warlords and Carolingian Kings*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 7.1 (1998) p. 93–95.

28 Abbo, *Bella Parisiaca urbis*, book 2, ll. 40–41: Henri Waquet (ed.), *Abbon: Le siège de Paris par les Normands*, Paris 1942, p. 68.



Charles paid off a second Viking chieftain in 857 or 858, although once again the sum is not recorded. On this occasion the leader was named Bjørn (Latin *Berno*), who entered the Seine in August 856 and built a stronghold on an island at Oissel, from where his men raided the surrounding area. In 858 he commended himself to Charles the Bald before the King launched an assault on the island. Although there is no mention of a payment to Bjørn in any contemporary narrative source, a letter written by the West Frankish bishops in November 858 describes a tribute which was being raised to pay off the Vikings<sup>29</sup>, and Bjørn's subsequent act of commendation to the king surely required some such incentive<sup>30</sup>. Once again, we have no idea of the size of the sum involved, although the bishops evidently felt it was too much, presumably because the church was being asked to pay, at least in part.

The five thousand pounds of silver given to a Viking fleet led by Weland in 861, and the six thousand pounds paid by Robert the Strong the following year were not strictly speaking tributes, but payments for mercenary service. The annalists themselves made this distinction, generally referring to a tribute as a *tributum*, but to this kind of fee as a *locarium*<sup>31</sup>. Even so, because there are evident similarities in the methods employed to collect the payments, it seems appropriate to consider them here.

The arrival of a Viking fleet on the Somme in July 859 was obviously a major headache for Charles the Bald, who was already unable to offer effective resistance to the Scandinavian army still encamped at Oissel on the Seine. The King could not depend on his army, since a number of the magnates who had defected to Louis the German in 858 had not yet returned to allegiance<sup>32</sup>. Hiring one of the Viking armies to set it against the other not only neutralised both, but also enabled the King to concentrate on the urgent problem of setting his own house in order.

According to the Annals of St Bertin, the initial payment agreed with the Somme Vikings, three thousand pounds of silver, was to be raised by drawing on the church treasuries, all the *mansi* and all the merchants, even the poorest, such that all their goods and even their homes would be evaluated and taxed<sup>33</sup>. When it became apparent that the promised sum was going to take some time to raise, the fleet took hostages and crossed over to England, only reappearing in the spring of 861<sup>34</sup>. Now the army, whose leader is named as Weland, demanded the inflated price of five thousand pounds of silver, presumably because their numbers had grown in the interval. The King agreed to this figure, which was paid in both silver and gold, and also furnished the besieging army with a large supply of livestock and grain, so that they would not need to forage in the surrounding area<sup>35</sup>. Hincmar gave no details of the method employed to raise the extra amount, but the payment was clearly felt to

29 *Ut ... regnum quod contra eos redimitur, a tributo indebito eripiantur*. Epistola synodi Carisiacensis, c. 6: MGH Capit. II, p. 430 (as n. 4).

30 COUPLAND, Poachers (as n. 27) p. 103–104. This tribute, and the reference cited in the preceding footnote, passed unnoticed by Joranson.

31 Compare Vita Faronis (as n. 23) c. 122: p. 200; AB (as n. 14) 866, 877: p. 125, 213 (*tributum*), with AB 861, 862, 864: p. 86, 89, 105 (*locarium*).

32 AB (as n. 14) 861: p. 85.

33 AB (as n. 14) 860: p. 82–83.

34 AB (as n. 14) 861: p. 83.

35 AB (as n. 14) 861: p. 86; Vita Faronis (as n. 23) c. 126: p. 201.



be a heavy financial burden on the kingdom. In the Decree of Quierzy, published later in the year, the King voiced his concern for those who had been impoverished by the imposition of taxes to ransom the nation<sup>36</sup>.

In one sense the King's ploy was successful. Weland's army forced the defenders of Oissel to submit to them, and to promise to leave the kingdom. However, things then went badly wrong. The defeated Viking army decided to make up for the loss of six thousand pounds of their booty by attacking Meaux, and it was only their entrapment at Isles-lès-Villenoy which eventually compelled them to leave the Seine in the spring of 862<sup>37</sup>. The two Viking armies then divided into several contingents, the largest of which made for Brittany.

The arrival of this force posed a severe threat to Robert the Strong, the Frankish commander in Neustria, since the hostile Breton leader Salomon had already hired another group of Vikings as mercenaries. The prospect of such powerful reinforcements joining the Bretons therefore forced Robert to act, and he agreed to pay the Seine Vikings six thousand pounds of silver to oppose Salomon<sup>38</sup>. Nothing is known about the method of collection for this payment, nor even who contributed to it. Presumably it was levied only on the inhabitants of Neustria, as also happened in 877<sup>39</sup>.

In 866 Charles the Bald again had to resort to a kingdom-wide tribute to buy off a Viking army. As in 845, the cause was military humiliation: the troops whom the king had sent to contain a Scandinavian fleet on the Seine suffered a crushing defeat, and were evidently incapable of restricting the invaders to the river. The King therefore agreed to pay a ransom for the kingdom<sup>40</sup>. The size of the tribute was *quattuor milium libris argenti ad pensam eorum*, a description similar to that used in 877, when the sum was five thousand pounds of silver *ad pensam*<sup>41</sup>.

The significance of this qualification was that the sums were paid in pounds by weight, or »account pounds«, and not in pounds of 240 *denarii*, or »mint pounds«. In order for coinage to be the preferred means of exchange, coins had to have a face value higher than their inherent worth as pieces of silver. Furthermore, when silver bullion was turned into coin, it was in the king's interest to take a percentage of that silver for both the moneyer and the treasury. As a result, a mint pound of 240 *denarii* weighed less than the account pound of silver from which the coins were struck. A capitulary of Pippin III shows that in the 750s the difference between the two types of pound was ten per cent, since twenty-two *solidi*, or 264 *denarii*, were coined from a pound of raw silver<sup>42</sup>. Unfortunately, no comparable figures are available from the ninth century, but the practice was undoubtedly similar. The sum paid to the Vikings in 866 was therefore four thousand pounds of silver bullion,

36 This text will be discussed in some detail below.

37 See SIMON COUPLAND, *The Fortified Bridges of Charles the Bald*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991) p. 2–4.

38 AB (as n. 14) 862: p. 89.

39 See below, at n. 52.

40 All details concerning the collection of the tribute are taken from AB (as n. 14) 866: p. 125–126.

41 AB (as n. 14) 877: p. 213.

42 Pippini regis capitulare c. 5: MGH Capit. I, p. 32.



weighed out by the Scandinavians themselves, which would have weighed significantly more than four thousand pounds in *denarii*<sup>43</sup>.

More than one stage of taxation was necessary to raise the tribute, undoubtedly because the initial assessment failed to bring in the required amount. It seems that three groups were taxed in the first round alone: merchants, who were required to give a tenth of their property, priests, who contributed according to their means, and those Franks eligible for military service, who paid the *heribannum*. This was originally a fine levied on those who failed to perform their military service, but subsequently came to take on the related meaning of a payment in lieu of such service<sup>44</sup>. It was apparently imposed only on those whose possessions were worth at least one pound, and ranged from five *solidi* to a maximum of three pounds. Although the evidence is not explicit, the polyptychs suggest that those free Franks who were liable for conscription lived on demesne farms, in contrast with the poor, who occupied *mansi ingenuiles* or *mansi serviles*. Because the latter were not liable to pay the *heribannum*, in the initial taxation of 866 they were instructed to pay six *denarii* if they farmed *mansi ingenuiles*, or three if they lived on *mansi serviles*. Those who tenanted the even poorer *accolae* and *hospitia* were expected to give one *denarius* and half a *denarius* respectively<sup>45</sup>.

In a second round of taxation, a further one *denarius* was exacted from every holding, free and servile alike, and as the magnates collected these contributions from their *honores*, the full amount of the tribute was eventually raised<sup>46</sup>. At first sight this appears unfair: in the first stage all levels of society were taxed, including the wealthier free Franks, the peasants, the merchants, and the church, but in the

43 Compare a tribute payment of 882, which was evidently calculated in mint pounds, since the unit was explicitly described as *quam libram XX solidos computamus expletam* – AF (as n. 14) Regensburg continuation 882: p. 109. JORANSON wrongly deduced that the tribute of 866 was calculated according to the Danish weight system: (as n. 5) p. 54, n. 61; 71, n. 61; 95, n. 17. This would in fact have given a much smaller payment, since the Scandinavian weight system was based on units of c. 25g and c. 200g, as opposed to the Carolingian pound of c. 408g: SIMON COUPLAND, Carolingian Coinage and Scandinavian Silver, in: Nordisk Numismatisk Årsskrift 1985–1986, p. 17–19. Joranson's deduction was based on the equally misguided premise that the Vikings mistrusted the weight and fineness of Frankish coins, both of which had in fact been improved in 864, as will be shown below. Lot's belief that the Carolingian coins in circulation were of poor alloy and had to be purified was thus similarly incorrect: FERDINAND LOT, Une année du règne de Charles le Chauve: année 866, in: Le Moyen Age, Second Series, vol. 6 (1902) p. 399, n. 1 (= ID., Recueil, vol. 2, 1970, p. 421, n. 1).

44 See e.g. Capitulare Bononiense cc. 1–2: MGH Capit. I, p. 166; JAN NIERMEYER, Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus, Leiden 1976, p. 481.

45 On the meaning of these terms, see Charles du Fresne DU CANGE, Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis, revised Léopold FAVRE, 10 vols, Niort and London 1883–7, vol. 1, p. 47 (*accola*), and vol. 4, p. 247 (*hospitium*).

46 Previous commentators have believed that three further rounds of taxation were necessary: JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 87, 89; LOT, Tributs (as n. 11) p. 77 (= ID., Recueil, vol. 3, 1973, p. 718); Walther VOGEL, Die Normannen und das fränkische Reich bis zur Gründung der Normandie (799–911), Heidelberg 1906, p. 216. This belief was based on a misinterpretation of the Annals of St Bertin, however, taking the phrase *coniectum contulit* to signify that the magnates paid a tribute, rather than the more natural reading that the King collected it (as also in Janet NELSON's translation, The Annals of St-Bertin, Manchester 1991, p. 130).



second stage only the peasantry had to contribute. Were they not the least able to afford this extra charge?

What must be remembered is that the payment of *heribannum* must have been a significant financial burden on those who had to pay it. Although the tax was graded according to an individual's means, the state could still demand no less than half of all that a man owned in precious metals, bronze, armour, cloth, livestock, or any other goods<sup>47</sup>. By comparison, the maximum payment of seven *denarii* levied in 866 was a relatively small sum, as is evident from a comparison with the military tax which free tenants paid in the ninth century, the *hostilitium*. The amount varied from one *mansus* to the next, but the maximum was evidently four *solidi*, and the sum was almost always more than seven *denarii*. Thus at Reims the sums ranged from five to thirty *denarii* per *mansus*, or in one instance, a ewe and a lamb; in the Polyptych of Montier-en-Der the figure was usually two *solidi*, but in one case only ten *denarii*. Only two cash payments were recorded at St Bertin, both of four *solidi*, and the two payments in the fragmentary Polyptych of St Maur-des-Fossés were of two *solidi*, »for an ox«, and fourteen *denarii*. At St Germain-des-Prés and Chartres the figure was again four *solidi*<sup>48</sup>.

Nevertheless, the *hostilitium* was not normally paid by tenants of *mansi serviles*, and it is reasonable to assume that the tribute payment caused them financial hardship. Even so, in contemporary terms the total of four *denarii* which they had to provide was equivalent only to the price of a piglet, or less than that of a pair of geese<sup>49</sup>. Alternatively, the sum can be compared with the amounts which tenants could choose to pay instead of performing labour service. At Montier-en-Der, for instance, the provision of a cartload of wood could be redeemed for two *denarii*, or that of three hundred shingles for seven *denarii*. At St Maur-des-Fossés, some tenants paid five *denarii* in lieu of cartage, and the annual poll tax was four *denarii*, while at St Amand the unmarried, landless peasants paid one *solidus* in poll tax, the same amount that they gave to escape working in the vineyards<sup>50</sup>. It is therefore evident that the sums demanded in 866 were relatively modest and affordable by all but the poorest of men. This second round of taxation evidently raised the requisite sum, the Viking fleet was paid off and left the West Frankish kingdom.

47 Capitulare missorum in Theodonis villa datum secundum, generale, c. 19: MGH Capit. I, p. 125; the provisions were repeated by Charles the Bald in 864: Edictum Pistense c. 27: MGH Capit. II, p. 322.

48 Benjamin GUÉRARD (ed.), Polyptyque de l'abbaye de Saint-Remi de Reims, Paris 1853, XVII.22, XXII.9: p. 45, 82; p. xvii; Claus-Dieter DROSTE (ed.), Das Polyptichon von Montierender (Trierer Historische Forschungen, 14), Trier 1988, c. 16, 17, 18, 19, 34: p. 27–29, 36; François-Louis GANSHOF (ed.), Le polyptyque de l'abbaye de Saint-Bertin (844–859), in: Mémoires de l'Institut national de France, Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres 45 (1975) p. 83, 85; Auguste LONGNON (ed.), Polyptyque de l'abbaye de Saint-Germain des Prés, 2 vols, Paris 1886–95, vol. 1, p. 126, 127; Vetus Agano VII.4: Benjamin GUÉRARD (ed.), Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint-Père de Chartres, 2 vols, Paris 1840, vol. 1, p. 36.

49 Benjamin GUÉRARD (ed.), Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint-Bertin, Paris 1841, II.27: p. 102; Georges TESSIER (ed.), Recueil des actes de Charles II le Chauve roi de France, 3 vols, Paris 1943–55, no. 247: vol. 2, p. 62.

50 Montier-en-Der: DROSTE (as n. 48) c. 8, 18: p. 23, 28. St Maur: Benjamin GUÉRARD (ed.) Polyptyque de l'abbé Irminon, 2 vols, Paris 1845, vol. 2, p. 285, 286. St Amand: *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 926.



It was fully eleven years before Charles the Bald again found himself compelled to pay tribute to a Viking army, once again one which had penetrated the river Seine. This time the King's decision was almost certainly determined by the military defeat which his army had recently suffered at Andernach<sup>51</sup>. The tribute was set at five thousand pounds of silver by weight, and was raised in Francia and Burgundy alone. The inhabitants of Lothar's former kingdom were specifically exempted, as were the people of Neustria, who were raising a separate ransom for the Vikings on the Loire<sup>52</sup>. Unfortunately, nothing further is known about this Neustrian tribute, but more is recorded about the method of taxation for the payment made to the Vikings on the Seine than in the case of any other tribute. This is due to the survival of two redactions of the capitulary issued at Compiègne setting out the measures to be taken, a detailed report in the Annals of St Bertin and a brief reference in the Annals of St Vaast<sup>53</sup>. Nevertheless, this wealth of documentation creates its own problems, as each of the principal sources contains a slightly different description of the provisions for payment.

There is no disagreement regarding the contributions required from the *mansi*. Demesne farms were instructed to give one *solidus*, free holdings eight *denarii*, of which four were to come from the demesne rent and four from the tenant's own assets, and unfree holdings four *denarii*, on the same shared basis. The relationship between these provisions and those laid down in 866 are discussed in more detail below. The sources also concur that bishops and abbots were to collect from the priests in their districts as much as each cleric could afford, ranging from as little as four *denarii* to a maximum of five *solidi*.

The Annals of St Bertin listed these quotas without further qualification, implying that they were levied on all the inhabitants of Francia and Burgundy, an impression strengthened by the comment in the Annals of St Vaast, *omne regnum ad hoc tributum dat*. Previous commentators have regarded this as incompatible with redaction »B« of the capitulary, which supposedly demonstrated that only the royal benefices in these areas were taxed (*episcopi, abbates, comites ac vassi dominici ex suis honoribus*)<sup>54</sup>. The two texts can easily be reconciled, however. Although *honor* could signify a benefice, an equally common meaning was an office or its jurisdiction, so that, for example, a count's *honor* was his county, or an abbot's his abbacy<sup>55</sup>. In the present context, this would indicate that the inhabitants of Francia and Burgundy were required to pay their contribution to the »count, abbot, bishop or royal vassal« under whose jurisdiction they lived.

There is, however, a clear discrepancy between these two texts and the »A« redaction of the capitulary, which limited the provisions for taxation to abbacies alone.

51 The events are discussed in COUPLAND, Charles the Bald (as n. 1) p. 80; see also JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 93–94; VOGEL (as n. 46) p. 252.

52 AB (as n. 14) 877: p. 213–214.

53 Edictum Compendiense de tributo Nordmannico: MGH Capit. II, p. 353–354; AB (as n. 14) 877: p. 213–214; Annales Vedastini [AV] 877, ed. Bernhard von SIMSON, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol., 1909, p. 41.

54 VOGEL (as n. 46) p. 253; JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 99, n. 42; LOT, Tributs (as n. 11) p. 67 (= ID., Recueil, vol. 3, 1973, p. 708).

55 NIERMEYER (as n. 44) p. 495–496: honor 8–9.



Lot argued that this text represented the definitive version of the decree, because his calculations suggested that far more than five thousand pounds would have been raised if the provisions in the »B« text or the Annals of St Bertin had been implemented<sup>56</sup>. These calculations were extremely speculative, however, given the limited evidence concerning the number, size, and population of Carolingian estates. Lot also ignored the fact that Hincmar was present at the Quierzy assembly where the tribute was discussed<sup>57</sup>, and presumably therefore wrote a reliable account of events. Whatever the precise function of the »A« text, it is unlikely to have contained a complete account of the provisions for taxation, in which case the tribute was not entirely, or even almost entirely raised from church lands, as Lot asserted<sup>58</sup>.

There are also two significant differences between the »B« text and the Annals of St Bertin. First, only the »B« text stated that a tribute was collected from merchants. It is unclear from the rather ambiguous Latin, *de negotiatoribus autem vel qui in civitatibus commanent ... coniectus exigatur*, whether a distinction was being made between itinerant and urban traders or between merchants and town-dwellers, presumably artisans. Although previous commentators have favoured the latter conclusion<sup>59</sup>, the interpretation of the reference to *honores* offered here favours the former, since settled town-dwellers lived under the jurisdiction of a lay or ecclesiastical magnate, and were thus covered by the general provisions for taxation, whereas itinerant merchants did not. Comparison with the 866 tribute, in which merchants were likewise taxed separately, supports this view. Hincmar probably omitted to mention the merchants because his text was not intended to be an exhaustive record of events.

Second, Hincmar alone reported that church treasuries were required to contribute to the ransom, although here he is backed up by the St Vaast annalist, who lamented that the churches were despoiled. The absence of any reference to the taxation of church treasuries in the capitulary may indicate that it was a supplementary measure, taken when the initial collection failed to raise the required amount.

The levy on merchants in the »B« text of the Compiègne decree has frequently been linked with a reference to the taxation of traders in the Capitulary of Quierzy of 877, where it is laid down that Jews should pay one tenth and Christians one eleventh (*ut Iudaei dent decimam et negotiatores christiani undecimam*)<sup>60</sup>. It is true that the previous article in the capitulary explicitly related to the tribute, but the two references are separated by a clause concerning the public offices of Boso and others in Burgundy. Joranson's hypothesis, that the clause relating to the merchants' rates of taxation was a marginal gloss to article 30 which was later mistakenly inserted into article 31, is implausible<sup>61</sup>. The conclusion drawn by another commentator, that

56 LOT, *Tributs* (as n. 11) p. 67–68 (= ID., *Recueil*, vol. 3, 1973, p. 708–709).

57 Jean DEVISSE, *Hincmar, archevêque de Reims 845–882*, 3 vols, Geneva 1975–6, vol. 2, p. 818–820.

58 LOT, *Tributs* (as n. 11) p. 74 (= ID., *Recueil*, vol. 3, 1973, p. 715); repeated by D'HAENENS (as n. 7) p. 42.

59 E.g. VOGEL (as n. 46) p. 254; LOT, *Tributs* (as n. 11) p. 67 (= ID., *Recueil des travaux*, vol. 3, p. 708); Renée DOEHAERD, *Le Haut Moyen Age Occidental: économies et sociétés*, Paris 1971, p. 251.

60 *Capitulare Carisiacense c. 31*: MGH *Capit. II*, p. 361. See LOT, *Tributs* (as n. 11) p. 67, n. 2 (= ID., *Recueil*, vol. 3, p. 708, n. 2); VOGEL (as n. 46) p. 254; JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 105–106.

61 JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 235. If such a gloss were to be added anywhere, it would surely have been appended to the capitulary which described the tribute in detail, the Edict of Compiègne, rather



Boso had evidently refused to pay the tribute, is utterly unfounded, and indeed contradicted by Charles's continuing, albeit misplaced, trust in him<sup>62</sup>. Nevertheless, Janet Nelson may be correct to see article 30 as a reference to the collection of the tribute in Boso and Bernard's benefices in Burgundy, in which case it is likely that Jewish traders did have to pay more than their Christian counterparts towards this tribute<sup>63</sup>.

What other differences can be observed between the taxation procedures of 866 and 877? The lack of precise information unfortunately prevents a comparison of the demands on the clergy, but in the case of the *mansi*, a detailed comparison is possible.

In 866, the free holdings gave six *denarii* and the unfree three, then both were required to donate an extra *denarius*. In 877, the method of taxation was changed, presumably as a result of the lessons learned eleven years earlier. The actual cost to the tenant dropped to only four *denarii* for the *mansi ingenuiles* and two *denarii* for the *mansi serviles*, but in both instances the sum was doubled by taking a matching contribution from the demesne rent, thereby increasing the overall amount received by the state to eight and four *denarii* respectively. The very poor also benefited from the changes in taxation in 877. The *acolae* and *hospitia*, which had been taxed in 866, did not apparently have to pay anything. Finally, for those Franks who were liable for military service but of modest means, the easing of the fiscal burden in 877 must have been dramatic. Whereas in 866 they had been ordered to pay the *heribannum*, that is, between five and sixty *solidi*, their contribution in 877 was fixed at a mere one *solidus*.

This brief survey of the taxes levied on the common people makes plain that all of them found the burden of the tribute payment considerably less onerous in 877 than in 866. Yet one thousand pounds more was raised in 877 from a smaller area of the kingdom, and it is clear that at least one group must have paid significantly more under the new provisions<sup>64</sup>. In fact it was the magnates, both lay and ecclesiastical, who bore an increased financial burden. In addition to the contributions exacted from their demesne farms, they also lost four *denarii* in rent from every free tenure on their estates, and two *denarii* from every unfree holding. On the hypothesis that every *mansus* recorded in the polyptychs was required to pay towards this tribute, this would have entailed a loss of some eight pounds of silver for the abbey at Reims, twelve pounds at Montier-en-Der, or over twenty-five pounds at St Germain-des-Prés<sup>65</sup>. Even if such figures are not necessarily precise, they give some idea of the scale of the sums involved. It was evidently such demands on the Church's resources which lay behind Hincmar's bitter comment in 877, quoted at the beginning of this

than to the Capitulary of Quierzy with its thirteen-word summary (*Qualiter hoc perficiatur et ad effectum perveniat, quod Nortmannis dari debet de coniecto*): Capitulare Carisiacense c. 30: MGH Capit. II, p. 361.

62 ZUMTHOR (as n. 9) p. 265; on Charles's faith in Boso see AB (as n. 14) 877: p. 216.

63 NELSON (as n. 13) p. 251.

64 Janet NELSON concluded that Francia alone was taxed in 866, although there is no evidence for this in contemporary texts: (as n. 13) p. 213.

65 These estimates are based on the numbers of *mansi* given by LOT, *Tributs* (as n. 11) p. 70–71, reprinted in *Recueil des travaux*, vol. 3, p. 711–712.



article: *redemptio et tributum et non solum pauperes homines, sed et ecclesias quondam divites iam evacuatatas habent*<sup>66</sup>.

### The military consequences of the tribute payments

In the short term, the military consequences of the tribute payments were invariably positive<sup>67</sup>. Thus in 845 Ragnar's fleet left the Seine and returned to Denmark; the Scandinavians who took tribute in 866 put to sea immediately afterwards, and in 877 the Viking army on the Seine likewise left the kingdom once the tribute had been handed over<sup>68</sup>. In 853 and 858 Godfrid and Bjørn ceased their attacks on the West Frankish realm, the former to depart for the middle kingdom, the latter to commend himself to Charles the Bald, and in 862 Weland followed Bjørn's example. Neither Godfrid nor Bjørn was ever named again among the ranks of those attacking the kingdom, and Weland was still in the royal entourage when he was killed<sup>69</sup>. There is indeed no suggestion in contemporary sources that any of the armies which took tribute from Charles the Bald returned to the West Frankish realm. Ragnar of course died shortly after his return to Denmark in 845, along with a large number of his followers<sup>70</sup>. Although we do not know the subsequent movements of the fleets which took tribute in 866 and 877, the fact that the annalists were not slow to accuse the Vikings of breaking their promises in other circumstances supports the assumption that these Scandinavians kept their word<sup>71</sup>.

It is therefore apparent that the payment of tribute was a highly effective means of permanently removing a Viking fleet from the kingdom, and a study of the annals shows that it was actually far more effective than defeating them in battle. For example, the string of victories won over the Vikings who were based in Aquitaine in the 860s did little to restrain their activities, and certainly did not cause them to leave the area<sup>72</sup>. The lament uttered by the St Vaast annalist in 882 could have applied to many similar situations: *commissoque proelio superiores Franci extiterunt, ... sed nil eos [sc. Nortmannos] haec pugna perdomuit* (when battle commenced, the Franks emerged victorious, but this engagement did nothing to subdue the Northmen)<sup>73</sup>.

66 MIGNE PL 125, cols 987–988 (as n. 3).

67 As has been recognised even by authors who are otherwise critical of the practice: see e.g. LOGAN (as n. 8) p. 123.

68 *Translatio sancti Germani* c. 30: *Analecta Bollandiana* 2, p. 91; AX (as n. 23) 845: p. 14; AB (as n. 14) 866: p. 127; AV (as n. 53) 877: p. 42.

69 COUPLAND, *Poachers* (as n. 27) p. 107.

70 AX (as n. 23) 845: p. 14–15; *Translatio sancti Germani* c. 30–31: *Analecta Bollandiana* 2, p. 91–93; AB (as n. 14) 845: p. 50–51; see also Ferdinand LOT, *Le monastère inconnu pillé par les Normands en 845 (comment les rumeurs se propagaient au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, in: *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes* 70 (1909) p. 440–444 (= *Id.*, *Recueil*, vol. 2, p. 827–831).

71 For Vikings' broken promises, see e.g. AB (as n. 14) 860: p. 82; *Vita Faronis* (as n. 23) c. 126: p. 201; *Miracula sancti Bertini* c. 1: *MGH SS XV-1*, p. 509.

72 AB (as n. 14) 864, 865, 866, 868, 869: p. 89, 116, 122, 124, 125, 151, 166, considered in COUPLAND, *Charles the Bald* (as n. 1) p. 65–73. In fact, there is good reason to believe that there was only a lull in the Vikings' activities when the local inhabitants paid a tribute: AB 869, p. 166–167, discussed in COUPLAND, *ibid.*, p. 73.

73 AV (as n. 53) 882: p. 53.



Even so, it has been claimed that the long term effect of the payments was to attract more Viking attacks<sup>74</sup>. The most extreme exponent of this view has been Professor Lucien Musset, who has gone so far as to distinguish a second phase of Viking activity as »celle des Danegelds, où les Vikings utilisent la violence non plus tant pour saisir directement leur butin que pour intimider la population, la convaincre de se racheter au plus haut prix«<sup>75</sup>. It is impossible to provide categorical evidence to refute Musset's theory because of the lack of reliable information about the Vikings' motivation, but at least two factors count against it. First, it is clear that there were incomparably more Viking raids than there were tribute payments, particularly if we consider royal tributes (just three in thirty-seven years!), but even if we also take local ransoms into account. Second, there is the fact that no trustworthy ninth-century author ever reported the Vikings asking for tribute payments; the suggestion is rather that on each occasion the impetus came from the Frankish side<sup>76</sup>. By implication, this conclusion also undermines the claim that the tributes attracted further Viking raids. On the contrary, the contemporary evidence suggests that the strategy of paying tribute was essentially successful in military terms.

### The political consequences of the tribute payments

With regard to the political effects of the tributes, Joranson saw the payments as a vital catalyst in the development of feudalism. He argued that they were planned and collected by the magnates in order to line their own pockets and to weaken royal power. This claim was based on Joranson's interpretation of certain aspects of the tribute payments of 866 and 877, which consequently deserve careful examination. In particular, Joranson repeatedly cited the words of Hincmar quoted at the beginning of this article: *redemptio et tributum et non solum pauperes homines, sed et ecclesias quondam divites iam evacuatas habent*. He took this to mean that the tributes had impoverished only poor men and once wealthy churches, and therefore that the lay magnates had somehow been able to evade the financial burden of the tributes, and even (reading between the lines) to turn them to their own profit<sup>77</sup>. This is, however, reading far too much into what is in any case a dubious translation. If the text is interpreted as we have done, »ransom and tribute have now not only made men poor, but also stripped churches which once were rich«, Joranson's case collapses.

Joranson cited just one other text in support of his thesis, the *Constitutio Carisiacensis de moneta* of 861, although again the passage will not bear the significance which Joranson placed on it. What the decree states is simply that the *missi* should be lenient when fining individuals for rejecting good coinage, *propter paupertatem hominum, quia necesse fuit in istis temporibus coniectum de illis accipere ... in Nort-*

74 E.g. JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 205; BLOCH (as n. 9) p. 43, repeated by d'HAENENS (as n. 7) p. 43.

75 LUCIEN MUSSET, *Les Invasions: le second assaut contre l'Europe chrétienne (VII<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, second edition, Paris 1971, p. 135.

76 The only text to state that the initiative for a tribute payment came from the Vikings is the *Miracula sancti Germani* by Aimoin, whose unreliability was argued above.

77 JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 57; p. 82-83, and nn. 114, 118; p. 85, and n. 125; p. 102-103, and n. 66; p. 109-110, and n. 114; p. 111-112, and n. 8; p. 116, and n. 25.



*mannorum causa pro regni... salvamento* (on account of men's poverty, since it was necessary to levy a tax on them at this time in order to pay the Northmen a ransom for the kingdom). Nothing at all is said to indicate that the *missi* were using tribute payments to line their own pockets, as Joranson repeatedly argued<sup>78</sup>.

Joranson also believed that the Decree of Quierzy supported his theory in another way. Following Soetbeer, he interpreted the practice of rejecting good coinage as a result of the magnates' refusal to accept taxes in coins which had not been locally minted<sup>79</sup>. He believed that this meant that the populace would have been compelled to exchange all other coinage at the local mint, which was supposedly under the control of the magnate, thereby increasing the latter's profits from recoinage. The major flaw in this argument is that similar measures prohibiting the rejection of good coinage are known from the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, when it is clear that coinage circulated freely and rapidly throughout the Empire and the mints were definitely under firm royal control<sup>80</sup>. In fact, as the Quierzy decree implied, the rejection of good coinage was motivated not by comital oppression but by the fear of forgeries, that is, underweight or adulterated coins<sup>81</sup>. Nor is there any reason to suspect that it was anyone other than the King who would have profited from the practice of recoinage at this time. Joranson's claim that there is «considerable evidence» that the magnates profited from the collection of tribute payments is therefore utterly unsubstantiated<sup>82</sup>.

The refutation of this argument significantly weakens Joranson's further contention that it was the deliberate policy of the magnates to force Charles the Bald to pay tribute<sup>83</sup>. Joranson was unable to offer any documentary evidence to back this assertion, undoubtedly because none exists. It was, however, to a large extent dependent on his further claim that the nobility intentionally failed to fulfil their military obligations towards the King. It must be emphasised that Joranson did not merely argue that the military failure of the magnates compelled Charles to ransom the kingdom from the Vikings. Such a view is amply supported by contemporary accounts of the events of 845, 853 and 866. The substance of Joranson's argument was rather that the magnates' failure to offer effective resistance was deliberate. Yet with regard to the events of 845, Joranson could only repeat Aimoin's unreliable assertion that it was the magnates who persuaded the King to pay a tribute, and as for 853 and 866, contemporary sources recorded the army's cowardice and incompetence, but never implied any more sinister motives on the part of the nobility. To

78 MGH Capit. II, p. 301–302, referring to the fee paid to Weland: JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 83, n. 114; see also p. 57, n. 75; p. 85, n. 125; p. 102, n. 66; p. 116, n. 25.

79 Adolph SOETBEER, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Geld- und Münzwesens in Deutschland, in: Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte 6 (1866) p. 5, 8–9; cited by JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 54, and n. 62; p. 84, and n. 121; p. 215, n. 62.

80 Synodus Franconofurtensis c. 5, Capitulare missorum Aquisgranense alterum c. 7, Capitula legibus addenda c. 18: MGH Capit. I, p. 74, 152, 285; Capitulare missorum Wormatiense c. 8: MGH Capit. II, p. 15–16. On the circulation of coinage see for example SIMON COUPLAND, Money and Coinage under Louis the Pious, in: Francia 17/1 (1990) p. 32–4.

81 The text is discussed in SIMON COUPLAND, The early Coinage of Charles the Bald, 840–864, in: Numismatic Chronicle 151 (1991) p. 154–155.

82 JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 33.

83 JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 19–20, 33, 41–42, 46–47, 61, 111–112, 114–117, 206.



be sure, what possible reason could the latter have had for compelling the King to pay a tribute, when the fiscal burden would have fallen heavily on them?

In short, there is no evidence that the magnates deliberately failed to fulfil their military obligations, sought to induce the King to ransom the kingdom, or enriched themselves through the collection of tribute payments. On the contrary, the silence of the ninth-century sources on all such points strongly suggests that none of these claims is true. Joranson's argument that the tributes hastened the rise of feudalism is consequently without foundation.

The tributes did nevertheless have one important political consequence, in that they created a considerable degree of resentment on the part of the Church towards the lay aristocracy<sup>84</sup>. This was partly due to the high burden of taxation which fell on the churches and clergy, but also because the latter regarded the tributes as the fault of the lay magnates, who were failing in their duty to defend the kingdom, including the Church, from the onslaught of the heathen. So, for example, the monk Ermentarius lamented that *quod defendere debuerant armis, tributis redimunt, ac christianorum pessumdatur regnum* (they ransom with tributes what they should defend with arms, and the kingdom of the Christians is laid waste)<sup>85</sup>. In this churchman's view, as in that of many others, the Church was suffering as a direct result of the weakness and ineffectiveness of the lay nobility. The defence of the realm was their responsibility, and yet when they failed and a tribute was levied, it was the churches on whom the burden fell, both through taxes on their estates and through the exactions on church treasuries. When the annalist of St Vaast complained that »the churches are being plundered« (*spoliantur ecclesiae*), it was not a Viking attack to which he was referring, but the collection of tribute<sup>86</sup>.

The King naturally received a share of the blame. When Hincmar declared to Louis II that the ransoms and tributes which had ruined the churches were a result of a lack of resistance to the Vikings, he was evidently expressing his dissatisfaction with the policies of Charles the Bald<sup>87</sup>. Nevertheless, the annals, letters, and hagiographical texts written by contemporary clerics show that the authors recognised the frustration often experienced by the King because of the lack of military support from his magnates. This can only have increased the tension between the lay and ecclesiastical aristocracy. But it was particularly in the other Frankish kingdoms that the payment of tributes provided useful ammunition for Charles the Bald's critics. Annalists in the Lotharingian monastery of Xanten and the East Frankish abbey of Fulda pilloried the King's cowardice and weakness, claiming that he preferred to pay tribute than to fight<sup>88</sup>. Such charges were, however, unfounded and unfair. The claims were false, because the King was clearly not afraid to give battle if circumstances permitted<sup>89</sup>. In 845, 866 and 877 he was compelled to pay tribute

84 This was touched upon, but not elaborated, by JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 218, esp. n. 84.

85 As n. 2.

86 AV (as n. 53) 877, 884: p. 41, 55.

87 As nn. 3, 66.

88 AX (as n. 23) 869: p. 27; AF (as n. 14) 875: p. 85.

89 As when the king won notable victories over Viking forces on the Dordogne in 848 and near Chartres in 856: AFont (as n. 15) 848, 855 [sic]: p. 81, 91; discussed in COUPLAND, Charles the Bald (as n. 1) p. 138.



because his troops were unwilling or unable to offer effective resistance. The assertions were also unfair, because it is clear that other contemporary rulers who faced the same menace resorted to tribute in precisely the same way, including not only Alfred in England<sup>90</sup>, but also Lothar II in the middle kingdom, who in 864 engaged the Viking leader Rodulf by imposing a tax of exactly the same type as those levied by Charles the Bald<sup>91</sup>. The principal reason why the West Frankish king paid more tributes than his Carolingian counterparts was that his kingdom suffered far more Viking attacks than either of the other two realms. This was partly because of its longer coastline, partly as a result of its political divisions, and also partly due to its greater wealth, particularly in comparison with Frisia, the Danes' alternative point of entry into the Empire<sup>92</sup>.

### The economic consequences of the tribute payments

The most obvious and important consequences of the tribute payments would naturally have been in the economic sphere. The impact of the tribute payments on the West Frankish coinage was considered by Joranson, who essentially reproduced the views of Soetbeer, and has more recently been discussed by Grierson. Soetbeer and, following him, Joranson, believed that two particular consequences could be discerned. Firstly, the counts are supposed to have undermined the royal currency and hastened the rise of feudal coinage<sup>93</sup> by refusing to accept in taxation coins which had not been locally minted. This theory has already been refuted; it was based on a misinterpretation of the capitularies referring to the rejection of good coinage, and is also contradicted by the widespread circulation of coinage within, and often between, the various *regna* which made up the kingdom of Charles the Bald<sup>94</sup>.

Secondly, the Vikings' rejection of underweight or impure coins as tribute is said to have led to an improvement in the standard of the coinage in the second half of the ninth century<sup>95</sup>. The second part of this claim is true, but the link with the Vikings is not. Charles the Bald's coinage prior to 864 apparently had a lower silver content than the currency issued by Louis the Pious, and certain mints (though not all) were striking underweight coinage<sup>96</sup>. However, these shortcomings were remedied after 864 in the new *Gratia Dei rex* coinage type introduced by the Edict of Pîtres. This improvement consequently came into effect *before* the large tribute payments of 866 and 877, and it appears to reflect Charles the Bald's resoluteness and the strength of his economy rather than any rejection of coinage by the Vikings.

Even though the tributes thus appear to have had no discernible influence on the standard of Charles the Bald's coinage, it has been suggested by Philip Grierson that

90 Simon KEYNES and Michael LAPIDGE, *Alfred the Great*, Harmondsworth 1983, p. 244.

91 AB (as n. 14) 864: p. 105. COUPLAND, *Poachers* (as n. 27) p. 101–102.

92 Dirk Peter BLOK, *De Wikingen in Friesland*, in: *Naamkunde* 10 (1978) p. 32. Dorestad was an exceptional case, in terms both of its prosperity and of the attention it received from the Vikings.

93 That is, coinage minted by counts, abbots, or bishops independently of royal authority and control.

94 See Michael METCALF, *A sketch of the currency in the time of Charles the Bald*, in: GIBSON and NELSON (as n. 12) p. 65–97.

95 SOETBEER (as n. 79) p. 7–9, 49; JORANSON (as n. 5) p. 214–216.

96 COUPLAND, *Early Coinage* (as n. 81) p. 152–153.



the payments had a profound effect on the number of mints in the kingdom. Before the Edict of Pîtres introduced the *Gratia Dei rex* type in 864, only fourteen mints are known to have been active in Charles's kingdom, and although the Edict itself prescribed only ten mints which would strike the new coinage, in the event, at least eighty-five mints are known to have struck the coinage before the end of Charles's reign, and possibly as many as one hundred<sup>97</sup>. Grierson explained this massive proliferation of mints by the need to change plate into coin to pay tribute to the Vikings, particularly in 866<sup>98</sup>. This explanation cannot be wholly correct, however, because at least twenty of these mints were located in Lotharingia, and were therefore only established after Charles the Bald's acquisition of the region in 869. This expansion thus cannot have been influenced by the tribute payment of 866, nor, indeed, that of 877, when the middle kingdom was explicitly exempted from taxation. However the proliferation of mints is to be explained, the payment of tribute cannot have been the determining factor.

A second specific area of the economy which deserves consideration is the wealth of the Church, which was said to have been hit particularly hard by the tribute payments: attention has already been drawn to the claim by Hincmar that the payment of tribute and ransom emptied church treasuries which once had been full. The best documented case of the sums paid by one particular church is that of the abbey of St Denis, described by a contemporary as »pre-eminent above the other churches of the lands by the strength of its esteem«<sup>99</sup>. In 841, the abbey paid a Viking army twenty-six pounds of silver to redeem captives who had been taken prisoner on abbatial estates near the mouth of the Seine<sup>100</sup>. During a raid in 857, the monastery itself was ransomed for a large sum of silver (*multa solidorum summa*) to avoid being burned<sup>101</sup>. In the following year, the Vikings achieved one of their most notable coups when they captured Abbot Louis, who was also the royal chancellor. The ransom demanded – 688 pounds of gold and 3250 pounds of silver – was so large that contributions were necessary from the King, the lay and ecclesiastical magnates, and even *ipsa aurea Roma*<sup>102</sup>. Even though many other institutions contributed to Louis's ransom, the resources of St Denis must have been severely strained by these

97 Edictum Pistense c. 12: MGH Capit. II, p. 315. The fifteen uncertain mints are known to have struck the coinage in the name of a king Charles, but it is unclear whether this was Charles the Bald or Charles the Simple, due to a lack of hoard evidence.

98 GRIERSON (as n. 12) p. 60, 63–64.

99 *Quae caput extollit super ceteras ecclesias terrarum potentia dignitatis*. Vita Faronis (as n. 23) c. 124: p. 200–201.

100 AFont (as n. 15) 841: p. 75.

101 AB (as n. 14) 857: p. 75.

102 Vita Faronis (as n. 23) c. 124: p. 201; AB (as n. 14) 858: p. 77. The figure was preserved in a marginal note on a ninth-century copy of the *Regula canonicorum*: *Datum est in redemptione Hludowvici abbatis a parte sancti Dionysii de auro libr. CCCCCCLXXXVIII de argento lib. III milia CCL excepto vassall. et illorum femin. et parentes illorum* (Georg Heinrich PERTZ, *Handschriftenverzeichnisse II: Handschriften in Reims*, in: *Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 8 [1843] p. 394). The most plausible interpretation of this passage was advanced by JORANSON, who proposed that the Vikings also captured other dependants of the abbey at the same time as Abbot Louis. As a result, a ransom had to be paid for them in addition to the huge sum demanded for the abbot: (as n. 5) p. 186, n. 12.



repeated payments. In addition, the abbey was undoubtedly required to give towards the general payments of 866 and 877, when all churches were taxed.

Of course, St Denis was to a certain extent an exceptional case, yet comments in contemporary sources reveal that ransom payments affected many churches, and that St Denis was atypical only in respect of the magnitude of the sums involved. For instance, the church at Reims contributed to the ransom of Louis's brother Gauzlin in 858, although the amount paid was not recorded. At the same church, a vessel which had belonged to St Remigius was melted down for the ransom of prisoners, and a golden, jewel-encrusted chalice donated by Hincmar was given to the Vikings *pro redemptione ac salute patriae*, presumably for a general tribute payment<sup>103</sup>. In another case, the monastery of Redon gave a chalice and paten worth sixty-seven *solidi* in gold to ransom Count Pascweten of Vannes from the Northmen<sup>104</sup>. Such episodes must have been commonplace, and the recorded examples undoubtedly represent no more than a fraction of the ransoms paid during Charles the Bald's reign. When the tribute payments are also taken into account, it is easy to understand how Hincmar could have been led to lament that rich churches had been ruined.

Nevertheless, the immense wealth of the Church in the ninth century should not be underestimated. Several inventories of ecclesiastical treasuries have survived, including those drawn up at St Riquier in 831, at St Bavo in Ghent after a Viking attack in 851, at the Lotharingian abbey of St Truiden in 870, and at the small monastery of Steneland near Furnes in 867<sup>105</sup>. Such inventories reveal how much gold and silver was owned, even by small foundations, in the form of altar plate, reliquaries, ornament, and even bullion. To take the case of St Denis again, a charter of 862 reveals that every year just five of the abbey's *villae* paid twenty-five pounds of silver *pro lignario* (wood) and another ten pounds *pro pice* (pitch), and an extensive list of gold and silver objects removed from the abbey's treasury by King Odo later in the century reveals that its reserves of precious metals were still substantial<sup>106</sup>. In conclusion, although the payment of tribute and ransom must to some extent have depleted the churches' resources, it is clear that they were by no means reduced to penury.

In contrast with these references to the payment of ransoms and tributes by the Church, very little is recorded about similar payments by the King or the lay magnates. Both groups contributed to Abbot Louis's ransom in 858, which Aimoin claimed was part of a deliberate strategy by the Vikings to capture Frankish nobles for ransom<sup>107</sup>. However, it is hard to see how this Frankish cleric could have known

103 Flodoard, *Historia Remensis ecclesiae* III.24, I.10, III.5: MGH SS XIII, 1881, p. 536, 421, 479.

104 Aurélien DE COURSON (ed.), *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint-Sauveur de Redon*, Paris 1863, no. 26: p. 21–22.

105 Ferdinand LOT (ed.), *Chronique de l'abbaye de Saint-Riquier*, Paris 1894, p. 86–97; Bernard BISCHOFF, *Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse*, vol. 1, Munich 1967, p. 36–38, 87–88; GUÉRARD, *Cartulaire de Saint-Bertin* (as n. 49) p. 164.

106 TESSIER (as n. 49) no. 247: vol. 2, p. 62; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 7230, fol. 117v; Percy SCHRAMM and Florentine MÜTHERICH, *Denkmale der deutschen Könige und Kaiser*, Munich 1962, p. 95.

107 *Miracula sancti Germani* II.10: *Acta Sanctorum Maii* VI, p. 803.



the invaders' intentions; what is more, from the period under discussion only one instance of the capture and redemption of a lay magnate is known, that of Pascweten referred to above.

It is not reported how much, if anything, the royal treasury gave towards the tributes of 845, 866, or 877. As for the magnates, they were required to pay the *heriban-num* in 866, and eleven years later furnished what was effectively a tax on every farm on their estates, though nothing is known about the amounts levied in 845. The dearth of evidence thus makes it difficult, if not impossible, to assess the impact of these payments on the wealth of the King or the magnates. Nevertheless, the fact that Charles was able to take a great quantity of gold and silver to Rome in 877 indicates that the kingdom was far from bankrupt<sup>108</sup>, an impression which is reinforced by the raising of the standard of the coinage in 864. In the case of the magnates, it is impossible to reach even such limited conclusions, because of the complete lack of information.

Finally, it is self-evident that the common people became poorer as a result of the taxation imposed upon them for the tribute payments. Yet it has already been demonstrated that the burden of such payments was by no means as great as has sometimes been believed. The sums exacted in 866 and 877 were not particularly large in contemporary terms, and the majority of peasants should have been able to afford them without notable financial hardship, particularly when the burden of payment was shifted upwards in 877.

## Conclusion

It is clear from the contemporary sources quoted above that Charles the Bald only ever had recourse to the payment of tribute when he was unable to expel the Vikings by military means. Yet it is not difficult to understand why the King was willing to ransom the kingdom when he did, and why he resorted to a tribute payment so quickly when a Viking fleet entered the Seine in 876. The information assembled here makes plain that the West Frankish economy could afford such sums, since there was neither any discernible debasement of the currency (quite the contrary), nor lasting hardship among any section of the populace. Moreover, on every occasion when the King paid tribute, the Northmen kept their word and left the kingdom soon afterwards, never to return. Those historians who have written about the tributes in largely negative terms have undoubtedly been coloured by the criticism of the clerical writers of the day, who as we have seen vilified the payment of tribute as a disgrace and described its collection as the spoliation of the churches. Such attitudes were based on the belief that it was the duty of the army to expel the invaders and not the responsibility of the Church to buy them off. Yet as the present study has shown, the measure was well established by precedent and remarkably effective, and deserves to be seen in a more positive light than has sometimes been the case.

108 AB (as n. 14) 877: p. 214; see also AB 870: p. 177-178.