their rival Seine fleet. These payments, used to keep the Vikings at bay or at least from enacting further damage, were made consistently through the ninth century and gradually drained Charles’ resources. However, we must be careful not to be coloured by contemporary clerical sources that describe these tribute payments in largely negative terms. Tribute payments were, in fact, remarkably effective and ‘deserve to be seen in a more positive light’. The West Frankish economy could afford such sums and on every occasion when the king paid tribute, the Vikings left the kingdom with the promise never to return. So, though this process of tribute payment may have drained the economic resources of Charles’s court, it was not a decisive factor in the demise of the kingdom.

There is a strong argument now emerging that places great emphasis on internal turmoil; indeed, Coupland credits the demise of the Carolingian empire to civil conflicts rather than external threats. The precarious nature by which Charles came to rule the western Frankish kingdom was the first domino in a number of civil disputes; ongoing battles with Lothair I in his early years combined with the later, post-855 conflicts with Louis the German and Charles of Provence created a toxic internal environment in which a stable realm could not be maintained. On top of such family disputes, were Charles’s struggles against repeated rebellions in Aquitaine and against the Bretons who were eventually successful in obtaining de facto autonomy. Internal political struggle was certainly an important factor in the destabilisation of Charles’s kingdom; there were severe limits to Charles’s influence throughout the realm and control persistently and continuously slid away from palace and court to provinces and magnates.

Recent historiography has placed a justified emphasis on internal crisis over Viking impact. Coupland has demonstrated the constructive relationships formed between Scandinavians and Frankish nobles and sought to display their interactions in a positive light whilst Nelson has defended his argument with a fuller discussion of the assimilation of Scandinavian warlords to the Frankish nobility, their conversion to Christianity and with a well-argued criticism of nineteenth and twentieth century historians who have ‘othered’ the Vikings. Though there is much to be said for Nelson’s argument, I think that the answer lies somewhere in the middle (though leaning towards Nelson). Certainly, the impact of the Vikings on the stability of Charles’s realm has been overstated and coloured by the personal agendas of contemporary clerical writers. Yet, it would be wrong to dismiss the magnitude and importance of the Viking threat; it was very real, very persistent and very much felt by the Frankish population who, for the most part, probably lived in perpetual fear of the giants across the border who possessed a mythified disposition for violence and atrocity.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

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