

# **Links Between Anglo-Saxon and Byzantines Until the End of the Eleventh Century**

## **Part one: Scandinavian Activities in the British Isles**

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### **Abstract:**

The study makes an insight into the history of the invasions and military confrontations that took place during the beginning of the 8th century and the end of the 11th century, between the Vikings and the Danes in the Scandinavian Peninsula, on the one hand, and the Christian populations and kingdoms in England, France, Ireland, on the other hand, pursuing the Christian evolution of these invaders, kingdoms and populations. It is evoked the military and political-religious activity of some outstanding personalities who participated in the events of this era, such as King Charles the Great (768-814), Ludovic cel Pios (814-840), King Aethelbald of Mercia (716-757), Charles II Pleșuv (840-877), Alfred the Great (871-899), Vlage King Olaf Guthfrithson of Dublin and Constantine II of Scotland, Danish King Svein Forkbeard, and Olaf I Tryggvason of Norway (995-1000). At the same time, there are evoked the connections between the British Isles, Scandinavia, Kyeveian Russia, and the Byzantine Empire

### **Keywords:**

history, vikings, christianisation, Alfred the Great, Olaf I Tryggvason

### **Introduction**

With the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, links between East and West became weak until the point to outline two different civilizations whose marks are

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strong even today. Although, for the most Western historians it is difficult to accept, The Roman Empire did not die with the Rome devastation by Alaric, Genseric or Odoacer and it has continued to survive and flourish in the New Rome, on the banks of the Bosphorus, for one thousand years, not in a constant state of decay, such Edward Gibbon asserts, but shining like a beacon of a preserver civilization of wisdom of the ancient philosophers, with the new doctrine of Christ's saving. Being in a permanent conflict with the Persian or Arab invader forces which were following the change of the European Christian values, Eastern Roman Empire repeatedly sacrificed for the safety of the whole Europe. Certainly, Charles Martel, with his franks, on the battlefield of Poitiers, in 732, could represent a heroic moment for the saving of the Christendom, in front of the Muslim invasion, but this is one singular moment in the history of the West. The true heroes of the anti-Muslim fight were Byzantines and medieval Romans which did not rejected only one appeal, but their struggle has continued for 800 years until the final sacrifice was demanded, in 1453. Due to these Greco-Roman, Greek and Roman values could survive in the rest of Europe. Even if New Rome died, her legacy lives today and will continue to persist in the Orthodox nations, until the end of the time. Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, Russian and Georgian ancients, are all survivors and heirs of the old millennial empire. All these peoples were Christianized and educated by the Constantinople in the spirit of Christ's kingdom and the impact was immense, so they remained devoted to Christianity even after 500 years of Ottoman persecution and atrocities among most of them.

The influence of the medieval Roman Empire was so strong that it became known in the most distant corners of Europe and beyond. Diplomatic exchanges between the Byzantine Empire and China are kept the annals of Constantinople. Initially, the Roman delegation managed to steal the precious silkworm from the deposits of the Chinese imperial court and in the second phase, Chinese diplomats visited Constantinople and were amazed to see the uncertainty the Roman emperor lived in, fearing permanently for his life. Moreover, killings from the imperial palace continued to be a scourge of Byzantine society that brought it to the end.

The prestige of Constantinople reached the edge of Europe, Ireland and Britain, which were considered at that time, also the edges of the world. Roman Egypt will send its missionaries on the Phoenicians' sea road until the way to Ireland or Hibernia, which was considered the unconquered island, as it was called by the Romans. But the Roman culture brought here by Christian missionaries made this island a green paradise of Christian culture and spirituality. Egyptian monasticism influences will give the Church a dissonant, unique and impressive note. Irish missionaries will carry the Christianity beyond their island, in Scotland and Britain and this aspect will profoundly change the mentalities and the society.

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In the seventh century, in 668, the Greek monk, Theodore of Tarsus was named the Archbishop of Canterbury, by Pope Vitalian. Together with his friend, the African monk Hadrian, Theodore reorganized the new English Church and gave it a new direction based on the spiritual teachings of the Fathers of East and West.

His relationship with the Irish Celtic monks and clergy was very close and it led to the establishment of a period of glory for the Church in the island. In the person of Theodore of Tarsus, two worlds came together, the old Eastern Roman and the new Anglo-Saxon people. After the death of Theodore, links between Britain and the Roman East will cease because of the Scandinavian and Arab invasions in northern Europe. But, contrary to expectations, the Vikings from Scandinavia will be those who will create new bridges between the two worlds. Perfect warriors, the Vikings will influence the destinies of England and Byzantium alike, and will create an axis between Britain, Scandinavia, Russia and the Byzantine Empire.

### **The age of the Vikings: Danes and Norwegians**

In 793, Alcuin of York wrote to King Ethelred of Wessex about the misfortune that deflected on Northumbria and on the monastery from the island of Lindisfarne which was exposed to the violent attacks from the North Sea. They were caused by some heathen barbarians beyond the sea:

*„Lo, it is nearly 350 years that we and our fathers have inhabited this most lovely land, and never before such a terror appeared as we have now suffered from a pagan race, nor was it thought that such inroad from the sea could be made. Behold the church of St Cuthberth spattered with the blood of the priests of God, despoiled of all its ornaments.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Heathen were Scandinavian invaders, generically called by the English “*Vikings*”. The etymology of the word is uncertain, however. According to some theories, it would come from the Old English word “*wic*”, having the sense of a temporary camp and it is also related to the Latin “*vicus*”, which means village. Another theory holds that the term came from Viken region, near Oslo Fjord<sup>2</sup>. The Danes and Norwegians were those who turned their raids to the West, while the Swedes were heading to the east, to Russia, Byzantium and the Middle East.

The attack on the Lindisfarne monastery marks the beginning of a new age in the history of the medieval Western Europe. It was dominated by the Vikings

<sup>1</sup> Alcuin of York, *Alcuin of York, c. AD 732 to 804: His Life and Letters*, York, Sessions 1974, Letter 12, p. 18

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln Paine, *Marea și civilizația, o istorie maritimă a lumii*, traducere. de Dana Bădulescu și Radu Andriescu, Polirom, București, 2015, p.211-212

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who left an undeniable military, social, political and cultural imprint on European civilization.

The attack had such a devastating impact on Celtic monastery that has been emptied of all the treasures and the monks were mercilessly killed. The monastery of St. Columba at Iona will have the same ruthless fate. The entire community of the monastery was martyred and the place where the sufferings took place was named “the Bay of Martyrs.” The easiness Scandinavians were operating with on the territory of Britain, demonstrates the poor organization of the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic states. The catastrophic negligence which concerned the maritime defense was curious and ironic at the same time for the Saxons because they too invaded Britain by water during the fifth century. Although Vikings were considered violent and bloody, they did not exceed the time’s patterns, while the entire European society was characterized by military conflicts particularly common, and life expectancy rarely exceeded 30 years. But what defined the Scandinavian spirit was not the bloodlust, but the thirst for exploration, discovery of new territories and establishing social contacts. The desire to colonize new lands and to establish new trade agreements, leads Norse people to leave their native land embarking on expeditions which were full of dangers, but also full of promises. Their specific boats were perfect for navigation on rivers and oceans. The hunger for exploration made the Vikings some of the most experienced navigators of history.

Danes’ attacks on Lindisfarne and Iona monasteries coincide very well and it is quite safe for us to assert that they were driven by Charlemagne’s expansion in Saxony and Jutland. The formidable force which challenged the role of the heir and leader of the Christian oikumene to the Byzantine Empire of Constantinople, was menacingly advancing to Danish territories through its campaigns against Saxony and North-Eastern Slavs. The force the Saxons were subjected with and the violence with they have been converted to Christianity prompted Danes’ neighbors to counter and the beginning of the Scandinavian age comes as a reaction against the expansionist actions of the Carolingians. Six years after the first attacks on Britain, the Danes devastated northern slopes of Francia, which made Charlemagne to build true fortifications at the mouths of the coastguard rivers, which stopped the Norse raids for 20 years.

Conflicts between Danes and Carolingians continued under Charlemagne’s successor, Louis the Pious (814-840). During his reign, the chieftain of the Danes from Hedeby, Harald Klak, converted to Christianity rather from political and economic reasons than spiritual feelings, asserting that Christian people would help him if he shares the same faith<sup>3</sup>. Christianity was preached, under the patronage

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<sup>3</sup> Rimbart, *Anksar; the Apostle of the North*, trad. Charles H. Robinson, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Londra, 1921, p. 38

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of Harald, by the priest Angsar who will be surnamed North's apostle. Angsar set up a catechetical school in Hedeby where he continued his successful work of evangelization for the Danes. For the success of his mission, Angsar was ordained the archbishop of Hamburg, but soon came into conflict with the heathen Danish king, Erik I, who devastated the port. King's hostile attitude towards Christianity has radically changed, but also from political and economical reasons, in this way, searching to ensure protection for the foreign Christians merchants.

With regard to the Viking attacks in the British Isles, they resumed with an increased intensity in 834, when the Danes and Norwegians attacked the Thames Estuary. The political situation of the Anglo-Saxon states during the first Scandinavian invasions, was poor and was characterized by numerous internal conflicts, the decline of Northumbria and Mercia's boarding in hierarchy, under King Aethelbald (716-757). Although he was a skillful politician, Aethelbald was put in a bad light by his subjects because of his immoral live and because of the conflicts with the Church, which was represented by Archbishop Cuthbert. Mercia's dominant position continued under King Offa (757-796). Mercia witnessed the zenith due to the expansionist military campaigns of the King against other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, but also against the Celts from Wales. To strengthen the border and to prevent Welshes' raids, the king has built a mound like those which were built by the Romans, from north to south, called Offa's dyke, separating Wales from Mercia. This boundary will become historical and will ethnically and culturally separate the two peoples. Offa is responsible for its legislative decrees that will be called the law of Mercia and will be fully implemented during the reign of Alfred the Great. It will also be responsible for close contacts, but not without tense situations with the Charlemagne's empire<sup>4</sup>. After the death of King Offa, Mercia started to decline and to lose the privileged position, leaving room for the permanent ascension of Wessex which was led by Egbert.

King Egbert was born around 771-775, being the son of Ealhmund, King of Kent. His father could not maintain the independence for a long time towards the Kingdom of Mercia. Offa and Egbert were forced to flee Wessex because of the intrigues of the Beorhtric of Wessex and Mercia. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions that while Egbert stood for 13 years at the court of Charlemagne, he learned the Carolingian way to rule. With the support of Charlemagne, after Beorhtric's death which occurred in 802, Egbert took the throne of Wessex<sup>5</sup>. His reign was an expansionary and aggressive one, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle recorded several attacks against British Celtic kingdom of Cornwall.

<sup>4</sup> Platon Alexandru-Florin, Laurențiu Rădvan, Bogdan-Petru Maleon, *O istorie a Europei de Apus in Evul Mediu*, Editura Polirom, Iași 2010, p. 76

<sup>5</sup> Kirby, D. P. *The Earliest English Kings*, Routledge, Londra, 2000, p. 186

In 825, one of the most significant battles in the Anglo-Saxon history took place at Ellandun, between Beornwulf, the king of Mercia and Egbert of Wessex. The victory belonged to Egbert and the consequences of this battle were irreversible. Mercia lost forever its dominance, allowing the kingdom of Wessex to absorb the Kingdom of Essex. Incited by Egbert's victory against Beornwulf, East English rebelled and declared their independence towards the Kingdom of Mercia. In two decisive battles, Beornwulf and his successor, Ludeca have been killed, which again strengthened the independence of East Anglia towards Mercia. Moreover, in 829, Egbert exercised his supremacy over Northumbria, but this situation did not last long and a year later, the independence was restored by Wiglaf of Mercia, but the kingdom could not impose the domination of yore.

The powerful kingdom of Wessex began to decline after 829, probably because of the lack of help which was provided by the Carolingians' busy domestic issues. Mercia, Kent and East Anglia are beyond the influence of Wessex. Meanwhile, the Danes reappeared in the British landscape, inflicting Egbert a defeat in 836 at Carhampton, but two years later, the Vikings and the Welshes were defeated in Cornwall. Egbert died in 838, leaving behind him a kingdom more powerful than it was when he took it. He also left a strong legacy for the extraordinary achievements of his grandson, Alfred the Great.

At first, Viking attacks in Western Europe were seasonal and focused in particular on raiding, robbery and slavery. But since 840, when Scandinavians have wintered for the first time in a foreign territory, specifically in northern France, at the mouth of the Loire, the perspective of the colonization of new territories becomes for them a favorable issue of returning to the iced and hostile Scandinavia.

In the social, cultural and technological terms, Scandinavians were far behind Europe, standing still in the Iron Age. Their organization was almost nonexistent, large groups of people gathered around a charismatic and influential chieftain who was able to promise them war and richness. Northern society was predominantly agrarian and warlike, but Scandinavian peninsula was leaving little room through vast forests, high mountains and heavy snow, in order to practice the agriculture or to ensure a decent life for the population which was growing fast. At the same time, the system which was based on hereditary birthright inheritance left many children without enough heritage. Many Danes and Norwegians were driven by the hope of new opportunities for enrichment and obtaining eternal fame thanks to their intrepid spirit and to the advanced technology they held in sea navigation. Attacks on Lindisfarne, Monkwearmouth-Jarrow and Iona Abbey monasteries caused consternation among Northerners, as they had found an impressive wealth at their reach, without minimum defense. It is wrong to consider that anti-Christian religious spirit that Scandinavians could have practiced in those moments is

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the principal agent of these attacks. Simply, these important monastic centers on the coasts of Britain were far too easy prey for the Vikings.

Beyond the rich monasteries which were left unprotected, in Britain, four separate kingdoms were founded - Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and Wessex – They were more or less prepared to face the Scandinavian attacks. As we have already seen, there have been two major attacks on Wessex during King Egbert's reign: in the first attack the victory was Nordics' and in the second, the Anglo-Saxons won. After British strength was objectively measured, Danish and Norwegian forces decided that it was time for a full scale invasion of Britain.

Danish army landed in Britain in 865 and, for 14 years, it has waged war against the four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Although it was called the Great Heathen Army, its number was unlikely to exceed a few thousand Scandinavian warriors, but this number was far greater than that one English people had been used with, being until then the most powerful Scandinavian force which invaded the British Isles. According to the Icelandic chronicles Danish-Norwegian army was led by Halfdan Ragnarson, Uba and Imar (Ivar) and Boneless. All these three were considered the sons of the legendary Danish king, Ragnar Lodbrok.

The starting point was the invasion of East Anglia, where the king Edmund made peace with the Vikings, giving them horses and supplies<sup>6</sup>. After spending the winter in this province, the Danes went to Northumbria. Frightened, the Anglo-Saxons from the north have paid huge amounts of money to Scandinavians and accepted a puppet leader to serve the interests of the Danes. Immediately after this episode, the Vikings invaded the kingdom of Mercia and captured Nottingham in 867, which was the most important urban center of the kingdom. The King of Mercia desperately called the Wessex King to come and help them. The combined army of the two kingdoms could not release the dominated city, and the Vikings did not leave until they have received huge amounts of money. They returned to Northumbria where they spent almost the entire years 868 and 869, then they headed back to East Anglia.

This time, the British people who were led by King Edmund, met the Vikings on the battlefield, but they were dramatically defeated, and their king was captured and tragically and brutally martyred by Imar, for his refuse to give up Christianity. The heroism he faced and his violent death made him the patron saint of England in the Middle Ages, and his cult has known an increasing and an impressive popularity.

In 871, another army arrived in Scandinavia under the leadership of Bagsecg. Following the merger of the two armies, they waged war against Wessex, but the

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<sup>6</sup> Ridyard, Susan J., *The Royal Saints of Anglo Saxon England: a Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 65

Vikings were defeated by Alfred, King Aethelred's brother, in the Battle of Ashdown, where Bagsecg was killed. Three months later, King Aethelred died and was succeeded by Alfred, who became perhaps the most remarkable king who sat on the English throne, one of the two monarchs in England who received the title of "the Great", alongside Cnut, the king of England, Denmark and Norway, specifying that King Cnut was Scandinavian and not Anglo-Saxon.

The information about the life of Alfred the Great is quite rich and comes from the work of Bishop Asser, a Welsh scholar. Alfred was the youngest son of King Aethelwulf and the nephew of King Egbert of Wessex. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, he traveled to Rome at the age of four<sup>7</sup>, where Pope Leo IV proclaimed him consul. It is supposed that he spent several years at the court of the king of the Franks, Charles the Bald (840-877) who was his grandfather from his mother, Judith.

At his father's death, which occurred in 858, the kingdom of Wessex was split among three older brothers: Aethelbald, Aethelberht and Aethelred. The reigns of the first two brothers were unimportant, but with the reign of the third brother, Aethelred of Wessex, Alfred's remarkable and amazing rise started. Alfred fought in the unsuccessful campaign which was supported by the kingdom of Wessex in Mercia when Imar, the Danish chieftain, occupied Nottingham. During 870, there were recorded violent clashes between Danish and Anglo-Saxon armies, both parts were victorious and defeated. Alfred took part at these attacks in the most active way. But the important victory at Ashdown ensured Alfred's debut as the leading role of desperate English resistance. Despite this recent victory, Anglo-Saxon army lost the battle at Merton. Within three months Aethelred died and left the kingdom in the hands of Alfred. Although Aethelred had two young sons who obviously had primacy to the throne, Alfred's rise was uncontested because of this extremely fragile situation of the kingdom and the desperate war with the Danes.

While Alfred was busy with the funeral ceremony of his brother, the Danes have won an important victory against the English army, which prompted the king to make demands of peace and also his territories to be released, but the armistice terms are not known<sup>8</sup>, although most likely Alfred paid the Vikings, as those from Mercia and Northumbria did before. The fact is that, for five years, the Vikings have been occupied with other parts of Britain, leaving Wessex for further campaigns.

The enthusiasm and the warrior spirit of the Scandinavian were reanimated by a new head of the Viking armies, named Guthrum. In 876 he attacked the king-

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<sup>7</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in Project Gutenberg, translated by James Ingram, London, september, 1996. p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon Culture*, Longman, Londra, 1998, p. 140-141.

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dom of Wessex, where he occupied Wareham city. Alfred encircled them, but after the failed talks and because of the shelter of the night, Scandinavians managed to escape.<sup>9</sup>

In January 878, the Danes launched a surprise attack on the fortress where Alfred was spending Christmas, killing all the inhabitants, except of Alfred and his companions who could hardly get out alive, retreating into the swamps of Somerset<sup>10</sup>. This dramatic episode is the climax of his life and of his reign. Here, in Somerset marshes, Alfred managed to organize an impressive and effective resistance, recruiting from neighboring counties all the people who were able to bear arms and with this improvised army, the king took the counteroffensive. Inspired by the beautiful character of the King, by his piety and courage he possessed, the English attacked and won a decisive victory on the battlefield at Edington. Defeated and frightened, Scandinavians retreated to Chippenham, but Alfred constantly harassed them, triggering a tight siege. The serious lack of supplies forced the Danes to give themselves up to the king. The condition which was imposed by Alfred to Scandinavians was based on Guthrum's conversion to Christianity. It spent three weeks later at the king's court. The baptism was celebrated with much pomp and enthusiasm and Alfred became Guthrum's godfather.

On this occasion, between Alfred and Guthrum was signed the famous Treaty of Wedmore that delineates the boundaries of the territories which were ruled by Wessex and the Danes. Kingdom of Mercia was divided between Alfred and Guthrum and London was given to Wessex. The drawn border and the Scandinavian territory are called the Danelaw. This division produced long-term effects, many Danes settled in eastern and northern England, offering these regions many important elements of Scandinavian culture and civilization. Meanwhile, York, old Eboracum, the city that proclaimed Constantine the Great as the Roman Emperor in 306, had to become the most important Scandinavian center in Britain, where Imar shall conduct its own fief Viking which contained Northumbria, territories along the coasts of Ireland and the kingdom of Laithlinn from Hebrides islands, Orkney and the western coast of Scotland. Guthrum leaves Wessex borders and retreats in East Anglia where he will be proclaimed king and will rule it until his death, in 890.

After the defeat of Guthrum, many years of peaceful followed for Alfred. He could restore his kingdom after the Carolingian example, making it political, religious and cultural remarkable. Wessex became the most powerful kingdom in the British Isles and one of the most prosperous of the West. Although there were

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<sup>9</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40.

minor clashes between British forces and the Danish, Scandinavian danger has been removed during his reign, and England sought to use gradually counteroffensive. The period between 880-890 was one of a relative peace for the new unified English kingdom, and the greatest achievement of this period was the rebuilding of London which was devastated by the Danes in the previous war. Around 892 or 893, Danes have had another attempt to invade England, but Alfred's ground and naval forces provoked a decisive defeat for Scandinavians who had to leave the shores of Britain. The Danes from Britain tried to synchronize their attack with the Vikings' one but they were repelled, not without the significant efforts which were made by Anglo-Saxons.

Alfred's greatness is demonstrated by many reforms that he initiated during his reign which was dominated by the almost permanent war waged against the Scandinavians. His legislative and military reforms strengthened the power over the kingdom. Alfred was the one who created a naval fleet, which was indispensable for an insular nation such as the England. For a people who invaded and colonized much of Britain, in the V - VI centuries, it was inadmissible to forget so quickly the recent past and give up their main weapon (naval fleet.) which ensured its integrity, its strength and even its survival. Alfred learned from the mistakes of his predecessors and initiated the construction of the vessels. Creating a fleet to rival the success of the enemy naval power was perhaps one of the main reasons for his success. In addition, Alfred created a standing army that promptly responded to the demands which were imposed by the aggressive and military Scandinavians campaigns. Along with the strong navy and the professional army, the energetic monarch created a complex system of fortifications that were designed to slow, or to stop the invading armies in their way to vital points of the kingdom, until Alfred could mobilize and use his army. Regarding the legal system of the kingdom, Alfred has created his own code of laws which was inspired by the precepts of the Christian faith, it was based on strong hierarchical system divine and was transposed on human hierarchical system.

The complexity and the beauty of King Alfred's character are also proven by his strong bias towards erudition and his attraction to spirituality and the depth of Christian faith. He translated from Latin to archaic English many creations that were considered indispensable to his people, including: the rule book and Pastoral Care of St. Gregory the Great, a few works of St. Augustine and the first fifty Psalms. Also, many foreign monks were invited to settle in the English monasteries and abbeys to fill the low British interest for the monastic life.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Simon Keynes, Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great, Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources*, ed. Penguin, Harmondsworth, England, 1983, p. 101-102

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A particularly interesting episode in the reign of King Alfred the Great is the correspondence with the Jerusalem Patriarch Elias III. The patriarchy situation was very precarious at the time, which caused the primate of the Church of Jerusalem to seek financial aid from Western courts, mentioning here Charles the Fat, the Carolingian king and Alfred the Great. Alfred sent to the patriarch numerous gifts and offered his financial support, while the patriarch gave him a written text in English containing oriental remedies for the disease that the king was suffering from<sup>12</sup>. Jerusalem has been in the hands of Muslim Arabs for more than two hundred years, Patriarchs of Jerusalem, Alexandria and even that of Antioch, during these periods when the city did not belong to Byzantium, were residing in Constantinople, and we can say without any danger of error, that the correspondence between King Alfred and the Patriarch of Jerusalem is one of the first indirect contact between England and the Byzantine Empire. It has repeated in more than one hundred years since the byzantine St. Theodore of Tarsus, has reformed the Anglo-Saxon church.

After a remarkable and impressive reign, Alfred passed away on October 26, 899, leaving behind a strong kingdom, crushing Scandinavian invasions and building a new era in the history of the English people. He was the only English monarch which was endowed by the history with the nickname “the Great”.

Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were not, however, the only state formations in the British Isles which were affected by the Scandinavian invasions. Simultaneously with the Danish attacks in England, Norwegian attacks, on the west coast of Scotland and Ireland were recorded. The first Viking raids in Ireland occurred around the years 795, 798 and 807. These attacks were intended for raiding actions, not an actual invasion, but they had the nefarious role to discontinue the Irish Celtic monasticism’s glory period. As in the case of Lindisfarne monastery attack in Northumbria, in Ireland, the coastal monasteries which were rich and dominated by a lack of any defense, were primarily concerned.

These early attacks come as a continuation of the Norwegian kingdom. Although they had a strong impact on the Irish divided society, these warlike actions did not have the same intensity as in England. Even more than that, Norwegian raids operated the reconciling between the two political and religious factions in Ireland: the patrician tradition of St. Patrik and the Ionian of St. Columba. The destruction of the Ionian community and its new establishment in Kells, on the Armagh clan’s territory marks the solution for the two rivalries between Colombian and Patrician churches<sup>13</sup>, although the Colombian community tried the excom-

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101

<sup>13</sup> Francis John Byrne, *Church and politics, c. 750-c. 1100*, in O Croinin Daibhi, *Prehistoric and Early Ireland, A New History of Ireland, vol. I*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, p. 663

munication from Tara, of Aed Oirdnide mac Neill<sup>14</sup>. Such events clearly prove the divided character of the Irish society on the verge of the Norwegians' arrival. This situation will persist throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, which will facilitate the Norman invasion in 1169-1170, led by Richard "Strongbow" de Clare, from the English King Henry II (1154 -1189) order, having the authorization of Pope Adrian IV to bring Irish Celtic Church under the obedience of Rome. Norman invasion of Ireland was held under the same auspices as the norman invasion of England, a century earlier, in 1066.

The Norwegian incursions in Ireland intensified since 821, when the Vikings began to winter on the enemy territory instead to withdraw in Laithlinn or Norway. Scandinavians have fortified their camps on the coast and thus created the so-called longphorts meant to become permanent settlements, which will turn soon into large urban centers. The first fortified port by Scandinavians in Ireland is Dublin, the current capital of the country. So Ireland owes much to Vikings whereas they brought many positive changes for the society in the island. If until then, human settlements were focused around the monastic centers, with the arrival and the installation of the Vikings in certain areas of the coast, veritable urban centers have risen. They benefited by the intense trade practiced by Norwegians. Even if Scandinavians, whether failed or did not attempt decisively, they did not conquered Ireland, but their presence in the fortified ports, allowed them to be actively involved in the internal politics of the Celtic kingdoms. Like all the cases where there were Viking conquests, Scandinavians were the only dominant ruling class, while the subjects were the conquered peoples. Thus, in small, conquered regions from Ireland, the ruling class was composed of Norwegian warriors, while the most inhabitants were Celts, which led to the formation of a new population on the island which was called Hiberno-Norse.

One of the first known Viking chieftains in Ireland is Thorgest, whose name is closely linked to the attacks on the kingdoms of Connacht, Mide and the famous monastery of Clonmacnoise. But his success was short because he was trapped and drowned by the King of Mide<sup>15</sup>. In 848 there were repeated defeats of the Norwegians, which were caused by an alliance of kingdoms Munster and Leinster. Irish victories were so famous that they sent an embassy to bring the news about the won battles at the Carolingian king<sup>16</sup>, Charles the Bald who also faced the Scandinavian incursions.

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<sup>14</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Aed Oirdnide mac Neill*, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 817.

<sup>15</sup> *Annals of Ulster* AD 431-1291, CELT, Corpus of Electronic Texts, 2003, p. 845.

<sup>16</sup> Donnchadh O Corrain, *The Vikings in Ireland*, in Anne-Christine Larsen, *The Vikings in Ireland*, The Viking Ship Museum, Roskilde, 2001, p. 16.

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In 853, the prince of Laithinn, Olaf arrives in Ireland. Olaf assumed his leadership of the Vikings in Ireland, even if he had to share it with Ivar Boneless, one of the greatest leaders of the army that invaded Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in 865. Along with his aggressive campaigns in Britain, Ivar or Imar according to other sources, was very active in Ireland, proclaiming himself the king of the Norse from Britain and Ireland. In Ireland, Imar founded Ui Imair dynasty, stemming from Scandinavian dynasty which gained an important role in the medieval Irish politics.

The policy of the two Scandinavian leaders have not always been aggressive against Celtic kingdoms, often creating alliances between Norwegian and Irish clans, and later these treaties were revoked on behalf of new agreements and new alliances that would be created. This comes to prove the increased importance that Scandinavians started to hold during the reigns of Imar and Olaf.

The death of Imar occurred in 873 and left behind a power vacuum that other Scandinavian captains sought to fill, but infighting between the Norse did nothing but significantly weaken power, enabling the Irish to conquer Dublin and to drive them away from the island, marking the end of the first phase of the Scandinavian invasion of Ireland.

The second phase occurs between 914-980 and the protagonists are Ragnall and Sitric. Norwegian fleet landed in the port of Waterford, allowing Scandinavian clan Ui Imair to rebel and join their compatriots. United Leinster was subjected to Scandinavian attacks, where Sitric recorded an important victory and Dublin has been recaptured. Reopening the communication lines with Laithinn and Scandinavia through Dublin allowed Norwegians to come to Ireland in far greater numbers than in the first invasion of the eighth and ninth centuries, and to establish new fortified ports in Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick.

In 918, Ragnall became the king of York in Britain and managed by his association with Sitric to create the Dublin – York alliance which will have a strong influence on England and Ireland for the next half century<sup>17</sup>.

Irish attacks on Dublin were successfully rejected by Sitric, which allowed him to leave the city and occupy the throne of York left vacant since the death of Ragnall in 921. Meanwhile, Gofraid followed the lead of Dublin, but Scandinavians' power in Ireland began to decline gradually, suffering repeated defeats from the Celtic clans. Irish general Muirchertach mac Neill distinguished himself in the art of war. According to the American historian Benjamin Hudson "Muirchertach was one of the most successful generals of the time and was described as the Hector of the Irish"<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Hudson, *Muirchertach mac Neill (d. 943)*, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 28

After Sitric's death in 927, Gofraid left Dublin in order to occupy the vacant throne of Northumbria, but he was expelled by the Anglo-Saxon Aethelstan (924-939) and was forced to return to Ireland a year later where he waged war with the Vikings from Limerick who have occupied Dublin for a while.

Gradually, Scandinavian power began to decline in Ireland and their presence on the political scene became a secondary. In 980 King mac Mael Sechnaill Domnaill, won a decisive victory against the Vikings from Dublin, at Tara, forcing them to recognize his suzerainty.

Brian Boru, the symbol of the royalty in the island, was perhaps the most important Irish king. Brian became king in Munster in 976, when his brother was killed. The first action Brian took was the defeat of the Vikings from Limerick in 977, significantly increasing his power in Munster. The next target of Brian was the kingdom of Leinster. The conflict has lasted for 15 years and due to Brian Boru's support by Hiberno-Nordic population, he managed to gain the control of the central province of Ireland. Only Meath, Connacht and Ulster provinces were outside of his domination. In 999, the forces led by Brian defeated the rebellion in Leinster. By the year 1002, Brian managed the unification of all Ireland under a single ruler, and this fact was considered impossible. By that time Ireland has had more than 150 kings. Thus, Brian Boru became the High King of Ireland.

During his reign Brian showed his great devotion for the Irish Church which was centered in that moment around the monastic centers. He also continued the Celtic monasticism tradition interrupted by the Viking invasions.

His authority was challenged in 1012 by the leader of Leinster, which started a rebellion that lasted until 1014 and culminated with the Battle of Clontarf. Although rebel forces were defeated, Brian Boru was killed in this battle by a Viking while he was praying in his tent. Thus, he became the eternal martyr of the Irish kingdom. As in the ranks of rebels were also numerous Vikings, it was found in Irish history that the Battle of Clontarf was the ultimate Irish victory against the Vikings. The historian Donnchadh O Corrain was the first who dismounted this theory, saying the Vikings have not been a main force in Ireland for decades and their importance in the Battle of Clontarf was secondary<sup>19</sup>.

In parallel with the invasion of Britain and Ireland, the Vikings were operating on the northern slopes of Francia, culminating with the devastation of the provinces of Paris and the Seine in 845. The large scandinavian fleet was led by Ragnar, who was identified with Ragnar Lodbrok, the famous legendary hero from the Icelandic sagas. But the attack on Paris was neither the first, neither the

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<sup>19</sup> Sean Duffy, *Ireland, c. 1000-1100*, in Pauline Stafford, *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland, c. 500-c. 1100*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford, 2009, p. 288

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last which was directed against the Carolingian Empire. In 799, the Danes ravaged the coasts of the English Channel in offensive against the aggressive actions of Charlemagne in Saxony and at the borders of Jutland. Danish incursions have forced Carol to order the construction of a defensive system along the north coast of his empire. The strategy worked and it has allowed his followers to repel the attacks of the Vikings at the mouth of the Seine, in 820. The attacks violently continued after 834 when the Vikings took the advantage of the civil wars in the bosom of the French monarchy.

The fleet that attacked Paris was composed, according to the estimates of the historian, Martina Sprague, from 120 ships containing approximately 5,000 Scandinavian warriors. On their way to the heart of Francia, the Danes sacked Rouen, but, surprisingly, spared Abbey of Saint Denis near Paris.<sup>20</sup>

To prevent the conquest of the French capital, the Emperor Charles the Bald divided his army into two halves and ordered each one to stay on the bank of the Seine, but the strategy was ineffective and Ragnar managed to defeat one of the divisions, taking a total of 111 prisoners who were hanged on an island on the river with the intention to terrorize the francs. After that, he went to Paris and devastated it<sup>21</sup>.

During the siege, in the Scandinavian camp the plague has burst and it ravaged the ranks of soldiers. To quell the terrible disease, Scandinavians have raised their prayers to the gods of Norse, but seeing that it doesn't work, they began to fast, taking into account the advice of a Christian prisoner, and disease began to subside<sup>22</sup>. Vikings decided to retire for the modest sum of 7,000 pounds of gold and silver. Charles the Bald, unable to defend his kingdom, was happy to honor the offer<sup>23</sup>.

Particularly interesting are the consequences of an attack on Paris. If the Emperor Charles the Bald was widely criticized for the amount of money he offered to the invaders and for failing to oppose the attack, he was forced to solve the rebellion problem which followed the Scandinavian attack. The treaty between him and Ragnar assured the tranquility from the Vikings for the near future. Regarding Ragnar, the subsequent history is very interesting. Arriving at the court of the Danish King Horik, Ragnar presented the tribute that he had received from Franks

<sup>20</sup> Eleanor Shipley Duckett, *Carolingian Portraits: A Study in the Ninth Century*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, The University of Michigan Press, 1988, p. 181

<sup>21</sup> Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 212

<sup>22</sup> Allen Mawer, *The Cambridge Medieval History, vol. III*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1922, p. 330

<sup>23</sup> Peter Sawyer, *The Oxford Illustrated History of The Vikings*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 40

and, while boasting with the ease he devastated Paris, he fell to his knees, saying that the only resistance he encountered was St's Germanus of Paris whose abbey was destroyed by him. As the plague was still raging among his comrades, Ragnar ordered the killing of all the survivors and the release of Christian prisoners. This event has contributed at the hospitality of Archbishop Angsar<sup>24</sup>, which led to the Christianization of Denmark.

The Vikings repeatedly came back, receiving tribute, but the resumed of the attacks on Paris, in 885-886, were not successful and the attacks were rejected due to strong walls and towers that the city was fortified with.

The leading figure of the Viking invasion of Francia was the Norwegian warrior, Rollo. His origins are the subject of many debates among the modern historians, but most of them claim that his origins are in Norway while others remain to the initial version of his belonging to the Danish royal house. The fact is that Rollo was descended from noble blood. His real name was Hrolfr and Rollo comes as an interpretation of his name in Latin.

His main biographer is the historian Dudo of Saint-Quentin who lived a time at the court of Normand Duke Richard I, the grandson of Rollo. According to him, Rollo occupied Rouen in 876 and has maintained a close friendship with King Alst from England<sup>25</sup>, which clearly identifies with Guthrum, the leader of the Danish forces, which was christened with the name of Athelstan by Alfred the Great and was recognized as king of East Anglia. Rollo is likely to be operate in Britain and Ireland, before to invade Francia' territory.

King Charles III the Simple decided rather to conclude the alliance with Rollo than to meet him on the battlefield and ordered the ceding of the northern lands that were occupied by the Scandinavian, in return for the recognition of the suzerainty of the frankish king, the acceptance of Christian baptism also in return for providing protection against other Scandinavian invaders. Rollo was awarded with the title of duke and the land which was offered to him was called Normandy. Rollo has encouraged the establishment of the Scandinavians in Normandy and supported marriages with ethnic francs. The mixture of the populations has led to the birth of a Norman warrior nation, with French blood and Latin culture, but with Scandinavian origins that influenced the destiny of the Western Europe, especially England's destiny and indirectly the whole world.

The contribution Normans will bring to the shaping of the medieval policy is substantial, being representative for the feudal system which was based on the relationship between vassal and senior, right as the model of the relationship be-

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<sup>24</sup> Johanne Hoops, Heinrich Beck, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2002, p. 90

<sup>25</sup> Dudo of St-Quentin, *History of the Normans*, ed. Eric Christiansen, Woodbridge 1998, p. 14

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tween Rollo and King Charles III. Warrior spirit of the Normans and their momentum on the battle will make them the masters of the battlefield and engineers of the fortifications, the creators of medieval castles, the initiators of chivalry, lovers of the arts and of beauty, patrons of culture, loyal followers of the Roman Church and soldiers loyal to papacy.

Beyond the English Channel, Alfred's the Great successors have continued the work of their predecessor and took further the war of liberation from the Scandinavian domination. In 899, Alfred was succeeded by his son, Edward the Elder. He managed to defeat the Vikings repeatedly and conquer the Midlands and East Anglia in 917. A year later, after the death of his sister, Aethelflaed, Edward took Mercia and made it part of his kingdom. The whole Anglo-Saxon world up to the River Humber was united under the scepter of one king. Only Northumbria which was occupied by Vikings was missing. That task will fall to the son of Edward, Athelstan.

Athelstan is perhaps one of the most important Anglo-Saxon kings who occupied the throne of England. However, Athelstan is the first who named himself by the title of King of the English (this event took place in 927). Like his grandfather Alfred, Athelstan had strong addictions to culture and faith, being a man whose spirituality supported in many occasions the Church and also being the person who encouraged the introduction of the Benedictine rules in England. He was a tireless follower of Alfred's administrative reforms, centralizing power in England. However, Athelstan has maintained diplomatic relations with important courts from Western Europe, creating a Carolingian empire of Anglo-Saxons. During his reign, England became the most important power in the West.

His reign started in 924 under hard auspices. He was recognized as the king of Mercia, but not in Wessex, where his stepbrother had been elected, but the latter did not survive due to some health issues. After the last resistances ended, Athelstan was recognized as the king of Anglo-Saxons, in 925. Two years later, in 927, Athelstan conquered the last remnants of the Viking kingdom of York, uniting for the first time in history all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms under one scepter. Giving up the title of King of the Anglo-Saxons, Athelstan has proclaimed himself the first king of England.

His rise to full power did not stop there, but continued with Welsh subjecting. In 934 Athelstan invaded Scotland which was led by Constantine II in order to be recognized as suzerain of the Scottish king. His mission has achieved its purpose, but not without consequences. In 937 a coalition formed by Olaf, the Viking King of Dublin and Constantine II of Scotland invaded England, but they were heavily defeated by Athelstan in the bloody massacre of Brunanburh. This victory, though was hardly won, is seen by many scholars of the Anglo-Saxon history, as one

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of the most important battles in British history. If Athelstan had lost the battle, everything his predecessors accomplished, would have been lost and the English kingdom would have been destroyed.

His victory brought him the recognition in all of Britain which allowed Athelstan to take the Byzantine title of “basileus et curagulus”<sup>26</sup>. This demonstrates a real influence and knowledge of the Byzantine world in England in the tenth century or it naturally coincides with the period of the maximum glory of the Byzantium which was led by Macedonian dynasty. Under the Macedonian emperors, the Byzantine Empire witnesses its golden age which exercised a significant influence over the entire known world. The wealth, patronage of the arts and culture, advanced technology, philosophy and sublime theology and performant military system perfected its complex and diplomatic administration. This is the reason why Byzantium was considered the most sophisticated empire in the world. Or, Western monarchs tended to imitate the Byzantine style, which was absolutely natural. Athelstan, also impressed by the strength of his achievements, was trying to emulate the imperial power in Constantinople by awarding himself with the Roman title. Naturally, the state power of English was inferior to the Byzantium, but superior over the other powers of the West. It justifies Athelstan’s tendency to confer an imperial title, having the example of the Carolingian former empire and the current Byzantine Empire, being also a successor in a form or another of the Roman Empire.

After the death of King Athelstan, the Vikings will attack England again and will capture the city of York, but they will be defeated in 954, and their last king, Erik will be banished from the British Isles.

In 1002, king Athelred ordered the massacre of the Danish inhabitants from England, which led to the death of thousands of Scandinavians. This thoughtless act will trigger a new Danish invasion, more numerous this time, which will threaten the existence of the English kingdom.

### **Links between the British Isles, Scandinavia, Kievan Russia and the Byzantine Empire**

In 1002, the massacre which was ordered by the English king against the Danes had serious repercussions on England, triggering a total invasion of the Danes. First of all, it requires a careful consideration of the political, social and religious situation from Scandinavia.

At that time the Danish throne was occupied by King Svein Forkbeard, a sever man who obtained the throne only after he had brutally removed his father

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<sup>26</sup> Sarah Foot, *Aethelstan: The First King of England*, Yale University Press, New York, 2011, p. 212-213

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Harold Bluetooth, the first Christian king of the Danes. His biography, although it is often disputed by some historians, is found in the famous Icelandic saga, *Heimskringla* and it is composed by Snorri Sturlson from the century XIII and and in the Acts of the bishops of Hamburg which is written by Adam of Bremen. However, it presents a subjective and a doubtful description of his reign which is seen from a light directed against him.

His ascension to the throne of Denmark took place in 986. At that time the Danish kings occupied even the throne of Norway, which Svein inherited from his father, but lost it between 995-1000 for the remarkable Norwegian king, Olaf Tryggvason whose spectacular life must be analyzed in the present study.

Olaf was the son of a petty-king in Norway who was called Tryggy Olafsson. He was killed or when Olaf has not been born yet or when he was three years old, according to first written sources which relates to his life. The fact is that his mother fled with him in the Orkney Islands to get rid of the assassins of his father. *Heimskringla* Saga, although it is dated later than other primary sources related to the life of the King Olaf I, introduces new elements in the description of his life which some historians tend to challenge. According to it, Olaf was born after his father's death in Orkney Islands where his mother, Astrid Eriksdottir, was hiding from her husband's killer. The killer's name was Harald and he was the son of Erik Bloodaxe, the Danish king from England who was expelled from York and from Britain in 954. After a while, Astrid and Olaf went to the Swedish king's court for protection, but they had to flee that place because the people under the command of the Norwegian King, Haakon the Good, were looking for the boy in order to bring him in Norway. A second exile had the destination of Kiev where Sigurd, Astrid's brother and the uncle of Olaf was in the service of the Grand-Prince Vladimir I. But the trip has failed, and Olaf was taken captive by the Estonian Vikings in Baltic Sea, while traveling to Novgorod. Olaf came into possession of a man named Klerkon with his adoptive father Thorolf. Klerkon considered Thorolf too old to be a good slave and killed him, while Olaf was sold for a ram to a man called Klerk.

After that, the young Scandinavian was again sold to a man called Reas for a good coat. Six years later when Sigurd, the uncle of Olaf traveled to Estonia to collect taxes which were imposed by Vladimir I, he noticed the northern appearance of Olaf. Finding out that he is the son of his sister, Astrid and of Tryggve Olafson, he bought the boy from Reas and took him back to Novgorod to live under the protection of Vladimir.

One day, in the square of Novgorod, Olaf met Klerkon, who led him into slavery and killed his adoptive father. Taking an axe, Olaf killed Klerkon with a blow to the head. The furious crowd followed Olaf in order to kill him but he found protection at Queen Alloga who paid the ransom price for him.

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At the Vladimir's court, Olaf came to the rank of captain of the guards, but the overwhelming popularity he had among the soldiers, alarmed Vladimir who began to treat him with hostility. Because he was no longer wanted at the Kievan court, Olaf decided it was time to try his luck in another place and headed to the Baltic Sea. He robbed successfully the ports from the region, but he was caught by a storm that forced him to land on the shores of the Western Slavs from the Baltic where he met Queen Geira, the daughter of the King Burizleif. After he accepted queen's invitation to remain on her territory and he successfully seduced her, Olaf married her. From this favorable position, he started again to attack the Swedish territories from Scania and Gotland.

Also, Olaf participated with King Otto II (973-983) in his campaigns against the pagan Danes. The two armies met on the battlefield near the Danevirke wall that separates Germany from Denmark, but Otto was unable to break through and had to bypass it on the sea and land with his army in Jutland. There he defeated the Danes who were led by King Harold Blue Tooth, the father of King Svein and forced them to convert to Christianity, becoming thus the first Christian king of the Danes.

After three years in the Baltic Slavs' country, his wife, Geira died. It seems that Olaf loved her sincerely because he could not endure the pain to stay there; he left the Frisians' country and went to the Hebrides islands west of Scotland. After four years, Olaf landed on a mission on the coasts of Scilly Islands archipelago where he heard that a Celtic clairvoyant monk had been living in solitude. Wanting to test the strength of the monk, he sent one of his men to him who was dressed in his clothes, pretending to be Olaf, but the monk could not be deceived and called for the true Olaf. The hermit predicted to Olaf that would become a famous king who will do many deeds of greatness and will bring people to faith and baptism, both for his sake and for the sake of others. To convince him of the veracity of his prophecies, the hermit foretold that when he returns to his ships, many of his people will conspire against him and a battle will start between them. He will be hurt and will almost die and he will be led by his men on the boat. After seven days he will recover and will be baptized immediately.

In 988, Olaf sailed to the British Isles to take part in a meeting which was organized by Queen Gyda, the sister of Olaf Cuaran who was the king of Dublin. Gyda was a widow and she was looking for a new husband. Many prominent men were present at the meeting, but Gyda noted Olaf, despite he was wearing bad clothes because it was raining while the others were dressed in the most expensive clothes. When it came time to marry, another man who was called Alfvine, objected and challenged Olaf and his men to a famous Scandinavian duel of honor. Olaf and his men fought with Alfvine and his companions and defeated them in

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every battle without killing anyone. Alfvine and his henchmen were expelled from Britain and Olaf and Gyda married, spending their time in England and Ireland.

Rumors about a king in Ireland with a Norwegian blood were scattered quickly in Norway and reached at the ears of King Haakon. He sent Thorer Klakka to Ireland and he was disguised as a merchant in order to ensnare Olaf in Norway to fall into the hands of Haakon. Thorer befriended Olaf and recounted him the real situation in Norway and how King Haakon became very unpopular because in many occasions he took the daughters of the noblemen to be his concubines, as it was his royal right in this pagan time. But he quickly got bored of them and sent them back to their fathers after a week or two. His strength had weakened because of the endless fights with the Danes and because of the refusal to accept the Christian faith.

Olaf took the opportunity and headed to Norway where he found the country in full revolt. King Haakon was forced to flee and hide with a minister who was called Karki in a hole, in a pig farm. The rebels proclaimed Olaf as a king at a meeting with him and together they began to search the place where Haakon was hiding. They did not find him anywhere, but they were sure that he was hiding at the farm. Olaf held a rally where he promised a great reward to whoever kills Haakon. Haakon and his slave heard what Olaf said. When Haakon could not stay awake because of his exhaustion, Karki cut his head off with a knife and presented it in front of Olaf, but instead of being rewarded by the king, he was hanged. After these events and after his coronation, Olaf traveled to the provinces of his kingdom to consolidate his power and to impose the conversion to Christianity<sup>27</sup>.

The adherence to Christianity was sincere and deep and continued throughout his reign to be spread in the lands of his kingdom. Olaf baptized the great explorer Leif Ericson, the son of Eric the Red, whose actions and expeditions we will analyze in the following lines.

The Northerners colonized Shetland and Faeroe Islands during the eighth century. Scandinavians' decision to explore these places comes after the rumors that there lived in solitude some Irish monks who sought the salvation in the middle of the ocean, like the Egyptian monks of yesteryear who were isolated from the world. This practice of the Irish and Scottish monks was common during this period and was called the golden age of the saints as we have seen in Olaf's meeting with the monk from the island of Scilly.

The founding father of Iceland is considered to be Ingólfur Arnarson who reached the island in 874 where he founded a farm in Reykjavik which eventually

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<sup>27</sup> According to Snorri Sturlson, *Heimskringla, or The Lives of the Norse Kings*, English translation by Erling Monsen & A. H. Smith, Dover Publications, Mineola, New York, 1990

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became the capital of Iceland. Iceland increased under King Harald Haarfager of Norway, the first who unified Norway<sup>28</sup>.

In this boom of the Viking explorations Eric the Red also activated. The first part of his life was spent in Norway until he was ousted for committing murder. His family has been established in the northwest Iceland where he was expelled for the second time, where he also committed crime. He then went to Greenland. Although he is considered by many people the discoverer of this huge island, Eric was not the first European who set foot here, but the first who established a permanent settlement. After three years on this island, Eric returned to Iceland to lure the potential settlers. In order to attract them on the icy island, Eric called it Greenland, which means the green earth<sup>29</sup>. His plan had a major success, because many poor people went to the new land. Here there were founded several colonies in those areas where the summer became milder and the cultivation of the cold coil was possible. The rest of the year, the Vikings survived by hunting whales, seals and walruses which were sought for their precious tusk. This aspect caused many conflicts between Vikings and the Inuit natives.

His son, Leif Ericson continued his father's work even more successful. At the age of almost thirty, Leif sailed from Greenland to Norway where he became the personal guard of King Olaf Tryggvason. Olaf baptized him and entrusted him with the mission of Christianization of Greenland. During his trip to Greenland, Leif was diverted from his course by strong winds and reached the coasts of North America. This land was generically called Vinland<sup>30</sup>.

According to the historian Einar Haugen, Leif Ericson was not the first European who discovered America and not the first who landed here. He had heard the story of Bjarni Herjólfsson, the merchant who claimed that he had seen the land from the west of Greenland after he was diverted from his course. Bjarni notes, however, that he did not land on this area. When Leif was diverted from the course to Greenland, he discovered territories that he did not expect to see. There were growing corn and wild grapes. During the exploration of this new territory, Leif rescued two Vikings who had shipwrecked there before and then they all headed to Greenland where Leif began his mission of evangelization<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Lincoln Paine, *op. cit.* p. 215

<sup>29</sup> Gwyn Jones (trans.), *Erik the Red's Saga*, in *The Norse Atlantic Saga: Being the Norse Voyages of Discovery and Settlement to Iceland, Greenland and North America*, new edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986, p. 207-235

<sup>30</sup> Angus Somerville, Andrew McDonald, *The Viking Age: A Reader*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2010, p. 419-420

<sup>31</sup> For more informations see Einar Haugen (trans. Eng.), *Voyages to Vinland, The First American Saga*, Alfred A. Knopf, University of Wisconsin, New York, 1942

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The spread of Christianity by Leif Ericson among the Vikings in Greenland had the expected success; many Northerners adopted the faith in Christ with the important exception of his father. Eric the Red kept the old, pagan Germanic beliefs. His father reacted very harshly to Leif's suggestion to convert. Instead his mother received the new faith and ensured the construction of the first church in Greenland<sup>32</sup>.

Leif Ericson started the preparations for another expedition to discover new lands. He got in contact with Bjarni, the merchant who first saw America and bought his boat. With other 35 crew members, they went to the destination. Leif invited his father, Eric the Red to take part in this expedition, but he fell from a horse while traveling to the boat. Interpreting it as a bad sign, Eric decided to stay in Greenland, but the decision will be fatal, he soon died of plague brought by new settlers from Iceland which devastated the land. Leif followed Bjarni's course and first arrived in a flat, barren and rocky land that he called Helluland (now identified with Baffin Island in Canada). Once they have ventured beyond the sea, they arrived in a land which was completely covered by forests. He called it Markland, the Country of Forests. The place was identified by the researchers with Labrador. After another two days, Leif reached in a pleasant place rich in salmon. As the winter was approaching, Leif decided to spend it in this place and divided the crew into two groups, one remained in the camp while the other explored the place. During the exploration, the Vikings found that the land was abundant in wild grapes and Leif called it Vinland, the country of the grapes. Once winter has passed, Leif returned to Greenland with grapes and timber. On the way back, Leif rescued an Icelandic castaway with the help of his crew and he acquired the nickname Leif the Lucky<sup>33</sup>.

Archaeological discoveries from 1960 have identified the northern settlement on the island of Newfoundland, and the archaeological site is known as L'Anse aux Meadows. Also Vinland can be identified and land surrounding the Gulf of St. Lawrence in Canada, and Anse aux Meadows was just one ship station where the Scandinavian craft could be repaired.

Leif's success has encouraged other Nordic people to repeat the voyage. After Leif left the lands of America, other Vikings began to settle in the territory and soon entered into a bloody conflict with native peoples which were called by Scandinavian Skraelingjars<sup>34</sup>. These conflicts led to the end of the European settlement in America although sporadic expeditions were organized in the area. However, the little ice age from the Middle Ages cut the links with Greenland

<sup>32</sup> Angus Somerville, Andrew McDonald, *op.cit.* p. 420

<sup>33</sup> Angus Somerville, Andrew McDonald, *op.cit.* p. 354

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 203-206

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and Vinland's European settlers in America could no longer be stocked and their connections with the main base were cut.

The news of the discovery of new lands in west, tangential reached at the ears of some Europeans on the continent. Adam of Bremen mentions the existence of these western lands, and his mentions have survived from generation to generation, filling the imagination of explorers and seafarers of the Great Geographical Discoveries from the XV century. It is very likely that the information about the existence of the lands in the west of the Atlantic could be known by Christopher Columbus who claimed that he visited Iceland in 1477<sup>35</sup>.

The discovery of America by Leif Ericson was done under the patronage and under the blessing of the Norwegian King, Olaf Tryggvason. While Leif was involved in discovering new territories, Olaf had domestic problems in his disputes with a part of the Norwegian nobility, with the Danish King Svein and with the Swedish Vikings.

Beside the mission to convert Greenland which was given to Leif Ericson, Olaf christened the Orkney islanders and their leader.

Olaf's secret ambition was to rule all of Scandinavia. According to Icelandic sources Olaf asked the Queen of Sweden to marry, but she refused to convert to Christianity and to give up the pagan faith. For this reason, Olaf declared a war on her and on her ally, the Danish king Svein. Olaf married Svein's sister who ran away from her husband, the pagan Burislav who was the king of the Baltic Slavs.

In 1000, Olaf went on the seaside in front of his fleet in order to seize the land from his new wife. But near the island of Svolder, Olaf was intercepted by a combined fleet of Danes, Swedes and Slavs, along with a few ships belonging to the sons of the former King Haakon of Norway, whom Olaf deposed. Although Olaf fought heroically on his famous boat called the Long Serpent, he was defeated by the Scandinavian coalition.

To avoid being caught in the hands of his enemies, Olaf jumped into the sea and has not been seen since then<sup>36</sup>. Legends about his survival continued to circulate, being used by some pretenders to the throne of Norway to invade the country. One of these was Tryggve, a Scandinavian prince who claimed to be the son of Olaf and Queen Gyda. Under this pretext, he invaded Norway, but he was defeated by the king of Norway's son, Cnut the Great. Tryggve was killed after the battle by a farmer. Many years later, when Harald Hadrada became the king of Norway, passing by the indicated place, he met an old friend who showed him the

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 206

<sup>36</sup> For more informations see Snorri Sturlson, *Heimskringla, or The Lives of the Norse Kings*, English translation by Erling Monsen & A. H. Smith, Dover Publications, Mineola, New York, 1990

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assassin of Tryggve. After he heard the killer's confession, he hung him, invoking the familial links between him and Tryggve, avenging thus his death<sup>37</sup>.

The rumors about Olaf's survival have continued to be widespread for some time after the battle of Svolder. Reports about Olaf's identification were made in Rome, Jerusalem, in Europe and in the Mediterranean. Both, the English king Ethelred and Olaf's sister, Astrid would have received gifts from former Norwegian king some time after his alleged death<sup>38</sup>.

Although Olaf Tryggvason's reign was a short one, it was very important in the history of founding and conversion of the Norway to Christianity. Under his patronage, Leif Ericson discovered America, and Greenland and Orkney islands were converted to Christianity.

On the score of the Battle at Svolder in 1000, the Danish king, Svein has increased his authority, occupying the Norwegian throne which was left vacant by Olaf.

The massacre of the Danes in England, in 1002, which was commissioned by the English king, Ethelred, triggered a series of invasions which were led by the Danish King Svein I. It seems that Svein was personally affected by this atrocity, because among the victims there were his sister, Gunhilde and her husband.<sup>39</sup>

The first invasion took place between 1002 and 1005, but a famine that was raging in that country forced Svein to leave Britain. Other Danish raids were also conducted between 1006-1007 and 1009-1012, but in 1013, Svein led a full scale invasion of England. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, King Svein came with his fleet to Britain where he easily conquered East Anglia, Northumbria and Lindsey kingdoms. Then he went down to Oxford, he conquered it and Winchester was also conquered, then he headed to London.<sup>40</sup>

In London, British endurance was remarkable, which forced Svein to bypass the royal city for a while, but Londoners surrendered in fear of a possible massacre. King Ethelred sent his two sons, Edward and Alfred in Normandy and after that, he followed them into exile<sup>41</sup>.

On the Christmas Day in 1013, the Danish Svein I was crowned the king of England, but he did not enjoy his victory too long, because he died after a short

<sup>37</sup> For more informations see Theodore Murdock Andersson, Kari Ellen Gade (trans. Eng.) *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1167)*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2000

<sup>38</sup> Oddr Snorrason, *The Saga of King Olaf Tryggvason*, (trans. Eng. Nutt), ed. Shepton J., Oxford University Press, 1895, p. 449-465

<sup>39</sup> Mike Ashley, *British Monarchs: A complete genealogy, gazetter and biographical Encyclopaedia of the Kings and Queens of Britain*, Robinson Publishing, London, 1998, p. 483

<sup>40</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in Project Guttenberg, translated by James Ingram, London, september, 1996, p. 61

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*

time. His son, Harald II was crowned king in Denmark, but the Danes in England proclaimed king his brother, Cnut, while the British sent for Ethelred in Normandy to come and reoccupy the English throne. Returning to England in 1014, Ethelred was able to chase Cnut from the country, but he will return a year later. On his returning to England, he found a divided kingdom because Ethelred's son, Edmund Ironside revolted against his father and proclaimed himself as King.

Danish invasion in 1015 was very intense and similar to the one in 865. Wessex was the first English kingdom who surrendered to Cnut's forces. Then a large part of Mercia ranged on the side of it, with Eadric Streona. The forces of the English king, Edmund could not stop the advance of the Danish Army which continued its campaign in the north where it occupied Northumbria.

After a large part of England fell into the hands of Cnut, he headed to London, where Edmund has consolidated his power after his father, Ethelred, died. Before the arrival of the Danes in London, Edmund initiated a campaign in Wessex where he met a faction of the Danish army, in two indecisive battles and London siege was finally lifted. Because of the ferocity Edmund fought with when he arrived from Wessex to save the English capital. Another battle brought the victory of the Danes because of many betrayals which came from the English camp. On the score of this battle Cnut and Edmund met and negotiated the peace which stipulated that all territories from north of the Thames to be passed into the possession of the Danish prince, and London to remain under the authority of Edmund. Also, Cnut had to be Edmund's successor. It all happened when the English king died a few days later, in unknown circumstances<sup>42</sup>.

Cnut was crowned king of England and he has ruled for 19 years, until his death which occurred in 1035. The new king married Emma of Normandy, King Ethelred's widow and daughter of Richard II. Cnut's reign in England gave that country a period of unprecedented stability and prosperity due to the elimination of the danger which was caused by the Scandinavian raids. The English throne was occupied by a Scandinavian. Mostly, the Danes massacre from 1002 was avenged. To consolidate his power, Cnut ordered a series of executions of the English survivors from Wessex, which led to the flight of Ethelred's sons in Normandy. Among these, there was Edward, the great future King of England.

With the vast sum which was collected from his English subjects, Cnut turned his attention to the Scandinavian business. His brother, Harald had already been crowned King of the Danes in 1014, but at his death in 1018, Cnut I succeeded him and became also the king of Denmark. His reign in Denmark was extremely successful and prosperous although the energetic Danish king spent most of his reign in England.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.

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The situation of the Norwegian throne was more complicated which determined Cnut to lead a long fight in order to occupy the power in Norway, which was also held by his father.

Norwegian throne has been occupied by King Olaf II Haraldson (1015-1028) for 13 years. He was a descendant of the royal family of Harald Fairhair who was the first king of Norway.

We can find in his biography many mythical elements from the Icelandic histories from the XIII century. During the Viking expansion, Iceland was characterized by a wild and inhospitable landscape. Scandinavian people, who settled in this frozen island near the Arctic Circle, were content with what little fertile ground offered for a living at Reykjavik farm and founded new settlements.

What bounded and united all these Icelandic Vikings was the love for adventure, poetry and stories. These elements of the Icelanders' character have contributed to the composition of the famous history of the most important rulers or Scandinavian explorers. Even if this history combines mythical elements which sometimes are criticized, they represent a fundamental source in the investigation of the events of the Middle Ages in Northern Europe. Icelanders' love for literature was transmitted from generation to generation what made that more than two thirds of the adult population of the country to become published authors. *Fagrskinna* saga, *Morkinskinna* saga and *Heimskringla* saga were written by the Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson which describes Olaf's ascension to the throne and the importance of his reign in the national struggle for the independence in forming and organizing Norway and Christianity in this mountainous country.

Before taking the power in Norway, Olaf Haraldson organized plundering expeditions on the shores of the Baltic States of Estonia and Finland who have failed to achieve their goal; Olaf barely escaped alive from the hands of the mighty Finns.

In his adolescence, Olaf was very active in the Baltic Sea, Denmark and even England. Skald poems of the Icelanders who loved poems and folk, mention an attack on the capital which was made by Olaf when he managed to destroy the London Bridge. This expedition is not mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or in any other contemporary chronicles. If this attack had actually taken place, it would have occurred in 1014 when Cnut was banished from Britain and the English throne was taken by King Ethelred<sup>43</sup>.

In his route to Norway, Olaf spent the winter at the court of Duke Richard II of Normandy. Richard Duke showed his devotion for the Christianity and persuaded Olaf to be baptized at Rouen. After Olaf received the Christian faith, he

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<sup>43</sup> For more details see Jan Ragnar Hagland, Bruce Watson, *Fact of folklore: the Viking attack on London Bridge*, London Archeologist Spring [http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-457-1/dissemination/pdf/vol10/vol10\\_12/10\\_12\\_328\\_333.pdf](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-457-1/dissemination/pdf/vol10/vol10_12/10_12_328_333.pdf)

arrived in Norway in 1015 where he received the support of an important part of the local nobility and managed to defeat the main pretender to the throne, Svein Hakonarson. In the following years, Olaf gained greater powers among the Scandinavians, as he managed the incorporation of the most Norwegian territories under his rule, including Orkney and Shetland Islands near Scotland. The relations with Sweden improved but relations with the Danes continued to be hostile.

His success was a short lived because in 1026 he lost the important battle at Helga against the Danish and English combined forces. King Olaf of Norway and King Anund Jacob of Sweden took the advantage of the fact that King Cnut spent the most of his time being involved in the English problems and attacked the Danish Baltic Sea. Naval battle was finally won by Cnut, but he lost in the battle many Danish and British troops. This victory with many losses has made Cnut the dominant force in Scandinavia.

The battle is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 1025 and in St. Olaf's saga by Snorri Sturlson. Olaf was forced to flee to Kievan Rus at the court of Yaroslav the Wise (1019-1054). After that, he fled to Sweden where he converted many pagans to Christianity, according to Icelandic sources.

In 1029 King Cnut's regent in Norway was lost at sea, and Olaf took the advantage of the situation to regain the throne. The fight took place at Stiklestad, in 1030 and it is considered one of the most famous battles in the history of Norway.

According to the source *Heimskringla*, Olaf started with an army of 3600 warriors; he crossed the mountains of Sweden to the Verdalen valley, near Trondheim. At Stiklestad, Olaf met with another Norwegian army which was led by his loyal nobles and thus the number of the troops has reached about 14 500 fighters. Snorri Sturlson describes the battle cries that Olaf's warriors used: "Forward, forward, people of Christ, people of the cross, the king's men." According to the Icelandic historian, Olaf fought heroically in the battle against the Danish forces of king Cnut the Great, but he has received numerous wounds to the knee and neck, and he was killed by a spear which has penetrated his chainmail and punctured his abdomen. The King's body was taken from there and was hidden in an unknown place. At Stiklestad, his brother, Harald Hardrada also fought side by side. He was seriously injured and was forced to flee to Kievan Rus, at Yaroslav the Wise, the protector of his brother when he was in exile. Also according to Snorri Sturlson, a year after the battle, Olaf's body was exhumed and he was found untouched by the decay. His body was taken and deposited in the cathedral of Trondheim, and Olaf was canonized by his friend, the Archbishop Grimkell, without any formal approval of the Roman curia. This aspect was unknown for the Norwegians at that

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time. The canonization of Olaf II makes him the last important saint venerated both in the West and in the East, before the Great Schism of 1054<sup>44</sup>.

After the victory of Stiklestad, Cnut the Great obtained the Norwegian throne, restoring the power which was created by his father, King Svein. The governance of Svein, Cnut's son, was so unpopular that it led to the rebellion of Magnus the Good, the illegitimate son of Olaf and it also led at the occupancy of the Norwegian throne.

The importance of the reign of Olaf II in Norway is not given by his political accomplishments but is given by the religious ones. At a first trial, the reign of Olaf hardly seems impressive. Its power was based primarily on his relationship with King Cnut the Great. When the relations between the two have distanced, Olaf lost his throne, and when he attempted a recapture of the royal power, he was killed on the battlefield. But his religious work makes Olaf to be called the Eternal King of Norway. Moreover, Olaf becomes the spiritual symbol of the Scandinavian countries, the saint patron who was adopted by the Norwegians after the Danish model of St. Cnut the Great and after the Swedish King Erik the Victorious.

Wrongly, Olaf II is considered the man who christened Norway, but from the reign of the King Haakon the Good, all the Norwegian monarchs were Christians. The one who started the strongest efforts to convert Norway to Christianity was rather the predecessor of Olaf II, Olaf Tryggvason I. During the reign of Olaf II, all the political opponents who were led by King Cnut the Great were already devoted to the Christian faith and were tireless patrons of the Church. As we saw above, Olaf converted pagan Swedes during his exile in this country. Church organization and implementation of the religious laws by Olaf had such an important impact that the delegates of Gregory VII (1073-1085) were categorically refused by the Norwegian Church council when they came to impose the celibacy of the priests among the Scandinavians. Norwegian Synod complained that these new rules for the priests were not in the law code of the Church which was composed by King Olaf II.

Although miraculous deeds were assigned to Olaf and his genuine faith cannot be questioned anymore, there should be highlighted, however, certain negative aspects of his personality. From all the sources of his biography we find out that Olaf was extremely violent and his actions often led to raids and bloodsheds. Olaf II Haraldson resorted to the brute force to convert the pagans to Christianity. However, this behavior can be excused if it is not removed from the general context

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<sup>44</sup> For more details regarding the life of Olaf al II-lea, see Snorre Sturlason, *The Heimskringla or The Sagas of the Norse Kings, vol. II*, translated by (eng.) Samuel Laing, Rasmus B. Anderson, L.L.D., London, 1939, chapter VII: *Saga of King Olaf Haraldson The Saint*, p. 248-399

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of the Nordic medieval society. Furthermore, while Christianity was sincerely assumed by Scandinavian monarchies and by the common people, some pagan practices have died harder. It is well known that, like his predecessors, Olaf practiced polygamy, taking more wives simultaneously. But human personality combined with the negative and positive aspects admits that no man is without any sin and the spiritual importance of his achievements deleted his failures.

His personality cult was so important that he became the most honored Scandinavian holy abroad. He soon became the patron saint of Varangian Scandinavian Guard in the Byzantine Empire, next to the Virgin Mary. A church with his patron was situated in York during the Middle Ages. He is very popular among English people with Danish origins. As we previously mentioned, Olaf is the last important holy man in the Christian Church before the Great Schism from 1054 and he is one of the most honored Westerners saints who is solemnized by the Orthodox Christians today, especially by those in the Western Europe or in America.

The death of Olaf II balanced the political situation in Scandinavia, giving King Cnut the Great an even greater power.

After he obtained the power in Norway, Cnut the Great became the dominant leader in Scandinavia. Occupying the throne of three countries: England, Norway and Denmark, King Cnut became one of the most powerful monarchs in Europe at that time. He founded an empire in the North Sea that rivaled with the Holy Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire.

At the peak of its power, his enemies were defeated and the power was concentrated in his hands safer than ever. Cnut honored the invitation to Rome to attend the coronation of the German Emperor, Conrad II. In 1037, Cnut went on pilgrimage to Rome where he tied close relations with the German Emperor and King of Burgundy, Rudolf. The invitation to join the most powerful men in West Europe demonstrates the prestige Cnut enjoyed and his force of decision regarding the main issues of the Christian powers in the West. His visit to Rome highlights the special relationship that he had with the Roman Church. During his reign, Christianity benefited by a strong position in Scandinavia and it led to the conversion of many Vikings to Christianity. Although some pagan customs were incompatible with the Christian teaching, such as polygamy, they continued to influence the Northern society. These practices were adopted even by Cnut and by the most Scandinavian leaders like Danish or Norwegian rulers. In this context, Olaf I Tryggvason, Olaf II Haraldson and Harald III Hardrada, the exponents of Christianity, practiced the polygamy.

While Denmark and Norway were adopting the Christian faith, Sweden continued to advocate pagan beliefs, drawing its own Scandinavian identity.

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Cnut has always preferred to evade the influence exerted by the archbishops of Bremen in Germany as it was imposed by the papacy and Cnut preferred to bring English missionaries to spread Christian, cultural and religious teachings, configuring new connections between England and Scandinavia.

Cnut died in the autumn of 1035, but its northern empire did not survive. Harthacnut who was called Cnut III, succeeded to the thrones of Denmark and England and Magnus I succeeded to the throne of Norway. In England, after the death of Harthacnut, Edward, son of King Ethelred succeeded to the throne. King Ethelred returned from Normandy in 1042, installing the dynasty of Wessex.

The reign of King Edward the Confessor will last until 1066 and will be one of the most stable and prosperous reign in the history of English people. It was exemplary for all the English monarchs who occupied the throne.

During his reign, there was maintained a lively correspondence with the Byzantine Empire and there was sent a delegation which was composed of English knights, clergy and monks to the Greek king, Maniakes. Of course, Edward the Confessor made confusion because there was not any emperor in Byzantium with this name. It was therefore a brilliant general, George Maniakes, who organized successful campaigns against Aleppo and Edessa in the Middle East, but he has crowned his military career in Italy and in Sicily against the Arabs and Normans. In these campaigns Maniakes was accompanied by the Varangian Guard which was led by Harald Hardrada, whose life and activity we will describe and analyze in the following lines. Because of the ingratitude of the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos, George Maniakes was outraged and rebelled, but he was defeated in battle in the end. Maniakes enjoyed an overwhelming popularity, surpassing the one of the emperor in the international relations and this was the reason why he was called a "king" in the English and Scandinavian sources. According to the chronicle which was called *Gesta Regnum Anglorum* English delegation from Constantinople intended to give to the emperor a letter related on a vision that King Edward the Confessor had. While he was at the feast of Easter in Westminster, the Reverend English king had a vision of the seven young asleep people on Coelius Mountain, in Ephesus. Their bodies have been placed in the tomb, on the right side, for more than two hundred years. In this vision, they have turned to the left and they have stood there for another 74 years. In these 74 years, many terrible things would happen to the Roman Empire. English delegation went to Ephesus where the bodies were exhumed and seven saints were found on the left, as in English king's vision. The people of Ephesus strongly advocated that the seven young people had been seated on the right side<sup>45</sup>. The warnings which were

<sup>45</sup> Vladimir Moss, *Căderea Angliei Ortodoxe*, trad. de Drăghici Mihaela-Daniela, Editura Egumenita, București 2010, p. 109-110

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addressed by the English King of Rome did not have the expected effect and the Byzantines have disregarded them. However, they were true and Byzantium was punished with unworthy and totally incompetent emperors who neglected the imperial policy and led the army of Constantinople in a deplorable state by abolishing the famous theme, the administrative specific military Byzantine forms and the abolition of the imperial fleet whose usefulness was challenged. It all culminated with the betrayals and humiliations which were suffered by the Byzantines on the battlefield of Manzikert in 1071. This fact left much of the army of Rome destroyed and thus Anatolia was flooded by the Seljuk Turks. However, the 74-year-old ended and the properly end can be interpreted with the debut of the Comnenian Restoration which was characterized by the reigns of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118), his son John II Komnenos (1118 -1143) and his nephew Manuel I Comnenos (1143-1180).