

The Ninth Century - Secular

The East

Nicephorus, 802-811

- Irene was deposed by a group of officials, and Nicephorus became emperor - in 803 he made peace with Charlemagne without really recognizing him as co-emperor

Staurakios, 811

- son of Nicephorus, reigned only a few months

Michael I, 811-813

- brother-in-law to Staurakios, incompetent

Leo V, 813-820

- was put on the throne by the army - the army believed that the monks were trying to take control of the government - Leo wasn't really concerned about religion, but in 815, the icons were banned again

Michael II, 820-829

- succeeded to the throne when Leo was murdered by conspirators - during his reign, Crete (826) and Cyprus (829) were lost to Muslim pirates

Theophilus, 829-842

- best known for his violent persecution of those in favor of icons

Michael III, 842-867

- at first his mother Theodora was regent, then later her brother Bardas was the power behind the throne - 843, the Iconoclastic controversy ended and icons were allowed again
- 856, Russians (Varangians) appear in history for the first time, appearing in Constantinople - beginning in 863, two missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, are sent to the Slavs to convert them - they also invent a new alphabet (the Cyrillic alphabet) in order to write down the Slav languages
- in 866, Michael had his favorite, Basil, kill his uncle so that he can gain full power

Basil, 867-886

- in 867, Basil kills Michael and takes the throne for himself
- his reign considered to be the most glorious period of Byzantine history - he rebuilt the army and navy and began taking the offensive against Islam

France

Charlemagne, 771-814

- Charlemagne came to Rome in 800, because the Pope had been accused of all sorts of crimes and corruption - rather than putting the Pope on trial, Charlemagne allowed him to take an oath that he was innocent of all these things
- because of that support, when Charlemagne came to church on Christmas, 800, Pope Leo placed a crown on his head, proclaiming him a Roman emperor - Charlemagne wasn't happy that it looked like the Pope was giving the crown to him, and the Eastern empire wasn't happy about it

Louis the Pious, 814-840

- a very religious man, but not a very good king or soldier - even before he died, he divided the kingdom up amongst his sons, and when he did die, they began fighting with each other

Lothair I, 840-855

- officially emperor, but spent much of his time fighting with his brothers, Charles the Bald and Louis the German
- in 842, the followers of Charles and Louis gathered and forced the two to support each other - this Treaty of Verdun is important because it's considered the first example of modern French and German (i.e., the languages that these two groups spoke were recognizably different and recognizably related to the French and German we hear today)
- Charles the Bald controlled what is today called France, Louis what is today most of Germany, and Lothair the land in between (Holland, the Netherlands, Switzerland) - historians believe that the actions taken during this century led directly to the modern countries of today

Louis II, 855-875

Charles the Bald, 875-877

- from 887-881, there was anarchy in what had been Charlemagne's empire (caused by weak or nonexistent descendants and the Viking raids)

885 - Count Odo of Paris wins great fame by defending Paris against a massive Viking raid

Spain

Al-Hakan I, 796-822

Abd-ar-Rahman II, 822-852

- the Vikings begin raiding in Spain during his reign

Muhammad I, 852-886

Al-Mundhir, 886-888

Abdallah, 888-912

- in 899, Spanish Christians discovered the bones of St. James - James becomes the patron saint of Spain, and a rallying point, the shrine of Santiago (St. James) de Compostello, is built

England

Egbert, 802-839

- had served under Charlemagne, becomes high king of England - on his death the small English kingdoms break apart again

865-875, the first great wave of Viking raids hits England

Alfred the Great, 871-899

- another high king in England - bought peace from the raiders for a time and built up a navy - though almost overwhelmed by a great invasion in 878, he finally defeats the Danes - the country is divided between Alfred and the Danes - the Danes get the north and east of England, Alfred gets the south and west
- in 878-900, the Danes turn their attention north and begin uniting Scotland - Alfred concentrates on defense, and fortifies and garrisons London - he also reorganized the army, built little forts all over, reorganized the *fyrd* (militia, national guard), and forced those who were wealthy enough to afford a horse to become *thegns* (knights, mounted infantry) which formed the core of Alfred's army

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Annals of Xanten, 845-853

The Mid-Ninth century is often taken as the low point of Western European civilization. The Annals of the Abbey of Xanten, (near the mouth of the River Rhine), express the situation.

845 Twice in the canton of Worms there was an earthquake; the first in the night following Palm Sunday, the second in the holy night of Christ's resurrection. In the same year the heathen broke in upon the Christians at many points, but more than twelve thousand of them were killed by the Frisians. Another party of invaders devastated Gaul; of these more than six hundred men perished. Yet owing to his indolence, Charles [the Bald, the ruler of France] agreed to give them many thousands of pounds of gold and silver if they would leave Gaul, and this they did. Nevertheless the cloisters of the most of the saints were destroyed, and many of the Christians were lead away captive.

846 According to their custom the Northmen plundered eastern and western Frisia and burned down the town of Dordrecht, with two other villages, before the eyes of Lothair [The Emperor], who was then in the castle of Nimwegen, but could not punish the crime. The Northmen, with their boats filled with immense booty, including both men and goods, returned to their own country.

At this same time, as no one can mention or hear without great sadness, the mother of all the churches, the basilica of the apostle Peter, was taken and plundered by the Moors, or Saracens, who had already occupied the region of Beneventum. The Saracens, moreover, slaughtered all the Christians whom they found outside the walls of Rome, either within or without this church. They also carried men and women away prisoners. They tore down, among many others, the altar of the blessed Peter, and their crimes from day to day bring sorrow to Christians. Pope Sergius departed life this year.

847 After the death of Sergius no mention of the apostolic see has come in any way to our ears.

848 On the fourth of February, towards evening, it lightened and there was thunder heard. The heathen, as was their custom, inflicted injury on the Christians.

849 While King Louis [Ludwig, the King of Germany] was ill his army of Bavaria took its way against the Bohemians. Many of these were killed and the remainder withdrew, much humiliated, into their own country. The heathen from the North wrought havoc in Christendom as usual and grew greater in strength, but it is revolting to say more of this matter.

850 On January 1st of that season, in the octave of the Lord, towards evening, a great deal of thunder was heard and a mighty flash of lightening seen; and an overflow of water afflicted the human race during this winter. In the following summer an all to great heat of the sun burned the earth. Leo, pope of the apostolic see, an extraordinary man, built a fortification round the church of St. Peter. The Moors, however, devastated here and there the coast towns in Italy&

852 The steel of the heathen glistened; excessive heat; a famine followed. There was not enough fodder for the animals& ..

853 A great famine in Saxony so that many were forced to live on horse meat.

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(Volsunga Saga, chapters 7-8)

In a passage that has become famous, the *Ynglingasaga* sets the comrades of Odin before us: 'They went without shields, and were mad as dogs or wolves, and bit on their shields, and were as strong as bears or bulls; men they slew, and neither fire nor steel would deal with them; and this is what is called the fury of the berserker.' This mythological picture has been rightly identified as a description of real men's societies-the famous *Mannerbunde* of the ancient Germanic civilization. The berserkers were, literally, the 'warriors in shirts (*serkr*) of bear.' This is as much as to say that they were magically identified with the bear. In addition they could sometimes change themselves into wolves and bears. A man became a berserker as the result of an initiation that included specifically martial ordeals. So, for example, Tacitus tells us that among the Chatti the candidate cut neither his hair nor his beard until he had killed an enemy. Among the Taifali, the youth had to bring down a boar or a wolf, among the Heruli, he had to fight unarmed. Through these ordeals, the candidate took to himself a wild-animal mode of being; he became a dreaded warrior in the measure in which he behaved like a beast of prey. He metamorphosed himself into a superman because he succeeded in assimilating the magico-religious force proper to the carnivore.

The *Volsunga Saga* has preserved the memory of certain ordeals typical of the initiations of berserkers. By treachery, King Siggeir obtains possession of his nine brothers-in-law, the Volsungs. Chained to a beam, they are all eaten by a she-wolf, except Sigmund, Who is saved by a ruse of his sister Signy. Hidden in a hut in the depths of the forest, where Signy brings him food, he awaits the hour of revenge. When her first two sons have reached the age of ten, Signy sends them to Sigmund to be tested. Sigmund finds that they are cowards, and by his advice Signy kills them. As the result of her incestuous relations with her brother, Signy has a third son, Sinfjotli. When he is nearly ten, his mother submits him to a first ordeal: she sews his shirt to his arms through the skin. Siggeir's sons, submitted to the same ordeal, had howled with pain, but Sinfjotli remains imperturbable. His mother then pulls off his shirt, tearing away the skin, and asks him if he feels anything. The boy answers that a Volsung is not troubled by such a trifle. His mother then sends him to Sigmund, who submits him to the same ordeal that Siggeir's two sons had failed to sustain: he orders him to make bread from a sack of flour in which there is a snake. When Sigmund comes home that night, he finds the bread baked and asks Sinfjotli if he did not find anything in the flour. The boy answers that he remembers

having seen something, but he paid no attention to it and kneaded everything up together. After this proof of courage Sigmund takes the boy into the forest with him. One day they find two wolfskins hanging from the wall of a hut. The two sons of a king had been transformed into wolves and could only come out of the skins every tenth day. Sigmund and Sinfjotli put on the skins, but cannot get them off. They howl like wolves and understand the wolves' language. They then separate, agreeing that they will not call on each other for help unless they have to deal with more than seven men. One day Sinfjotli is summoned to help and kills all the men who had attacked Sigmund. Another time, Sinfjotli himself is attacked by eleven men, and kills them without summoning Sigmund to help him. Then Sigmund rushes at him and bites him in the throat, but not long afterward finds a way to cure the wound. Finally they return to their cabin to await the moment when they can put off their wolfskins. When the time comes, they throw the skins into the fire. With this episode, Sinfjotli's initiation is completed, and he can avenge the slaying of the Volsungs.

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**From *Abbo's Wars of Count Odo with the Northmen in the Reign of Charles the Fat*
[Text in Bouquet, *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de las France*, Vol. VIII, pp. 4-26].**

885. The Northmen came to Paris with 700 sailing ships, not counting those of smaller size which are commonly called barques. At one stretch the Seine was lined with the vessels for more than two leagues, so that one might ask in astonishment in what cavern the river had been swallowed up, since it was not to be seen. The second day after the fleet of the Northmen arrived under the walls of the city, Siegfried, who was then king only in name but who was in command of the expedition, came to the dwelling of the illustrious bishop. He bowed his head and said: "Gauzelin, have compassion on yourself and on your flock. We beseech you to listen to us, in order that you may escape death. Allow us only the freedom of the city. We will do no harm and we will see to it that whatever belongs either to you or to Odo shall be strictly respected." Count Odo, who later became king, was then the defender of the city. The bishop replied to Siegfried, "Paris has been entrusted to us by the Emperor Charles, who, after God, king and lord of the powerful, rules over almost all the world. He has put it in our care, not at all that the kingdom may be ruined by our misconduct, but that he may keep it and be assured of its peace. If, like us, you had been given the duty of defending these walls, and if you should have done that which you ask us to do, what treatment do you think you would deserve?" Siegfried replied. "I should deserve that my head be cut off and thrown to the dogs. Nevertheless, if you do not listen to my demand, on the morrow our war machines will destroy you with poisoned arrows. You will be the prey of famine and of pestilence and these evils will renew themselves perpetually every year." So saying, he departed and gathered together his comrades.

In the morning the Northmen, boarding their ships, approached the tower and attacked it [the tower blocked access to the city by the so-called "Great Bridge," which connected the right bank of the Seine with the island on which the city was built. The tower stood on the present site of the Châtelet]. They shook it with their engines and stormed it with arrows. The city resounded with clamor, the people were aroused, the bridges trembled. All came together to defend the tower. There Odo, his brother Robert, and the Count Ragenar distinguished themselves for bravery; likewise the courageous Abbot Ebolus, the nephew of the bishop. A keen arrow wounded the prelate, while at his side the young warrior Frederick was struck by a sword. Frederick died, but the old man, thanks to God, survived. There perished many Franks; after receiving wounds they were lavish of life. At last the enemy withdrew, carrying off their dead. The evening came. The tower had been sorely tried, but its foundations were still solid, as were also the narrow bays which surmounted them. The people spent the night repairing it with boards. By the next day, on the old citadel had been erected a new tower of wood, a half higher than the former one. At sunrise the Danes caught their first glimpse of it. Once more the latter engaged with the Christians in violent combat. On every side arrows sped and blood flowed. With the arrows mingled the stones hurled by slings and war-machines; the air was filled with them. The tower which had been built during the night groaned under the strokes of the darts, the city shook with the struggle, the people ran hither and thither, the bells jangled. The warriors rushed together to defend the tottering tower and to repel the fierce assault. Among these warriors two, a count and an abbot [Ebolus], surpassed all the rest in courage. The former was the redoubtable Odo who never experienced defeat and who continually revived the spirits of the worn-out defenders. He ran

along the ramparts and hurled back the enemy. On those who were secreting themselves so as to undermine the tower he poured oil, wax, and pitch, which, being mixed and heated, burned the Danes and tore off their scalps. Some of them died; others threw themselves into the river to escape the awful substance. . . .

Meanwhile Paris was suffering not only from the sword outside but also from a pestilence within which brought death to many noble men. Within the walls there was not ground in which to bury the dead. . . . Odo, the future king, was sent to Charles, emperor of the Franks, to implore help for the stricken city. One day Odo suddenly appeared in splendor in the midst of three bands of warriors. The sun made his armor glisten and greeted him before it illuminated the country around. The Parisians saw their beloved chief at a distance, but the enemy, hoping to prevent his gaining entrance to the tower, crossed the Seine and took up their position on the bank. Nevertheless Odo, his horse at a gallop, got past the Northmen and reached the tower, whose gates Ebohus opened to him. The enemy pursued fiercely the comrades of the count who were trying to keep up with him and get refuge in the tower. [The Danes were defeated in the attack.]

Now came the Emperor Charles, surrounded by soldiers of all nations, even as the sky is adorned with resplendent stars. A great throng, speaking many languages, accompanied him. He established his camp at the foot of the heights of Montmartre, near the tower. He allowed the Northmen to have the country of Sens to plunder; and in the spring he gave them 700 pounds of silver on condition that by the month of March they leave France for their own kingdom. Then Charles returned, destined to an early death.