**/// Episode 05 – The Dawn of a New Era**

**ASSASSIN’S CREED VALHALLA AND XBOX PRESENT: ECHOS OF VALHALLA.**

**LIFE IN VIKING TIMES, THE PODCAST**

/// INTRO

(Cawing of ravens)

(Mystical atmosphere, crisp noises)

Voiceover:

*In the land of our forefathers, at dawn in the dark of winter...*

*The Gods sometimes send us the strangest signals!*

*A green haze fills the sky like a fleeting puff of smoke*

*Flashes of emerald, so vibrant they seem spectral…*

*For a few moments, darkness gives way to these meandering spirals.*

*Our ancestors saw in them the reflection of the Valkyrie armours sent by Odin.*

*Others took them for dragons circling the skies.*

(Cawing of ravens)

Voiceover:

*Following Alfred of Wessex’s crushing victory and Danish chief Guthrum’s conversion to Christianity, both enemies, now united through faith, signed an important peace treaty.*

*Danelaw is limited to East Anglia, Northumbria and North Mercia. Wessex gains control of South Mercia. Alfred’s kingdom covers the southwestern stretches of the island while we Danes control the northeast.*

*But beyond the clauses of the treaty, Alfred is now in a position to call the shots.*

Alfred of Wessex and Guthrum

*- Let’s celebrate, friend! Our borders are established along the river Thames, up the river Lea. Our kingdom has never been so immense!*

*- Thanks to you Alfred, we have won this battle! This is a blessed day from the Gods. Victory at last!*

*- No, my friend… Not yet… Only when our land is united under one banner will the day be truly a great one…*

*- But… The treaty has made Danelaw legitimate… You have agreed to cede land to these pagans!*

*- Patience… This treaty will allow me to keep my eye on them but do you really believe this peace will last?*

*- Probably not, knowing our former enemies…*

*- We share the same sentiment. But know this, when war breaks out again, this time we shall be ready, and we will take back all our land.*

**Focus #1 – The Peace Treaty of 878-890**

**ALBAN GAUTIER**

**Between Guthrum et Alfred - ALBAN GAUTIER, Professor of Medieval History, University of Caen, France- The peace held for the next 10 to 15 years. So Alfred enjoyed a few years of respite, but naturally not all the Vikings were under Guthrum’s orders. Alfred had to engage in battle with other groups of Vikings. In the 880s, these groups didn’t pose much of a threat, but they certainly would, come the 890s.**

Voiceover:

*While Alfred uses his advantage to make London fall into his hands, Guthrum for once actually keeps his word. He remains peacefully confined in his kingdom of East Anglia and rules as a Christian monarch. Many great Viking warlords also choose to convert in his wake.*

(Bells ringing)

*Something had changed... One generation had passed since the attacks carried out by Ivar, Halfdan and the others. The Great Army’s victorious momentum that had helped it swarm across the island had died down… The Viking wave had crashed onto the Wessex rock! The wind had turned, and was now filling the Anglo-Saxon sails. Had the Great Army offered all it had to give? Perhaps not…*

**Focus #2 – The End of the Century**

**ALBAN GAUTIER**

**The Vikings hordes that didn’t manage to carve out a territory in England fell back on the Carolingian kingdom. These Viking hordes remained extremely active during the 880’s, but this time their sights were set on the continent. Later, in the 890’s, many more Vikings would set foot on the shores of England.**

Voiceover:

*The apparent peace was in fact more of a long truce, enabling both sides to regroup and prepare for the battles to come.*

*All Danes do not see Guthrum as their king… He cannot prevent scattered forces in different corners of the realm from picking up their swords. After his death, new waves of warriors land in droves in Kent, having set off from the continent where their positions were under threat.*

(Sound of boats)

*These Vikings did not land on the Great Island to carry out simple one-off raids. Their plan was to continue the invasion!*

(Sound of boats landing, footsteps) NO HORSES!

**Focus #3 – The Defence of Alfred Against the New Invasions**

**Ryan Lavelle**

**They were just trying their luck, basically, within the West-Saxon kingdom, once again - RYAN LAVELLE, Early Medieval History Professor, University of Winchester - But I think this is the mark of Alfred’s use of the hiatus, the period of peace after the treaty of 878, a mark of the degree of strategic thinking: Alfred used that moment to consolidate the defences of the West Saxon kingdom.**

Alfred of Wessex and his son Edward:

*- Father, the Danes have landed in Kent! They have arrived from the continent!*

*- Ah! They took their time, but as I have always said, weeds always grow back …and Alfred of Wessex has taken up arms again to drive them off once more!*

*- Father, I beg you, give me an army, I will take care of them!*

*-Come on, let’s go. Go and warn Æthelred!*

Voiceover:

*Alfred, his son Edward and brother-in-law Æthelred manage to push their enemies further north. But for the English, the only outcome is total victory over the new invaders. The Danish troops, headed by chief Hastein, flee north and find themselves under siege at Buttington fortress…*

(Siege ambience, battering ram to break down the fortress gates)

Hastein and his aide de camp:

- *Hastein, we have been under Saxon siege for weeks... Our supplies are depleted. Water is scarce. Our men are starving to death.*

*- I know, I know, yes I know…*

*- Some are even hunting rats as a last resort! What shall we do?*

*- Gather our warriors at the gates! We’re going to force our way out!*

*- We are?*

*- Don’t look at me like that. If we’re going to die, we might as well go down swinging! Gather our troops!*

*- Right away! Soldiers at the gates!*

Voiceover:

*The battle turns into a massacre on both sides...*

*While the Saxons come out on top, they are unable to stop a fraction of the Danish fighters from fleeing to Essex. Weeds always grow back, to quote Alfred!*

*Six years after successfully stopping the new wave of invasions, the “Great” king, as he was called even in his lifetime, passed away. He is given a solemn funeral.*

(Death knell rings, church ambience, sacred songs)

Priest:

*Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

*Te decet hymnus Deus, in Sion, et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem*.

Voiceover:

*A page has been turned, but war rages on. Through his son and grandson, kings Edward and Aethelstan, Alfred’s dream of reclaiming the country is kept alive. One by one, they submit the Danish princes of East Anglia, the Five Boroughs and the town of York. But the reconquest is long and arduous. Danelaw survives and maintains its influence… All English kings are not cut from the same cloth as Alfred the Great. King Edgar’s peaceful reign allows the Danish princes to pick themselves back up.*

**Focus #4 – Post Alfred**

**ALBAN GAUTIER**

**Again, from around 980, there are new Viking expeditions, more and more numerous, with increasingly bold attacks and vaster armies than at the end of the 9th century, a hundred years earlier. Now, one of the strategies, not the only one, but one of the strategies pursued by Aethelred II, the king of the English at the end of the 10th century, is to pay the Vikings to leave.**

Voiceover:

*A few decades earlier, King Harald Bluetooth of Denmark had converted to Christianity, which led to the Christianisation of our homeland…*

*But in these uncertain times, some clerics cannot help but wonder about the future of Christianity.*

*Some watch for signs from heaven. Would God let Evil prevail?*

*For the English, once again the “Demons” would come from the sea…*

*Although he too had converted to Christianity, their leader bore a name that would make monasteries tremble: Sweyn Forkbeard!*

(Sounds of battle)

*After setting foot in England, he dethrones king Aethelred and takes the crown. His son, Cnut the Great, reigned over an empire both massive and short-lived that included England, Norway and Denmark.*

*Upon his death, Alfred of Wessex’s dynasty returned to the throne in the person of Edward the Confessor. But not for long!*

**Focus #5 – New Invasion**

**In 1042, 7 years after the death of Knut, this prince who has spent most of his life in exile flees the country in 1014 and returns in 1042. After nearly 30 years in exile, he is called back by the Great Men of the Kingdom to ascend to the throne. He reigned until 1066.**

Voiceover:

*Upon Edward the Confessor’s death, the throne of England remained vacant. The list of pretenders included Harald “the Stern”, king of Norway, who was said to be the “last of the Vikings”… Harald makes an alliance with the Duke of Normandy, William the Conqueror, but his death on the battlefield allows William to take the crown and rule supreme. In a twist of fate, he too had Viking blood in his veins as a descendant of Jarl Rollon, who had conquered Normandy. Through him, the Norsemen had finally fulfilled their goal of conquering England!*

**Focus #6 – William the Conqueror**

**Ryan Lavelle**

**The Bayeux tapestry is perhaps evidence of the last Viking invasion of Britain. The Bayeux tapestry shows the Normans with Viking haircuts, or what they thought looked like Viking haircuts, and we can see the construction of Viking ships with overlapping planks and with their great keels.**

Voiceover:

*This marked the end of the great Viking saga in England. Two centuries of invasions and fighting, but also building, trading, sharing and evolving…*

*How far we have come! An adventure of epic proportions!*

*Having left the homeland, my people made the Earth tremble… And not only in England!*

*Over three extraordinary centuries, some swept through France, sailing up the Seine to Paris…*

*Others scoured the Mediterranean Sea all the way to Constantinople…*

*Others settled in Iceland and never left…*

*And more yet submitted the Slavic tribes and founded a State at the gates of the Orient…*

Dialogue between two Vikings:

* Olé?
* Yes?
* Olé, is that you?
* Ah! Alrek, I am happy to see you again, my brother. Where did you go for so long? Take a seat and tell me where you were.
* Do you remember? I left to seek fortune in Kiev.
* Yes. Yes, I remember.
* I stayed some time in Kiev, before succumbing to my thirst for adventure. I joined a merchant fleet that was sailing towards Byzantium with a cargo of furs.
* Waitress: You went to Byzantium?  I have heard that there’s no city like it!
	+ Oh yes, it’s the greatest city I have ever seen! And you should see the markets! It is a trader’s paradise!
* Waitress: It is true that you cannot find many silk dresses like yours here…
* This is just a small sample of what I could have brought back.
* Waitress: Here, this one is on the house if you promise to tell me more!
	+ I promise!
	+ I see you still have a keen sense of business!
	+ Don’t mock me… And you, what brings you here?
	+ I have not done too badly either. I have just returned from Iceland. I filled my ship with walrus ivory. It is in great demand in these parts. I have never sailed beyond, but I have heard there are other lands to be found…
	+ Let’s drink to lands we have crossed, and especially to those that Njörd will open up to us! To Njörd!
	+ *Yes,* to Njörd!

**Focus #7 – Other Viking Invasions**

**Lucie Malbos
Around 1000 AD, the Scandinavians cross the Atlantic. -LUCIE MALBOS, Lecturer in Medieval History, University of Poitiers, France - They arrive from Newfoundland in a region they named Vinland, where we have indeed found traces of Scandinavian settlements. So we can now say the Vikings have discovered America nearly 5 centuries before Christopher Columbus.**

Voiceover:

*What is left of the Sons of the North? What is left of the Vikings, now that they have blended into new kingdoms, abandoning their customs and traditions? Has their trace vanished forever? Has the time of the Ragnarök come?*

**Focus #8 – The Ragnarök**

**Lucie Malbos**

**We have long focused on the violence of the Vikings, the barbarian destroyers. Nowadays, although we do not deny the violence they inflicted, we concentrate on the Vikings' relations with others in terms of cultural transfer, the exchange of goods but also of ideas, beliefs, and know-how. Historians now call this phenomenon the Viking diaspora.**

**So there is no longer a Viking culture but rather multiple Viking cultures scattered here and there.**

Voiceover:

*It was not the end of the world.*

*Only the end of one particular world… our world!*

*But all is not lost…*

*We have not vanished for good!*

*The Sagas tell of our achievements…*

*Unearthed objects remind us of how ingenious our craftsmen were.*

*Many languages across the globe are peppered with Old Norse words…*

*But the main point lies elsewhere…*

*It cannot be seen. It can only be felt.*

*It is a state of mind.*

*The mind of the Vikings.*

(Sound of waves, wind)

*Can you hear me?*

*I cast these words to the wind…*

*From atop this cliff, I gaze at the sea…*

*I see the same views as those who set off one fateful morning on a quest for fortune and glory…*

*I see the same horizon that unfolds into infinity.*

*The eternal hourglass of life constantly being turned on its head… only to start again!*

*And you… You who are listening… If you feel the call of the sea, the call of the wilderness, the urge to explore new horizons, to overcome obstacles and constantly reinvent yourselves… Then… the spirit of the Vikings is not dead. It lives within you!*