

# KINHEM

*The turning point*

*An epic story in 9th century Kennemerland*

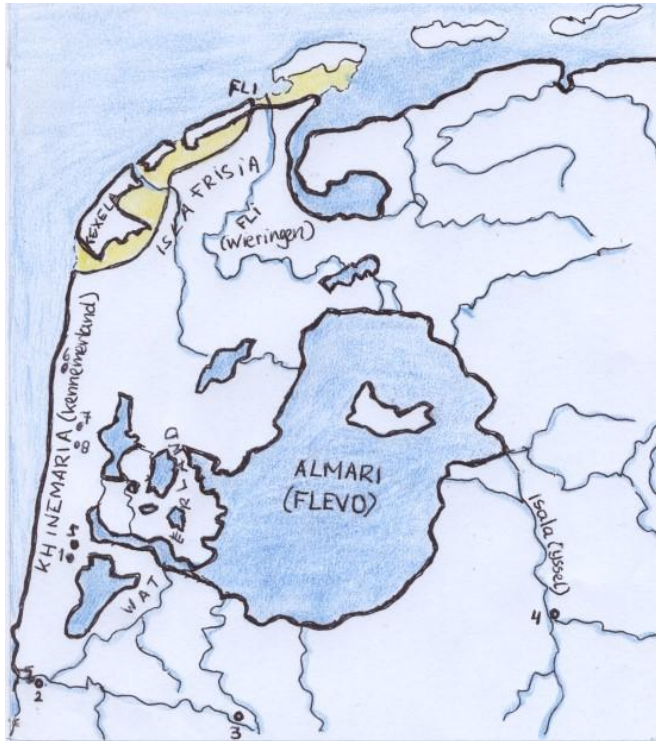
DE GROTE VERANDERING  
EEN EPISCH VERHAAL IN 9DE EEUWS KENNEMERLAND

LOEK VAN STRAATEN

This story is made up. The characters in the book live and act in the midst of real historical events and people. The years correspond to the official history. However, one event has changed with increasingly greater consequences. In this book, the battle of Poitiers in 732 was not won by Charlemagne's grandfather, but by his opponent, Emir Abdul Rahman, leader of the Moorish army in Spain.

*When Charles Martel in 732 AD lost the Battle of Poitiers to the Moorish army under Emir Abdul Rahman, the northward expansion of Islam from Spain continued. At the end of the century, Paris fell within the sphere of influence of Al-Andalus and Gaul became a Wilaya. The breakthrough also took place in eastern Europe in the 9th century. The Franks were forced to turn away from the area and increase their influence to the north. In doing so, they encountered Frisians, Saxons and Vikings. This period after the Roman period was sometimes called the 'Dark Ages' and for 400 years little progress was visible. Then changes followed in quick succession...*

847 AD In the Low Countries, monks from the west preach the gospel, while the Vikings from the north scourge Western Europe. A family flees from Wieringen to Kinhem and ends up in a feudal world, where Rorik holds sway on behalf of the Frankish king Lothair. A false feudal lord sows discord in Vellesan. A new flight takes place, causing two lovers to lose each other. A search begins.



Khinemaria or Kinhem is Kennemerland in the 9th century. 1. Haarhem (Haarlem), 2. Litte (Leiden), 3. Trajectum (Utrecht), 4. Daventria (Deventer), 5. Vellesan (Velsen), 6. Hallem (Bergen), 7. Heiloo, 8. Limbon (Limmen).

It is not entirely clear what this country was like at that time. The landscape consisted largely of swampy peat forests. It was not until the eleventh century that the map changed dramatically. Then there was a breakthrough between the North Sea and the large central Lake Flevo. The yellow-colored areas have only been inundated by the sea since the ninth or tenth century.

## Part 1

### The Vikings

Kybbe was two years old when the Norsemen came. They rushed into the village and slashed with their battle axes and swords at the men who tried in vain to defend themselves. They rounded up the women and children, after which they organized a feast on the spot with the boar that was already turning on the spit when they started the slaughter. Everything that was drinkable was poured into their brought cups. Then the rape started.

### **847 AD**

Marzoeta was picking berries with her two children when she heard the commotion. Fortunately, she was sheltered by the dense undergrowth. Thus they were hidden from the eyes of the hard men with their shining weapons. She could barely suppress a scream of horror and held her daughter, Pytske, tightly so that she could not see the scene. She had to get out of here quickly before the girl or Kybbe shouted to alert the Vikings to their presence. When she thought she had gone far enough away not to be discovered by the plunderers, she sat down on a dry patch of ground, gave Pytske some berries to eat and let Kybbe suck on her nipple, even though he was already too big for that.

After the feast, the captors set all the huts ablaze and, with the rounded up villagers, left the place where they had celebrated their easy victory.

Marzoeta had heard many stories about that. She knew that these men came to collect slaves, who had to do all kinds of work in their distant home, such as processing wool into warm clothing and sails for their ships. In addition, they were used for the sexual pleasure of these barbarians.

Towards the evening she returned and walked with her children into the smoking village. Pytske started to cry uncontrollably when she saw Uncle Oege lying in a large pool of blood. She tore herself away from her mother and threw herself on the lifeless body. Marzoeta stood with Kybbe on her hip, watching the picture of a silent slaughter. Here her relatives and acquaintances lay dead. She would certainly never again see those who had been taken. She shuddered to think of what awaited them. All she could do now was waiting for Aeijolt to return from the hunt. How lucky it was that he had decided to go catch fish with some men today at the Fli,

the large river that flowed from Flevo into the Northern Sea. With a gentle hand she led the girl away from her favorite uncle.

When they returned, they found their lives in pieces. The men cursed and pulled their hair out. There was crying and wailing. Rium couldn't handle it and was vomiting until the last bit of bile had left his body. Marzoeta, as the only woman in the group, mourned her dead relatives. Pytske was quiet and just looked around with big eyes.

What was to be done now? Who could lead them? Aeijolt was very certain, while the other men had the vague idea of rebuilding the village and continuing their old lives as best they could, he indicated that he saw no point in doing so. "All our relatives are dead or taken away. Do you want to build a new society with ten men and one woman? How? No, our future lies in Kinhem. I heard there are already larger communities on the higher ground. That offers more protection against these inhumans. Together we are stronger. There we can hunt, keep and grow some livestock. We can also go out to sea to catch fish or perhaps in the lakes of Waterland. Now let us first honor our dead and place them in the fire. Then we have to smoke the fish we caught before it spoils. Finally, we look at which tools can be salvaged from our burned houses. It will be all we take."

They turned as one when a sound came from behind a half-burned hut. A woman and child emerged.

"Duna!" Marzoeta shouted. "You're alive!"

Tears streamed down Duna's cheeks as she fell into her sister's arms. Her story was listened to in great silence by those present and even the toughest of the men shed a tear. After two large Northmen had assaulted her, they were distracted by the partying gang and so she was able to sneak away quietly to her hut, where she hastily grabbed Atze from his bed and, with her hand clamping his mouth, managed to reach the bush behind the village unnoticed. There she had waited, trembling, until the noise had died down and the smoke had filled her nostrils. She didn't know what to do until she heard Aeijolt's voice. Then she crept carefully behind the hut.

It was a small and sad procession that set off in a south-west direction three days later. They left Wieringen, although they were not aware of it, and entered Kinhem. On the higher ground they met more and more people, who treated them kindly when they heard the story of the poor group. Out of gratitude for their help and for the letting them stay

overnight, their fish supply quickly dwindled. They heard new stories about the Normans and the biggest surprise came when a resident of a small community in the dune area told them that this area was considered his property by the Viking Rorik. Although he had fled to the Saxon areas, because his feudal lord, the Roman Emperor Lothair, doubted his loyalty, Rorik was officially the boss in this area. Aeijolt was shocked by that. A Viking? The concept of a king was well known to him, because the stories about Radbod, king of the Frisians were often told. According to tradition, Radbod protected the Frisians and therefore fought the Franks, who tried to conquer the area. After his experience with the Normans and the stories he heard about plundering raids here in Kinhem, he could not imagine that a Viking could be in charge here. No, a new life for his group could not be found here. They would only stop their journey at a larger community and settle there.

Finally they reached Vellesan. There was a lot of activity. They were amazed. They had never seen so many wooden houses together. Accustomed as they were to their huts of sods and reeds, this was an enormous luxury that unfolded before their eyes. This was what Aeijolt had wanted. There were plenty of trees here that were suitable for construction. Building a house like that would be great. So much was happening here! He soon discovered that not everyone did everything themselves. There was a shoemaker and the shoes he made he traded for other things he needed and for food. He often received coins - especially many sceattas - at the sale. These were then weighed to determine the value. There were bakers. In his experience, that had always been the work of women. Washing, baking bread and brewing beer were among the household chores. It was important for his relatives to be able to earn a living here and find shelter. He had to copy the art from the builders in this place. Perhaps such a builder would help him or hire him.

On the market square he saw a strange building. It looked like a house, but part of it rose a little into the air. What was the point of this? He looked up, mesmerized.

"You're new here, surely?" he heard a voice next to him ask. "I see you looking at the bell chair of our church as if you have never seen anything like it before."

'Bell chair? Church? What is that? What is it for?' Aeijolt was baffled.

"A church is dedicated to the Lord. Here the word of God is proclaimed. See that big wooden cross? That is the symbol of Christianity. Jesus was nailed to it to take away the sins of man."

When the man saw that Aeijolt did not understand, he told him that more and more people were converting to the Christian faith. Monks had come from Ireland, England and the lands of the Franks to spread the faith in the one true God.

'Monks live there together in monasteries to serve God and spread his word. Their homes are just as threatened by the Vikings as ours and that is why they build high towers at their monasteries, which they use as a bell tower and as a lookout post. This way they can warn in time in the event of a raid. Monks such as Adelbert, Wigbert, Liudger and Willibrord preached here in Frisia. By the way, our great pride hangs in the bell chair, a bell made in the abbey of Susteren and brought all the way to Vellesan by a Frisian merchant.'

Aeijolt felt dizzy. Although he had heard from itinerant preachers and their preaching that there was only one god, the rest was all new to him. His conversation partner introduced himself as Clauwaert the carpenter and it soon turned out that he had built this church after he had converted to this new faith. Aeijolt took the opportunity to tell him of his hope to one day be able to build like this. Clauwaert was touched by the story of the massacre in Aeijolt's village, where they had lost everything, and their subsequent journey south.

"So you need work and a roof over your head. If there are twelve of you that came here, you have the best chance of getting a job at Claes van Hoelyde. He's the richest man in this spot. He uses the peatlands between the rows of dunes west of here as pastureland. To extract even more land, it is necessary to widen the waterways so that the water is drained away more quickly. Now it is a swampy area. He needs people who can dig. You would get food and shelter in exchange for your work."

Clauwaert proved to be a source of useful information and was very moved by their unfortunate history. He therefore asked Aeijolt to visit him the next morning to help him build a large two-aisled barn for the central storage of the serfs' mandatory payment of part of their harvest. Optimistically, Aeijolt went looking for his family.

The Wieringer fugitives had settled just outside the group of houses on the main path to the north. The time in Aeijolt's absence had been spent building temporary shelters. They hoped the rain would hold off, as it was by no means waterproof. They were all eager to hear what he had to tell them and excited to hear that there might be work waiting for them. Lunch was provided. The pot they brought with them hung on an open fire,

containing a mixture of found vegetables, green herbs, grains, duck eggs and two ducks caught by Rium. This would have to last them the rest of the day. In the afternoon they would visit Claes van Hoelyde and ask for work.

Delighted, Aeijolt went looking for Clauwaert the next morning. His relatives had set out before dawn to widen a watercourse. They were welcomed with open arms by Claes van Hoeleyde. Work and shelter were assured for the time being. There was only one stain on this hopeful future and that was Pytske. She had not spoken a word since the girl had witnessed the horrors in their village. Marzoeta had assumed that her ability to speak would return on its own, but this situation had been going on for months now and Aeijolt was afraid that things would not turn out well for his beautiful daughter. He put these worrying thoughts aside when Clauwaert welcomed him.

When they arrived at the construction site, Aeijolt saw that the groundwork had already been done. His new mentor explained to him what was needed in preparation for a construction project like the one they were now undertaking. It soon became clear to him what the intention was and how the structure would be put together. Not only was Clauwaert good at explaining, but Aeijolt had the gift of visualization. He could already see the building that Clauwaert described growing in his mind's eye. At the end of a day of hard work, the foundation was firmly standing. The master was pleased with his student. He could really use such a hard worker. He took Aeijolt home to soothe their thirsty throats. His wife, Floor welcomed them with a free-range toddler at her feet. The little girl was about Kybbe's age and was called Saartje.

When the conversation turned to his children Aeijolt said that his daughter refused to talk after the events in their home village. Floor said that it would be good for the child to get a little more outside the narrow band of the family. She suggested that Pytske would be entrusted to her regularly. The girl would certainly want to mother Saartje and therefore probably get rid of her problem. Aeijolt promised to talk about it with Marzoeta.

In the following months, the terrible events in their native village slowly began to fade and they managed to give it a place in their memories. Not all of them could do that to the same extent. Rium suffered the most. His anxiety attacks often startled the housemates in the middle of the night. His face regularly showed a tic in the eye. The influence this had was so

great that many people who spoke to him were blinking in no time too. Depression regularly overtook Rium, but when Pytske silently sat next to him and took his hand, a great calm descended upon him. They sat next to each other for some time, motionless and without words.

Not much later, Floor heard Pytske's first words. Saartje had fallen and was crying uncontrollably about the scrape on her knee. Pytske embraced her and whispered: "Be quiet, Saartje, I'll give it a kiss and then the pain will go away completely."

The sobbing subsided while Floor withdrew unnoticed. She was delighted and would certainly make Marzoeta happy with this, but there was still a long way to go. The adults were not allowed to apply too much pressure. She would emphasize that to Marzoeta. First let the children grow in their play and then the rest will come naturally. When Pytske took on a motherly role over Saartje, she could not do it silently. For now, she would continue to pray for the child's recovery.

Meanwhile, Aeijolt had become aware of the power relations and machinations in the village of Vellesan. This place was governed by a mayor, who resided in a larger house on the market square. The tax revenue was recorded here. Confusing was the presence of a priest, who, as Aeijolt saw it, could also collect a kind of tax. After all, it was an obligation for the faithful to provide for the priest. From what he heard, things weren't going well between the two men. That seemed rather difficult to Aeijolt since the court proceedings of the mayor took place in the church. Furthermore, there were meliores, the richest inhabitants of Vellesan, such as Claes van Hoeleyde. Aeijolt heard that Claes was a Huesman with his own horse and armor. That showed what an important man he was. The land was worked by free farmers, but also by serf farmers with a mansus. That was the amount of land that the farmer and his family were able to cultivate. For this purpose he handed over part of the harvest to his lord. It was all quite complicated if you compared it to life in their simple village in Wieringen. There was no gentleman to be seen there and no tax was collected. The villagers had made all the decisions themselves.

There was a day of rest here, when Christians went to church to pray and listen to the priest's words. Aeijolt was committed to the old faith and regularly sacrificed to the Germanic gods. He saw nothing in the Christian church. For half a century, people in this area had been forced to convert to the Christian faith. When Charlemagne conquered Frisia, the clergy were helped to forcibly impose the christian faith on the residents. Aeijolt and his fellow villagers had always honored the old customs and their

ancestors. They asked the gods for prosperity in the harvest and reproduction of the livestock. Food was offered and there was singing. Beloved animals were often buried next to family members after their death. Offerings were thrown into a pool near the village, because the world of the gods could be reached through the water.

However, the Christians found their rituals objectionable and where previously Donar, the god of fertility and slaughter, was honored, people now had to worship Saint Peter in the church for fertility, protection of livestock and arable farming. Every Christian was baptized with sanctified water. Marzoeta recently started going to church with Floor and prayed for their daughter there. She said that the priest also spoke beautifully at the service, but Aeijolt did not feel called to attend. However, he saw no harm in Marzoeta praying for Pytske's health. He himself had gone to the pool in the bog and had offered a beautiful polished pot and a cone-shaped pendant into the water.

## **The Storm**

### **855 AD**

*When Lothair I dies, the Treaty of Prüm is concluded, dividing the empire among his three sons. The eldest son, named Louis, inherits the imperial title and Northern Italy. In 863, Louis is killed in the Battle of Rome. Lothair II then inherits the northern part of the empire, of which Frisia is part. The youngest son, Charles the Younger, inherits areas in the west, but that was only in name, because France was already in the hands of the Caliphate.*



*Treaty of Prüm 855 AD*

A storm was coming. The Vellesanners were afraid, because such storms had destroyed the harvest before and not all houses emerged unscathed from the natural disaster. In Wieringen, Aejolt's group had regularly seen the waters being stirred up and they knew that it was better to look for heights. But here the danger seemed to come from the west, from the high dunes. Their new friends told them how the sand could swallow everything up and that people caught by it could die. Old Dirk had said that this would be a monster storm and that is why Marzoeta quickly went looking for her husband at Clauwaert's latest project. Floor and Duna were already there, driven by their fear and the five of them started a search for their children. At the edge of the village they met a couple of children with whom Kybbe and Saartje regularly went into the dunes. Relieved, Duna hugged her son in her arms. However, Marzoeta and Floor's children were not present. "Where are Kybbe and Saartje?" Marzoeta asked Joukje.

"They went to the beach to see the big waves," said the smallest of the bunch. "We didn't dare and came back, because Dieke said it was very dangerous there when it storms."

"Dieke is a very sensible girl. You did well to come back." Marzoeta turned to Aejolt and Clauwaert. "I'm so scared. The children are in great danger. You have to go get them! At all costs."

Clauwaert had become deathly pale. "We can't do anything, we would get hopelessly lost in the sandstorm ourselves. The only one who has a chance of finding them is my cousin", and he ran away to call Jannes for help.

Panting, with his hand on his side against the shooting pain, Clauwaert arrived at his cousins. As soon as it became clear to Jannes that children had been left behind in the dune area in the oncoming storm, he grabbed a large piece of cloth from his home and ran to the west. Speed was of the greatest essence, because as it stood the storm would peak in half an hour. The children had to be found before then.

He had taught them the way to the sea and repeatedly urged them to always follow the same route, so that they were not in danger of getting lost. He now hoped they had not turned aside and that they were not trying to wander blindly through the storm.

The children loved seeing the high waves of the sea and the gusts of sand washing over the beach. But it soon became less fun. The storm continued to build and seemed to be targeting them. Kybbe took Saartje by the hand and they fled into the dunes; back home. They followed the path indicated by Jannes and knew that they were not allowed to deviate from it. He had reminded them of this so many times. But it became an almost impossible task as the storm intensified further. Soon the swirling sand blinded the two children. In blind panic they tried to find shelter. Kybbe held Saartje's hand tightly as if it were his anchor to survive the raging forces. With the other hand covering his face and his eyes closed, he staggered through the hellish sandstorm. They had lost their sense of direction and could no longer hear anything except the roar of the wind. Where were they supposed to go? Their breath was cut off. Their skin was battered by the sand-saturated storm wind.

Every pore seemed choked. Kybbe threw his arms around Saartje and pressed her against his chest. Completely unexpectedly they were overthrown. Strong hands grabbed them and forced them to the ground. Something swept over them. It was possible to breathe again. Kybbe heard a voice near his ear shouting, "Stay down. Wait until the storm passes."

All they heard after that was the roar of the storm, which very gradually diminished in strength. After a period that seemed to last for days, peace returned. Whatever they were covered with was taken away. There was sand everywhere. It rubbed their bodies under their clothes and Kybbe diligently picked his nose to remove it. Saartje tried to spit it out, but her mouth was so dry that she couldn't. Jannes also tried to get rid of a load of sand and said: "Come, let's go home. As soon as we see a stream we will rinse our mouths and wash out eyes and ears. Your parents will be overjoyed."

They met their parents at the old brook. They were anxiously on the search as soon as the wind abated. Their fearful suspicions were refuted and all four of them could breathe a sigh of relief when they saw Jannes with the two children by the hand. It was a difficult road, because everything was covered with a thick layer of sand. When the sand had been washed off them by their diligent parents and they had taken a few long gulps of water, Jannes was able to tell his story: "At a certain point I could no longer see my hand in front of my eyes and I followed the path purely from memory. I thought it was hopeless. Fear tightened my throat and I had no hope left. But at that very moment I literally bumped into them. We immediately lay down and I pulled the blanket over us to wait for the end of the storm. I practically had to dig us out afterwards."

Kybbe also had to tell the story and he said that he stopped walking when he realized that they were going to stray off the path. He had hoped there was a search for them going on. Saartje said that her greatest fear had left her when she felt Jannes' strong hand. Everything would be fine. It was clear that the children had had the fright of their lives and it was unlikely that they would ever find themselves in this situation again.

It was now clearly visible that the sand on the sea side of the dune had risen in enormous volumes and then settled on the other side of the dunes. All vegetation was covered with a thick layer of sand. As soon as the storm passed, farm workers began shoveling sand from the fields. It now turned out that many crops had not survived.

This was a disaster. The previous year the cold had lasted so long that it had been impossible to sow and plant. Everything froze to death in the night or didn't rise at all. They could only start the planting season in June and that turned out to be a very short season when the cold set in again in September. The barns were not stocked for the winter and people were starving. And now that terrible storm had destroyed everything on the land. They would have to buy food from the traveling merchants.

The need had been great in the winter of 855. Many elderly people in particular had died during the severe frost period, both due to the cold and the lack of food. Fortunately, the frost seemed to have passed in April. But it took a long time after the earth thawed before any hope could be seen on the faces of the Vellesanners again. The baby boom in the livestock herd and the emergence of edible greenery ensured this and the farmers were finally able to sow and plant again, a week before the ice holidays in

May. Their working day now began before dawn, interrupted only by the Angelus. The first time of the day the bell rang at 6 o'clock and then work was stopped twice more for prayers at 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock in the evening. It was hard work. The Angelus bell for the thrice-daily call to prayer had been the last addition to the church. Hopefully the big bell wouldn't have to be rung this year for a big sandstorm and maybe they would be spared a fire too. These were certainly the biggest problems for the residents of Vellesan.

That life was getting back on track was also evident from an increase in the number of foreigners. Some settled here and others turned out to be on their way to Adelbert's grave near Egmond. This Irish preacher had come to Kinhem a century and a half ago to convert the Frisians and there were stories about the miracles he had performed. The pilgrims were on their way to the spot in the dunes where he was said to be buried and where it was said that you could be cured of diseases if you drank from a spring there. Although Aeijolt was friends with Clauwaert, who was a Christian, and whilst Marzoeta tried to get him to attend the services in the church, he could not believe in a human son of a god, who had died for the sins of all people. Imagine, a trinity of a human, a god and a holy spirit! That was too strange for him. Likewise, he did not believe in miracles that were said to have been performed by various preachers. All those places where miracles took place now became places of pilgrimage. Practical as he was, he saw the benefits that such developments could bring. Pilgrims, of course, needed shelter, food and clothing. You could make money from that.

The great sandstorm of that year and the subsequent harsh winter had made him even more aware of the threats to the inhabitants of this country. "Misery always comes in threes," his father used to tell him. He couldn't do much about natural disasters and crop failure, but he thought he could do something against groups of plunderers. He started talking to Clauwaert about it. The carpenter told Aeijolt about the history of Vellesan. It was mainly the disasters that got stuck in the memory. Robbery, fire, sandstorms and famine. Aeijolt eagerly absorbed the stories and when Clauwaert stood up to serve another cup of beer, he said: "We know all kinds of bad luck. There are regular sandstorms that cause crop failure and there are long winters that make our lives difficult. We can't do much about those two things, but we can do more in the event of a fire. We can build in a different way and we can build a defense against robbers and looters."

"I can't imagine how you want to achieve that," Clauwaert said.

"Well,' Aeijolt continued, "for example, if you leave more space between buildings, it will be more difficult for a fire to spread. You could also use a layer of stones, on which you can build further with wood." Clauwaert responded immediately: "Then you would have to demolish a lot of houses. Do you think the residents would agree to that? No Aeijolt, it's a nice idea, but absolutely impossible to implement."

"Maybe not, but you can organize firefighting better. If you require everyone to have a bucket ready and ensure that people are on the street more quickly, you can prevent a fire from becoming too big."

"That is certainly possible. I personally think that someone should be permanently on guard at a higher position to identify a fire more quickly. That would certainly help keep the fire under control. But I'm curious about your idea for a defense against armed gangs."

"In the south and east of these low countries there are ring walls, in which the residents of the area are safe from attacks by invaders. A Frisian merchant told me about it. A wall of earth, reinforced with wood, is built - preferably near a natural obstacle, such as a river. You dig trenches around it to make it more inaccessible to robbers. There are four passages in the wall, which are connected by wooden paths in a cross shape. This way, the defenders can easily and quickly move from 1 point to another, where the enemy threatens to break through," Aeijolt rattled off enthusiastically.

"That sounds very nice, but how do you envision that? Are you going to build such a ring wall around Vellesan?" Clauwaert asked.

Now Aeijolt continued a little more thoughtfully: "No, that would require a lot of digging. I'm thinking more of a place outside the area that offers good natural opportunities. The residents can flee within the ring wall if there is a threat of violence and plunder."

"Then you need permission from the feudal lord. And that feudal lord happens to be a Viking. We don't know much about him here, but Vikings are known as hard men and warriors. He is now on his way north with an army to claim the title of King in Jutland. I don't know who will enable you to accomplish such a work on his behalf. You need materials and labor.

Who will deliver that to you? No Aeijolt, you can dream all you want, but that can't be realized."

It had become clear to him that it would be impossible to build the ring wall he wanted. However, he had enough work and his wife's wishes were added to that. She wanted a new brewing space at home.

Marzoeta had managed to acquire a nice sized mash tun and brewing kettle. The old kettle was too small to supply everyone who wanted its beer. Aeijolt had built an extension to their home and had everything installed. She could now get to work together with her sister Duna. Rium had, as usual, provided peat. She herself had gone out to pick rosemary, sage, laurel, gale and yarrow in the fields. With this gruit she could provide fresh beer. She just needed honey so the beer wouldn't be too sour. After that she processed the grain into malt, which she then coarsely grounded. Duna went to work with it and made a thin batter that was cooked with the grit in the large open cauldron. Outside was a large, flat tub in which the beer would cool. She had bought this tub from an old man whose wife had died. She was happy with it, because the beer fermented excellently in this tub. There was a nice foamy layer on the beer.

Of course there was a celebration when the first brew was successful. Claes van Hoeleyde was present at this celebration and he praised the beer: "It is not at all as bitter and sour as the beer I normally drink. I would like you to also brew for my household, Marzoeta." A deep red color on her face was the result of this compliment.

Of course there was too much drinking, also by Aeijolt. When they walked back home, he constantly felt and squeezed her breasts and if she hadn't walked firmly, he probably wouldn't have paid any attention to the surroundings.

"Stop, Aeijolt. Hold back until we get inside," she ordered him. Longingly, he followed her into the house.

## **Krijn's secret**

### **857 AD**

*For the second time, Rorik moves north with his troops to strengthen his claim to the Jutland throne. He hopes he can force a quick decision. Two years earlier, during an earlier attempt to conquer the crown, it had become clear that his territories in the Low Countries could not survive for long without his protection. He was needed there to protect the territory of Lothair, his liege lord, against the raids of groups of Vikings. They had already plundered Dorestad several times and had also regularly ascended the Rhine during their plundering raids. It was difficult to respond to this, because when the Viking ships landed on the beaches, or attacked from the rivers, about forty rough fighters came out of each boat. These took control of all the horses that were walking around as quickly as possible and after that the foot soldiers could no longer stop them. Only his cavalry could keep pace with the Vikings in speed. The men on horseback could break through a wall of Viking shields. That was virtually impossible for the usually poorly equipped foot soldiers.*

*Despite the fact that the coastal defenses would be weakened by his absence, Lothair had approved of Rorik's military venture. The political struggles with Louis the German, the King of East Francia, made it attractive to have a confidant like Rorik as a source of power north of his opponent's territory.*

*It did mean that the Lower Rhine area was unprotected and it was promptly attacked by Vikings. Attacks on Utrecht and Dorestad take place again and Bishop Hunger of Utrecht is forced to flee to St. Peter's Monastery in the south.*

*All of northern France was now in the hands of the Umayyads. The papal seat, which had previously been moved from Rome to Reims, will now be moved to Cologne.*

Full of enthusiasm Kybbe and Saartje had gone to the stream, where they often splashed around in the water. She ran quickly to the flowing water, pulled her dress over her head and jumped into the stream. Kybbe was

suddenly aware of her tender breasts and felt something peculiar in his lower body. He looked down and saw that his willy was stiff. He turned around so she couldn't see and quickly pulled his pants back up. "Come in Kybbe. The water is not really cold," she shouted.

He replied sullenly and with a red face that he did not feel like playing in the water and that he had promised to help his father. He walked away from Saartje with big steps. She didn't understand it at all. Kybbe himself had suggested they go romp in the water and now he reacted harshly and left her behind.

Aeijolt immediately saw that something was going on when Kybbe came trudging along and encouraged his son to tell him. The boy was ashamed of something, that was clear to him. Finally he managed to get it out of him. He smiled, but knew Kybbe would take it the wrong way and hurriedly straightened his face. Then he sat quietly next to Kybbe and told him that what happened to him at the stream was completely normal. When Kybbe was able to make the connection with what he heard the adults doing under the covers in the sleeping place, Aeijolt told him that there was a great responsibility associated with the sexual act. The result could be that the girl became pregnant. Kybbe was deeply impressed after his father's story and understood that it was better to be an adult before having a baby. The girls he knew were usually already 16 years or older when they had a child. He resolved to protect Saartje from other boys.

She was angry with Kybbe. Why did he abandon her like that? Suddenly she heard hoofbeats and a loud voice. Frantically she scrambled up the bank, but slipped and fell back into the water. Too late! The men were stunned when they saw her. "A young naked wench. We could really use that after a long, dusty journey," one of them exclaimed excitedly. He then jumped into the stream and lifted her struggling body.

"Lord Darra, a tasty snack for you."

Saartje screamed in fear, her doe eyes darted back and forth past the men and rested on the member of the nobleman who had lowered his trousers and was looking at her with a lustful grin. He licked his lips and ordered two of his men to put the girl on the ground and hold her down. When she screamed again, he punched her straight in the face. "Be quiet, you little shrew, and enjoy the privilege I grant you."

To everyone's surprise, the priest presented himself second when their lord had arrived at his comfort. The girl cried uncontrollably as Anselm

tried to put his sex in her mouth. "Open!" he hissed. One of the men pried her jaws open, but when that part of Anselm slid in, her teeth clicked together loudly. The cleric screamed. He cupped his member with both hands and did a strange hopping dance. Darra and his men were laughing. Anselm was furious at being ridiculed like this. He lifted his habit again, pushed the men aside, punched Saartje so hard that her nose broke and entered her in one go. After the deed was done he cherished his still painful member under his habit and had a cup of wine handed to him with a piece of sausage, while he watched the remaining men assault Saartje. After this they left her lying there like a broken rag doll and sat down to dinner. They alternately bit off a piece of bread and a piece of sausage. After some time had passed, Darra stood up from the tree stump he was sitting on.

"It's time to be on our way, guys. We will surprise them in Vellesan." Laughing, Darra mounted his horse. The men quickly followed, Anselm letting out a yelp as he made contact with the back of his horse. The girl was left behind as a broken doll. The men didn't look back once.

Krijn was one of Claes van Hoeleyde's diggers. He was deaf at birth and therefore had a very difficult time as a child. His childhood was marked by being bullied by other children, while adults saw him as an idiot. His mother had always protected him like a lioness. With signs and signals, she communicated with her son and he began to understand the body language of others. With the patience of an angel she taught him to read the words from her lips and to produce sounds himself. As a result, he had survived his difficult childhood and it had made him resilient. He became an awe-inspiring appearance and was very strong. When he turned 18 he was completely accepted in the community and people were used to his strange way of speaking. More often than not, they were surprised by his special powers of observation. On the way back from work for Claes, he saw Darra's group get on in the distance and leave for Vellesan. He nudged Rium and pointed, "What did they leave there?"

Rium looked in the direction he was pointing and they quickened their pace to get an overview. When he got closer, Rium recognized Clauwaert's daughter in the naked and bloody body. Krijn carefully picked her up and carried her all the way to her parental home.

When Kybbe heard the conversation between Rium and Aeijolt about what had happened to Saartje and that she had been brought home injured, he was in a state of panic. How could he have left her behind like

that? He had intended to protect her and had failed her immediately. How could he ever face her again? And that was only because he had felt ashamed when his member had risen.

Saartje had a high fever and was delirious. Fortunately, the bleeding had stopped and Floor had used medicinal plants to heal the wounds on her face. Her nose was crooked, there was nothing that could be done about that. She was also missing two front teeth.

In her feverish dreams she screamed out. She called for her father and her mother also heard her say in a pleading tone: "Please Kybbe, stay here."

She told her husband that Saartje kept calling Kybbe's name. Clauwaert could not imagine that her boyfriend had done this to her and decided to have Kybbe fetched. He and his father appeared at the door shortly afterwards. "He didn't dare come here. He is ashamed that he left Saartje alone at the stream", Aeijolt told Clauwaert and he reported what he had heard from Rium.

Clauwaert was furious: "Those villains will pay, even if I have to chase them to the end of the world."

Kybbe cried when he saw Saartje and knelt by her bed. "Oh, Saartje, I am so sorry that I ran off!", he sobbed.

The girl opened her eyes, looked at Kybbe and whispered: "I bit his dick." After this her head fell to the side.

Floor and Clauwaert were inconsolable. Their beautiful girl was dead. The murderers would pay for this.

Darra had arrived at the market square with his entourage and priest Anselm and, after asking a resident a few questions, went on horseback to the home of the mayor, Barteld van Davetre.

When the mayor stepped out, he was immediately surrounded by five armed men. Darra looked fearsome in his chain mail and one-piece metal helmet. His eyes were not visible behind the holes in his face protection. In his left hand he held a wooden shield, the edges of which were covered with iron. He rose from the back of his horse, which had a shoulder height of 2 ells and standing in the stirrups he spoke: "Lord Barteld, you are accused of not fulfilling your obligations to your lord, Rorik Yngling, Count in Frisia. Before his departure to become the lawful King of Jutland, the count appointed me as his mayor for this area. We have come here from

Hallem to call you to account. You are under arrest. Men, handcuff him and find a suitable place to hold him until the hearing.”

The protesting Barteld was powerless. His wife, who had rushed to him, burst into wailing. Darra pushed her aside and said: “Stop that whining and make sure you tidy up your rooms and make them suitable for my stay. Then we will inspect your house and see how we can accommodate you and my 5 faithful servants.”

In the meantime, the market square had filled up. The rumor that a number of armed men were on their way from the north to their Bailiff’s house had aroused curiosity. This was an exciting event for these people, who often never went further than 5 kilometres from their birthplace and place of residence in their entire lives.

After hearing the accusation against Barteld and Darra’s claim that he had been appointed as their new mayor, some of the residents pressed forward and demanded proof from Darra that he had been appointed mayor. “Here is the proof,” Darra shouted, holding up a signet ring. “And here is the parchment with the order of Lord Rorik with his seal on it.” He held up a roll of parchment that he had pulled from his saddlebag. That claim and the threatening attitude of his armed men caused the boldest Vellesanners to step back again.

“There is more news for you,” he continued his speech. “Here beside me is the reverend Anselm. Lord Rorik has charged me to protect the church and its high representative. The reverend has been sent from the diocese of Utrecht to this region to take charge of the ecclesiastical institutions in Vellesan.” He turned sideways to his confidant and whispered: “Find out who the ones are that were ready to protest. We have to keep an eye on them. They will certainly cause more problems in the future.”

Bruno had come out of church, where he was preparing the scripture reading for vespers that evening. He joined the back of the group of listeners and craned his neck to see the man who had been introduced as his superior. Who was this clergyman and what message would he bring? What were the plans for the church in Vellesan?

For the time being his questions remained unanswered, because the newcomers first sat down to a hastily prepared meal. Now that they had the chance, the men refused the weak beer that was usually served with the meal and demanded the heavier beer. Since they did not usually drink that, their movements became less controlled and now and then a tongue doubled. Krijn came along with a new bucket of beer and looked

contemptuously at the drunken group. Lamé jokes were exchanged across the table, but his focus sharpened when he saw 'little hot wench' appear on the lips of one of the men. The men told each other with relish how beautiful the creature in the stream had looked and how horny they were, while taking her one by one. They were talking about the rape of Saartje, he realized. Anger welled up, but he managed to control himself and disappeared outside as quickly as possible.

Darra leaned over to Anselm, who was sitting next to him, and said: "What a great idea of yours to write a parchment and seal it with this ring. Those idiots really believe it belongs to Rorik."

Anselm whispered back: "But your idea to take advantage of the count's absence was already brilliant. If that stupid Viking dies in his war of succession in the north for his grandfather's crown, we're all set."

"If that doesn't happen and he comes back here, we should at least have brought in as much as possible," Darra grinned.

"What do you actually want to do with Barteld?", Anselm wanted to know.

"We'll take him out as a kind of insurance. If Rorik comes back and we've left, it might help that he finds his mayor alive. Who knows how we can still use that."

After the meal, a still fresh-looking Anselm entered the church of the chaplain. Bruno had never received a visit from a church dignitary. However, he was a simple, sincere believer, who was not easily impressed and was full of questions. After some introductory remarks he said: "I have heard that Bishop Hunger has left Utrecht for St. Peter's Monastery in the south." Anselm decided to intimidate Bruno with pure bluff and replied: "That's right, from there he now governs the diocese on behalf of the Archdiocese of Cologne. A reorganization of the dioceses is in the making, now that the Umayyad army has taken so many christian lands. A new diocese is to be founded on these coasts. As Archdeacon, I have been instructed by Bishop Hunger to prepare this. Before his departure to the south, he instructed me to strengthen the position of the church here in the west. As soon as I have settled in here, I will have you called and tell you what is needed for the reorganization of the church in Kinhem and what your role will be in it. In the meantime, I would like to hear from you how things are going with the church here and how many believers you receive in your church."

Bruno told him that there were still many in Vellesan who adhered to the old faith, but that the number of converts was steadily increasing. He wanted to know how the archdeacon would approach the Christianization of the Frisians. However, after the information Bruno gave him, Anselm

apparently considered the conversation to be over and he left the church to join Darra.

Krijn realized that if he told Clauwaert what he had heard in the bailiff's house, his emotions would be fatal, because he would undoubtedly rush straight to Darra's house. For weeks, Krijn walked around with his secret. He was unsure what to do. He did not want to take the law into his own hands. Violence was something that was foreign to him. He knew that it was possible to go to confession. Would that be possible with any priest? The new priest was clearly on Darra's side. He did not want to confide anything to him. The only one who was eligible for that was chaplain Bruno. His decision had been made, he would knock on the priest's door the next day. As a faithful visitor to the services, the priest had taken Krijn to his heart when it turned out that they could communicate very well. He had been delighted that someone could overcome such an enormous limitation with perseverance and could be so positive in life. He had accepted his disability, just as Jesus had accepted his fate. The next morning Bruno confirmed that any secret Krijn told would be safe with him. After Krijn's account of the men's conversations, Bruno was shocked to the core. Actually, he should have gone to his superior with this story, but he could not betray Krijn's trust, because he had explicitly said that he did not trust the Archdeacon. He could do absolutely nothing with this story. And so a few more months passed.

Krijn was still struggling with the big secret. He felt better for a while after telling chaplain Bruno, but he didn't feel comfortable that the terrible event went unpunished. That's why he decided to talk to Aeijolt in the spring of 858. He was more or less the leader of their group from Wieringen and Clauwaert's best friend. He would know what to do. His first action was to talk to the chaplain. Together they couldn't figure it out either. Bruno mentioned Anselm, but Aeijolt refused to consult him. "Krijn doesn't trust that man and that's the end of it for me. But it's crystal clear that we need a plan before we tell Clauwaert. I know him and without a good plan we won't be able to stop him from going straight to the wrongdoers and demanding justice. We need someone who knows more about the laws of this country. Someone who also knows the outside world."

Bruno suggested looking for a merchant in that case. They went everywhere, knew the latest news and were aware of many things.

That is how Aeijolt ended up with Sake. The Frisian merchant, who had provided Marzoeta with a new brewing kettle and with whom Clauwaert regularly did business, was able to tell him in detail how a lawsuit about manslaughter in the west proceeded. If they did not agree to a Weregeld for mutual approval, a lawsuit would follow. Judges would be appointed, oaths would be sworn, also by witnesses. Ultimately, the judges would determine a punishment after all the oaths and testimonies.

Aeijolt decided to go to Clauwaert with this. His anger was enormous, but Aeijolt succeeded in calming him down. In the presence of Claes van Hoeleyde, who indicated that he would be one of the judges, a plan of action was made and an official accusation was brought to Mayor Darra and his men. All preparations for the trial were then made.

## **The lawsuit**

### **858 AD**

It was all very exciting what was about to happen. A lawsuit against the lord of Vellesan. Kybbe wanted to know what was going to happen now and his father told him that Clauwaert was going to take an oath of accusation, in which he accused lord Darra of a crime. His uncles, Krijn and Rium were oath helpers. They would support Clauwaert's accusation. Darra would then take an oath of innocence. He would also have oath helpers. When they went to the market square among the other residents to attend the lawsuit, it turned out that Darra had six oath helpers, his 5 strong men and Archdeacon Anselm.

Three judges had already taken their places on a hastily constructed podium. One of them was landowner Claes van Hoeleyde. When the noise from the audience had finally died down, the oaths were pronounced by Clauwaert and Darra. Then it was Krijn's turn. He swore and repeated the words of the drunken warriors, which he had heard at their first meal in Vellesan. He had no chance to speak further about this, because Guy took over as Darra's oath-helper: "This idiot can't be an oath-helper. He can hardly speak and he's as deaf as a stone. How could he have heard anything?"

Aeijolt protested: "Krijn may not be able to hear, but he can see the words that people say coming from their lips."

“That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard! You can read words from the vellum, if you are trained. Reading mouths is impossible. It even sounds devilish.”

With this Anselm joined in the commotion that had arisen. “If the accusations against Lord Darra are based on the devil’s work, this can never be accepted by God-fearing people.”

Krijn seemed very confused by the remarks that followed his oath and at first did not understand what he was accused of. When understanding dawned on him, he roared and attacked Guy. Guy defended himself as best he could against this unexpected attack. After a few good blows, Darra’s men were able to overpower the enraged man.

Darra raised his hand and the protest that arose from Aeijolt’s sympathizers slowly faded away. In the silence that followed, the Lord of Vellesan addressed the three judges. “This session can come to a conclusion. As a deaf man, Krijn could never have heard anything. This story is therefore clearly false and I demand that this attack on my good honor be avenged. Moreover, he deserves punishment because he attacked a nobleman and oath helper during this trial.”

Rium’s nervous tic increased in intensity during the hearing and he was also dismissed as an idiot by Guy. The deciding factor was of course Anselm’s oath. Surely a man of God would speak the truth. His word certainly prevailed over that of a bunch of heathens.

The judges got into a heated discussion as the trial neared its end. Claes van Hoeleyde knew Krijn and knew that the gentle giant never did anything wrong, was honest and always understood his spoken instructions well. He therefore believed that the accusation was correct. Darra intervened personally. As lord of the domain, he had the right to pronounce the decision. There were screams from the audience when he announced that Clauwaert would be subjected to an ordeal as complainant. Because the condemned man had not demanded negotiations about Weregeld, but wanted a judicial decision, this was the outcome that Darra had aimed for. Apparently this outcome had already been taken into account, because a pot of boiling water was hoisted onto the stage by two of Darra’s oath helpers and Clauwaert was forced to undergo the ordeal. Screaming in pain, his arms were raised in the air by Darra’s men a moment later, so that everyone could see the red-burned flesh. That was proof of Clauwaert’s guilt according to custom. The story went that an innocent

person would be protected by God from being burned and his hands would remain unharmed.

Since he was the deputy of the lord of the land, Darra himself pronounced the sentence: "The highest judge has pronounced his verdict. God himself has shown by the outcome of this trial that Clauwaert has falsely accused me, the lord of Kinhem. His oath helpers are punished for their false testimony with 20 lashes for each. Clauwaert has insulted the lord of Vellesan with his false oath and as punishment for this slander, his tongue will be torn out. Krijn will suffer the same punishment, because his lying goes the furthest. The punishments will be carried out immediately after the end of this session."

Both Claes van Hoeleyde and chaplain Bruno stood up to protest: "These punishments are never given here. These are barbaric practices from a distant past."

Immediately, two of Darra's helpers positioned themselves threateningly next to both men. The ever so gentle Bruno exploded: "Shutting people up by ripping out their tongues and intimidating and threatening honorable Vellesanners with violence is not what a good gentleman does. Only oppressors act like that."

One of the men punched him in the stomach. The chaplain was led away, gasping for breath. Darra loudly diverted attention from this incident that had not been seen by the people further back in the crowd. "It is written in the Lex Frisionum, as it was already carried out by Charlemagne."

The men left. They were unable to act. Darra addressed Guy, who was standing next to him: "Make sure that van Hoeleyde is kept under surveillance. He is going to cause trouble."

His confidant agreed with him: "He presents himself as a Christian, but he mainly surrounds himself with pagans from Wieringen and Vellesan."

Darra continued this whispered conversation: "We have to proceed with caution. Hoeleyde is an important man here. He has to be sidelined in some way. There after we can easily eliminate his supporters one by one."

Guy de Montclosse was Darra's first man. He lost his heritage in the battle against the advancing Caliphate. After another defeat, the Franks were forced to retreat behind the rivers Meuse and Saône, which formed the new border between the warring parties. Guy had also ended up in that border area and had met Darra there. His horse had thrown him off, causing him to end up in the river with his armor on. He went under, came up again and, gasping for breath, disappeared under the water a second time. He lost consciousness. His body was swept away by the current. To this day he did not know what had happened next, but when he opened

his eyes later on, Darra was there. It was clear that he had saved him from drowning. Out of deep gratitude, Guy swore afterwards that he would follow Darra to the end of the world.

In Vellesan, he had immediately started looking for candidates for a spy network that he wanted to set up. He realized that if they wanted to get the most out of their position, it was essential to prevent any form of resistance from the population. Money and threats were successful means to carry out his plan.

One of his spies was at that moment in the group that had gathered at the house of Claes van Hoeleyde. They had brought the broken Clauwaert to his house, where Floor had put him to bed, crying. It was terrible what had happened to them. Her husband would never be able to speak again and his hands and forearms were badly burned. She smeared them with some raw eggs and bandaged them. She could not relieve his pain. Cherry juice seemed to help a little. Where could she buy that now? The season for cherries was over. After leaving Clauwaert in the hands of Floor, the men had gone to the house of the meliores. They sat on the ground in the large barn and a bucket of Marzoeta's beer was passed around.

Claes was there talking to Bruno, Jannes and Aeijolt. They had separated themselves from the rest and were talking about the events. "That was not a fair trial. They didn't even listen and that Guy used Krijn's attack to end the show as quickly as possible"

Claes said that he believed that Krijn had spoken the truth. The way the trial had gone and Darra's claim about the trial by God in the laws was a bad thing. Maybe that happened in the distant past, but nowadays they would solve the case with a Weregeld. The other two judges had clearly been on the side of the bailiff. It seemed that they had already been instructed beforehand. If Darra and his men were guilty of the girl's death, the Weregeld should be equal to that of a man. The ratio in the Weregeld between a noble, a free man and a serf was 4:2:1.

Bruno said: "If Lord Darra is indeed guilty, then the Archdeacon is also untrustworthy. He was an oath helper and then took a false oath. As a man of the church, that is unacceptable."

"But what can we do now?", Aeijolt asked. "The trial has been held. The punishments have been given. Honest people are damaged for life."

"We can only go to the lord of this country, to Rorik," said Claes.

"But he is fighting somewhere in the north with his army," protested Aeijolt.

"It is the only option."

"Then we will have to wait for his return. I wish Barteld was still our bailiff. Have you ever noticed him abusing his position as bailiff?", Aeijolt asked.

Bruno replied that he had had a disagreement about collecting the tithe. His right to it in the northeast corner of Vellesan was disputed by the bailiff. According to him, two posts that demarcated the tithe block were in the wrong place. However, they had reached an agreement about that without any further problems.

Claes said that he had had some disagreement with him about the tithe on newly reclaimed land. But all the tithes were eventually simply stored in his tithe barn.

At that moment they became aware of Dirk, who had moved away from the other men during their conversation and had crept closer unnoticed. Claes stopped the conversation and stared at the fisherman, who turned around and went back to the group of beer drinkers. The three men looked at each other. Claes shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. After this they continued their conversation: "I wonder if there is any truth in the accusations of Lord Darra against him. It would be nice if Lord Rorik would clarify this."

To this remark of Aeijolt, Bruno added that there was nothing else to do but wait for the arrival of the Norman. "For the time being, Lord Darra is holding Barteld captive until the count returns. We can't do anything about that. What we can do, however, is gather information about the Archdeacon in the diocese of Utrecht." Jannes took on that task.

Dirk went to Guy as quickly as possible with his story. He found him on the training ground outside Vellesan. Here the men and Darra himself practiced fighting on horseback. They stood in the stirrups when they approached each other to make the blows come down harder. Guy interrupted the exercises when he saw Dirk and beckoned him. "What did you find out?" he asked.

"They thought the trial had been unfair and that it had been a show. They talked about how the other two judges had been told how to decide and that they believed Krijn had told the truth. According to them, the Archdeacon had lied and they did not believe that Mayor Barteld had acted wrongly. They would wait for Count Rorik to return."

After Dirk had told this, he was sent away with the order to bring any news he heard from or about these men to Guy immediately. Darra told his support and confidant that those who had stood opposite him at the trial had to be silenced. However, it should not be too obvious. Guy suggested to make sure that they would not be able to get work anymore. The best

thing would be if they would leave Vellesan themselves due to lack of food and lack of possibilities.

Meanwhile, on Anselm's initiative, the construction of a new, larger church had begun. Darra had brought in a master builder from Dorestad for this. The work was not awarded to Aeijolt. Guy ensured, mainly through intimidation, that no one offered him work. Fortunately, Claes van Hoeleyde ignored this and awarded new work on buildings and barns to Aeijolt. He still had the Wieringers work for him too.

Kybbe was curious about the construction of the new church. It would certainly be the largest building in Vellesan. When Simon, the master builder, began to lay out the ground plan, Kybbe was constantly in his vicinity. Simon soon noticed the curious boy and he began to take pleasure in answering the boy's questions. His enthusiasm was infectious and he soon had Kybbe do odd jobs for him. Kybbe eagerly seized every opportunity to be on the building site. He helped to dig in the field stones, which were flat on top. These stones formed the stubs for the wooden posts that would rest on them. He could see that this would be a considerable improvement on what Clauwaert and his father did. They had always dug in the posts of their buildings. This church would certainly last longer than the old church. It was also larger than Bruno's church, measuring 100 feet in length and 30 in width. On the east side came the choir, where the altar was located and on the west side Simon wanted to place a wooden tower, the roof turret. When his father needed him, he worked on the properties of Claes van Hoeleyde. He quickly learned the tricks of the trade and Simon never had to explain or ask him anything twice. The boy got to work immediately.

## The spring miracle

### 859 AD

In the first month of the new year, Darra, Guy and Anselm warmed themselves by the fire of the large fireplace. They enjoyed the wine delivered by the Frisian merchant. How wonderful life was here. Darra could not afford all those extras that made life worth living in his earlier life. Now he could take what he wanted and he had no intention of ever giving this up again. So he broke the silence they enjoyed and said: "I have changed my mind. My original plan was to take advantage and pack my bags before Rorik came back, but now I'm going to try to get him on my side. The case against Mayor Barteld must be so strong that my action seems to be in Rorik's favor. I'm going to try to get him to confirm me in my current position. For this I need people who report favorably about me and we should not pocket too much of the annual proceeds. The accusations against Barteld must be well substantiated. We fabricate the evidence ourselves and enough witnesses against the previous mayor. If we succeed, our income and current lifestyle will be assured over a longer period. Rorik remains a Viking of course, so I thought how about we build a beautiful new longhouse for him. When he comes back from the north, we can organize a nice welcome party for him and make sure he wants to keep me as his mayor.

Darra was becoming more and more enthusiastic as he said these words. Anselm nodded thoughtfully. "That seems like a very feasible plan to me. I'm glad you decided to stay. I appreciate your help in planning and financing a new church as I want to build a strong Christian community here. But the uncertainty of what would happen when you left gnawed at me. As for the longhouse, we still need a master builder, because Simon van Litte is not finished with the church yet. We need one who has knowledge of building a longhouse and who can provide materials and manpower."

Darra said thoughtfully: "The best thing, of course, would be if we can persuade a builder from the north to come here. One that has already built Viking longhouses. I think Sake intended to travel to Ribe in the north for a profitable trade. We can ask him to contact a professional."

Guy nodded in agreement: "Let me take care of the positive reviews. We now have enough supporters and profiteers among the people to favor Rorik. Anselm's plan to have a miracle take place here at the source in the name of Saint Engelmundus helped enormously. Pilgrims are already coming here to ask for the blessing of Saint Engelmundus and the residents are proud of their hometown. Everyone wants to believe in the miracle."

Anselm began to glow with pride. "People are easily deceived. We paid the man well to wander around here as a blind person for a few weeks and then to be 'healed' with water from the source of Engelmundus. The most difficult thing was to have enough people present at the time of the 'healing' without arousing suspicion. Afterwards, the story of the 'miracle' spread like wildfire. First, the story of the monk Engelmundus, who miraculously caused our spring to spring up here, had to find fertile ground. That wasn't that difficult. There are plenty of fictional stories and few people know what happened here a century and a half ago when the missionaries arrived in Kinhem. Willibrord did not come alone and so I introduced the monk Engelmundus, a name I came across in the library in Cologne. It was said that he caused a spring to spring up and I thought why not in Vellesan? It could very well have happened here."

"That suits us best anyway. Fortunately, we have a spring", Darra hiccupped.

Anselm continued his story unperturbed: "A nice addition is that he was born from a Frisian family. The people here feel more connected to that. One more thing is needed to make it a permanent success story, a relic!" Guy also said he knew a solution for that. "Leave that to me. Maybe it is a good idea to have a statue of our Engelmundus made. I will inquire for a skilled craftsman."

Chaplain Bruno was happy with the beautiful statue of Saint Engelmundus, which Darra donated to the church. The construction of the new church progressed steadily and the statue would get a nice place there. The saint was dressed in a simple priestly robe. He wore a ring with the image of the Lamb of God and a necklace with 20 beads painted in different colors.

The bell was rung to summon the faithful and soon they came from all directions to the market square. The statue was placed on a platform and the crowd marveled at the beautiful colors that made it lifelike. They had never seen anything like it. Then Anselm stepped onto the dais and called the people to silence: "Pope Nicholas has sent a messenger from Cologne. He wants us to find the grave of Saint Engelmundus and give his remains a place of honor in the new church. Vellesan will be blessed."

The crowd looked at each other in amazement. A grave? But where?

Nobody had ever heard of it. How could they find it then?

"The image itself will show us the way," Anselm said.

In the crowd stood Aeijolt with Clauwaert, who had recovered, but would no longer be able to speak. "How can a wooden statue show the way,"

Aeijolt sneered softly.

Clauwaert shrugged.

Four of Darra's men put their shoulders under a stretcher on which the statue was secured and the procession set off for a tour of Vellesan. After

an hour's journey, during which the parade continued to grow with curious people, the bar began to shake in the men's hands.

"It must be here." Anselm shouted. "The image has spoken to us." Some diggers were put to work. There was a stretch where the ground was looser, and after the hole had deepened, there was a cry from one of the diggers.

A sigh arose from those present, who eagerly watched as Anselm and Bruno bent down into the dug hole and saw the former emerge with a glass chain of different colors. Bruno looked in awe at a ring he had picked up. "This is the same image as the ring of the statue!" he exclaimed. Then he saw the chain in Anselm's hands. His eyes widened as he stammered that it was the same one the saint was carrying. A bustle came from the crowd surrounding them. 'Hallelujah' and 'Hosanna' were shouted by the faithful present. A piece of priest's garment and a skull with some bones were also brought up from the pit. These were placed respectfully by Anselm on the stretcher next to the statue. Once again in procession they returned to the market square, to give the alleged remains of the saint a place in the old church.

Beautiful caskets would have to be made to display the relics and the most beautiful thing, Anselm thought, would be if they could encase the skull in gold. The pilgrims would flock to hear about the miracle, view the relics and pray for the salvation of their souls. The money would flow in.

Aeijolt spoke to Claes: "Don't you think it is very coincidental that a ring and necklace of Engelmundus are found, which exactly match those of the statue donated by Darra? How could he know that Engelmundus had such jewelry?"

"Maybe he heard that from the Archdeacon?" Claes tried.

"Anselm? It could be, but I'm not convinced. It suits the gentlemen very well."

"What do you mean? What do they have to gain from that?"

"Think about it, Claes. It's great publicity. It strengthens Anselm's position. Have you seen the people's faces? They are thrilled that we have our own saint here and that 'miracles' happen. And what do you think of Darra? He also benefits. Mark my words. A pilgrimage to Vellesan is starting and money will be made. Loads of money."

"Don't you believe in miracles and in Jesus as our savior?"

"Of course there are miracles, but I am not a Christian, like Marzoeta, and I do not believe in coincidences when it is so obvious."

"But the image itself showed the way. That's a miracle!"

"Ha! If I instruct four of my people to walk with such a statue and shake it vigorously at a pre-arranged location, I get the same result."

“Do you think Anselm and Bruno made that grave themselves?”

‘No, I don't believe that about Bruno. He's way too honest for that. But I do believe that our archdeacon would and I think that Chaplain Bruno is simply being deceived by him.’

“Well, in that respect it is a pity that Jannes did not find out anything about Anselm in Utrecht. Bishop Hunger took all the original charters from the Utrecht church to Sint-Odiliënberg.”

The story of Vellesan's miracle quickly spread in all directions. In the summer the first pilgrims arrived who wanted to see the reliquaries of the miraculous Saint Engelmundus. There were rumors about monks wanting to establish a monastery in Vellesan. There was also an influx of artisans and traders.

Marzoeta and Duna had their hands full brewing beer and needed more hands to do the work. Especially now that two boilers had been added. That was necessary, because the new arrivals quickly found their way to their brewery. Claes van Hoeleyde did not have enough work for two carpenters. Now that Kybbe was helping his father with the work, Clauwaert had become redundant. The latter did not get a chance to wallow in his sorrow, because Marzoeta had immediately brought Floor and her husband to the brewery. Sake had told them about beer in Germany, which had recently been brewed with hops instead of gale. The beer could be stored for much longer than gruit beer, which had to be consumed almost immediately. They made some beer with hops and it proved the claim to be true. The taste of the beer was also much better. The light gruit beer was mainly drunk as an alternative to water. Everyone drank it, men, women and children. However, this new beer was a delight. With the increasing demand, Marzoeta needed a large supply of hops, because a person who had tasted the hop beer no longer wanted gruit beer. There was another advantage to hops, no more grit duties had to be paid to Darra. Tithing had to be paid on everything picked from the lord's land.

Kybbe also occasionally worked in the brewery. One day he bumped into a girl at the door who had come to order beer for her father. It was one of the newcomers in Vellesan. He muttered an apology as he looked up. The words froze on his lips. Normally he was never at a loss for words. But now he stood there grinning like an idiot. That was the first time he saw Anna. Only when she stepped inside did he come back to life. It was a strange sensation. It seemed like there was something fluttering inside him that wanted to get out.

Anna was too preoccupied with her thoughts to notice the boy who nudged her as she entered the brewery. But his niece Pytske had noticed the intermezzo. One of her admirers regularly looked that sheepish in her

presence. She had now grown into a beautiful young woman and had no shortage of interest from the opposite sex. However, she herself had set her sights on chaplain Bruno. He was 12 years older than her and had mesmerizing eyes and a beautiful voice, with which he could talk passionately. She was therefore often found in church and sought contact as much as possible. Even the shy Bruno was aware of the fact that Pytske was particularly interested in him. He didn't dare to talk to her about that yet, but in his dreams he did and they were sweet dreams.

Kybbe had been absent from the moment he saw Anna. Only when he was working with his father could he concentrate, because carpentry and building was his passion. He was very eager to learn and wanted to understand and master all aspects of construction. But when he wasn't working, he was often found daydreaming. He forgot to do the errand his mother told him to and she didn't want him in the brewery anymore because of the mistakes he made there.

"I don't understand," Marzoeta complained to her sister. "He was always so interested in everything around him and paid attention to everything."

When Duna mentioned this at home during the meal, her daughter said that she had a suspicion what the cause of that change was. "He's in love. I saw it in him when he saw a girl going into the brewery two months ago."

"Do you know who that was?"

"No, Mom, I don't know."

"Can you find out then? I think the only way to change his behavior is to arrange a meeting between the two. Your aunt will thank you for it."

And so Pytske went looking for the girl who made Kybbe dream.

Guy had a great plan to increase Darra's number of spies and support. The newcomers offered a wonderful opportunity to do this. Investments had to be made for this. His plan was simple. Darra would welcome all newcomers with a party. Every suitable candidate would be carefully examined and assisted in his establishment or in his work.

Roef was extremely interesting for him. He too was attracted by the growing fame of Saint Engelmundus. Not because of the relics or the pilgrimage, but because of the travelers. His plan was very original. He wanted to start a house where pilgrims could find shelter for a fee. Until now there was one private house in Vellesan, where pilgrims were welcome. That of chaplain Bruno. He had hung a wooden scallop shell on the front facade as a recognition sign. After all, hospitality was one of the seven works of mercy for Christians. Roef had no mercy in mind, only profit.

Guy managed to convince Darra to help Roef start such an inn, because many people would come there. So there was a lot of information to be

obtained. In return, Darra expected a fixed annual amount and the passing on of interesting information to Guy.

Roef's inn consisted of a room where people would eat, but probably even more drink. There was also a large room where you could sleep. In no time the business flourished.

One day two men came to ask for shelter. One introduced himself as Sake. It turned out that the merchant had been coming to Vellesan for years, but the owner of his guest address recently passed away. His traveling companion was Sven, a man from northern regions, a builder. Roef ordered his daughter to provide the men with beer to lubricate their thirsty throats and then hurried to Guy.

"Isn't Lord Darra looking for someone who can build a longhouse?" he asked. When Guy nodded in confirmation, he continued: "I am currently hosting a master builder from the Viking lands. He arrived this afternoon, accompanied by Sake the merchant. Sake said that this man comes from Ribe, a market town in the Viking country, where he worked as a master builder. He is on his way to Dorestad."

While Roef returned to his inn, Guy immediately sought out Darra. "We have to make Sven an offer so that he stays here and builds the longhouse."

After Sven had accepted the assignment, he worked diligently. Experienced workers such as Clauwaert and Aeijolt were deliberately kept away from the construction site by Guy. They were not given any work. Now Sven could easily design a simple construction such as a longhouse on his own. Fortunately, he had access to sufficient labor. There was a large supply of tree trunks available. These were stored west of the spot. He had immediately placed orders for all the necessary materials and Sake had said that he, together with three other merchants, could deliver within the foreseeable future. The building could be finished before the Passion.

## The Mayery

### 860 AD

*Rorik had conquered much territory in the north, but had to return quickly in 860 to face the Normans attacking Dorestad. He now settles permanently in the north of Kinhem and has the chapel of Saint Adelbertus, which has been submerged by dune sand, excavated. A pilgrimage to this place is underway. Now Vellesan, Hallem and the intermediate places Heiloo and Limbon become stopping points on this pilgrim route. The route continues to the holy sources at Petten.*

“Count Rorik is on his way to Dorestad. King Lothair desperately needs him to drive the marauding Vikings out of these lands. His army had been spotted near Bremen and must have reached Daventre by now on its way to Dorestad to chase away the Vikings who are attacking the city,” Guy reported to Darra.

“Then Sven will have to hurry to finish the longhouse. We must be ready to receive the count when he has chased away the plunderers and heads for his walled fortress in Hallem. Although he did not succeed in becoming King of the Danes, we will receive him as a King and work on him in such a way that he confirms me in the position of mayor. We worked hard for it. The rents and taxes have been collected and the administration is in order. A nice amount is deposited in Rorik's treasury. The miracle of Saint Engelmundus and the arrival of pilgrims have made a significant contribution to this. It would be decisive if we could get Barteld to accuse himself. The best option to get him to cooperate is probably to threaten his wife with torture and mutilation.”

Anna had a black eye and Kybbe saw bruises on her arms. She said she had fallen, but it wasn't the first time he had seen her with bruises. You couldn't fall that many times, could you? Not even if you were the biggest klutz in Vellesan. Once, just after he met her, he saw her sitting on a barrel. He approached her from behind and was shocked to find that she was crying. Kybbe had hesitantly retreated. On the one hand he wanted to comfort her, but on the other hand he had only just met her and he was afraid of being rejected.

Her father was often angry and he had heard him scold Anna several times. When they had known each other for several months, Kybbe asked

her if her father hit her. She denied it half-heartedly, but she definitely didn't want him to talk to her father. He felt powerless because he didn't want to go against her. She had stated clearly enough that her father needed to be cared for after her mother's death. That was her job, she thought. She made him promise to keep it to himself and not talk about it to anyone. It frustrated him immensely, but he had promised.

In addition to his frequent presence on the church building site and the odd jobs he did with his father, he was also interested in the work that northerner Sven did on the longhouse. He had already gone to see it many times. Although it was a large building - almost as large as the new church - it was much simpler. The posts were placed in holes dug at regular intervals and connected by cross beams. The roof covering rested on a railing and the twig walls were covered with clay. It was a rectangular space and the entrances would be on the long sides. Kybbe thought that his father could have built this. That wouldn't have required a master builder from Viking land.

However, Sven's advantage was that he was aware of the functions of the longhouse, how it should be furnished and what rules should be followed during a party. Darra and Guy took good note of this. They wanted to put Rorik in a good mood upon his arrival. What helped better than creating a feeling of home? Then everything had to be right.

Krijn and Clauwaert had always been close to each other since their major trial. They had found a way to communicate through gestures. It was more difficult to explain their intentions and wishes to others. It had become clear to them from conversations between Claes and Aeijolt that the previous mayor was still locked up and that Darra probably wanted to make use of Barteld in some way when Rorik arrived. They planned to free Barteld from captivity and hide him. If he could freely explain the situation to his lord, it might mean the end of Darra. They hated the man who had destroyed their lives. In any case, a weapon was needed to free Barteld. Clauwaert would bring that from home and also a chisel and hammer to pick open a lock. Clauwaert was familiar with the floor plan of the mayor's house. He had worked there on several occasions. He made a drawing in the sand for Krijn to show him the place where the entrance to the cell in the house was located. At that moment, Aeijolt walked by with an assignment for Clauwaert from Marzoeta. He glanced at the drawing and saw that it was a map. In his mind, his best friend was still busy with his old profession, he thought. He shook his head pityingly. Apart from the occasional job, no one would ever give him a big assignment again and

that was because of Darra. He could understand that these two men hated the mayor.

It only fell into place for him a week later, when he heard Floor tell Marzoeta that she had lost her best knife. He realized that it had been a map of the mayor's house, drawn there in the sand. He went straight to Bruno, who was talking to Pytske. Aeijolt immediately got straight to the point and said that he thought the two men wanted to kill Darra. Bruno and Pytske looked at each other. "We must stop them!" they shouted as if with one voice, "because that would rather mean suicide against the armed men of Darra."

Dirk had noticed the meeting of the two men and immediately left to inform Guy of a suspected attempt on his lord's life. In turn, Guy went to Darra. He began to beam with pleasure when he heard the story. "This is great! I suddenly have a brilliant plan to ingratiate myself with Count Rorik. Listen Guy, here's what we're doing..."

A very emaciated Barteld was locked in the basement of the house he had once lived in as a mayor. His hair was tangled in front of his eyes and there was not much left of his beautiful clothes other than a few rags. He was dirty and smelly. Food and drinks were brought at regular times. The bucket in which he relieved himself was emptied regularly. No one said anything to him and he could only talk to himself. He didn't know how long he had been here. The days passed monotonously and without distinction into day and night. The door opened and a face he hadn't seen in a long time came into his view. "Ah, Lord Barteld, what a miserable state you are in," said Guy. "Fortunately, this is about to change. We won't keep you stringing along here anymore. Gustav here has another rope for you." On his signal, Gustav stepped forward and without further ado he twisted the rope around Barteld's neck. It didn't take long for the thrashing body to fall still. "So," Guy said to Gustav, "just leave the door ajar as an invitation for the curious." He walked up the stairs, laughing.

It was not much later that Krijn and Clauwaert arrived at the mayor's house. They moved cautiously towards the entrance. There was no one in sight and not a sound came from the house. The door was not locked, Krijn noticed to his surprise when he pushed down the handle. A nervous Clauwaert followed him inside. The sequel was childishly simple. They descended the stairs and arrived at the cell door. To their surprise, it was slightly ajar. Krijn carefully pushed the door open further. Barteld lay there on the ground. He knelt down next to him and noticed that all life had left him. He turned when he heard the clink of a coat of mail. Guy entered the

cell and laughed his teeth. "Ha, there we have the deaf one. Well, why don't you say anything? Have you lost your tongue?"

The 4 men behind Guy roared with laughter. Krijn stood up as quickly as lightning. He grabbed Guy by the arm and hurled him forcefully against the wall. He collapsed, gasping for breath. The four warriors jumped at Krijn and managed to knock him to the ground.

Clauwaert had retreated to an alcove when he heard the men coming down the stairs. When they jumped into the cell to overpower Krijn, panic struck and he ran up the stairs as quickly as he could. Darra had remained upstairs awaiting the arrest of the two intruders. Now he heard someone coming up the stairs, breathing heavily. To be sure, he pulled out his knife. He saw that it was Clauwaert, who appeared in the doorway in panic. His eyes darted back and forth like a hunted animal. Without thinking, Darra struck immediately. The knife disappeared deep into poor Clauwaert's chest. A sigh escaped him and the floor turned red.

They were too late. When he heard the church bell ringing, Aejolt knew that what he had feared had happened. People started moving around him. A stream moved towards the new church. This house of God could accommodate many more people than chaplain Bruno's old church. Lord Darra silenced the crowd and began: "We have just witnessed a crime of the worst kind. Two men descended to the dungeon and strangled the former Mayor Barteld before Guy de Monclosse, who noticed that something strange was going on, could intervene. When he arrived at the scene, the killer tried to kill him too. Fortunately, that didn't work out and Guy was only left with a broken arm. At the same time I was attacked by the other man in the main room. Only with the greatest effort could I avoid being killed myself and the murderer died by my knife. Justice will be done for the murdered nobleman. That is the only comfort I can offer his widow. She will not become homeless, but will be able to continue her life here in Vellesan under my protection. The trial of Barteld's murderer will take place in two days."

A growing murmur arose in the church and continued among those outside the church who had tried to hear Darra's words. There was speculation who the murderers were. Soon the rumor spread that it was about the two men who had lost their tongues because of Darra. The people who knew the two men did not want to believe that they had committed murder. The other people present could imagine that the men wished death on the lord of Vellesan. They had reason enough to hate the man, but killing Barteld? Why? The newcomers had no idea about all this. They did not know the

'murderers' or the previous mayor and owed a lot to Darra. They had no reason to doubt the mayor's words.

Pytske had fallen into Bruno's arms, crying. When Aeiolt had come up with this murder plan, they had been about to go to the brewery and talk about their love for each other. Now the bliss had turned into sadness. Her shoulders shook and she let her tears flow. Uncle Clauwaert and Aunt Floor had been so good to her and their misery was so immeasurable after Floortje's death. It was unbelievable! Guy watched from a distance as the chaplain comforted the girl. "Good to know," he muttered as he turned and left the market.

Roef was angry. He owed a lot to the Lord of Vellesan, but now he had been told that he could no longer get his beer from the Marzoeta brewery. The orders now had to be placed with Fergus. This southerner had started a brewery with the help of Darra. Unfortunately, the beer was not as tasty as Marzoeta's and he anticipated that his beer sales would decline. Roef had told Guy that it would make a difference in income and that meant that the mayor would also receive less tax.

Now that Darra was awaiting the arrival of the count, he would like to get rid of his opponents. Clauwaert had been put to death. The Wieringers' group had already thinned out somewhat. Unfortunately they were helped by Claes van Hoeleyde. The best thing would be if this meliores and Aeiolt had disappeared from the stage before Rorik arrived in Vellesan. Tackling the brewery was part of his plan, because as long as it was profitable, his critics could survive. It didn't really matter to him that Roef was angry. But Roef took out his anger on his daughter. He punched her in the face and when she fell to the ground he kicked her stomach and kicked her in the legs. With a cry of rage, Kybbe lunged at the brute. His mother had instructed him to ask Roef when he would pick up the ordered beer. The moment he entered the inn he saw the innkeeper kicking his daughter who was lying on the ground. Roef shook Kybbe off like a bothersome fly and gave the boy such a blow that he flew into the wall and lay there dazed.

"Just tell your mother I don't need her nasty beer and that no one is interfering with a father's right to correct his daughter."

Still furious, he stomped into the other room. Anna had gotten up and saw Kybbe taking her father's punch. She leaned over him and took him in her arms. Then she kissed him again and again, mumbling, "Stupid, stupid, sweet boy."

## **The kidnapping**

**861 AD**

On Palm Sunday, people crowded into the new church for the blessing at the beginning of the Holy Mass. On this second Sunday of the Passion season, the joyful entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem was celebrated.

At the start of the mass, Archdeacon Anselm blessed the boxwood branches with holy water.

In the days that followed, the Christian residents of Vellesan commemorated the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. The true Christians had one full meal a day during Lent. However, most Vellesan residents stuck to their 2 meals a day and looked forward to Easter Sunday.

On Holy Saturday, the last day of Lent, Rorik arrived in Vellesan. The large group of men in armor looked like an invasion force. They had never seen so many knights together at the same time in Vellesan. Count Rorik rode into the market square at the head of a procession. Darra had been warned well in advance of his arrival and enough people had been mobilized to care for the horses after the soldiers had dismounted. The count showed no sign of surprise that he was not met by Mayor Barteld and allowed himself to be led into the house by Darra. Once inside, he proved to be extremely decisive and wanted an explanation for Darra's presence instead of his own appointed mayor.

The self-proclaimed mayor had prepared everything well, while Guy kept his opponents out of the way. Aeijolt had been imprisoned by him. Guy started an investigation when he heard from one of the people in his network that ditches were being dug in the peat along the shore of the pool. These were apparently intended to ensure that visitors to the pagan sacrifice site could only reach the bank via one passage. Guy immediately went out with a few men to investigate. There he found Aeijolt who sacrificed to appease the gods for the deceased Krijn and Clauwaert. A trial would follow to expose these pagan practices.

The Count seemed satisfied when he was shown the produce of the shire. That was much more than the area had ever yielded. The 'evidence' that Darra put forward to show that Barteld shortchanged his lord, apparently

also satisfied him. Most convincing, however, was the story he was told about dissatisfied Vellesanners, who had suffered so much evil at the hands of Barteld that they had murdered him in his cell at the place where he was housed, while awaiting the judgment that the count himself would pass on him. One of the murderers was killed during this action. The nobleman Guy de Monclosse had caught the other in the cell with the choke cord in his hand, after which the man attacked Guy himself. Fortunately, they had been able to overpower him. A trial followed against this savage, at which he was tried and sentenced to death for the terrible act of murdering a nobleman.

“Now then,” count Rorik sneered, “this is the most special thing I've ever experienced. A self-appointed mayor deposes a corrupt mayor and takes all kinds of actions that are beneficial to the feudal lord, who never appointed him as such. I think I should be happy with you, Darragh van Alveringem. And then also an Archdeacon, who was sent here in my absence by the Utrecht Bishop. I believe the uncovering of the history of an Irish monk by your Archdeacon did the church and me a lot of good. It was the stories about a miracle involving a saint unknown to me that lured me here. It's almost to much what has happened in such a short space of time.”

“Archdeacon Anselm will tell you all about it and show you the relics of Saint Engelmundus in the new church. You will be pleased to know that we have organized a party in honor of your coming to Vellesan at the longhouse.”

Rorik responded in surprise: “A longhouse?”

“Yes, built by Sven the Norseman from Ribe,” Darra said proudly.

The next day the count was shown and told everything about the miracle of Vellesan, with an explanation of how much the stain had yielded for the settlement of Vellesan. Anselm knew what was important to Rorik. In return for stroking his ego and the desire for wealth he had aroused in the count, he hoped to baptize him and thereby convert him to Christianity. He would ensure that the count would realize that with the rapid growth in the number of Christians, it was profitable as a ruler to be a christian himself. Popular acceptance for a christian gentleman would be of a great advantage.

In the newly built longhouse, Easter took the form of a Blót party. Sven had given Darra all the information about these types of Viking sacrifices. As a Christian, Darra could of course not hold such a festival in honor of a Norse god, but now he could hold the celebration of Jesus' resurrection here in the second largest building in Vellesan in the form of a Viking festival. The Count would probably appreciate that, because it would

remind him of his home. Darra did his best to adhere to Viking customs as much as possible. The Count was led into the longhouse with all due respect. As the highest in the Kinhem hierarchy, he took the place of honor on the high bench in the 39 cubit long hall. Darra took the second place in status compared to Rorik. The rest of the group took their seats on wooden benches. The best seats were those on the same side of the table as the seat of honor. Your status diminished the further away you were from this. Here sat the nobles and the meliores.

Many new residents also found a place here. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy sat on the low bench. Darra knew from Sven how important it was among the Vikings, which place they were assigned. The free peasants and most important serfs were placed on the low bench. The rest sat on the packed floor, including children and dogs. Claes van Hoeleyde found himself on the outer edge of the high bench. Under the previous mayor he would have been sitting next to the place of honor, but it was clear that Lord Darra was putting him away. As a meliores, with considerable possessions, he belonged in the highest social stratum, but under Darra he was in danger of losing that position. The followers sat in the places closest to the mayor. The other attendees had to sit on the floor. The master builder was close to Darra, just like Anselm and Guy. Roef, the innkeeper, had also been given a place and was very pleased with it. No one from the Marzoeta brewery was invited, although its entire beer supply had been bought by Guy.

He had convinced Darra to serve only good beer to the count and everyone at the high table. Moreover, he cunningly added, it would be better not to destroy the brewery until they had managed to obtain Marzoeta's beer recipe. When every guest was herded to his seat and the others had found a spot on the floor, Darra welcomed everyone and passed around a tub in which everyone could wash their hands. The tables were now set and the food brought in. Meat from pigs, cows and chickens was prepared. The previous day many women and a few men had spent the entire day preparing this meal. The fish was fresh. There was bread, eggs, cheese and vegetables. The week before, a brown bear had been hunted by Darra, which had been spotted outside Vellesan. The bear meat was prepared and pre-cut for convenience. Darra knew from Sven that game was only on the Vikings' menu on special occasions. It would please Rorik. Dessert consisted of fruit and cakes. Sven had also said that the Vikings normally drank water or milk, but at a party they drank beer, the light mungát and the heavy beer, bjórr. Large wooden buckets with Marzoeta's beer were brought in. The Count took a long sip and a glorified expression came over his face. "This is better than any bjórr I've ever had!" he exclaimed. Satisfied, he took another sip. "But," he continued, "it is already said in Hávamál:

*'Beer is not  
always so good  
as one says for the sons of the family  
the more one drinks  
the less sense  
remains in the head'."*

After this declamation he let out a booming laugh and put the cup to his lips again.

Before the end of the evening, Rorik had made two commitments. Anselm would be allowed to baptize him the next day and Darra would be confirmed in the office of mayor.

Claes van Hoeleyde watched helplessly from his end of the table as the count was slyly taken over by Darra and Anselm. His only chance of preserving what he had built was if Darra was removed from his position. At this moment it really didn't look like that. How could things still be turned around for the better? Desperation overcame him.

In the meantime, the mood at his table improved. Due to the freely flowing fluid, a number of younger men and women formed 'drinking couples'. They sat next to each other and drank from the same cup. This caused a lot of flirting.

Anselm dressed the baptism of Count Rorik with great ceremony. Those present saw how the beautifully dressed nobleman knelt and bowed his head. The archdeacon prayed to the Father to bless the water, to exorcise evil and to confirm the profession of faith and baptism. While he poured water on the baptized nobleman, Anselm, as minister of the sacrament, said the words: "Rorik Yngling, count of Frisia, I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." He couldn't suppress a triumphant smile.

After this ceremony, everyone left the church to resume their duties. Of course, the Christians were the most impressed by the ceremony, but others also reflected on the fact that their ruler had converted to the faith.

When Anna walked home she was followed by Steinar, one of Rorik's men. His eye fell on her during the baptism ceremony and he continued to watch her graceful appearance constantly afterwards.

Preparations were now being made in the church to confirm Darra in his position as mayor. The new mayor had played it smart. First he had created an image of himself as the perfect agent of the shire. His story about the assassination attempts on the previous mayor and on him had

already made the count look favorably upon him. The very attractive income statement also helped to put him in a favorable light. Negative signs about him from society were carefully kept away from the count. Some people were physically kept away and others were intimidated by Guy and his men. It was almost only new residents of Vellesan that the count spoke to. The favorable image of Darra that emerged from this had made Rorik decide to actually employ him.

Darra was cheering inwardly when his position was finally recorded in writing. Now phase two of his grand plan could go into effect. All possible opponents now had to disappear from the scene. Discouragement worked best, so the families had to be torn apart so that they had no hope left at all. Guy's eye fell on Pytske, the daughter of Aeijolt and Marzoeta. His idea was to have Pytske taken by the count's retinue to Hallem. He would present her to one of the knights as a serf, who could be molded according to his wishes. Of course she would fight and make it clear that she was a free man and not a serf and that the mayor had no right to give her away or sell her. This event would affect both the parents and that foolish Bruno, who wanted to marry her. Bruno had Jannes gather information about Anselm in Utrecht. Fortunately, nothing came of this, but it was safer to nip new actions by this chaplain in the bud. If they could entice him to rebel against lawful authority, they could easily get rid of him. Guy approached the knight who had shown that he wanted a taste of Pytske's meat. He had looked at her with pleasure when she attended the ceremony next to Bruno and he confided to Guy that he did not understand why she chose such a bigot of a clergyman. He would know what to do with her. Guy then dared to present him with a daring plan.

He would see to it that the girl was delivered bound and gagged if the knight found a way to smuggle her north. When asked later, the nobleman would be able to say that the girl was a serf, given to him by the mayor to serve in his household. The knight had agreed with a horny look on his face.

After the confirmation, Rorik decided to move north. What a victory had been achieved in Vellesan with the miracle of the ancient spring. He realized that the success of the previously unknown Engelmundus could be copied. In Hallem at the mouth of the Rekere, where he wanted to settle permanently far from the influence of Louis the German, there was a small devotional chapel. This Kinhem was full of sacrificial pits and stories about missionaries. For example there was a sacred forest near Heiloo

and also sacred springs near Petten. Willibrord and Boniface could well fit in here as miracle workers. First a story about miracles, then perhaps some relics and then perhaps the founding of a monastery. The money would flow in large numbers. It had been a good move to be converted in this country of the gullible.

The day after the departure of Rorik and his entourage, Kybbe went to Roef's inn. He wanted to discuss the exciting events of the previous day with Anna. However, she wasn't there. He looked for her all day, but saw her nowhere. In the evening Bruno came to the door to ask about Pytske. The fear that Marzoeta already had about her husband's uncertain fate became unbearable with the thought that something bad could have happened to her daughter too. She had thought that Pytske was with Bruno. She had seen her daughter's relationship with the cleric blossom and knew of the two's intention to marry. Now fear gripped both of them. Her daughter was old and wise enough. So something must have happened to her. Together with Riuum, Kybbe, Atze, Duna, Jannes, Joukje and Floor, they went to everyone they knew to look for Pytske, but without any result.

For two weeks Kybbe kept looking out for his sister and Anna. There was no trace of either of the girls. Finally he decided to speak to the grumpy Roef. He refused to talk to Kybbe. He belittled Kybbe and talked about that disobedient little slut who wasn't worth rooting for. The boy became so angry that he attacked Roef. He had not counted on that and stumbled. He hit his head against the edge of a table and lay groaning on the floor while Kybbe pounded his chest with his fists. "Where is Anna? What did you do to her? Did you kill her? I know you used to beat her up all the time." Furious, Roef threw the boy away from him. "I had no use for that girl. I took her to Hallem so she could be the whore she already was. Just like her mother. The bastard who cheated on me with a trafficker. I'm glad I got rid of that cuckoo chick. At least now she has yielded something." He grinned evilly at Kybbe. "In any case, she will never be your sweetheart." He gave Kybbe a huge push. "And now I'm screwed, out of my inn." Kybbe let out a heartbreaking cry and ran outside.

Marzoeta was crumpled on a bench and held her head in her hands. Her daughter had disappeared and there had been no word of her husband. An accusation of 'pagan practices' had been made against him and a trial would follow. The uncertainty gnawed at her. In turn, Floor tried to comfort her. The friendship between the two women had deepened after the

tragedy that had happened to Clauwaert. They had both lost a husband and a child in a short period of time. They would need a lot of resilience to get back on track.

## **Anselm's confession**

### **862 AD**

Kybbe had not stopped his search for Anna, Pytske and his father. According to him, the blame for all the misery that had befallen them lay with the mayor and his men. So he tried to find ways to get near them inconspicuously. He hoped to gain information from their conversations. One evening he took cover next to the longhouse. He had previously made a hole near the high table inside, so he could peek and listen in on conversations. From the looks of it, a modest feast was in progress. The heavier beer variant flowed freely again, judging by the volume of joyful cries. Crude jokes were exchanged in which Pope Nicholas and Theutberga played the leading roles. The Pope had threatened Lothair II with excommunication because the monarch put aside his wife when the marriage remained childless. One of the jokes was about the length of the papal member under the habit and Theutberga's seductive skills. Kybbe peeked through the hole and saw the mayor and the Archdeacon talking to each other. As the laughter subsided for a moment, he heard Anselm say, "I always liked fellatio, but ever since that little bitch bit me, I don't dare stick it in anything anymore." "Ha, ha," laughed Darra, "then you were forced to become a real clergyman after all!"

It was unbelievable, Kybbe thought. So it was Anselm who had abused his girlfriend all those years ago. A man of God. What kind of god was that to allow such things. It certainly wasn't brother Bruno's god. He preached gentleness and was against any violence. He had to be informed about what his superior had done and they had to figure out how to undermine Anselm's position. Surely evil couldn't win? Anselm had to be judged and punished. He rushed to the chaplain's home to report what he had heard. Bruno was shocked by Anselm's revelation of his sexual excesses and asked in disbelief what this had to do with Saartje's tragic fate five years ago. Kybbe then told him what Saartje had said on her deathbed. Bruno was shocked. How could a clergyman do something like that to a child?

However, he was also realistic enough to realize that Anselm could only be held accountable by a bishop or perhaps even the Pope. Kybbe was furious when Bruno told him that there was nothing they could do against the Archdeacon here. "Think about it Kybbe," he said to the boy. "For a trial you must go to Lord Darra. Do you really think he's willing to accept charges against Anselm? And the same applies to the count in Frisia. No, there's only one thing to do. I am leaving for Cologne to request an audience with Pope Nicholas and hope for a willing ear. It is said that he is a powerful, but also honest man. It is not without reason that he is called Nicholas the Great. Since Pytske disappeared, I don't know what to do with myself, so I will go and hopefully be of any good"

Kybbe knew in his heart that Bruno was right, but the anger consumed him and he felt powerless. The next morning Kybbe waved goodbye to Bruno. They had not informed anyone of the cleric's departure. Kybbe sat for a long time in gloomy reflection on the bank of the Velisana, the river from which Vellesan took its name. He stared unseeing into the pale brown water.

"The chaplain has left," Guy reported to Darra, whom he found talking to Anselm in the large room.

"Left? Where to and why?" Anselm asked.

Guy said that one of his spies saw Bruno and the young Kybbe saying goodbye to each other, after which Bruno left for the east. "That's actually quite good news," Darra said. "This is how we get rid of all the meddlesome types. We will now focus on the brewery. Aeijolt is safely stored. I don't dare start a lawsuit for idolatry for the time being. Too many people here still adhere to the ancient religion for that. I know you would like to execute them all, Anselm, but that could lead to an uprising." He turned to Guy: "What about the recipe for the beer that Marzoeta brews? Do we know how she does it yet?"

She replied: "We know she no longer uses gale. She found something else to flavor the beer, hops. It also apparently has a longer shelf life than grit beer. We now have to find out what all the components are and how the process works. I'm trying to get a man inside the brewery."

"Great, the sooner we know, the better. We will kick all the filth out of Vellesan."

Anselm chimed in: "Then I will look for a new candidate for the position of chaplain. If Bruno returns, there will no longer be room for him here."

Jabik walked into the brewery. The young man looked around with genuine interest. Marzoeta walked up to him and asked, "Can I help you?"

“Well...” the boy hesitated, “I’m not coming to buy beer, because I have no job and no money. I was actually hoping that you had work for me.” Marzoeta replied that she had enough people working in the brewery and that she regretted that she could not help him. The boy was visibly disappointed. He looked so sad that she couldn’t just send him away. “Maybe my son knows something for you. Just come back at the end of the day and he’ll be there.”

When Kybbe and Atze returned to the brewery with hungry stomachs, they met the boy with the open face. He introduced himself as Jabik and said their mother had sent him. “You certainly mean his mother,” Atze pointed to Kybbe. “I’m his cousin, not his brother.” The three of them laughed at the misunderstanding.

Then Jabik explained why he came to the brewery. They went inside while talking. Jabik’s eyes darted in all directions. “It’s so big and neat here,” he said admiringly.

“It’s so big because of my father. He is a builder and I helped him build it,” Kybbe said proudly.

“Yes,” Atze added, “and the fact that it is so clean and tidy is because of Marzoeta and my mother. We are fucked in the winter, because they insist we wash regularly. We can jump high or low, but we can’t get away from it. Otherwise they threaten to wash us themselves, as if we were little children.”

This made Jabik laugh his bowels out. The boys liked him immediately. Jabik looked at the large kettle and asked if they would explain to him how the brewing process worked, because he was very curious about that. The boys were not unwilling to explain it to him.

With the arrival of so many new people in Vellesan and the increase in the number of pilgrims, there was a need for more food and thus the peat soil to the east of the spot came more and more into focus. Claes van Hoeleyde needed many workers there for the drainage of the area. Many ditches were dug for this purpose, so that the top layer of the peat became usable. According to Kybbe, Jabik could get started straight away.

In the days that followed, the boys often hung out together and Jabik became a regular at home with Marzoeta and Duna. He was very helpful and eager to learn. After work he always walked into the brewery and was immediately ready to lend a hand. Marzoeta let him have his way and even took pleasure in the boy. He was so much more handy and attentive than her son at the kinds of chores that needed to be done here.

One day Kybbe came home out of breath. He found her talking to Claes van Hoeleyde. The uncertainty about her husband's fate consumed her and one of the few people she could talk to about it was Claes. Aeijolt had always been a good worker for him and they had had many discussions together. Their conversation was rudely interrupted by Kybbe. He gasped and told his mother that Fergus had a new and larger brewhouse built by Simon van Litte. All building materials had been delivered to the port by boat within the last two weeks. He had heard that several boilers had already been ordered. Claes reacted with disbelief. "How is that possible? That man doesn't have a nail to scratch his ass. He can never afford that. Be careful Marzoeta, because Darra is probably behind this. He wants to destroy you and me and will never miss an opportunity to hurt us. I think I'll go to Hallem and tell the count that his master is probably using his money to increase his own power. Kybbe, would you go and listen if you can catch some information at Darra's? See if you can find out anything about the plans of Lord Darra and his cronies. But be careful. Kybbe nodded eagerly and rushed outside, where he immediately bumped into Jabik. "Come," he said, "you can help me."

When it was clear to Jabik what Kybbe wanted to do, he responded enthusiastically. "It's better if we split up. If you will seek information with Lord Darra, I will do so with Guy de Monclosse." And he was already on his way.

Claes van Hoeleyde had been a widower for 15 years and never remarried. In his absence, his possessions were managed by Oeds, a free farmer. The farm adjacent to Claes' land had been in Oed's family for generations and the two men trusted each other unconditionally. The farmer had become concerned when Claes' horse returned without a rider. He recalled the workers from the land and organized a search for his neighbor. Since he knew what Claes was planning, he had every possible route searched in the northern direction to Hallem. They didn't get any results. There was no trace of Claes to be found anywhere. Work in the peat area was resumed. One of the last 4 Wieringers found his body there after a few days. He was lying on a patch of sand, one arm raised as if he had crawled out of the water. It was not entirely clear what had caused death. He was not injured, but had a dent in his helmet. Had he perhaps fallen from his horse and hit his head on a stone?

The story quickly spread around Vellesan. There were rumors that Claes had been murdered. One talked about highwaymen who made the peatlands and swamps of Waterland unsafe. Another talked about a group of Vikings who came ashore to plunder. Kybbe, however, had very

different ideas about his death. He knew that Claes had planned to file a complaint against Darra with the count. The Mayor had to be behind his death. But how had he known of the meliores' plan? Kybbe racked his brains and dug deep into his memory. No one other than Marzoeta, Claes and himself had been present at the conversation and Claes would certainly not have confided in anyone about his plan. Yes, of course he had talked about it with Oeds, but it was impossible that this taciturn farmer had talked to anyone other about it, knowing the portance of Claes' undertaking. In his mind he went back to that day. He had gone to listen in on Darra's conversations to see if anything was being discussed about the new brewery. However, he was none the wiser. Only Jabik had managed to overhear a conversation with Dirk at Guy's. This was, Jabik said, a spy, because he heard Dirk asking for his reward for reporting the plans of two men for an attack on the former and the new mayor. Guy then paid him from a leather pouch that hung from a belt around his waist. Kybbe had responded in disbelief: "But that's not possible! Clauwaert and Krijn would never have made such a plan. At least not against Mayor Barteld."

Jabik shrugged and said: "I'm just telling you what I heard and saw and it really was jingling coins that Guy paid to Dirk."

In the meantime, Darra had not been idle. He stated that in the absence of a legal heir, Claes van Hoeleyde's possessions would revert to the count in Frisia and that Darra would manage the land for him as mayor. His first act as administrator was to dismiss the Wieringer workers, who were left without a living. Marzoeta became aware of a second action on his part when she noticed that several buyers of her beer had switched to the Fergus brewery. She also heard stories of Guy had pressuring several residents to stop buying from her. Kybbe had heard that Fergus' beer was just as tasty as Marzoeta's.

They had gathered at the brewery to discuss their misfortunes. Atze was sent away with Jabik to pick up a relative in the peat area. Kybbe wanted to respond when the boys were given that assignment, but after a warning look from Marzoeta, he clenched his jaw. Jannes quickly provided clarity after the departure of the two boys. "Atze and I discussed the strange and sad events of the last few weeks and tried to figure out how Darra could keep bothering our friends and acquaintances so much. None of us doubt that he was to blame for Claes' death. He would not have liked a complaint about him to the count. How could he have known about his departure to Rorik? Who could have told him that? I had a suspicion when Kybbe told me about the eavesdropping adventure Claes had sent him on and the story Jabik told him about the payment to Dirk. I thought if anyone

collaborates with Darra, it would be Roef. Without the mayor he would never have been able to start the inn. So I dropped in on him this week to find out more and drank beer with him. One thing quickly became clear to me. It was Marzoeta's beer, while I knew that he gets his beer from Fergus. Roef also confirmed this.

Now I guessed that someone must have given Fergus the recipe for making Marzoeta's beer. That's why I called this meeting. What can we do to defend us against the treachery? I have instructed Atze to keep Jabik away from here for the next two hours, because the only possible culprit for passing on information is Jabik."

Kybbe went over the events in his mind and realized in a flash of insight that Jannes was right. Jabik had been present at both events. He could find his way blindly in the brewery and in hindsight Kybbe realized that he was very curious and kept asking questions about the brewing process. Although he had not been present during the conversation with Claes, Kybbe had immediately bumped into him outside. So he could have been eavesdropping. What a treacherous brat he was. "I'll give him..."

Jannes stopped him with a hand in the air. "You don't do anything! We'll just let him do his thing here. We'll make sure he doesn't hear anything important. Maybe we can still use him by feeding him some false information. That may come in handy in due course. One thing we certainly cannot let him hear is that we are going to free Aeijolt from prison. I think that a dirty game was also played in the past to put Krijn and Clauwaert in a position that cost them their lives. Darra and Guy are not to be told about this undertaking of ours. But we certainly can't leave Aeijolt in prison, otherwise he will end his life just like Barteld's. I don't want any indiscretion, not even around the Archdeacon. It's clear to me that he's in the same league with Darra. After all, how quickly a new chaplain was appointed after Bruno's departure. I have already heard stories about this chaplain from a newcomer. He doesn't exactly seem to be a man of God." After this, Jannes designated a number of people with whom he would realize the liberation of Aeijolt. Everyone present then vowed not to share anything discussed with anyone outside this group. The cups were then filled and by the time Atze and Jabik returned, there was an optimistic atmosphere in the brewery. Atze said that they had not been able to find 'Uncle Oege'. Kybbe thought that was funny in a way. He knew that Uncle Oege had been killed in a Viking raid when he was only two years old.

Duna and Marzoeta looked at the holes in the barrels in horror. Someone had entered the brewery at night and smashed the beer barrels. Floor

stood with her hand over her mouth, whimpering. It reeked of the beer that was running freely on the floor.

Marzoeta quickly recovered. They had already been through so much that she felt she must not dwell in misery. Direct action was necessary. They would also overcome this deed of evil. Kybbe was instructed to devise a lock for the brewery so that no one would be able again to enter at night. He devised a simple system of a beam on the inside of the double doors, which was slid into holders on either side. No one could come from outside anymore. He made a new single entry door on the side of the building. This could be closed with a simple lock, but an additional measure was that from now on, their oldest friends from Wieringen kept watch during the night. New barrels arrived and Atze and Kybbe were sent out to find new potential customers now that they had lost clients to Fergus. The pilgrims on their way to Heiloo and Hallem in the north were so many, that it had been worth while to built a new inn near Limmen. They visited the church of Limbon before they lay down to rest in the inn. The innkeeper could use increasingly larger quantities of Marzoeta's beer. Business flourished again as before.

Jannes had decided that this was the time to free Aeijolt from his sickening dungeon. It was arranged that Jabik would be present at the brewery in the morning to mislead him with false information. The boy looked up as the large man came running into the brewery in apparent panic. "I was on the beach gathering shrimps and saw a Viking ship coming towards the coast," he shouted.

Without listening or asking anything, Jabik ran outside. Fear drove him to run faster than he had ever run before. He had heard the most terrible stories about Vikings all his life and he had also heard the story of the Wieringers countless of times. He ran as fast as his legs could carry him to Guy de Moncrosse and shouted that Vikings had landed on the beach. Guy hurried to the weapon depot where the soldiers were and he ordered them to put on their coats of mail, helmets and arm themselves. The group then galloped northwest to meet the Vikings. Jannes had counted on this. Aeijolt was readily freed from his dungeon and reunited with his wife. Then a select group went into the peat area to install him in a hut that had already been prepared for him. Here he would be out of sight and reach of Darra. Marzoeta was able to visit him there regularly and provide him with things he needed. A boat was ready for Aeijolt, with which he could improve his old qualities as a fisherman. One of the four Wieringers would

take turns to keep him company and go fishing with him. The fish could then be sold again in Vellesan.

Naturally, Darra was furious when he noticed that there was no Viking ship to be seen and that was made worse when it turned out that Aeijolt was no longer in his cell. Guy was ordered to retrieve him with great haste. However, none of his spies had any idea where that piece of shit might be. No one had heard anything. It was clear that the boy had allowed himself to be taken advantage of with his Viking message. It was a hopeless mission, Guy undertook. Aeijolt's friends expressed great surprise and all claimed to know nothing of their friend's miraculous escape. In his frenzy, Guy gave Jabik a massive beating before reporting back to Darra empty-handed.

Kybbe found Jabik early in the morning in front of the still closed double doors of the brewery. The boy was crumpled on the ground, his shoulders slumped forward and his hands clasped over his eyes. His whole body shook with deep soundless gasps. When Kybbe lightly touched his shoulder, he looked up. His face was a patchwork of bruises and welts. One eye was shut and a crust of clotted blood could be seen under his nose. "Help me," he said. "I want to belong to you all. I want it to be like before. That we are friends again."

Kybbe looked at him scornfully. "You don't think we can trust you after everything that's happened. No, we don't want you here. Just go and see your friends in the Mayery."

The boy stood up, looked at Kybbe with a tearful face and clenched his fists. From his clenched teeth Kybbe heard him saying: "I will get even with them and I will show you that I mean it. I will prove that. I will be on your side from now on!" With those words he walked away.

## The brawl in the moor

865 AD



Waterland, a peat area and swamp landscape east of the settlements in Kinhem.

1. Hallem (Bergen);
2. Limbon (Limmen);
3. Vellesan (Velsen); B. Beverhem (Beverwijk);
4. Heiligerloo (Heiloo);
5. Haralem (Haarlem);
6. Litte (Leiden);
7. Utrecht;
8. Dorestad (in the neighbourhood of current Wijk bij Duurstede);
9. Daventre (Deventer);
10. Numaga (Nijmegen).

After his father's liberation, Kybbe was often to be found in Waterland and regularly went fishing with him. However, his heart was in building and fortunately he could talk a lot about it with Aeijolt. His knowledge of the theory of building was a marvelous educational source to Kybbe. In addition, he was able to regularly put what he had learned into practice in various places, where he made contacts during the assignments on behalf of the brewery that his mother entrusted him with throughout the area. In the long conversations with his father he also learned about history. For example, he was told that emperor Charlemagne had resisted the armies of the Wali of Parisi for a long time, but that the mutual rivalry of his grandsons had weakened the empire. In 843 they finally agreed to a division of the area. It was a turbulent time, especially in the border areas.

The Vikings had taken advantage of the weakness by plundering the coastal area. In the ninth century, the Carolingian Empire had been so weakened that the Frisians could no longer count on support from the Carolingian nobles. Dorestad was plundered four times without hindrance during that time. Many Frisians in the coastal area were then captured and enslaved. The Wieringers had learned to be on their guard, but were forced to flee in 847 after such a raid by the Vikings. Their village had been burned down and relatives had been taken or killed. He of course knew this story well, because it was discussed at every meeting and the old Wieringers still regularly made sacrifices at a pool in the peat.

Guy saw with sorrow how all his plans to get the Wieringers under control had failed. The brewery flourished, despite Darra's favoritism of Fergus. Marzoeta had tapped into new markets and she had enough customers for her beers. A direct attack on the brewery would not have deterred her either. In no time she was back in business and it had become more difficult to sabotage the business. Moreover, the Wieringers had become more prosperous due to their fishing in the east. All this had developed after Aeijolt's disappearance from captivity. Perhaps it was possible to destroy their lucrative fishing activities. He would instruct his spies to find out exactly where their fishing grounds were.

It soon turned out that not only the men entered Waterland, but that Marzoeta and Kybbe also regularly accompanied them. These reports from his informants made Guy think. Why did Marzoeta go into that large, almost empty area in the first place? And so regularly. It almost had to be that Aeijolt was there somewhere. It was the only logical explanation he could think of. A plan began to mature in his mind and when he felt sure of his case, he went to Darra to present it. He responded enthusiastically and gave his blessing to the proposed undertaking.

“Kybbe! You have to listen to me. I know you don't trust me, but this is really important,” Jabik just begged him to hear him out. At first he had walked on stiffly and turned a deaf ear to his words, but when Jabik said that his father and mother were in danger, he stopped. “Really, you have to believe me, Kybbe. I overheard a conversation between Darra and Guy. They know your mother is going to your father and they are planning to follow her. Their goal is to kill all the Wieringers in Waterland once and for all.” Kybbe was shocked by this. Could they kill all his friends and family without anyone noticing?

Still suspicious, he turned to his former friend. “How can I know you won't cheat and betray us again?”

“I swear it's true and I'm on your side, but I can't make you believe me. All you can do is let me stay with you and not lose sight of me for a moment. If necessary, tie me up until it's all over, but believe what I tell you.”

Kybbe had already made his decision. “You stay with me and we will go to Jannes and my mother together. They can then decide what should be done with you.”

After listening to Jabik's account, Jannes decided that the Wieringers should meet to come up with a counter plan to Guy's. Atze was called and sent out with orders to look out for possible spies. That evening, everyone involved gathered unseen, one by one, in the brewery after dark. Jabik then had to tell his story again for the gathered group. Unfortunately, he

could not tell on which day Guy was going to implement his plan. The meeting lasted until the early hours and ultimately produced a well-thought-out plan to foil the attack. Jabik was locked up in Jannes' home at his own request and despite his protests, Kybbe was ordered not to leave him alone there for a moment. Kybbe would have liked to participate in the action and felt that it was his job to protect and help his father and mother.

“Your job is also a form of help to your parents. You know it's necessary to keep Jabik out of the way. You yourself have already said that you doubt him. We cannot take any risks. You stay here”, Jannes said sternly. Grumbling, Kybbe had to agree. Atze was instructed to pay close attention when Guy's men prepared for action and to report this immediately to Jannes.

A few days later the time had come. Three of the Wieringers left the town on the eastern side with Marzoeta. Jannes noticed from a concealed position that they were being followed by their enemy. One of the men had been sent ahead and would probably keep the group behind him informed of the location of Marzoeta and the fishermen. All this to prevent them from realizing that they were being followed. They were on foot. Horses would only hinder their progress in the wet area. In turn, Guy and his men were followed by Jannes, Atze and their friends. Their advantage was that they knew where they were going and could therefore follow at a safe distance, without chance of discovery.

Jabik was very nervous and kept talking to Kybbe. “I hope everything turns out well and that that bastard of a Guy gets his comeuppance. And I hope that Atze, you and I can become friends again.” Slowly Kybbe started to thaw a bit towards Jabik. The boy seemed sincere and very eager to be included back into their circle, so that it was difficult to continue excluding him. Hadn't his story proven enough that he had finally broken with those wretches of the Mayery? He was curious how Jabik had ended up with Guy in the first place. When asked it turned out that Jabik's father had started drinking and neglecting his work after his mother's death. The boy was forced to forage for his own food at a young age. His father didn't look after him at all. One day an aunt on his mother's side showed up in Litte and took Jabik to Vellesan. That was 4 years ago. She was a single widow who had to survive on a meager income. Jabik meant an extra mouth for her to feed. However, she had said that she could not leave her sister's child with a man who neglected the child so much. To her regret, she only found out after many years that Jabik had been abandoned to his fate. However, his new life in Vellesan threatened to be disrupted again after a year, because his aunt became seriously ill. At that moment, Guy had

entered his life. He had sent a woman to care for his aunt until her death and had told Jabik that he would receive assignments for payment. Grateful that his aunt did not have to die in misery and for the opportunity Guy offered him, he had accepted. The work consisted of giving oral reports on everything that happened in Vellesan. His last assignment had been to obtain the recipe for Marzoeta's beer. An assignment he increasingly began to doubt when he became friends with Atze and Kybbe. But Guy had been good to him and he had really no reason to doubt his intentions, which is why he had told him about Claes van Hoeleyde's plan to go to the count in Hallem. When Guy had beaten him so terribly after reporting that Vikings had been spotted on the coast, his eyes had been opened and he had seen Guy's true colors. He then also came to the conclusion that he had contributed to the murder of Claes. Jabik felt extremely guilty because his information had turned out to be fatal. When he heard that the beer barrels in the brewery had been broken, he knew that Guy must also be guilty of this. The boys then got into deep conversation. For example, Jabik did not know that Fergus was helped with a brewery by Darra at the expense of Marzoeta. The stories about Krijn and Clauwaert also touched Jabik. "How can people be so evil that they crush the defenseless?"

"Power," Kybbe replied. "Power and greed make people behave this way." Here Jabik countered that there were plenty of good people who had power and wealth.

"I don't know," Kybbe responded. "Maybe some people are born that way, or they got bad milk from their mother's breast. Or maybe there is a devil, as Christians believe, and he whispers bad things to people." He shrugged at these words.

Behind some low bushes, Guy and his men peered at the fishermen. Suddenly one of the Wieringers looked in their direction and uttered a shrill cry. The four start running. Guy realized they had been discovered. "Give chase," he shouted. "Kill them, but spare Marzoeta." He would still need her to find Aeijolt, he realized. He went after his men, sword raised. The pursuers seemed to be gaining ground. The fishermen were forced to moderate their pace because Marzoeta could not keep up with them. They would soon be within range, Guy thought. At that moment he saw the men sinking away in front of him. He stopped short, realizing they had entered a swamp. He had to get his men out and while he was frantically trying to figure out how to do that, he heard a noise behind him. A huge blow to his head put an end to all his thoughts. The fishermen and the pursuing group threw spears at the soldiers trapped in the swamp. One of them was hit in

the neck under his helmet. Blood gushed over his coat of mail. The others struggled in panic, sinking further and further. One by one they were killed. Jannes grabbed Guy's body under the armpits and dragged him into the swamp. Although it wasn't deep here, it was enough to make a body that was lying flat on the mud disappear.

After the massacre, the victors went all together to Aeijolt's shelter to bring him the good news. They enjoyed the food and drinks they brought before they went to work. Aeijolt and the three fishermen took to the water in a boat. Although Guy had been dealt with briefly, that did not mean that Aeijolt could return to Vellesan. Not as long as Darra was in charge there. The others returned to Vellesan for their day's work.

The Mayor was worried. It now became clear how dependent he was on his friend and supporter, Guy. He didn't even know who his right hand's informants were. How could he find out what had happened? Guy had left with his men three days ago and there had been no sign of them since. There were two men he could send out. Both Roef, the innkeeper, and Fergus, the brewer, owed him a lot. He sent an errand boy to summon the two to him. Both men could not bring him any news about Guy, Gustav and his other men. Roef could only tell that he had seen Marzoeta and that nasty kid of hers that morning at the harbor. Fergus added that her brewery was still in full operation. That meant that Guy's plan had failed. But had things gone so seriously wrong that all his men had died? That couldn't be true. Trained, armed men who had lost out to a few fishermen and a woman? Impossible!

There was something that had escaped Roef that morning in the harbor. He hadn't paid much attention to Kybbe and his mother, too busy loading his goods into a handcart. It was always a hard job to push it from the dock to the inn. He had arrived there drenched in sweat, after which he had rested for a while and drank some of his light beer before unloading the cart. Marzoeta and Kybbe had arrived at the harbor out of breath after Atze had come to tell them that Pytske had returned. The surprise was great, but once they arrived in the harbor, it became even more so, because when Marzoeta embraced her daughter, a toddler stood with his hand firmly glued to Pytske's skirt. It turned out to be her son. "This is Stilgar, momma, your grandson."

Marzoeta sank to her knees to take the boy in her arms. The boy retreated in fear, but disappeared into the strange woman's arms. Because his mother apparently approved of it, he relaxed a little. As Kybbe watched this scene pass by, waiting for his turn to embrace his sister, his gaze was

struck by a young woman behind Pytske. She waited timidly with her hands folded in front of her. Her gaze fixed on Kybbe. Could that be true? Was this...? He burst into a loud shout of joy: "Anna!"

Immediately a radiant smile broke out on her face and she flew into Kybbe's arms. How was this possible? After so many years of not receiving any message or sign from the women, they were now here in the flesh.

There were so many questions to ask and so many stories to tell. The words tumbled over each other. Laughing and crying at the same time, they went to Marzoeta's house. The rumor of their return home after so many years spread rapidly. Relatives and friends came from all sides. However, Marzoeta did not want to share her daughter with others before she had heard her story in its entirety. Atze was stationed outside to keep everyone away and promise them that they could come back later to share in the joy and the stories. A party would be given to mark the return to the bosom of the family.

Now the women were given the opportunity to tell their stories. Pytske started. But first she wanted to know when Bruno was coming. Marzoeta had to tell her that Bruno had gone to Cologne almost a year after her disappearance in an attempt to denounce Anselm to the Pope. They had not heard from him since and she was afraid that perhaps the same thing had happened to him as Claes van Hoeleyde, who had been found dead in the peat area. The Archdeacon had appointed a new chaplain almost immediately after his departure. Pytske was very shocked and the sadness grabbed her by the throat. So many years had passed. She had given birth to someone else's child and was in fear that Bruno would not accept Stilgar after she returned home. Yet she had always had hope, because Bruno had a big heart and their love had been strong, although they had not been allowed to be together for long. Since Pytske was so overcome with grief, Anna began to tell the story, while Marzoeta comforted her daughter and Stilgar held his mother and said over and over again, "Mamma, don't cry."

First she told how her father had sold her to a brute of a knight, an animal of a Viking who took her whenever he felt like it and left her behind. She had to do all kinds of chores in the knight's household and was disparagingly called 'Harald's whore' by the others. After a couple of years, Harald's younger brother came from the north. He had taken Anna's fate to heart. He turned out to be the opposite of Harald and eventually helped her escape from Hallem. And not only her, but also Pytske and her son,

after he heard from Anna that Pytske had never been a serf. Marzoeta had been surprised by this. "Pytske a serf? How did they come up with that?"

Pytske had now regained some control over her emotions and was able to tell her story. She said that she was approached by Guy de Monclose at the time. The bastard had isolated her and then grabbed her, handcuffed her and gagged her. Then she was at the mercy of Steinar. This knight of the count had treated her like a serf and used her as a companion. The latter came to an end when she turned out to be pregnant. Her son's father never showed himself again after that. He probably already had another free-range. Fortunately, she had been able to keep in regular contact with Anna in Hallem and they were supportive of each other.

Ultimately, Harald's brother had provided a boat and they rowed away from Hallem on the inland waterways. It had been an extremely difficult journey. It had been easy enough on the Rekere River, but elsewhere during their trip the water was often not deep enough and they had to pull the boat back into deeper water. Fortunately they had been given enough food to take with them. Once they had sailed up the Velisana, it had been easy to reach the port. The rough hands of both women showed the hard work of the boat ride and Marzoeta ordered Kybbe to gather plantain to ease the pain. He hastily jumped up to comply. He cheered internally. His Anna had returned. Life looked benignly on him.

How terrible he looked, Darra thought. Finally Guy de Monclose had returned home. He looked as if he had been wallowing in a mud puddle among the pigs. His story was even more depressing than his sight. What Darra had thought impossible had happened. Besides Guy, none of the men had survived. The cowardly Wieringers had lured them into the swamp and then slaughtered the defenseless men. Darra was shaking with anger. Guy said that he eventually recovered with a huge bump on the side of his head. He had been partially submerged in the swamp. Miraculously, his head had remained above water. The perpetrator had dragged him into the swamp, but had overlooked the boulder beneath the muddy water surface. It had taken him days to find his way back to Vellesan. There had been enough water to drink, but he was rattling with hunger. So food was hastily prepared and brought to him, whereupon he wolfed it all down. A little later Roef came to say that his 'whore of a daughter' had been spotted. Guy clenched his fist and hit his other open hand. "How is that possible?"

"It seems they came from the north on a boat," Roef replied.

"They?" Darra asked. 'Who are 'they'?"

"She and Marzoeta's daughter."

Guy spoke bitterly: "Everything we had so carefully prepared is being undone. Will we never get rid of that plague?"

## **The gathering**

### **866 AD**

The farms in the dune area and further south on the Spaarne river were new customers for Marzoeta's beer. A small settlement had arisen there, which some called Haarlhem. Her beer was also drunk north of Vellesan in Limmen and even as far as Heiloo. Nowadays Oeds harvested hop cones on his land. He had a good customer in Marzoeta and Fergus had also cast an eye on his hop cones. Kybbe was busy building a simple church in Haarlhem. Marzoeta's contacts with the inhabitants of that settlement had contributed greatly to his receiving this assignment, as young as he was. A bright future dawned, especially because this enabled him to live together with Anna. Kybbe had wanted to confront her father after Anna's return, but Anna had forbidden him to do so. "I never want to have anything to do with that man again, but he is still my father, so you don't do anything. Especially because Guy will probably throw you in jail."

Aeijolt still lived in Waterland, where Marzoeta visited him regularly. There was a lot of demand for fresh fish in Vellesan and that meant that the Wieringers were doing well with their fishing business east of Vellesan.

It had been a complete surprise to the family that Guy had shown up in town a few days later after their adventure in the peat bog. Jannes was really very sour about it. "I should have just wrung that guy's neck before I threw him into the swamp," he cursed. Of course, he had to wait for a new trick or attack from what he considered his archenemy. They had to be

prepared for anything. In fact, changes were in the air. Travelers brought back stories of the increasing amount of looting in the west. The Vikings were raiding there and also plundered here and there on the estuaries of the European mainland. It seemed that they had few chances with their plundering raids in the Caliphate. Only Brittany was open to them, but there were defenses on all the major rivers north and south of Brittany. Louis the German had more difficulty with them in the Baltic Sea area. Their lives here could also be threatened by the Vikings. Could Rorik and Darra protect them from plunder? The latter had been allowed to take on new soldiers. Two battle-hardened knights had come from German territory. They were old comrades-in-arms of the mayor and of Guy de Monclosse. Three knights had also come from Hallem, with 10 young men in training in their wake. Training practise took place every day on a site west of the village. They all owned a horse and armor.

With the arrival of the men, Darra felt stronger than before. Plans could again be made to eradicate any resistance in and around Vellesan. Reports reached him from the northeast that the Frisians were showing increasing hostility towards the count and his institutions. The dissatisfaction should certainly not spread to Vellesan. Although he had plenty of supporters here, the people who had become part of this country had never really accepted him as their leader. Stories kept circulating in which suspicions were expressed about him. He was sure that those stories came from the Wieringers. They had to disappear from Vellesan permanently. The church of Anselm would come in handy for this. The new chaplain had proven to be an asset. Residents who told him their sins, suspicions and secrets in confidence did not suspect that chaplain Wolfsfroyde passed this on to Anselm, who in turn shared the really important matters with Darra himself. There had to be something there that could be used against the clique around Marzoeta.

Ultimately, urged by Anselm, he decided to definitively play the card of faith. It seemed the only way to hit the Wieringers. Ever since Charlemagne, the Frisians have been forced to convert to Christianity, and this was not always done gently. The Archdeacon had long urged him to put an end by force to the pagan rituals, which were still practiced in Frisia. Darra himself was not very religious and he knew that many pagan customs had been adopted by the church without any problems. Christian saints had taken the place of pagan gods. New Year's Eve celebrations had been given a christian flavor. Christmas and Easter were celebrated at the change of seasons like the pagan celebrations before. Pilgrimages also existed before Christianity came to Kinhem. Since Vellesan now had

his own saint, Anselm had made it a habit to have the Engelmundus statue carried around on his name day with a beautiful closing service. Under the influence of pilgrims and the many new residents of Vellesan, church attendance increased by leaps and bounds. Times were changing rapidly. Perhaps this was the right time to tackle paganism, without much risk of resistance. Anselm was pleased when Darra told him what he was planning to do. The influence of Christianity would increase and he dreamed of Kinhem as a diocese with a beautiful stone basilica in Vellesan, modeled on the one in Cologne. He knew that Darra mainly had the Wieringers in mind, but ultimately the church would prevail everywhere. "I have the information you need. From a source you wouldn't expect," he chuckled. "Marzoeta still goes to the church of Wolfsfroyde, where chaplain Bruno used to play the first violin. She refuses to go to the new church and that's probably because she doesn't trust me. What she doesn't know is that I have ordered Wolfsfroyde to tell me everything he hears about paganism. I convinced him that there is no secret of confession in such cases. The coincidence now is that she told him during confession how much trouble she has with her relatives, who continue to persist in their pagan ways. She would love for them to convert to the true faith. It seems that they perform their strange rituals with singing and music somewhere in the peat area, where they also offer things of value. If we find their place of sacrifice, we can finally put an end to their disgusting excesses. It is told that they crawl around in animal skins and then engage in sexual immorality with each other naked, without respect of persons. They huddle together like animals. It is like Sodom and Gomorrah." The latter splashed from his mouth, causing the saliva to fly into the air in fine droplets.

Darra doubted whether the archdeacon's statements had any basis. Probably the fools were just stuck in an old superstition and the church saw them as competition, so the devil must be behind it. However, the church became an increasingly important power factor during this time, so it was better to be on its side. So he went to church himself and showed himself to be a good christian, but he only believed in himself.

Guy was particularly enthusiastic. His resentment towards the Wieringers was great and now he could take revenge for the death of his friends and for what they had made him endure, alone in the swamp. He would use his snitches to find out the location of the sacrificial site in the peat.

Rium had a bronze cloak pin to offer. It was an item of great value to him, as it was the only thing he had been able to take with him from his mother after their homestead was destroyed by the Vikings. The brutes had had no respect even for an old woman. Only after a very long time had Marzoeta told him that mother had first been sexually assaulted, before she was thrown aside like a useless piece of trash and murdered.

The other Wieringers had brought nails, coins and carved cone-shaped pendants as offerings. About 20 Vellesanners had gathered at the place in the swampy part where they would hold their rituals. They were all somewhat older Frisians. Old Jekke played on a flute made of swan bone. The old man had always been very pugnacious and his preference for the heavier beer had landed him in many conflicts. He had lost a lot of teeth because of it, but he could still play the flute very well. The water flowed through the peat at a leisurely pace. This had an important symbolic function for those present as a flow to the world of the gods. Here they begged the blessing of the gods, so that there would be enough sun and rain. They prayed that enough calves would be born and that there would be a good harvest. They also honored their ancestors.

Without any warning, the knights led by Guy appeared in their midst. "Let no one escape and spare no one. Death to the wicked!" he shouted at his men. The elderly had no chance. The Wieringers tried to resist. Tybe had grabbed a large branch and was waving it at an attacker. He got a sword in his back and fell to the ground. The other three Wieringers barely had time to resist and died quickly.

Aeijolt had recognized Jekke's flute from afar. That was nice, he was not the first to arrive at the place of sacrifice. He was looking forward to the upcoming ceremonies with his old friends. Suddenly the sound turned into pained cries and clashing weapons. He hurried forward and saw through the bushes near the brook that he was too late. All friends and acquaintances lay lifeless on the ground. Their blood mixed with the rippling water. The knights raised their weapons and shouted a victory cry. Without further concern for their victims, they left for Vellesan. Aeijolt sat down and mourned for his loved ones. After a while he got up and started gathering branches. Eventually he gathered enough and dragged all the bodies to the pyre. Almost tenderly he laid them down and prayed to the gods to take them up. Then he lit the pile and stared at it until the fire went out. He took a handful of the remaining ashes and sprinkled them into the water, muttering a few words. He then walked briskly to Vellesan and waited for the darkness to fall before entering the town.

Marzoeta was shocked when a dark figure entered her house from the darkness. But the light of an oil lamp showed that it was Aeijolt. Her joy mixed with fear. "What are you doing here? You know it is dangerous for you to come to Vellesan," she whispered agitatedly. He told her of the day's events. A great sadness descended on her. "Rium, Tybe and everyone else, dead?" She began to sob uncontrollably. "Will it never end?" Suddenly she perked up. "But you, Aeijolt. You shouldn't stay here. I don't want to lose you too. Then I wouldn't be able to continue!"

He took her in his arms and soothed her. "Quiet, Marzoeta. I'm already going, but I can't go back into the swamp. Our fishing has now come to an end, for I am the only one left. I have to do something now that our lives have been turned upside down so viciously. I hear rumors that more and more people in Oostergo are rebelling against the count. They want to free themselves from the yoke he has placed on them. That's where I have to go. If they manage to chase away that Viking, Darra's reign will also come to an end and only then can we live in peace again and can I finally be with you and carry out my old trade again." Marzoeta started to protest, but Aeijolt did not want to hear about it. "All the time I am away from you, I will long for you. But I promise I will come back to you. I'm going to Kybbe in Haarlhem first. Will you send Pytske there tomorrow? Then I can say goodbye to them before I leave for Oostergo." Before he left Marzoeta, they made love in silence one more time. It tasted sweet and they would both keep this memory until his return to Vellesan.

## **Jannes' plan**

### **867 AD**

His father had left for Oostergo months ago. It had been an emotional farewell. Pytske had been so happy when, after her flight from Hallem, she was told that her father was free after a long captivity and had been living in the peat area for a while. Since then she had started visiting him

regularly with her mother. Now she would lose him again. She was inconsolable. Aeijolt himself was clearly having a hard time with it.

The signs of an impending Frisian uprising became increasingly clear. Count Rorik had made his preparations to nip the rebellion in the bud. However, his army was surprised at first contact and defeat threatened. The uprising appeared to be well prepared. Although the small contingent of Vikings that formed part of his army was used to fighting without heavy armor, which made the men more agile, they turned out to be unable to cope with the fanatical Frisians on the swampy ground. The knights on horseback were even easier prey for the rebels. They were at an even greater disadvantage in the wet area where the battle was fought. The Frisians knew the terrain down to the last detail. This was their homeland. The combat techniques used by Rorik proved to be no match for the belligerent rebels. Their shields could not save the Vikings either. They were unable to build their famous shield wall. One by one they fell under the hammers, swords and clubs of their opponents. The count also had the disadvantage that he did not have as many men at his disposal as during the two previous failed campaigns at the Schlei in the north, when he fought for the succession of Horik I, king of the Danes. The lack of manpower now troubled Rorik. The Frisians were victorious and Rorik narrowly escaped to the kingdom of Louis the German.

The rumors about a Frisian success soon reached Kinhem. Jannes had been waiting for this. With a number of men from families that had been rooted in Vellesan for generations, he had drawn up a battle plan to chase Darra van Alveringem out of town. The sturdy Oeds would be ready with a few men at the back of the prison and Jannes would do the same at the front of the Mayery. Thus, the knights who were there could only come out one by one to fight. However, it was about Darra and Guy. They had to be sure that the key players were in the building at the start of the plan.

Jannes thought he could use one of Guy's snitches for this purpose. The knights and apprentices outside the building would likely pose no problems without leadership and would likely leave Vellesan quickly. Jannes and Kybbe went with three others to Roef's inn. There they ordered beer and huddled close together. Roef caught the words 'rebellion', 'perjury', 'with violence' and Darra's name when one of the men raised his voice in an agitated manner. He decided to listen closer. The men were so deep in conversation that they didn't seem to notice him. What he heard made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. They planned to kill Darra and Guy and the others. "Tomorrow," it was said. He had to warn the master. In his haste he bumped into a bench. Jannes looked up, disturbed. Roef quickly

recovered and said: "I saw that your cups were almost empty and came to ask if I should pour again."

Oeds shook his head. "No, not for us, we have to get back to work." The four then said goodbye to Kybbe and left the inn to go to the brewery as agreed. Kybbe stayed in the inn for a drink so that Roef was prevented from going straight to his benefactor and tell him the results of his eavesdropping. He had to keep Roef there for another two hours, so that everyone could take their position on the market square.

Roef disappeared through the doorway into the other room and so Kybbe had to followed him to fulfill his mission. He carefully poked his head around the corner to see what Roef was doing when all the lights went out. A deep darkness engulfed him. The innkeeper had been ready to hit the kid he hated on his skull. Fortunately, no one else had entered the inn. He ran to Guy and breathlessly told him what he had heard. Guy immediately took action. He had long ago drawn up a plan for such an eventuality. The locations where the recalcitrant Vellesanners were located were targeted. He sent men to Oeds' farm, the homes of Jannes and Marzoeta and to the brewery. They found no one in the last two homes. The soldiers now turned to go to the brewery according to their instructions. There they took their positions. Everything was allowed, Guy had told them. There were no inhibitions. A cart with flammable material had been ready near the brewery for a long time. This was wheeled to the double doors. Inside, they had apparently realized that something strange was going on. Oeds stuck his head out of the single door on the side. He was instantly pierced by one of Darra's knights. The fire quickly ate into the wood of the building. It was remarkable how quickly the fire developed into a raging wall of flames, partly due to the strong wind. In panic, the Vellesanners, trapped by the fire, tried to break out, only to find a quick death by the swords of their attackers.

The double doors were open. Five knights prevented everyone from coming out. Kybbe stood petrified. He peered through the flames to catch a glimpse of Anna. He saw her! The flames seemed to be licking her face. With a shout he wanted to rush forward. A pair of strong arms held him down and then gently pulled him away. The crying didn't stop. Not when he arrived at Floor's house, held in a firm grip, and not afterwards. It just kept going. He was gently pushed onto a bench. And he wasn't the only one to cry. After the stream finally dried up, he looked up into his father's tear-stained face. Suddenly anger washed over him. He jumped up and pounded Aeijolt's chest with his fists. "You stopped me! I could have saved

her. You could have saved Mom! Why? Why didn't you do that?" He started crying uncontrollably again. Aeijolt hugged him and gently stroked his hair. Kybbe was now hanging limply against his father. Floor placed two mugs of milk in front of them and looked at the two men with pity. They had lost everything, mother, wife, sister, daughter, nephew, grandchild. She knew what they were going through.

Then Aeijolt's voice sounded: "We couldn't save them, Kybbe. You saw the blaze and Guy would have killed us right away. If not when entering the conflagration, then when trying to get out. We wouldn't have survived. Now I only want one thing, revenge! I will not rest until I achieve that goal."

Kybbe looked up at his father. His face hardened. "I'm in." The men looked at each other. Now the fire burned in their eyes.

Many Vellesanners were confused. They looked at the sea of fire in amazement. It seemed like a living organism that came to consciousness due to the screams from the brewery. Several men and women threw themselves at the knights. The armor bearers dropped their weapons and fled the rapidly growing crowd. The first knight fell under their hands and was trampled. However, the conflagration was too powerful for anyone. No one was able to enter. The crowd was temporarily confused, but a moment later they turned around and marched with ever greater determination towards the market square, towards the Mayery. Behind them the corpses lay crumpled, trampled or smothered in blood. The soulless body of Guy de Monclosse lay near the side entrance.

The roar of the crowd pulled Aeijolt and Kybbe outside. They saw the angry Vellesanners advancing towards the market square and rushed to the head of the disorganized procession. Aeijolt had a knife in his hand and Kybbe picked up a piece of wood. The noise was fast approaching and now rose from the market square. Darra saw an angry crowd approaching and realized that things had gone horribly wrong. He hurried to the stables and found Anselm there, who had come to tell him that everyone, including Guy, had lost their lives at the brewery. The archdeacon knew that his life was also in danger. He had seen Aeijolt leading the approaching horde and knew that he was seen by him as a collaborator of the mayor. There was no need to urge Darra to leave, as he was already running into a stable. Anselm hurried after him. Once in the saddle, he felt under his shirt. Fortunately, his pouch of coins was still safely around his waist. It would be a long drive, with many overnight stays. He just hoped Darra was as sensible as he and had taken precautions too.

Aeijolt spotted the two mounted men and ran towards them, roaring with rage. He caught Darra's right leg, but his horse reared and his hooves hit Aeijolt on the head. Darra miraculously managed to stay in the saddle, got his rearing horse under control and urged it into a gallop. Kybbe had reacted too late to his father's sudden change of course. The two riders took off at full speed towards the east and were soon out of sight. Kybbe knelt down next to his father's body. A rattling sound reached his ear and he realized that Aeijolt was breathing his last breath. For a while he sat there and cradled Aeijolt in his arms. He did not notice that the anger had flowed from the crowd, with the realization that their prey had escaped their vengeance. He also didn't notice that Floor had come to stand next to him. She bent down and placed a hand on his shoulder. The contact took him out of his trance. Tears flowed freely down his face. The last link with his past was broken with the death of his father. Floor and Kybbe carried Aeijolt together to her accommodation, where they placed the body on a bed. They reminisced for an hour and Floor was able to tell him that his father had fought against Rorik's army. Aeijolt had then rushed to Vellesan as quickly as he could. However, he had returned just too late to help his family and friends. Kybbe was sadder than he ever had been.

A great restlessness came over him. He couldn't and didn't want to stay here any longer. The idea of having to continue living in this place made him feel nauseous. With Floor and a few remaining acquaintances, he held a small ceremony outside the village the same day. He gave his father's body to the all-consuming fire, as his ancestors had always done. He realized that the fire had also consumed his mother's body. If she had had a choice, she would have been buried as a Christian. Now she followed the path of her ancestors, just like Kybbe's sister, her son and all her friends. He had been able to see his greatest love one more time. The image of her disappearing into the flames was forever burned into his retina. There was nothing left for him in Vellesan. He had to leave. Kybbe fled from his memories and decided to go to Cologne.

## Part 2

### On the road to Dorestad



1. Hallem; 2. Limbon; 3. Vellesan; 4. Heiligerloo; 5. Haralem; 6. Litte; 7. Utrecht; 8. Dorestad; 9. Daventre; 10. Numaga.

She carefully lifted the lid of the barrel. At the moment when the sea of flames seemed to swallow everything and everyone, Anna had desperately looked for an escape route. However, she had nowhere to go. Part of the ceiling came down with a loud noise. A shower of sparks sprayed over her, forcing her to slash at the sparks on her clothes with her bare hands. It didn't help, her clothes caught fire. Her consciousness seemed to narrow into one very bright spot and then she knew what to do. An escape! She quickly climbed into a barrel where the beer had been fermenting for several days. The heat had caused her to immerse herself completely. The glow of the flames dimmed as she lifted the lid over her head. She ingested a lot of the fluid and became quite intoxicated in these extreme circumstances. She was lucky she didn't drown in it. Somehow, unconsciously, she had kept breathing, despite her intoxication.

Finally it became quiet. First the roaring sound of the blaze disappeared.

The only noise that sounded now was the crackling sound of a smoldering pyre. Not a single sound of voice reached her. She didn't know how long she had been in the barrel, but it was clear that dawn had just broken. Wary of possible accomplices of Darra, she crept through the streets in her wet rags. However, she saw no one. Finally she arrived at Floor's house. She knocked and called her name softly. The door opened and Floor peered into the rising sun. Her narrowed eyes widened when she saw who was at the door. She grabbed Anna by the arm and pulled her in, shouting with a beaming face: "Girl, you're alive! But what do you look like! And you stink of beer! How did you survive? Kybbe said he saw you burn in front of his eyes. He was inconsolable."

Anna asked anxiously: "How is he? Where is he?"

"Don't know. He packed some things yesterday and walked out of Vellesan on the south side. He said he couldn't stay in Vellesan any longer. There was nothing left for him, now that his loved one and his family and friends were all dead."

Anna reacted in horror: "No one survived?"

Floor told her that no one had been able to escape from the brewery and that those who had tried had been killed by the knights who were waiting for them outside. She also told how Aeijolt and Kybbe had then gone to the market square to ask Darra to account, after which Aeijolt had died and the mayor had fled. They had let Aeijolt go to his ancestors that same night. Floor had wanted to bury him, but Kybbe had insisted that his father was to be given to the fire according to Wieringer tradition. Anna shuddered at the idea of the fire. Her heart cried for Kybbe. He had left assuming that she had died. "But isn't there anything else he said? I have to go after him! I have to find him."

"I only remember one thing. He talked about learning new things. Things he couldn't learn here," Floor replied.

Anna understood that Kybbe thought she was dead and had set out to pursue his other greatest love, building. Then there was still hope. She would follow him south. The first stop had to be Dorestad, because that was the trading center of the Low Countries and she would have the best chance of receiving information from the mouths of traders and travelers. Now that she had made up her mind, she began to make preparations for her journey. The best way to travel was to join a group of pilgrims. She and Pytske and her son Stilgar had experienced fears on their flight from

Hallem. There was the fear of being overtaken by Harald or Steinar, but much more could happen along the way. It was astonishing that they had reached Vellesan without encountering a single traveler. After all, there were plenty of groups moving around that didn't mean much good. You had to be able to protect yourself against robbers and plunderers, who took advantage of every opportunity out of sight of the lords who had to protect the population.

She was lucky that at the exit road to the south she met a group of 15 pilgrims who were returning south after visiting the holy relics of Engelmundus. Their goal was Dorestad, whereto they would travel via Utrecht. They were tough walks, but walking was a daily activity for the people in this era and fortunately Anna was free of blisters or other discomfort. They had left early in the morning and passed through extensive peat areas with sparsely spread meadows. After two days they reached Trecht Castle, on the banks of the great river. From Kinhem to the east, the country was sparsely peopled. A single farm was on their route. But significantly more people lived here near Utrecht. The roads were busier. They found a place to stay in an inn, which consisted of wooden posts and mud walls. The fatigue was great, so they immediately went to their sleeping places after eating. During the hike, Anna had spoken to several pilgrims. Two of them were on their way to Utrecht from Heiloo and upon arrival they immediately reported to the Domschool, which was located in the monastery community within the walls of the old Roman castellum. They had told her that the school had flourished since Gregory and that his successor Alberik had been the first to be ordained bishop of Utrecht a century ago. However, Bishop Hunger had fled from the Vikings to the south a few years ago, where his successor now held sway.

After a sparse breakfast, most pilgrims headed to the monastery. They wanted to attend a service and then see with their own eyes the remains of what, until 10 years ago, were the most beautiful churches in the diocese, St. Martin's Church and St. Salvator's Church. Both churches were destroyed by the Vikings at the time. Anna tried to find out from the Benedictine monks whether they had met Kybbe, because, she reasoned, he would report to places where stone was built. If he wanted to learn new things, as Floor had said, he would certainly visit a church or castle under construction. She heard from a friendly older brother that there were no plans for reconstruction or new construction for the time being. Certainly not now that the bishop was in exile. The pilgrims stayed a second night in Utrecht. This time they took advantage of the monastery's hospitality. They were allowed to spread their blankets in a room that was always reserved

for travelers. Several pilgrims shared this space with Anna and her remaining 13 fellow travelers. There was snoring, gurgling, and a single muttered prayer reached her ears. Violent movements could be seen under the covers on her right side. Excited cries from a darker and a higher voice sounded somewhat muffled. Not all pilgrims were constantly occupied with the spiritual.

Anna had high hopes for her next goal. She was restless now that she knew that Kybbe had probably chosen a different route to Dorestad. This was the most important city in the Low Countries, as far as she knew. Stories from merchants about the prosperity of the trading place and the multitude of products traded there had reached Vellesan. The prosperity was so great that Dorestad had to endure several times a plundering from the Vikings in a period of 30 years. The last time had been 4 years ago. She was almost certain that she would find Kybbe there and was impatient to get going. However, the pilgrims made no move yet. They took their time for confession. Almost all of them were devout Christians, except for three young men. Of course they were Christians, they said. But they were more interested in the adventure. Their plan was to see Parisi, where the Wali of the Caliphate resided. He seemed to modernize the city at a rapid pace. There were things on display that were not known at all here in the west, the merchants said. However, Anna only had one thing in mind and that was to find Kybbe in Dorestad as quickly as possible. Late in the morning the thirteen pilgrims left with Anna for the trading city on the Rhine.

They followed the river, which was called Kromme Rhine, for large parts. The stream meandered through the landscape. Sometimes they found a road that followed a direct line to another bend in the river, but always their journey returned to the river course. There were many smaller settlements. In one of them they took time to eat a modest meal. There were farms everywhere. It was not a long distance to Dorestad. After a very uneventful walk, they saw the city located on a huge river after just a couple of hours. Anna marveled at the large expanse of water. It looked like a lake, but with fast-flowing water. She watched openmouthed. One of the three travel-loving boys pointed to the confluence of the rivers. Ulbo showed her where the Kromme Rhine flowed out and where the Rhine split downstream. "What an awful lot of water," Anna exclaimed. Djurre told her that the water could be as much as a cubit and a half higher when the meltwater reached the river in the east. He pointed out which meadows would then be flooded.

“That's like spring tide at home, but even more so,” she expressed her surprise.

“Some farms are flooded almost every year,” Haio also contributed.

“Yes, and it also happens that entire settlements disappear under water,” Ulbo added.

Anna said that in Vellesan they were protected from the sea waves, but that they regularly had to deal with the dune sand driven by storms, which could lay a thick blanket over the fertile fields and spoil the crops.

The boys were curious about her plan to find her boyfriend in this city. The houses lay in a long ribbon of about 3,000 cubits along the river bank. “Thousands of people live here. How are you going to find out where he is?” Djurre asked.

Anna thought about this and then replied: “Kybbe likes to build. So I want to look at every construction site. That's why I'm now saying goodbye to you, because I'm eager to start looking. When are you going on to Parisi?”

Ulbo then told her that they planned to stay in Dorestad for a few days before continuing their journey. “There's bound to be something fun to do in such a big city. We'll spend a few days there and then...off to Parisi!”

After three days, Anna began to despair. She had spoken with so many people and visited so many places but there was not a single sign of Kybbe to be seen or heard. No one remembered seeing or speaking to him. Not even at the markets she visited. There were so many different people here from all over the world! There were even Arabs from the Caliphate. One man immediately caught her eye. Her mouth fell open, his skin color tended towards black. She had heard stories in Vellesan about black people in the south, but never really believed them. He was dressed in a shirt that reached his ankles. The shirt was woven of wool or cotton and on his head he wore an artfully folded large checkered cloth. He had a deep black, curly beard and his beautiful brown eyes met hers with an intensity that made her look away. When she looked back he was gone. Presumably he had gone into one of the wooden houses. She did know that Dorestad traded with many areas in the known world. Part of the trade ran through Brabant to the Caliphate. Trade also went north, to Viking territory and the Baltic Sea area. It also formed an important hub in trade between the German territories along the Rhine to the coast and the kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia and Wessex.

Anna saw merchants selling wool. Others sold silk, swords or jewelry made from different materials, such as glass and amber. She even saw a hunting dog seller. A merchant advised her to take a look at the harbor. "Your friend will need money to live on and there is always work to be found in the port."

The port was located in the northern part of the city. The merchants' warehouses were also located there, with a landscape behind them filled with crisscross placed farms, which had long curved walls. This made them look like ships.

At the water's edge were many jetties that rested on piles driven into the bottom of the river. Several jetties had been extended over the years as the riverbed gradually moved. An extensive network of platforms unfolded above the water before Anna's eyes.

In the wide range of activities that took place there, she suddenly spotted three familiar figures. Ulbo, Djurre and Haió walked back and forth across the scaffolding. They staggered across the platform. It looked like they were weighed down with very heavy bags. Anna waved to the young men, but apparently the work required all their attention and they did not see her. She did not believe Kybbe had looked for work at the port. He would rather move on and earn his living along the way than walk into such a port lugging heavy loads. She therefore decided to turn her back on the port and think about her next step in her temporary home.

She hurriedly traced her steps back, passing one of the markets where she had asked questions earlier. Distracted by a flight of noisy starlings, she looked up and bumped into a man. She was very shocked when she saw that it was the Arab merchant she had seen there before, a Moor. Anna didn't know if he could hear her apology, but apparently he did, because the corners of his mouth curled up, beautiful white teeth smiling at her. He then spoke in understandable West Frisian with a lilting accent. "No, I have to apologize. I wasn't paying close attention."

Anna was stunned and turned deep red. She had previously formed an image of a Muslim, automatically assuming that they ignored women because they were considered inferior by them. However, this sympathetic man apologized to her and in her own language. Hope welled up in her. Maybe he could answer her questions and give her a clue as to where to look for Kybbe. She had to admit that she was very curious about this exotic man from a culture unknown to her.

"Can I ask you something?" she shot out. He noticed her shyness and put her at ease by inviting her to sit on a low bench in front of the house, which he apparently owned. He insisted on pouring her a cup of milk and handed it to her as he sat down next to her. "First tell me why you're walking

around here alone. You are clearly looking for something and terribly restless. I noticed that earlier today, when I saw your eyes darting in all directions in front of my house.” Because of the Moor's trusting behavior and his soothing voice, Anna started to tell the story of her search for Kybbe. Eventually he understood that her great love had thought her dead after the terrible event in the brewery and had left her hometown. “But what did you want to ask me? I don't know the young man.”

Anna said: “Kybbe is a builder. He is extremely eager to learn and wanted to understand all aspects of construction. He is especially curious about new techniques and building materials. That's why I think he went someplace where they are building with stones instead of wood. He's talked about that several times. My question is this. If you were a builder and absorbed in the latest developments in your field, where would you go?”

“Ah, I can give a simple answer to that. Of course I would go to the capital Córdoba or to Granada. Beautiful new buildings using the newest techniques are being built there.

"And closer?"

“Then I would at least take a look at Parisi. That is where the Wilaya for the northern area of the Umayyad Caliphate is located.” They are in need of new buildings to accommodate the multitude of people travelling there.

Anna resolved to do just that. She would undoubtedly find her Kybbe there.

### **The brothel**

After her meeting with the Moorish merchant in Dorestad, Anna made plans to go south. In Parisi she finally had a better chance of finding Kybbe. According to this man from the Caliphate, truly innovative construction took place there. Such an activity would attract Kybbe like a magnet. He also gave her the name of his cousin, who looked after their trading interests in Parisi. He made her promise to visit him as soon as she got there. He could help her and at least provide her with a safe haven.

After saying goodbye to the Moorish merchant, she decided that she would like to make the journey to the Caliphate again in a group. She was wary of the unknown dangers on the road in these faraway places. But wait...maybe the adventurous boys were still in Dorestad. They originally

wanted to go to Parisi. Maybe she could travel with them. She went to the harbor and entered the jetty complex.

But no matter how she searched, Djurre and the other two were nowhere to be seen. She recognized the ship where she had seen them working as porters. There was a lot of activity there, because the ship was being loaded again. A porter swung a bag off his shoulder and could not prevent hitting her. She staggered and fell. Two strong hands grabbed her before she tumbled into the water. A rough man with a not unfriendly face said: "There, girl, this is no place for you. Just get back to shore quickly." Anna seized her chance. "Sir, I am looking for three friends. I saw them working here at this ship two days ago. Do you know where they are?" After she had given a description of Djurre, Ulbo and Haio, he told her that the boys had worked here for their last day yesterday. He had paid them their wages himself. According to him, they were staying in a cheap lodging in the middle part of the city and added that as a beautiful young woman she should not go there because it was the place where the ship's crew stayed, while they were in the city. Not a place to go alone.

Hopefully they hadn't left yet. Anna therefore ignored the sailor's advice and trotted to the indicated district. The wooden houses were closer together here. There were shouts and curses from several homes. There were dowdy women on the street, ogling every passing man. She didn't notice that she was being watched intently from one of the buildings. A few men made lewd comments and she was pinched in the buttocks. She backed away in fear when a large guy was pushed against her by his friends. "So girl, are you just on the street without your pimp? You look better than those worn-out bastards here."

He grabbed her breasts and then collapsed to the ground with a cry. Before Anna realized what was happening, she was pulled into the house, where she had been pushed with her back against by the attacker. Rough hands dragged her inside. There was a huge commotion in the street. The group outside tried to enter the house, two of them bending over their fallen companion. Four men stormed out of the building and started hitting them with batons. They hastily retreated, taking their wounded friend with them. It had all happened so astonishingly quickly that Anna had not yet had time to get her bearings. She was about to thank the men who saved her when one of them turned to her and said. "From now on, this is your workplace. You obey to everything I tell you, otherwise I will have to ram it in. You're going to make me a lot of money, honey."

She realized that she had fallen into the hands of a pimp and that she was expected to become a prostitute. She cried out and threw herself against

the man. She kept hitting him with her fists. The rest of the men stood there laughing, watching the scene until she was pulled away.

“Well Gijs, that's a fiery kitten you caught there. You can still have a lot of fun with that. But first you give us a reward for our help just now.” He leered at Anna, grinning as he said this. He tore her clothes from her body with one jerk. She stood naked in front of the five men and automatically covered her pubic area with her hands.

The man called Gijs said: “You have your way, Koos. But this is a one-off. After this you will have to pay, like everyone else who wants this baby.”

Djurre, Ulbo and Haio had found shelter in a seedy lodging house a stone's throw from where Anna had been overpowered. They had been able to supplement their reserves considerably with their work in the port and had received their wages the day before. They would stay in Dorestad for a while to stock up on supplies for the trip and to look for a boat that could take them some way south for a fee. After several days they found a vessel willing to take them. Satisfied, they returned to their lodgings to pack their things. Along the way they ended up in a crowd, where a fight suddenly broke out. They were pushed and pulled and had to use their fists to get out of the melee. Somewhat battered, they praised their good luck for getting out of there. Only at the lodging did they discover that they had been robbed. Their purses had been cut loose in the chaos of the battle. They lost all their money. They would have to postpone their journey and beg for work again in the port. The walk to the harbor was difficult for them. They were really dreading having to torture themselves again with the heavy loads they had to drag to and fro the ship. Of course, they could rejoin a group of pilgrims heading in the right direction. The overnight stays were free in the monasteries, but it would be nice to have some money in their purses. They needed that anyway to pay for their food and accommodation today.

They automatically walked to the place where the ship was moored, where they had last worked. There was no trace of it left. One of the dock workers recognized the boys and said: “That ship has already left. Who was that beautiful girl who came there to ask about you? I walked past just as she called your names and described you to the boatswain. Is that family?”

Ulbo reacted a little faster than the other two and said, “That must have been my sister. Do you know where she is?”

The worker replied that he had heard the boatswain say that the three had a place to stay in the middle part of the city. "But he warned her not to go to that red light district alone."

The boys thanked him and walked away. Ulbo said: "Knowing Anna, she ignored that warning. I hope nothing happened to her."

They decided to try to find out where Anna was. The young woman had won their hearts on the way to Dorestad.

They went into the neighborhood to make careful inquiries, but were met with ignorance everywhere. No one could tell them something about Anna. After a few hours they heard something interesting from a fellow resident of their accommodation for the first time. He said there had been a fight over a whore. A group of men had approached her on the street. The pimp had stormed out with some friends and injured one of them so much that he succumbed to it a little later. Haio and Djurre shrugged. It was the story of a whore who was waylaid. However, Ulbo thought there could be something in this. After all, it was a woman alone. He therefore asked if their fellow resident had seen it happen. That turned out not to be the case. He had heard the story at the inn two blocks away. There the men sat drinking to their deceased friend. Ulbo thought it was worthwhile to inquire at that inn. Coincidentally, the group was drinking there again that evening. They were impossible to miss, as they drank again for their deceased friend. Ulbo quickly settled down and soon found out where the unfortunate incident had occurred. He was also told that it was a very beautiful whore that they had seen there. They would have liked to spend their money there, but her pimp had come outside with his friends and they immediately started hitting them. That's why they had dropped off and dragged their injured friend along. Only later did it become clear that he had suffered a nasty stab in the stomach, which was fatal. They had made plans to avenge him, but in the end they were strangers in this city and the entire neighborhood would probably line up behind the perpetrator. It was difficult to get justice for a stranger in this city.

"I am convinced that it was not a whore, but Anna who was there alone and looking for us. She must have been captured by such a bastard and is now being forced to work for him," Ulbo said. "But that's not possible," Haio protested. "You can't just be forced to do that in the city, can you?"

“Oh no? Then think about what you saw in the harbor and on the market. Slaves are traded here! Do you think anyone will even ask a question if a single woman here is claimed by some scoundrel as his slave?”

Djurre nodded diligently. “I think you're right Ulbo. But what do you want to do about it?”

“Listen. I'm going to take stock there. I'm pretending to be a customer to see if I can find Anna there.”

“Hey, you got no money man! You can't go in there as a customer,” Djurre protested.

Ulbo said he would look around and say he didn't see anything he liked and get out of there. “At most, I'll leave with a kick in the ass. Well, that's what I'm willing to undergo.”

Anna was lying in a corner. She cried. She felt dirty. The last time she felt like this was when she was forced by Harald, the Viking her father had sold her to. However, she still had hope of getting out of here. Her eyes had always followed Gijs closely. So she now knew that he had a hiding place under a barrel in the corner of the room. Whenever he had received money, she would see him sneaking around in that corner, when he thought he was unwatched. However, an opportunity for escape had not yet presented itself. He made sure there was always someone to hold her to his rules. There hadn't been an opportunity to get outside since she moved in. She was closely guarded by Gijs, because she was his prize cow. She had also tried to win over the whoremongers to help her. Either they did not respond, were indifferent, or they looked around nervously out of fear for Gijs and quickly left the house in which she was trapped after paying. The other three women in the house wanted nothing to do with her. They stayed out of her way. They had been explicitly warned and threatened by Gijs. Their fear of him was clearly visible in their faces and posture. They all stayed in their own room, where a blanket was hung when they received a customer. Anna became disillusioned and introverted. That's why she barely responded when a new customer came in. They went past the various fenced off areas and then entered her room. She only looked up when she heard the conversation change in pitch. Gijs got angry. The source of his anger looked over his shoulder at Anna. A shock went through her. It was Ulbo. His eyes warned her not to say anything. The next moment she saw through the opening of her room how he was being led out of the house by Gijs, swearing profusely. She

had woken up from her lethargy. The eye contact with Ulbo had provided a glimmer of hope for escape.

The two young men responded with a mixture of disbelief and resolve to Ulbo's account of his visit to the brothel. They discussed how to get Anna out of there. However, it did not immediately lead to a clearly defined plan. Djurre suggested to first study the daily affairs of the brothel. "We need to know for sure who is or are present in the house at what time. Only then can we make a plan."

They divided the surveillance among themselves. They would take turns in 4-hour slots, so they could observe the house around the clock.

After a few days it was clear that a time at night, before dawn, offered the best opportunity to make an attempt. There was no more rush and Gijs was the only man staying there at that time with the four women. They were all probably in dreamland. Ulbo had kept his eyes peeled during his visit and was able to explain exactly how the house was laid out and where Anna was located near the outside wall. During their observation, they had determined that there was an opportunity to make a hole in the mud wall relatively unnoticed, right there between two houses. The noise from the street and from the nearby workshops would obscure their work. When Haio was finally ready to expose the underlying wickerwork, Ulbo shifted on his side against the wall and whispered, "Anna, can you hear me?"

It took only a few moments for the whispered answer to return. "Ulbo? Is that you?"

Ulbo quickly continued: "Yes, listen carefully Anna. We want to get you out, but you're going to have to take out that guy yourself before you can let us in. Can you do that?"

Anna replied that she could, but with what? Ulbo pried open the wickerwork and slid a flat knife through the twigs. "This should do it. Success!"

Anna carefully took the knife and held it behind her back.

She stood up silently. Gijs was kneeling by the barrel in the corner of the room. She crept up behind him, leaned forward and drew the sharp blade across his throat. Blood spurted out and the pimp fell to the ground, gurgling, both hands against his throat in an attempt to stop the bleeding and with his eyes wide open. Then there was only a faint rattling sound and with a sigh his eyes broke. It had all happened so quickly that Anna could barely comprehend it. She had killed a man! But she didn't allow herself to feel guilty. It had not been a man, but an animal. Even less than an animal. The other women hadn't even woken up. She quickly walked to

the door and removed the bolt. The three young men quickly entered. Anna pointed to the corpse. "He's lying there with his hidden money." Ulbo quickly came to a decision. "Give me some help. We'll put him in this barrel so he won't be found for a while."

Anna said, "Take his money." In the meantime, I'll wake up those girls." When the three women emerged from their rooms, the body had been removed and the young men had hidden the money, which was in five pouches, under their clothes. The women were stunned and Anna had difficulty convincing them that they were free and had nothing to fear from Gijs. "Grab what you have and get out of here before his friends show up at the door."

Then Anna walked out of the house with the three young men. They were euphoric that their plan had succeeded. They were looking for a quiet place in the southern part of the city. The three men informed Anna of the events that led them to find her. Everything was a big coincidence. They had only been able to find her because they were forced to stay in the city longer than they had planned. Here followed a juicy account of their robbery. Then there was another coincidence, namely that they learned that Anna had been looking for them. Djurre and Haio gave full credit to Ulbo for drawing the right conclusions about what must have happened to her. Anna, in turn, told what had happened to her during her search for them. She was forced to leave large parts of what happened afterwards unmentioned. The shame of what had been done to her and what she had been forced to do was too great. She would bury that far away in her memory and never speak of it again. The three were wise enough not to ask anything about this. It was mutually decided to first do some shopping and then leave Dorestad as quickly as possible. The three men had spent the last few days on the street. They had found a place to sleep in one of the two large cemeteries in the city. Because they could no longer pay anything, they were evicted from the accommodation. They did not tell Anna how they got food. They were a little embarrassed about that. They walked past the displays of pottery and glassware, pelts and pigments, salt, honey and all kinds of jewelry. All four of them needed clothes and Anna allowed herself a comb made from antlers and a beautiful fibula to pin her new cloak closed. They also bought knives. They were of course needed to eat, but they could also use something with which they could defend themselves in an emergency.

They bought food from a farmer for the first leg of the journey that was now about to begin. They had divided Gijs' sceattas among the four of them. Almost all of these coins were minted at the Mint in Dorestad. They

could last a while with this. They had decided not to return to the harbor district in an attempt to find a boat, because they did not want to spend another moment in the city that had caused them so much trouble.

## Liberation



### Anna's journey

1. Vellesan; 2. Utrecht (Het Sticht); 3. Dorestad; 4. Ereslo; 5. Turnhout; 6. Loven (Leuven); 7. Bergen; 8. Saint-Quentin; 9. Compiène (Compiègne); 10. Conflans; 11. Parisi (Paris)

The river area was extremely large and the wide rivers often formed a considerable obstacle in their progress through the landscape. Now Anna knew that you could almost never go in a straight line to your goal. Both the dune landscape and the peat area that she was familiar with had taught her that. Water, swamp and sand made your journey difficult, so that in unknown terrain you always had to take into account that you had to spend the night somewhere in the open field or in a forest. There was not always a monastery, farm or hamlet in sight where you could enjoy hospitality. She was not traveling among a large group of pilgrims, but she was happy with her three companions. She knew they would do anything to protect her and felt safe in their company. At last they reached an area where high and low ground brushed against each other, and a height called Ereslo. There were farms here around a triangular square. This was called 'the plaatse' by the residents. There were fields all around. They were told that the agricultural village was part of the shire of Toxandria. In addition to arable villages, domains had been formed here. Frankish noblemen were the owners or managers. The farms on this site were built by serfs. They found shelter for the night. The residents were very curious about travelers, but also cautious. When the tongue-ties loosened a little due to the drink that flowed freely, Anna heard that people were very afraid of traveling gangs in these regions. Many a free farmer had joined a domain so that he could enjoy the protection of the lord of the land. So far the foursome had felt free during their hike, but they now realized that they had behaved somewhat rashly.

The landscape they crossed had given them a false sense of peace and security. Here the population density was greater, but apparently so was the insecurity. They should pay more attention to their progress and be especially careful in open areas where they could be spotted by malicious people from a great distance.

They felt uncomfortable in the many open areas they passed through. Often there was only a grove and a single patch of forest here and there. Much of the land here had been brought under cultivation. Moreover, it started to rain and then it intensified and poured down. They were soaked to the skin, but there was no point in stopping.

There was not a tree to be seen, no way to shelter from the merciless downpours that descended on them. So they trudged on, heads bowed in the wind.

When the sun finally showed its face, the gray veils of rain rushed eastward. The steam came off the clothes, which they quickly stripped off to dry. They hung everything in the branches of a thin, solitary tree. The

young men looked furtively at Anna's slender figure. In fact, all three of them had already fallen in love with her after Vellesan. That infatuation had turned into admiration for her perseverance. Anna braved all dangers and took unknown paths to find her loved one. What woman would start such a undertaking? She was unique. In Dorestad they had often talked about her among themselves and they had come to the conclusion that no man stood a chance of winning her over as long as Kybbe was written in her eyes. That's why they would never dare to risk their friendship with each other and with her.

Their clothes were not yet completely dry, but they felt much better and continued their way optimistically. In the meantime, they continued to pay close attention to whether there was danger anywhere. A forest appeared on the horizon and after a few hours they walked among ancient trees. The setting sun played between the leaves and drew long shadows. They would spend the night here. Haio and Ulbo went to look for deadwood for a fire. Anna jumped when a scream sounded. It was Haio, who arrived a little later with a fox. "I found it in a snare and quickly used my knife." He turned out to have experience in removing the skin. "I learned that from my uncle. He once shot a deer with a bow and arrow. By the way, that literally cost him his head, because it was in the lord's hunting forest."

"You idiot," shouted Ulbo, "the same thing will happen to us soon, because you got that animal out of a snare."

Haio disagreed. "The nobles hunt. They don't set traps. This could only be a poacher's loot. So we're stealing from a poacher."

Ulbo shook his head. "That may be so. But if the lord of this land finds us with a dead animal, he will consider us poachers and we will be screwed. Take the animal back to the snare and then come back immediately."

Haio resisted, but was finally persuaded by Anna to do what Ulbo had said. The last bits of food from their packs were devoured before they lay down to rest under a large oak tree.

Early the next morning the sun cast its rays through the foliage. It promised to be a beautiful day. Anna laughed when she saw Djurre's sleepy face beneath a mop of hair sticking out in all directions. "We'll have to find some cold water first to wake you up," she teased.

They moved deeper and deeper into the forest, having to retrace their steps several times to find the path south they were following and continue their journey. In the distance came the sound of a blowing horn. Suddenly a deer jumped from the bushes at their feet. The animal panicked and quickly disappeared from view. Immediately afterwards they reached an opening in the forest and entered the field. Ulbo cursed when he saw the

group of men. "That's what the deer fled from. Quickly back among the trees!"

They turned around. Their path was cut off by three men dressed in rags. Now the encirclement was complete. The largest of them was missing an eye and had a broken nose. He carried an ax in one hand and a long knife in the other. The other men also looked mean. Their grinning faces did not bode well. The three young men involuntarily stood protectively around Anna. "Youthful flesh, Burk. That's a welcome break at this time of day." The big man replied: "Certainly Nef, we could use a little pick-me-up, after all the misery of late. Fried, would you prepare our guests for the party? It's a nice day to roll around in the grass."

The man with a scar from one ear to the corner of his right mouth barked at the four young people: "Undress. Now!"

Djurre, Ulbo, and Haio all pulled out their blades and held them in front of them. The big man burst out laughing: "Ha, ha, take care Fried. They already have baby teeth."

Before the young men had a chance to use their knives, they had been skillfully disarmed and lay on their bellies in the grass while Fried and two companions stripped off their trousers. "Look at those tender bottoms." Loud laughter erupted from the group of thugs. Each of the young men was pinned to the ground by a gang member while another prepared to do the deed. Anna was now held by two of the thugs, while two more watched how Burk, as leader of the gang, started to make use of his position. He had first right. There was a sound of hoofbeats. The gang members were instantly cured of their horniness and looked up in horror. Burk was the first to disappear into the forest. The others ran after him. Two, who were still pulling up their trousers while trying to run, were the first to be struck by a sword from the horse's back, their heads cleaved. The fourteen riders soon caught up with the other gang members. They were mowed down without mercy. Meanwhile, Anna and her three protectors quickly dressed. Ulbo turned to the other three and said, "Be careful. These are noblemen, but that does not mean that they are any better than the bandits they are now killing. We are pilgrims on our way to see the Pope in Cologne and to show our devotion to Saint Gereon. These nobles are Franks and therefore more afraid of the rulers in the capital. That can be to our advantage. Maybe they'll leave us alone."

The riders had completed their task and returned to the four young people. After listening to their story, the eldest grumbled that they were a bit young for a pilgrimage. Ulbo then told a story about their journey with several pilgrims, a previous robbery by bandits and how they had lost each other.

The riders appeared to be hunting in this forest. The youngest, Reinier, pointed to a tower that rose above the treetops in the distance. "There's a guard there who keeps an eye on this area for us. He sounds a horn when he sees poachers or a gang like this. As a result, we were alerted to the presence of these bandits. Sometimes hunting rogues is more fun than hunting deer and boar." He let out a bright laugh.

Reinier and Richwin were the sons of the leader of these knights. It soon became clear that they were in the company of none other than Giselbert, count in the Maasgouw and since a year also in the Lommegouw. His power extended here to the southern part of the Brabantgouw. Reinier had discussed in a low voice with his brother and then went to his father, who he whispered something in his ear. The older man first shook his head, but after some insistence from the young nobleman he shrugged his shoulders. Smiling with satisfaction, Reinier said to the group of young pilgrims: "You have experienced something extreme in our forests and that is why we feel obliged to provide you with a good meal and night's sleep before you set off again for Cologne." Richwin helped Anna onto his horse and Reinier and two other knights did the same with Ulbo, Haio and Djurre.

Not far away at a small settlement called Turnhout, there was a fortification that the nobles used as a hunting lodge. Two major trade routes crossed here. A short drive was enough to take them to the hunting lodge. Earlier, Ulbo had caught the brothers' eager glances at Anna. These two couldn't be trusted. After the thugs more trouble awaited them from these noblemen. How could they get out of here? Darkness offered the best opportunity. First it was necessary to know what the noble brothers were planning. He wouldn't let them out of his sight. Once they arrived at their destination, he apologized for having to relieve himself. Reinier and Richwin disappeared into the stables, while the rest of the group went inside.

At 21 years old, Richwin was the older of the two, but his brother who was two years younger usually took the initiative. "I know you want it too. We talked about it before and you were more than happy to do it. I will not let the opportunity to be with such a nice girl be denied me and I will not talk about a violation of guest rights. These are commoners, not nobles. Not a rooster will crow about it."

Richwin spluttered, "But Father will..."

Reinier interrupted him. "Father will be angry for a while at first, but it will soon be over. It's too unimportant. If necessary, we will give them some money if that eases your conscience," he chuckled.

Richwin looked sour and said, "What do we do with those three guys? Soon you will be lying naked and then they will jump on your neck."

"We make sure they get so much to drink that they sleep like logs. We put two guards with them and if they wake up from their stupor, a light slap to knock them out is quickly given."

Ulbo had sneaked to the back of the stables and found a place where he could eavesdrop on the young nobles. He kept very quiet and waited until the two brothers moved away, then he quickly went to inform his traveling companions and added: "So pretend that you drink a lot, but make sure you don't swallow it. You need to have a clear head when we sneak out tonight."

He managed to speak to Anna separately, out of earshot of others. "They think we are going to Cologne and will not look in the south. If we stay off the beaten track, they probably won't find us."

Anna said: "I don't believe they will launch an intensive search. Like you said, we're too unimportant. The count would not approve of it."

Their sleeping place turned out to be in the stables and not in the main building. The brothers had probably chosen this location to keep their plans out of their father's sight, but now it actually facilitated their secret departure. There was no accomplice of the brothers to be seen, convinced as they were of the drunkenness of the three young men. The moment Anna came in to rest, they were ready to leave. They were soon swallowed up by the forest. The brothers would be very surprised a little later in the night.

On their journey towards Leuven they had to cross five larger and smaller rivers. That slowed their progress considerably. They had to keep looking for a ferryman or a bridge and of course they could be found on the main roads, they wanted to stay away from. Therefore they deviated from the road again by going further upstream or downstream into the forest after such a crossing. The terrain also became hillier. As a result, they did not progress as quickly. Seven days had passed since their departure from the hunting lodge stables before they dared to follow the main road. After another three days they saw the tower of St. Peter's Church.

This city was the capital of the county of the same name, which was bordered by two rivers and two streams, the Demer, the Dijle, the Wasbeek and the Lobeek. Leuven owed its function as capital to its favorable location on the Dyle and the highway from Boulogne to Cologne.

The foursome had survived on the provisions provided to them by Count Gisibert and what they had found and captured in the woods. Now they could enjoy a good meal and do some shopping. Djurre went to the quay to inquire about transport options. It turned out to be possible to sail with a merchant for a fee, who sold his merchandise at a number of points upstream along the river. At a certain point the river became unnavigable at the upper reaches and the merchant would let them disembark there, after which they had to continue their journey on foot. There they would enter the Umayyad Caliphate. A number of larger and smaller rivers, between which a line could be drawn from west to east, formed the border between Lothair's Christian empire and the Islamic empire.

After crossing the border river, the Hene, they saw a castle under construction on top of a hill. They approached the city in anxious anticipation. This was Islamic territory. At first glance it was an ordinary town, built around a castle. The count of this area had lived here before the city was conquered by the Umayyads. Most people looked normal enough, but there were also men walking in long robes, an example of which Anna had seen in Dorestad.

## **The search for Moussa**

### ***Winter 868 AD***

The four youngsters were startled by a loud vibrating chant. They looked around without understanding. What was this? They had never heard such singing before. At the market stall where they were at that moment, the merchant laughed at the bewildered expression on their faces. "Haven't you ever heard that? It's Friday. It is the call to prayer. The Muslims gather in the mosque every Friday to pray communally and listen to the sermon."

Anna looked at the market vendor without understanding. "The mosque?" The man sighed: "Yes, it's like a church, but for the Muslims. What Christians do on Sunday, they do on Friday."

Ulbo wanted to know if there were many Muslims living in the city and was told that there was actually only a representative of the Caliphate with his entourage in the count's castle and added that things would change soon.

A castle was under construction on the adjacent hill and soldiers would be stationed there.

Anna exclaimed: "Which of those 2 churches is a mosque?"

She pointed to two buildings facing different directions.

"Ah, no." The man pointed: "That's the abbey tower. It was founded by Saint Waldetrudis and the other one is where the Waldetrudis Church was built later. The Muslims gather in a room in the old count's castle. There is their prayer room. I heard that they are building mosques in the south. That will also happen here if the number of Muslims grows."

Ulbo said he had never heard of Saint Waldetrudis.

The merchant started to explain. "She is not officially a saint, but for the people of Mons she is. Her remains are buried in the small monastery church. Two hundred years ago, after raising her four children, she started a religious community here and lived a life of prayer and charity. They say she could heal children with the sign of the cross and the money for the poor people miraculously multiplied."

Ulbo was quite skeptical when it came to such stories. Wherever you went, these kinds of stories were heard. It seemed as if the saints had been sown by a fanatical farmer, there were so many of them. They thanked the man and continued walking.

"What do we do now?" Haio asked. "Are we staying here or are we going to Parisi?"

Djurre knew from an uncle that it could get quite cold here in the winter. In December it rained more than in other months and the snowfall could also be heavy.

Ulbo expressed what Anna also felt: "But, I don't find it an attractive idea to spend an entire winter in this city. If we leave now we can be in Parisi by the end of December."

"Yes, now that we have come this far, I would like to reach the end goal as quickly as possible," Anna added. They decided to spend the next day buying warmer clothing and spending this night and the next as pilgrims in the abbey.

The landscape was difficult to navigate in the regularly falling rain. The moisture seeped into everything. At first they were grateful when the rain turned to snow, but they soon noticed that this slowed their progress even more. They ended up in a large forest again. Regularly a lot of snow fell from a tree and it often slipped and melted between their clothes. All of them were struck at some point by a slab of snow, no matter how observant they were. Eventually the snow thinned again and turned into a

drizzle. It now started to melt visibly. They felt miserable. Finally Saint-Quentin came into view and they decided to spend two days here warming up their bodies and restoring their morale. There was a large abbey where they could spend the night. There were several pilgrims present. These travelers visited the abbey to beg the blessing of Saint Quintinus, a missionary who was venerated in these regions and after whom the city was named and who was buried here. Djurre joked to Ulbo: "Hey, that farmer of yours has been here too."

Anna laughed when she saw Ulbo's uncomprehending face and shouted, "He's talking about that farmer who you think sowed all the saints."

Ulbo then twisted his mouth like a farmer with a toothache. They heard from a monk that Saint-Quentin was the capital of Vermandland. A county that had only recently been created from two viscounties and that had come under the leadership of a direct descendant of Charlemagne, Pepin of Vermandland. He could not enjoy his title and earldom for long, because the army of the Umayyads had chased him out and added Vermandland to the Caliphate. Anna asked the monk how things were going under Islamic leadership. Could the abbey remain here under the new rulers? Didn't the Christian faith clash with the religion of the Moors?

"No," said the monk. Islam views Christians as people of God and protects us. They call us 'dhimmis'. I don't know what that means, but I have the feeling that they see us a bit like a little brother who doesn't know the way yet."

Afterwards, Ulbo told his friends that the Muslims treated those of other faiths more kindly and respectfully than the Christian church in Kinhem treated the Frisians with their faith in Donar and Wodan.

After recovering from their winter journey from Mons, they left for the next stop on the road to Parisi. According to the kind monk, that was Compiègne. There they could travel by boat to their final destination on the River Oise.

Fortunately the weather held up well. That evening they enjoyed the hospitality of a farmer and the second evening they slept close together for warmth in the shelter of some bushes. The wind had picked up and was making a whistling sound. Shivering in this wind, they only had their body heat at their disposal.

They reached Compiègne in mid-December. Two rivers came together here. Hopefully they would find a merchant who was willing to let them sail to Parisi.

Luck was with them, although Djurre did not entirely agree. An older man showed them the way to a flat-bottomed boat that was ready for departure. When they asked if the boat was going in the right direction, the old man

laughed. "From this point a boat can only go one way, downstream. Upstream the river is no longer navigable."

So much for their happiness. Djurre's bad luck was that the man then started a whole story about the river and Compiègne. He told about a mutual war between the Franks, in which a major battle was fought near this city, after the death of Duke Pepin of Herstal. The story went on endlessly and turned out to have taken place more than 150 years earlier. Djurre sighed behind his hand: "He acts as if he fought that war himself. Could it be Methuselah?"

Ulbo grinned slyly. Finally the man finished his story and let them go. As they took a brisk pace to the quay where the boat was moored, Djurre said: "It seems as if we ourselves have just escaped the melee of the ferocious Franks. I would like to know what he thinks of life now under the Caliphate. However, I'm not going to ask him, because then it would be three days later and we would probably miss the boat."

Anna smiled her bright smile and pointed, "There it is."

They were able to agree a reasonable price with the boat's owner for their river transportation.

The boat measured about 8 cubits and was almost entirely open. It had one deck for the rowers to sit on and had a mast with a spritsail. The four-man crew was busy. The owner was also the captain. After a short while he shouted: "We're going to shoot" and that was apparently the signal to leave. They pushed away from the shore and were caught by the current, which brought them into a gentle rhythm. The sail was hoisted. They would now continue downstream to the great river into which the Oise flowed. Anna decided this was the perfect way to travel. Of course she had sailed in a boat before, but the memory of the arduous slog during her flight from Hallem to Vellesan was still etched in her memory. Sailing downriver on a calm river was better than dragging a boat through shoals and over land. Moreover, it was nice when someone else pulled on the oars. She enjoyed the journey and basked in the winter sun.

"We sail as far as Conflans on the Seine. You will leave the boat there, because we are sailing west, to Honfleur," the captain said.

"Aren't you sailing to Parisi?" asked Ulbo.

"No, our trade is with Honfleur. But it is only a five-hour boat ride upriver to the capital. There is probably a ship that would like to take you," the captain replied.

The city was visible from afar. The towers were characteristic, one of which on the island in the river was particularly striking because of its layered structure. It seemed like a smaller and smaller tower was growing above the first. The third stage was topped by a sphere with a crescent moon on it. They looked with open mouths at the approaching tower, which was made entirely of stone. The ship found a berth on the left bank of the Seine. They disembarked and four of them stood on the quay. This city exceeded their wildest dreams. Not only was it by far the largest any of them had ever seen, but on all sides were imposing stone buildings: Towers and domes and a great wide road leading north towards the island and reaching a bridge there. The three young men looked hesitantly at Anna until Ulbo asked, "What are you going to do now, Anna?" "I have the name of a cousin of the Moorish merchant I met in Dorestad. He said his cousin would definitely help me look for Kybbe." Haio chimed in: "But how are you going to look for them in this huge city?" "Just like in Dorestad, ask at the quay. There must be a merchant there who knows him." "Then we first have to find a place that can serve as a base for your search," said Ulbo. But Anna didn't think that was necessary. "The Moorish merchant said his cousin would give me shelter and ensure my safety." "In that case, we will look for that man with you. We won't say goodbye until we find him." Anna looked gratefully at her traveling companions. "Then let's begin. You are such dears."

They had already seen Arabs in Mons and Compiègne, but here the street scene was determined by them to a much greater extent. In this cold, many wore a cloak of camel hair. Moussa Bennani seemed like a special name to them, but there was great confusion among the men. To Anna it sounded like they were having a big argument. The man who had translated their words joined in just as hard. The group grew quickly and the noise level of the foreign language increased as they all talked over each other and tried to get over it. Apparently everyone knew a 'Bennani' and each of them assumed that it was the person they suggested. Until a man shouted something that made everyone burst out laughing. Anna tapped the translator on the shoulder. He turned around and said that the man who had shouted was also called Bennani and was mentioned by one of the others. To which he said that he was standing next to the speaker and was sure that he was not being referred to. That got people laughing. He was a sailmaker and not a

merchant. This craftsman said something else and Anna's conversation partner translated it immediately: "He asks why you don't ask at the Toll house. Everything that is traded here is administered there. You mentioned a cousin who trades in the north? Then ask which ships came from the north with merchandise. It is your best option."

At first they started making inquiries with optimism. When it turned out that the name of the man they were looking for was apparently so common, their hearts sank at the Arabs' mutual bickering. But in the end it turned out to be much easier in the Toll house than it had seemed on the quay. An errand boy was sent with them to the merchant's house. The young men wanted to see what kind of man Moussa Bennani was and talk to him before they were willing to let Anna go.

Moussa welcomed them with open arms, after Anna mentioned his cousin's recommendation. It was a very friendly conversation, during which they were treated to all kinds of delicacies. They could confidently leave Anna in the care of this man. A rather emotional farewell followed. Maybe fate would bring them together again.

"Inshallah," Moussa added.

The first days in this house were spent on clothes for Anna and all kinds of things that Moussa's daughter Fatima said she would need. It became an immersion in the culture of the Umayyad empire. The search for Kybbe also started. Moussa said all his antennae were finetuned. His contacts would certainly report it if they noticed anything pointing towards a blond northerner with an interest in building. Anna was eager to start looking for herself. Not only Fatima was available for this expedition, but also a sturdy Muslim who functioned as protector. Moussa was relentless. "You don't just need an interpreter in this city. The laws may be strict, but there are always violators. There are unreliable types walking around everywhere. Fatima can translate and mediate for you, but I will not let her walk around Parisi alone without protection."

Anna learned a lot from Fatima. All facets of life in this city were mentioned. It made her all the more curious. Much was beyond comprehension, but what was especially annoying, she thought, was the difficult communication, which required Fatima as an intermediary. She tried to absorb and understand as much of the language as possible. When she told Fatima this, the young woman responded enthusiastically. "I'm going to help you learn the language."

“Can you also help me with the writing?” I know the Latin alphabet, but this is so different. I don't recognize any inscription. The mosque you showed me had beautiful decorations, but I would not have recognized it as writing if you had not told me.”

Fatima wanted to help her: “Listening, speaking, reading and writing are best learned in combination. We'll start immediately.”

The days passed with great regularity. Anna quickly got used to the rhythm whereupon a believer's day was built. The rehearsal of events contributed to faster knowledge acquisition. Friday afternoon was the time for the mosque visit, but Anna spent the day at home with Fatima and the women who took care of the household.

One day Fatima took her to a hammam. They walked along the north bank, where her friend pointed to the other side.

“The other bank of the river is very swampy. That's why they are now working on reclamation. The population has grown rapidly since this became the Wilaya of the Caliphate for the northern part. Several bridges have been built over the river and we can use the limestone that is quarried here locally for many new buildings.”

Anna again looked with awe at the many stone towers that could be seen at regular intervals in the street scene. Fatima had explained to her that from these minarets the muezzin called for prayers. Fatima had already shown her much of the city, patiently explaining each new thing to Anna. Fatima was very interested in the bath rituals. The hammam was a kind of a hobby to her and she knew its history. For example, she said that there were hammams everywhere in the Caliphate and that the Romans already started building bathhouses a long time ago. Also here in Parisi. However, they were all gone except one. It was restored and put back into use after the city was captured. She also said that there was a difference between the Arab bathhouses and those of the ancient Romans. By now they had arrived at their destination and entered the hammam.

“This is where you get changed. You wrap this cloth around you and put on these wooden shoes, so that you don't slip on the wet floor, because it can be very slippery. We go into the hot room first. It is filled with steam and you are supposed to lie there so that you sweat out all the dirt.”

Anna followed Fatima's instructions and entered the room. Steam hit her face and at first she saw nothing. However, she became anxious when she saw that there were more people present in the misty room. Fatima

reassured her. "There are only women here. Maybe there will be a bride, because every girl enters her wedding clean."

Anna looked around curiously. The women were chatting happily. There was laughter as they doused each other with warm water and rubbed their skins. Fatima seated her on a warm platform. After some time she followed the example of the women. It was wonderful to feel the warm water flowing and then Fatima started rubbing oil and kneading her skin. She had never experienced anything so wonderful. Fatima put on a rough glove, with which she vigorously scrubbed Anna's body. At the end of their visit to the hammam, they entered a cool room, where they dried off and sat on a couch.

"Delicious," sighed Anna. "I'm going to make this a habit. When I return to Kinhem with Kybbe, he has to build a hammam for me."

4 months had passed since her arrival in Parisi and no sign of Kybbe had been found. Moussa told her that none of his investigations had led to even a scrap of information about Kybbe. Ultimately, his acquaintances had checked more than 300 blond youngsters, but time and again it turned out not to be Kybbe.

Anna herself had visited every construction site in Paris for information. Her knowledge of Arabic was now such that she could express herself clearly in it. There was a lot of construction going on in this city, which was rapidly increasing in size. Kybbe would be particularly attracted to the mosques, with their beautiful domes and minarets. Since no one in these places could tell her anything about a northerner who had looked for work, it was clear that Kybbe had never arrived in Parisi. She came to a decision and told Moussa: "I feel that Kybbe is still alive. If he's not here, he must have gone to a place where everything is even grander. I'm going to Cordoba."

"Good," said Moussa. "I see you are determined. We will see how you can get there."

## Part 3

### Meeting with a monk

The mighty towers could be seen from afar. After all these months, Cologne was finally here. He had initially completed the journey on foot, including a number of rest stops. A few times he had found work and stayed there a little longer, despite his hunger for new knowledge. However, the journey had also given him new knowledge. In Numaga, his father's practical lessons in building had come in handy in the Palatinate. On the hill overlooking the river, Charlemagne had a fortification built a century ago. In addition to the palace, there were buildings for the court staff and for the military. It housed hundreds of people. Kybbe had contributed to repairs to the main building and the chapel. The master builder had been very pleased with the quick learner. But Kybbe wanted more. He wanted to go to Cologne, where new stone buildings were being built in the rapidly growing seat of the Pope. There was heavy traffic on the Waal. At the bottom of the hill of the Palatinate of Numaga there was a trading settlement on the river. His journey through the German area included a number of stops, where he learned a lot through conversations with various residents of the river area. He now spoke the German language fluently. Not only had he worked the land and done carpentry jobs, but he had filled in for an innkeeper who had broken both legs while doing roof maintenance. Kybbe had finished the job and the innkeeper had begged him to take over his duties temporarily. That had been fun and varied work. It only became oppressive when, after his recovery, the innkeeper had the idea that Kybbe would be a perfect son-in-law. Of course he should not have entered into an amorous relationship with the girl, but the temptation had been too great when she had attacked him in his bedroom. He reproached himself for his hardness of body and weakness of mind at that moment. He had allowed it to happen and expectations had been raised. The girl was sweet and beautiful, but he couldn't deprive himself of his dream and moved on.

It was the end of August and before his eyes now unfolded the spectacle of a modern city that looked nothing like Vellesan. Much larger than the

episcopal city of Utrecht or the ancient Numaga, where he had first seen that the Romans built with stone centuries ago. It was not without reason that Charlemagne had himself crowned emperor almost a century ago. He wanted to follow in the footsteps of those illustrious Romans and now that the Pope had settled in the lands of Charles's descendants, this would certainly become a reality for the Frankish Empire.

Kybbe was amazed. Right in front of him stood a stone building, so large it seemed almost unreal. It turned out that the building had been there for hundreds of years. It was a basilica, a Roman building, from the time when Cologne was an important city in the great Roman Empire. But now, he heard, it was part of the bishop's foundation. In theory, the bishop had secular authority in this area, but with the arrival of the Pope nine years earlier, the bishop's duties were considerably limited. Kybbe struck up a conversation with a cleric who told him about the veneration of the martyrs of the Theban legion at this site. One of them was the patron saint of the church, St. Gereon. For example, he was told the story of the Roman legion, which had converted en masse to Christianity and the soldiers had subsequently been martyred 6 centuries ago because they displeased Emperor Maximus when they refused to sacrifice to the gods before their advance. They were sentenced to death, tortured and then beheaded and thrown into a deep well. The clergyman then said that the mother of Emperor Constantine later had the church built above this well to honor the famous Cologne resident from the past. Kybbe was stunned to learn that the legion had consisted of 6,666 soldiers. The story seemed too improbable to him. How could an entire legion be converted at once and believe so firmly that the soldiers were willing to die a martyr's death for it? Through his experiences, it had become clear to him that no group formed such a unity. There were always people with different ideas. Some constantly took a different position. Money was often the greatest motivation, people were corruptible. He understood however that such a story could have a great influence on believers.

The cleric took pleasure in showing the clearly interested young man around the basilica. He showed Kybbe the choir, where the chants of priests and monks sounded. This was closed with an apse, where the altar and a beautiful seat behind it were located. This was the seat of the bishop, the white-haired priest said. But now Pope Nicholas, nicknamed 'the Great', sat here with great regularity. The apse was on the east side of the building. Kybbe saw that the nave was flanked by two aisles and that these aisles were lower, allowing light to enter through the windows high in the walls. He saw how the weight was distributed over the load-bearing

walls. The columns inside were equally spaced and topped by arches. At the apse the roof was also supported by an arch that stood perpendicular to the row of columns and connected the two rows. How skilled those Romans had been centuries ago! This is how it had to happen in Kinhem. The transport of stones would make it difficult, because such stones were not found anywhere on his native soil.

The singing that still sounded was of an unearthly beauty, but he could not understand the words.

After saying goodbye to the clergyman, he walked around the building. He paid attention to the structure and construction and took great steps to get an idea of the dimensions. It was awe-inspiring. He would spend this day exploring the city. The construction projects had priority. He was eager to work on a similar building and gain further knowledge.

He came to an area on the south side of the city where all kinds of grave monuments could be seen. This was something completely unknown to Kybbe. Astonished, he looked at a monument that looked like an entire building, its occupant standing between two columns. The image was beautiful and seemed lifelike. It was made of white stone. The folds of his clothing were also beautifully made of the same material. If you stood right in front of it you had to tilt your head to see it, because its 'house' stood on top of stones decorated with garlands of flowers and the corners of which looked like columns. There were all kinds of images and decorations on display. The eaves of the 'house' was crowned by a bell shape with a figure on either side at the corners. Literally everything was made of stone. The text was in Latin, the language of the Romans. He spelled the inscription, but it gave no meaning to the words he spoke aloud. A voice behind him said the same text, which sounded very different from his mouth.

Kybbe turned around. It was a monk in a simple robe. "It says this is the monument to Lucius Poblicus, a veteran of the 5th Legion and to his daughter and also to his wife and son when they die. That's the short version. I haven't translated it exactly.", the wrinkled monk laughed kindly. "Were all Romans buried this way?" Kybbe asked the cheerful monk.

"No, of course only those who could afford it. It was quite expensive." The monk introduced himself as Brother Basil and said he was a Benedictine monk. Kybbe was corrected when he asked what rank Brother Basil had in the church.

“Our monastery is independent of the church organization. We follow the rules of Saint Benedict and take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to our Abbot. This means that we divide all possessions in our monastery and that we focus on spiritual deepening and working for the community.” Kybbe objected: “But clergy and nobles never work, do they?” Basilius replied that it was different for monks. “Know that laziness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, we must do manual labor at certain times and study the scriptures at other times.” He showed his calloused hands, which clearly showed manual labor. “There are brothers who are devoted to copying manuscripts. They also study the writings of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers. This way we retain knowledge that would otherwise be lost.”

Kybbe was impressed. An idea formed in his mind, causing him to ask: "Are there any Roman books describing their building processes?" If so, it would be worthwhile to master the Latin language. A monk like Basil could show him the ropes.

Brother Basil replied that his monastery had only religious books in its library and that he had no knowledge of works in which Kybbe showed interest. “I think you have to be in Constantinople or Alexandria for that. But I'm not sure you'll find what you're looking for in Constantinople. According to the latest reports from merchants, war is looming between the Bulgarian troops of Knyaz Michael I and the Byzantine Emperor. Well, Alexandria is located in Egypt, in the middle of the Caliphate. Apparently they left the Roman library intact, but I don't know if it's safe for a Christian there. Kybbe wisely kept his mouth shut. He did not think it advisable to tell this brother that he had no faith in his God. Churches were interesting as buildings in themselves. The Pope's church had power and money and could therefore afford such buildings. He was not particularly interested in the purpose for which such buildings were used.

His search through the city led Kybbe to a huge construction site, where the construction of a new church was already at an advanced stage. It would be a very large three-naved basilica, but something completely new was done here, because it seemed as if another building was placed perpendicular to the nave. In fact, it went straight through! He had to know more about this. This was the place he wanted to work. Kybbe decided to report immediately to the master builder.

He did succeed in this goal, he had gotten work as a stone worker. He had convinced the master builder of his expertise. In Numaga he had worked

with marl and limestone, but also with sandstone from Bentheim and bluestone. He would be paid per piece of work. He marked each workpiece with 3 short lines perpendicular to a horizontal line. An important job awaited him in his capacity as a stoneworker. A large sand-lime stone slab had to be placed in the choir. This had to be done with great care, because this plate was more than 400 years old. It bore an inscription by Clematius. Kybbe was told that the engraved Latin text dealt with the martyrdom of several virgins in Cologne. According to this text, the martyrs would have died here.

Kybbe soon stood out because of his more general knowledge of building. Several times he solved a problem on the construction floor in such a way that he caught the eye of Cornelius, the master builder. They became increasingly involved in construction-technical discussions. Cornelius clearly enjoyed the young man's eagerness to learn and, on the other hand, admired his ability to solve problems.

He made friends easily. Everyone knew they could count on Kybbe's help if a problem arose. The woodworker Gerhard became his best friend. Gerhard knew the places in Cologne where you could relax and where you could eat and drink in the company of your friends.

When the master builder's assistant fell ill in mid-October, Kybbe was appointed as his assistant by Cornelius, much to his surprise. The building was nearing completion. Presumably they would be working on it for another two years or so. It was a dizzying experience to stand so high on the vault. The cruciform shape of the church was clearly visible from here. The transept intersected the main nave and separated it from the chancel. The crossing tower was under construction atop this intersection. It was an overwhelming sight. From this point you could also see the entire city. The great winding snake that the Rhine formed as it cut through the city was magnificent. The harbor works were insignificant from this height. The bridge dated from Roman times, but a new bridge was under construction further north. The city had grown rapidly since the Caliphate's conquest of western Franconia. The Roman walls had been demolished for the expansion. Only a corner tower was still standing, as part of the original ramparts. Trade on the Rhine had also experienced strong growth. The imperial court was located in Aachen, but with the arrival of the papal court, the city had gained in importance.

That afternoon it was very busy in Cologne. Gerhard was the first to tell Kybbe the latest news. The emperor had arrived with his entourage. He reportedly came to consult with the Pope about the situation in the

dioceses, which fell under the Archdiocese of Cologne. There was a lot of commotion in Frisia. Alfried, the new bishop of Utrecht, still could not return to his residence. Emperor Louis also wanted to take advantage of the weakness of his cousin Lothair in the area. His liege had been chased away and the Frisians were without authority. Kybbe knew all about it and he was able to tell Gerhard how Count Rorik and his vassal had been chased away in Vellesan. "Imagine," Gerhard responded, "an entire area without a patron." However, according to Kybbe, the Frisians were better off without a feudal lord.

### **Darra and Anselm**

Upon arriving in Cologne, Anselm had immediately tried to get an audience with Pope Nicholas. However, it was not that easy. The days passed and Darra became increasingly restless. "I still think it would have been better if we had gone to the court in Aachen. The emperor will not miss the opportunity to take over the coastal area from his cousin. Lothair is now so weak with a revolt of the Frisians in the north, the threat of the Caliphate in the south and the raids of Vikings in the Scheldt area, that it is a matter of time before he loses all his territories."

"Oh, yes?" Anselm said scornfully. "And do you think that, as a vassal of Lothair, you will be heard by Louis the German, the emperor?"

"Why not? I will make it clear to him that he can count on my support if he starts a war against his cousin. My knowledge of the area can contribute to the success of such an undertaking. Who knows, maybe he will accept me as Frisia's vassal."

"What about Rorik?" Anselm asked.

"Rorik is suspected by many here of colluding with the marauding Vikings. I will confirm this delicately, thereby undermining his claims. I tell them that the beating from the Frisians was his fault and that, despite being heavily outnumbered, we tried valiantly to hold Kinhem, but that we received no support from the count and could barely survive."

Anselm had to admit that Darra had a well-thought-out plan that could well succeed. He would stick to the same story when meeting the Pope. Darra left for Aachen, to gain access to Louis, the emperor of the East Frankish Empire.

He would spend the remainder of the day driving to Kerpinna to spend the night and complete most of the journey the next day. With some luck he hoped to speak to the monarch that same day.

However, that was a vain hope. Louis the German was in Moravia. This principality had been formed about 30 years earlier by Mojmir I. This was a pagan empire on the eastern border of the East Frankish empire. His cousin Rastislav, with the help of Louis, overthrew him from the throne in 846 and began the Christianization of his country. After this, the emperor twice had to deal with a rebellion by his own son, Karloman. In 861 and 864 he was supported by Rastislav. As a result, Louis had to hand over part of the empire to his son. It was customary among the Frankish princes for sons to receive a title and part of their father's territory to govern. The problems on the border with Moravia continued, as Rastislav tried to secure the independence of his principality. Therefore, he asked the Patriarch of Constantinople for help in converting his people to the Christian faith.

The emperor of the Byzantine Empire then sent two brothers to Rastislav. Methodius became the archbishop of the Great Moravian Empire. He translated the Bible into Slavic and it was written in a script that his brother Cyril invented.

Now Louis had been in Moravia for some time to establish ties with Rastislav and keep him on a leash. The Pope had even given permission to use a language other than Latin for the liturgy. It was important to Pope Nicholas that Constantinople's influence did not expand further into the Slavic area.

Nobody knew when Louis would arrive in Aachen again.

Darra had no choice but to wait for the Emperor's return.

While Darra was agonizing with impatience in Aachen, Anselm was doing something similar in Cologne. Although the Pope was present, Anselm was denied every request for an audience. He decided to take advantage of his stay in the largest city in Franconia. You gained influence through friendships. You had to make your network so big that powerful people could no longer ignore you. He started an inventory of representatives of the church and nobility in this region. It was clear who he should visit first and make an ally, Gunthar the former Archbishop of Cologne. In these uncertain times it was not clear what his position exactly entailed. Coming from an important noble family, Gunthar had a pivotal role in the Empire. He had been chancellor of Lorraine, had sanctioned the divorce of Lothair II from Theutberga and was a renowned author of both literary and theological writings. In 850 he became archbishop. His role in Lothair's

divorce earned him an excommunication by the Pope in 863 and his deposition as archbishop, which he opposed. The arrival of Nicholas I, due to the fact that Rome had been taken by the Umayyad empire, meant that Cologne became the residence of the Pope, who in effect took over the duties of the Archbishop. Gunthar, however, continued to move in high noble and spiritual circles, especially since Louis the German used him to limit the power of Nicholas I.

Anselm decided to make an attempt to get this man on his side.

When he presented himself at Gunthar's beautiful house, the mention that he was from Frisia was apparently the entrance to the former church prince. It soon turned out that Gunthar still felt like an archbishop. He was curious about the situation in the subordinate diocese of Utrecht. Anselm told him that Alfried, the abbot of Sint-Amands, had become bishop this year. However, due to the uncertain situation in the area, he was not yet able to take his seat in Utrecht and therefore resided in Darentre by the river IJssel. He then enthusiastically explained how quickly the Christian church in Frisia and especially in Kinhem was growing and that he had already had a new church built there to accommodate the increasing numbers of new residents and pilgrims. "There is also talk of establishing a monastery. I think it is time for a separate diocese on the coast of these countries."

Gunthar looked Anselm over and said, "You have been confirmed to the office of archdeacon by Bishop Hunger?"

Anselm replied in the affirmative and added that Hunger had fled from Utrecht, taking his archives with him.

"In short, you have no proof of your appointment," Gunthar stated delicately.

"That's right. I hope Bishop Alfried will get the archives in order soon. A reconfirmation of my appointment would of course be very welcome. That removes all uncertainty. But I am actually aiming to establish a new diocese in Vellesan. I have already invested my energies there until the uprising of the Frisians drove me out. It would be a shame to see all that lost."

It turned out that Gunthar could appreciate a man with ambition.

Something Anselm had estimated correctly. He had heard the stories about this prince. There was talk about his splendor, the promotion of family members and the squandering of church property for his own benefit. 'Frivolous and ambitious' were the descriptions heard. After all, the man had questioned Pope Nicholas' authority several times. This had cost him and his friend the Bishop of Trier their positions. What he saw within the extensive number of rooms here certainly bore witness to profligacy

and pomp. He felt he was accepted as an ally. The prospect of a new sub-diocese of Cologne apparently pleased Gunthar.

The next step was to get the abbot of the large monastery on his side. He started to enjoy his visit to Cologne more and more.

One day went after another and another. Darra visited the hot springs and enjoyed the comfortable temperature of the water. The only downside to the healing springs was the putrid stench of rotten eggs that permeated everything. After another unsuccessful attempt to visit the emperor, he walked around the city. Aachen was an imperial city, which means that it fell under the direct tutelage of the emperor. The importance of the city was clearly reflected in the volume of pilgrimages, the fabric industry, needle production and the numbers of bathers. It brought great prosperity to the city. The coronation of monarchs also took place here. Darra was impressed. The emperor's palace was enormous. He had admired the mosaics in the large church. At the back was a beautiful reliquary containing part of the bones of Charlemagne. In fact, Aachen owed its existence to the fact that the then emperor of the empire had sought relief here for the rheumatic pains that tormented him. The springs were already there in Roman times, but because Charlemagne permanently established his traveling court here a century ago, Aachen grew in importance. The beautiful black and white arches that caught Darra's eye seemed to be made of marble brought from Rome by Charles after his coronation as emperor by the Pope. The palace was built at the same time and Charles brought artists and scientists from all over Europe here.

Finally news came of Louis the German. The emperor had left Moravia, but instead of returning to Aachen, he went straight to Cologne to consult with the Pope about Constantinople's involvement in the area he had just visited.

After a few strong curses, Darra saddled his horse to visit the emperor in Cologne.

Here too it would take several days before succeeding to be heard by the emperor. He half-heartedly looked for Anselm, but the archdeacon now moved in higher circles than Darra suspected and for that reason could not be found. Moreover, Darra prioritized a conversation with the emperor.

A commotion came from the adjacent room. Louis looked up, disturbed. The schenk appeared in the doorway and approached the emperor when he beckoned him closer. "Forgiveness Sire, there was a nobleman from

Vellesan who insisted on speaking to you. We got him out of your hearing as quickly as possible.”

Rorik then broke in: “I apologize for interrupting you, Sire. But I heard it said ‘from Vellesan’. Is it perhaps about my underling, Darra of Alveringem?”

Louis turned to his schenk: "Find out and if so, bring him here."

The servant bowed deeply and hurried to fulfill the order.

While Darra was being fetched, Rorik informed the emperor of the significance of the town of Vellesan. Darra came in, accompanied by the schenk, and quickly surveyed the situation. Rorik was here! That meant he had to be careful. He had to abandon his plan to portray Rorik as a protector of plunderers and could not blame him for the uprising. Quick thinking was needed. He was already adjusting his story in his head. He was allowed to take a seat to give an account of the events in Vellesan. Here he began to paint a picture of a gang from Wieringen that repeatedly tried to undermine his authority as mayor. Twice they had attempted assassination and had ambushed the Vellesan nobles in the marshes east of the spot. They had all died, except Guy de Monclosse, his right-hand man. But he too was later murdered. All this took place under the leadership of a meliores, Claes van Hoeleyde. The hard core of the gang also consisted of pagan craftsmen, who had enjoyed too much freedom under the previous mayor. He had worked with them to rob Count Rorik. A number of them had been heroically eliminated by his men during the uprising a few months ago. Then a sea of insurgents had engulfed them. “All my soldiers were killed.

I was only able to survive to report to you. Archdeacon Anselm accompanied me here to tell his story to the Pope and to inform him of the precarious situation of the church in Kinhem. I traveled on to Aachen to meet you, but heard that your Highness had already left. Then I followed you to Cologne as quickly as possible. However, they did not want to receive me at your court. If you send an army to teach the Frisians a lesson, I can assist you with my knowledge of the area and the instigators of the rebellion.”

“You talked about eliminating some of the instigators of the rebellion. Who are they?” Rorik asked.

“Pagans, a Wieringer named Aeijolt and his son Kybbe.”

## The Pope



### *Kybbe's journey*

1. Vellesan (Velsen); 2. Utrecht (Het Sticht); 3. Numaga (Nijmegen); 4. Cologne; 5. Bonn; 6. Koblenz; 7. Mainz; 8. Heilbronn; 9. Halle (Schwäbisch Hall); 10. Ratisbon (Regensburg)

The two Vellesanners had a lot to tell each other. They had settled at a low table in the 'Fischerhus' inn. Anselm took a long drink and talked about his success in infiltrating the cabal of powerful clergy and noble families. "I can expect to get an invitation for an interview with Pope Nicholas at any moment," he said proudly. "I now have quite a few friends in important positions."

Darra then told him about his adventures. The wait for the emperor in Aachen and its failure. His hasty return trip to Cologne to meet Louis there and the surprise when it turned out that Rorik was there.

"So Rorik has become good friends with the emperor?" Anselm asked.

"Yes, it looks like that. They are working on some big plan, of which Lothair will probably become a victim."

Excitedly, the archdeacon interrupted Darra: "That means he is turning against his lord. He breaks his vow to the King of Lorraine!"

"That's right. The fortune seeker has no use for the powerless Lothair.

Louis can help him find soldiers to take over his cousin's territory. If Rorik

manages to subdue the rebellious Frisians, there will be one Frankish Empire again like in the days of Charlemagne, with Rorik as Louis' vassal.” Anselm then asked what that meant for Darra.

“Well,” he continued, “I can return to my role as leader in Vellesan. My ambition to control all of Kinhem is taking a hit, but who knows what lies ahead. On the name day of Saint Livinus I am expected to participate in a consultation with the emperor, Rorik and a number of nobles. First however the emperor talks to the pope.

Pope Nicholas had listened patiently to the explanation of the two nobles who sat before him. He found it reprehensible that the emperor intended to wrest Lorraine from his cousin Lothair. But the combination of events he heard about led him increasingly to the conviction that the plan was in the interests of the Christian church. One large Frankish Empire, through which the problems could be solved in both the east and the west. He did not like the involvement of Patriarch Photius of Constantinople in Eastern and Central Europe at all. And while the Christianization of Scandinavia was successful, the loss of territory in Western Europe to the Caliphate was a blow to the church. In the plan that was now presented to him, the coastal area would be conquered by Count Rorik and he would have to entice his tribesmen from the north to raid across the rivers in the area of the Caliphate. At the same time, Louis' army would invade the eastern border of the Caliphate, allowing Western Franconia to return to the bosom of the church. The emperor had made an agreement with Rastislav of Moravia and with Michael of Bulgaria. The latter would attack Constantinople and thus form a strong buffer against the Eastern Caliphate. As guardian of the church, Nicholas felt superior to the emperor. He was able to avert the danger of Louis as a strong emperor by entering into an alliance with Karloman. The son had already rebelled against his father, the emperor, several times.

That would be a nice counterbalance to Louis's excessive power. All in all, Nicholas was satisfied after his meeting with the emperor. He remembered that in three days time he would receive an audience with an archdeacon from Count Rorik's territory. Maybe there was some interesting news to hear there.

At the meeting on the name day of Saint Livinius, plans for a coordinated military operation against Lorraine, the Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire were further developed. There was talk of troop movements to the west; about discussions to be held with Vikings in England and

Scandinavia; about Michael's attack on the Byzantine Empire, which was planned for the following spring, and the financial support. The papal court was important in this regard.

Darra now knew what his role in the whole thing would be. He talked about this with Anselm while they were taking a walk through the city. From the Roman bridge they approached the construction site where the new church was under construction. Suddenly Anselm hissed: "Unbelievable." He pointed to the construction site. "Look there! Kybbe is standing there." When Darra flew into a rage and was about to enter the grounds, he placed his hand on his chest. "Guard yourself! Let's do this smartly. This is something that could be very useful in achieving our goals. I have an audience with the Pope tomorrow afternoon. Maybe we can bring Kybbe's presence to his attention."

Darra managed to control his anger. "You're right. But the Pope is not the way. This is something I better take to Rorik and perhaps the Emperor. Imagine, we can get them the 'rebel leader of Frisia'." He laughed grimly at these words.

They stood on top of the vault near the balustrade and could clearly see from here the cruciform shape of the church. They looked down at the site below, where workmen were working on the foundations of several retaining walls.

"Look," said Cornelius, "because we make extra buttresses here and there, we can make the church so big. The heaviness of the crossing tower must be absorbed by additional supports on the outside of the walls."

"But, can't you just make the walls thicker so that they are stronger? Then wouldn't a heavier and larger tower be possible?" the Pope asked him.

"No, that doesn't work. Then we still have to place pillars inside the church to be able to bear the weight. We have made the church larger than the original plan and that now also requires a higher tower. So we are going to build up higher than planned. It will be the most impressive church in the Christian world. Then this new basilica will really reach to heaven."

The Pope leaned back to follow the master builder's pointing finger. He lost his balance. He took an extra step and ended up standing on a loose plank, which started to slide under his feet. Part of the balustrade fell away as the pope slipped away. Cornelius managed to grab Nicholas's robe before he disappeared into the depths. But the forward movement had already started, a fall could no longer be prevented. Kybbe watched them fall in horror. The pope's robes, which fluttered around both men, made it

look like a large bird was flying through the sky. But in this case more like a bird that was shot out of the sky. The ground was inevitably closing in on them quickly. Before the sound of the blow reached him, Kybbe started moving and descended as quickly as possible.

There was great consternation downstairs. The craftsmen and porters ran into each other or fell to their knees next to the crumpled bodies. Some wailed and others said a silent prayer. People came running onto the work site from outside. In no time a crowd gathered and when word got around that the Pope was dead here, more lamentations arose.

Gerhard saw Kybbe and immediately pulled him to the street side, away from the crowds. "What happened? You went upstairs with Master Cornelius and the Pope, didn't you?"

Kybbe nodded affirmatively and said: "The Pope slipped on a loose plank and Master Cornelius tried to stop him from falling. Then both went over the edge."

At that moment they heard a loud rumbling sound.

"Look," Gerhard shouted, "the tower is collapsing."

Helplessly, they saw large pieces of debris falling on the work site, where the crowd was gathered around the corpses. When the large dust clouds had cleared and the world seemed to have calmed down again, the two men saw that a number of people were buried under the rubble. There were many injured. Some tried to free themselves from the rubble. Kybbe saw a single arm sticking out of the cairn, a finger spasmed and fell still. They immediately began moving chunks of stone to free victims. It was impossible. There were injured people who needed to be helped and more people and equipment needed to be brought in to rescue the victims from the rubble and recover the dead. The crash was heard throughout the city and help soon arrived. The Benedictine monks were the first on the scene. They eventually freed the body of the church leader from the rubble and carried him to their monastery. A little later they were joined by Gunthar, the former archbishop of the city, and some minor clergy. The question was who had the right to care for the pope's corpse. The monks were not willing to give up the body. After all, they did not fall under the authority of the episcopal order, but directly under that of the Pope.

When the Umayyads took Rome in 858, the Pope fled to Cologne, taking over the duties of Archbishop Gunthar. He was relieved of his duties and even excommunicated in 863. That humiliation could now be undone. The former archbishop's ambition was undiminished and now was his chance. If he had the body of the deceased Pope in his hands, he might even be elevated to the highest ecclesiastical position. Louis and many other

powerful people would certainly support him in this. After a short meeting with the emperor, Gunthar secured his support in claiming the body of the pope. He got a number of soldiers with him to force the takeover of the body.

Anselm was preparing for his audience with the Pope when the blow came that shook the city to its foundations. Soon there was a big commotion. He heard someone shout, "The Pope is dead!"

In disbelief he followed the many people heading in the same direction. That couldn't be true, could it? Just as he was about to speak to the prelate. Adversity upon adversity. The dust clouds were still in the air when he saw Darra at the construction site. "What happened?"

"I heard that the Pope stood on top of the church to oversee the work and the city. Master Cornelius had to explain to him the progress that had been made in the construction."

It dawned to Anselm that this could be a blessing in disguise. A new Pope would have to be elected and Gunthar was a powerful and wealthy man. It wouldn't do Anselm any harm if Gunthar knew how to play the right card. He thought of something else. "Darra, you said you heard that Kybbe was Master Cornelius' assistant, right?"

"Yes, that's what I was told."

"Where is he? We have to track him down. Then we'll charge him with the Pope's murder!"

Darra responded enthusiastically: "What an ingenious plan, Anselm. I have already made him known as a troublemaker, pagan and rebel to the emperor. He will certainly be put to death. As a reward, I can return to Vellesan with Rorik's army and you may have the opportunity to set up a new diocese."

To inform the residents of the city, a platform was set up on the market square. Church dignitaries and distinguished nobles were seated on it. The market filled up with curious people. As the most important resident of Cologne, Gunthar wanted to address the masses. That didn't seem like a good idea to Anselm.

"Let me do the talking," he said to Gunthar. "Given the history you have with Nicholas, it is better to remain in the background for a while." The former archbishop saw the wisdom of this. He understood that he could better realize his ambition if he also had broad support among the

residents. Any contradiction with the deceased pope had to be ironed out and erased from memory. Therefore he agreed with the archdeacon. Anselm then addressed the gathering crowd and raised his voice. “Our Pope is the head of the entire Christian world. In Constantinople they call their patriarch Photius the Great. But there is only one who has the right to that nickname and that is our Pope Nicholas. He has made it clear that as successor to Peter, he is above everyone in the Christian world. For eight years he increased the power and glory of the Church. And now he has been murdered by a Frisian villain. A pagan who managed to incite the mob in Frisia against their lord, Count Rorik, through a dirty game. He attempted to kill the lord of his hometown. Fortunately he failed in that.” He pointed to Darra. “This nobleman, Darra of Alveringem was his target. He has come to the emperor to obtain a just punishment for the bandit. Apparently the villain has followed us to make another assassination attempt and prevent the Emperor from being informed. Now it appears that this pagan has also aimed his arrows at the church. He managed to gain the trust of Master Cornelius in a devious way, so that he was able to assassinate Pope Nicholas. I call on anyone who has information about this Kybbe to come forward. The villain deserves death.”

## **The flight**

*Gunthar's battle for the papal throne becomes tougher than expected. He has a competitor in Rimbart of Turholt, who had become Archbishop of Bremen-Hamburg in 865. It also takes much longer than anticipated to get the Viking leaders of Scandinavia, Ireland and England in line and launch raids on the Caliphate. As long as Rorik still has to deal with this, he cannot return to Frisia with an army. East of Franconia, Rastislav of Moravia does not adhere to German church policy. Since Louis wants to solve this problem first, he is unable to quickly raise an army for an invasion of the Caliphate.*

Gerhard and Kybbe had started digging in the cairn with their bare hands, where an arm protruded above the rubble. When they had partially freed the body, they saw that the skull had been completely destroyed. No rescue was possible here. They got up, groaning, with bloody fingers and torn nails. Kybbe was visibly shocked when two familiar figures came into

his field of vision and froze. Gerhard noticed the change in his friend and punched him in the shoulder. "What's wrong with you?" he asked.

"Ghosts from the past. The men who massacred my family are standing there," Kybbe replied, shaking himself out of his apathy.

Gerhard looked in the same direction. "I recognize that one. He was with the emperor. I think it's better for you to avoid him. Come on." He pulled Kybbe along with him.

They headed to the shelter they had shared since Kybbe started working on the construction site. Here Gerhard heard the story about the bullying and persecution of friends and family in Vellesan by Darra and Guy, ending with the death of Kybbe's returned father. He also did not leave out the role of the unreliable cleric.

"You stay here. You won't show your face outside this room until I get back. I am going to carefully gather information about those two gentlemen."

Gerhard was attracted by the commotion on the market. There the clergyman, whom he had seen earlier near the collapsed church tower, stood on a platform. Behind him sat a number of dignitaries, including Bishop Gunthar and the man Kybbe had identified as responsible for the deaths of his relatives and friends.

The cleric had finished his speech and there was a great commotion among the crowd present. Gerhard caught fragments of conversations and it became clear to him that there was a call for everyone to report any sightings of the murderer of the Pope and Master Cornelius. Kybbe's name was to be heard everywhere in the murmur of the crowd. He was held responsible for the murder. Gerhard understood that his friend had already been identified as the murderer and that there was no chance of a fair trial. That realization made him act quickly. Too many people knew that he and Kybbe shared a shelter and that meant they were both in danger of being reported. Just by association with Kybbe, he himself would be under suspicion. Maybe he was in for torture for giving out information about his friend. They had to go into hiding as quickly as possible. The drizzle during the meeting at the market turned into a cloudburst. The rain poured down and quickly formed mud puddles in the streets. Gerhard hurried home.

It didn't dawn on Kybbe that he was accused of murdering the pope. He looked blankly ahead until Gerhard shook him loose out of his inertia. "Get your most important things together as quickly as possible and come along. We have to get out of here before soldiers are sent. You know how

that lord of Vellesan works and here he is supported by the emperor and the church. Be quick about it!

Kybbe let himself be dragged along and a little later they knocked on the door of the monastery. Gerhard's brother was fetched while they were standing shivering and soaking wet in the covered cloister. Brother Robertus hugged his brother and asked the reason for their arrival in this weather you didn't want to chase a dog through.

Gerhard quickly informed him. Robertus reacted indignantly. "The villains rule in the outside world. I will inform the abbot immediately. He will probably want to give you shelter until you figure out what to do."

Abbot Tatwin and Bishop Gunthar had often faced each other in the past. The abbot did not consider the profligate church prince to be a model of essential Christianity. Gunthar's last action, when he forcibly claimed Pope Nicholas' body, still made his blood boil. He therefore offered the two friends the safety of his abbey for as long as they needed it.

While the city was busy searching for the murderer and his friend and Darra became increasingly angry with every investigation that led to nothing, the two lived the calm contemplative life of a monastery.

Kybbe took the opportunity to explore the abbey. He was interested in the structure and layout of the complex. In the center was a square courtyard. On one side was the cloister, which provided access to the other buildings. The northern wing of the monastery was adjacent to the church aisle. The refectory, where the communal meal was consumed, was located on the south side. Above that was the dormitory. Close to the choir of the church was the chapter house. This was the administrative center of the abbey. Daily work was arranged here, which consisted of caring for the sick, tending the vegetable garden, saying prayers and all kinds of maintenance work. Gerhard and Kybbe took a look at the brewery and were allowed to lend a helping hand to the monks who were working here. Kybbe had of course learned a lot from his mother, but the brothers' knowledge went much further.

Kybbe eagerly absorbed all the information, not only in the brewery, but also in conversations with monks about the buildings on the complex. Daily life also offered new knowledge. For example, the monks had to wash their hands in the lavatory before meals. This was a free-standing structure with an octagonal basin. Gerhard and Kybbe were also obliged to wash their hands here. Renewing his acquaintance with Brother Basil earned him a visit to the scriptorium. This was a revelation. Monks were busy writing and translating texts and books here. The manuscripts looked beautiful. Kybbe especially admired Basilius for his beautiful paintings of

the capital letters with which each page began. However, there were no books on architecture here, as Brother Basil had already told him.

The monks were up early in the morning. Their day started at five o'clock and ended at eight in the evening. In the summer they seemed to work even longer days. They spent the day mainly in Liturgy of the Hours, alternating with work and reading or copying spiritual literature.

One day Kybbe told Gerhard of his intention to travel to Constantinople in order to gain knowledge about architecture. His friend decided to go with him. "There is nothing that ties me to Cologne. I have no family other than Robertus and if the high lords are still looking for you, they are looking for me too. I'll come with you."

After living in the monastery for two weeks, they left at the end of November. The monks said a warm farewell to their guests.

The Rhine would be the best option for a trip to Constantinople. They could quickly cover a greater distance across the river and get out of the reach of any pursuers. However, it was not an option to look for passage in the port of Cologne. They would soon be exposed there. There was no other option than to walk to the next port. They decided to embark in Bonn. According to Gerhard's calculations, they could reach the city in a day's march. That brought out the first disappointment. The terrain turned out to be more uneven than expected, although parts along the river were easily walkable. To be on the safe side, they carefully walked past places that were inhabited. Who knows how far the news of the Pope's assassination and their identification as murderers preceded them. Caution remained necessary. That's why they stayed overnight outside the city in nature with Bonn in sight. The next day they would gauge whether the news had actually preceded them.

The weather was inclement. Sleet fell and the two friends woke up shivering. They knocked the snow off their clothes and decided to throw caution to the wind. What they needed now was a hearty meal and warmth. There was an inn on the quay that looked inviting. Kybbe was the first to enter the smoky room. The fire in the hearth flared high and the heat it gave off made up for the fact that the chimney did not draw properly. The men settled down at a table and ordered a hearty meal. They looked up as a guest entered the taproom from the adjacent room. Kybbe jumped up in surprise. "Sake!" he shouted. "What are you doing here?"

It was a strange sensation. The Frisian merchant, whom he had seen so often in Vellesan, now suddenly popped up here. The merchant joined them and they exchanged news. He said he was on his way from Helvetia to Frisia. He had heard of the Frisian uprising against Rorik and wanted to hear further details from Kybbe. Sake heard his account and responded with surprise: "So Rorik has put aside his liege and is now with the emperor? What will they come up with? I bet Louis is after his cousin's territories. But what surprises me most is that Darra and Anselm are also in Cologne. What do they hope to gain there?"

"All we know is that those two accuse me of killing Pope Nicholas. They say there that I am the rebel leader of the Frisians against Rorik," Kybbe replied.

"What an idiotic story. Why did they make that up?"

Gerhard answered this question: "It seems to me that presenting a rebel leader on a silver platter puts Darra in good standing with Rorik and the emperor. While the accusation of papal murder helps Anselm get a nice position in the church. Finally, as a former archbishop, Gunthar has every interest in regaining his old position and he is a powerful man with a lot of influence. Kybbe is the perfect scapegoat. They would like to try him to strengthen their position."

Sake wanted to know what they were planning to do now that they were in such danger.

"We want to go to Constantinople. We hope to find work there as artisans," Kybbe replied.

The merchant said that, from what he heard, the situation in that area was quite uncertain. "I heard rumors that the Byzantine emperor is becoming increasingly weak against the Bulgarians and the Abbasid Caliphate." Kybbe and Gerhard looked at each other. "We're taking the gamble," Kybbe concluded.

They said goodbye outside the inn. The two men would try to find passage on a ship. Sake was just wishing them all the best when his eye fell on a group of riders. "Guys, walk quietly to the other side of the inn."

Kybbe looked at him in surprise.

"Do it now," Sake hissed. "There is Darra with a number of soldiers. I will distract them."

The two friends disappeared behind the inn, while Sake walked towards the riders. Gerhard peered around the corner and saw how the Frisian merchant started talking to Darra, gesticulating and pointing to the west. At this the men turned their horses and galloped away to the west.

Sake walked back and beckoned the friends. He told them that he had convinced Darra that they had met yesterday and that Kybbe and his friend were planning to head towards Rheinbach in the southwest and from there cross to the protection of the Caliphate.

Sake firmly rejected Kybbe's thanks. "We Frisians must support each other if we have the opportunity."

Darra was with the Emperor and Count Rorik. The conversation was about the escape of the Pope's murderer and his accomplice. Louis was not dissatisfied with the events. "Nicholaas was difficult. He even put himself above me. Our efforts are now focused on getting Gunthar appointed pope. But first he must be reinstated as Archbishop of Cologne."

Darra elaborated: "I think it would be very beneficial in that endeavor to get hold of the murderer and have Gunthar bring him to justice. I therefore have a proposal. For the time being I have nothing to do and since it is in both your and Archbishop Gunthar's interests to get hold of the murderer, I can deliver him to you. Give me some soldiers and I will find him soon."

Rorik wanted to know where Darra planned to look for him.

"My informant says he was last seen on the south side of town. This means that he does not flee back to Frisia. Moreover, I do not believe that he went directly west to Aachen. But of course he doesn't dare to board a ship here in Cologne either. He must have almost gone to Bonn and taken a ship south to the Caliphate. They must be willing to welcome a pope murderer there."

"That sounds plausible. I will give you 4 men and expect a successful mission," said the emperor.

"I won't disappoint you," Darra said confidently.

To his surprise he met an old acquaintance in Bonn, the merchant Sake. His information confirmed his suspicion that the two men were trying to flee to the Caliphate. The chase started. When the imposing pieces of the ancient Roman aqueduct came into view after two hours, Darra knew that the refugees were within reach.

## Overboard

Darra stood under a remnant of the aqueduct in the center of Rheinbach. Earlier, his group had split up to get information about the two refugees. Two hours later they had gathered again under one of the arches of what was once the most important Roman waterworks in this area. All their questions in this city had not yielded a single positive answer. There was no trace of Kybbe here. Darra gradually came to the conclusion that Sake had not told him the truth. Either the merchant himself had been misled by Kybbe, or he had deliberately lied. The latter seemed the most plausible to him. After all, it concerned a Frisian, a brother. They would have to pick up the trail again somewhere near the river. Presumably the pair had found a ship in Bonn after all. With this they would follow the river upstream south and probably enter the Caliphate somewhere near Strasbourg. Two of his men had sailed the Rhine several times and were able to name the anchorages that most ships visited from Bonn upstream. Next after Bonn was Lincesce, followed by the free imperial city of Andernach. In one of these ports it would certainly be possible to take the refugees into custody and take them back to Cologne for their execution. To do this they had to cross the Rhineland to the river, where they would arrive at Lincesce.

They may have known the river, but the Rhineland was a different story. Darra had relied on his escort to lead them to the port via the fastest route. They had been driving for hours before it became clear that they were on the wrong track. It was unbelievable that he had to rely on these losers. The Rhine meandered quite a bit on its way to its origin, so the damage could be repaired. In any case, they moved faster on horseback than a ship sailing upstream. The night had lasted forever and the men were tired, but Darra initially let them continue. Forced by the darkness, they kept a leisurely pace. The intention was not to wear down the horses to such an extent that progress became impossible. So rest breaks had to be taken. As a result, they did not arrive in Lincesce until the early morning hours. An anguished cry came from Darra's lips as he noticed that the ship had already left for the next station. After a short spurt they galloped parallel to the boat on which the refugees had found passage. However finally he managed to calm down and kept quiet. The best thing was to return to the harbor for a good meal. There was plenty of time for a rest.

He grimly thought that they would at least arrive in Andernach before the fugitives. He could then quietly await the arrival of the ship.

Gerhard and Kybbe sailed across the river to the first landing stage, where the ship on which they had gained passage would moor. There they could spend the night on land before continuing the journey to Andernach. They had relaxed a bit on the ship. The Rhine itself contributed to their relaxation. The river was wide here and flowed leisurely towards them. On the other bank, the many peaks of the Siebengebirge offered an imposing sight. Kybbe had never seen such mountains. The town of Lincesse, as the center of a small Untergau, offered them some entertainment in the evening. They soon made contact with the locals, curious as they were about the foreigner with the strange accent. The drink flowed more freely than Kybbe would have liked. He was quite under the weather when at last he woke up on the straw in the inn. Gerhard was in somewhat better condition. He had been shaking Kybbe for some time before his eyes opened with difficulty. "Come on. We have to get on board before they leave without us. The captain talked about an early departure." The weather was cold and clear. Kybbe walked to the harbor, shivering. The crew was in great spirits. The bunches were cast off. Kybbe could only think about his poor head in the noisy environment.

A cry from Gerhard penetrated his foggy brain. He looked at his friend with a painful grimace. Gerhard pointed to the western bank, where 5 men on horseback were galloping parallel to their direction. "That must be Darra," he shouted excitedly. "Of course he found out he'd been tricked and now he's looking for us at the next port along the river."

Kybbe's brain was working again. "The next port is Andernach. We must be off board before then. The crew has no interest in helping us against a representative of lawful authority. They will certainly extradite us. So we can't ask them to drop us off somewhere along the river. It would be best if we could disembark unnoticed."

"How should we do that?" Gerhard asked.

The answer came quickly. "There is only one option, swimming. When the crew is busy, we jump into the water out of their sight. The river looks calm here. You can swim, can't you, Gerhard?" Kybbe suddenly realized that, although he grew up in a watery environment, many in Vellesan could not swim. This was perhaps even more true for the people from Cologne. Gerhard confirmed that he had learned to swim in a lake in his native village during his youth. There was a large boulder, from which the daredevils kept diving. They tied their pouches tighter, and when the

opportunity arose, they jumped into the river. There, Kybbe was shocked by the ice-cold water, which also had a much stronger current than he expected. With difficulty he struggled to the surface of the water. As the river sucked him in, he searched desperately for Gerhard. He thought he saw a head above water further on.

His attempts to swim to shore were not very successful. The river held him in its grip until a bend brought him closer to the left bank. Now was the time to use all his strength. As the river pulled at him, he tried to break free by swimming along and reaching the edge of the current at the same time. He almost missed the branches hanging from a rock formation slightly above the bank that extended into the river. With the last of his strength he managed to pull himself hand over hand from the first branch to the next out of the stream into the shelter that the formation offered. Here he pulled himself onto the bank and lay completely exhausted. The cold penetrated deep into his bones and he was unable to move. He regained consciousness wrapped in a thick blanket, with his feet towards a wood fire.

He looked around hopefully, searching for his friend's face. That hope was immediately dashed. It was a stranger looking at him with a concerned face. It turned out to be a fisherman who found him more dead than alive. Since he had rested for the night in the open field, he stripped Kybbe of his wet clothing immediately after noticing that there was still life in the alleged corpse. Then he wiped it dry, wrapped it and started a fire. Now that he had returned to the land of the living, Kybbe naturally had to tell his story. But Kybbe first wanted to know if the fisherman had seen his friend. The man replied in the negative. He had only found Kybbe in a sorry state on the bank. Kybbe adjusted his story. Who knows how far the story of the 'pope assassination' had penetrated. He'd better be careful. He was very curious where exactly he was. The fisherman pointed north. In the distance the peaks of the Ölberg, the Löwenburg, the Lohrberg, the Wolkenburg and the Drachenfels could be seen. He pointed out the peaks of the Siebengebirge one by one. On the other side of the river was the town of Oncale. Kybbe realized he had drifted quite a distance downstream. His clothes had now dried by the fire. He threw off the blanket and got dressed. After thanking the fisherman very much for saving his life, he headed back towards Lincisce.

He had to get to the other bank to do that. The fatigue turned out to be greater than expected. A little later he found a suitable place to rest. That's when realization hit him hard. Gerhard had disappeared. Despondent, he collapsed, his hands clasped over his face. It was his fault. He should never have let them jump off the ship. There must have been another

opportunity to stay out of Darra's hands. Now he had a third life on his conscience. At first he had left his childhood friend to her fate because he was ashamed. Then he had been unable to save his loved one from the burning brewery and now he had driven his best friend to his death. He sat there shaking his shoulders and let his tears flow freely. Eventually he calmed down and fell into a deep sleep. After a few hours he was able to continue his journey. Physically he was back on track, but emotionally he was exhausted.

Darra had reached Andernach with his group. Now it was just a matter of waiting until his prey fell into his hands. First he contacted the local authorities. The representatives of the Elector of Trier were informed that they could expect two fugitive papal assassins in their city in the foreseeable future. Two city guards were stationed at the landing stage as a precaution. Nothing was left to chance. The fugitives would have no chance to escape.

From an ecclesiastical point of view, the city came under the Bishop of Trier. This bishop stood on the side of the Archbishop of Cologne in the battle for the papacy. Darra therefore thought it worthwhile to also inform the local clergy. If the men managed to escape and sought a safe haven in the church of Andernach, they would not have to count on protection there. Everything was ready for the final settlement with the family that had cost him his pleasant post in Vellesan.

The ship came into view. One of the city guards immediately reported this to Darra, who warmed herself by the cozy fire on the hearth in the inn. The ship was preparing to dock by the time Darra and his men reached port. The gangway was extended and they went on board. The captain said he first missed both men around noon. They were no longer on board. He didn't understand why. The weather conditions were not bad. It was impossible that the men had fallen overboard. For some reason incomprehensible to him, they had disembarked themselves, and since they had stopped at no port between Lincisce and Andernach, the men must have jumped ship themselves. Now the captain was told that they were the Pope's murderers. His eyes lit up in understanding. "Ah, well I guess you don't have to look for them anymore. I suspect they drowned. That river has already claimed many lives. It's not easy to survive a fall into the river. It's incomprehensible why they jumped."

Darra did not trust the man and had the entire ship turned inside out in a search for the man who had escaped him every single time. The search

turned up nothing except for a very angry captain. The fugitives remained untraceable. Darra would have to return to Cologne with hanging legs. There he would at least be laughed at after his assurance to the emperor that he was returning with the murderer. He ordered his men to mount and ride back to Lincisce. If they had survived the Rhine, they would certainly board a ship here again.

After their arrival at this port, Darra rushed to the local authorities and told them the same thing he had done in Andernach. People would be on the lookout for the two refugees if they had survived their jump into the river. He also spoke to several people who knew the river well. He was told that at this time of year the current speed of the Rhine was 3 knots. In the unlikely event that you managed to stay afloat for that long, you would be in Bonn from Lincisce within seven hours. It was impossible to get to land once you were swept away. The bodies would probably only come ashore somewhere in the river delta. After waiting four days, Darra decided to continue the search in Bonn. They might have drifted further than he had originally supposed. Along the way they were to announce the fact that two refugees were heading south and everyone was to inform the local authorities as soon as possible if these two men were seen.

Only after many days did Kybbe manage to get to the other side of the river. Along the way he heard stories about two escaped prisoners wanted for the murder of Pope Nicholas. To his luck, they were looking for two men and apparently no clear description of these men had been made available. He was able to board a trading ship in peace and quiet and traveled via Andernach to Koblenz, where there was a bridge over the Rhine and Moselle. The city already existed in Roman times and later became a Frankish royal court. A few centuries later, negotiations took place in St. Castor's Basilica between the three grandsons of Charlemagne. This led to the Treaty of Verdun two years before Kybbe's birth, where they agreed on the division of the great empire. Kybbe found work here. He planned to continue his journey on the Rhine as far as Mannheim and then transfer to a boat on a tributary, the Neckar, as far as Heilbronn. He would make further plans there. Winter had already shown itself outside Bonn with wet snow, but although it was cold, the winter weather did not materialize and it was still easy to travel. He could make great progress toward his final destination as long as he stayed on the river. He hoped that after that the snow wouldn't pose too many obstacles. The contents of his pouch were now large enough to travel further. He paid for a sequel on a smaller ship. It seemed to be quite difficult for shipping to navigate the narrow valley through which the Rhine ran. There

were many shoals and small islands in this middle part of the river. In this narrow valley the mountains sometimes came right up to the river. Near Sankt Goarshausen Kybbe saw the Loreley, a steep rock that towered high above the river. The Rhine meandered around it in a sharp bend. The captain told him that there was an extremely dangerous current here, which could cause ships to get into great difficulty. Also because there was also a current coming up from the depths. However, things got even more exciting at Bingen. There was an almost continuous reef across the entire river. It took a lot of effort to get past this and everyone on the ship breathed a sigh of relief when this obstacle was successfully overcome. Apparently people were building a tower on an island. Kybbe asked the captain what that was. The answer he received did not surprise him. "We're going to get squeezed out here. In the future we will have to pay a toll here to be allowed to pass. I don't know whose idea this is, because it's a hodgepodge here. The Romans once built a fortification here and now there are several feudal lords in this area. The emperor comes first, but the monasteries of Fulda, Lorch and Hassenried also have a hand in this. Oh yes! The Archdiocese of Mainz is also in charge here. I can see the bishop setting up something like this."

Kybbe immediately thought of the story of Saint Engelmundus in Vellesan and his relics in the church, which were used to rake in money from pilgrims. The captain's suspicions may well be true.

The river widened and they passed some river islands again. On the right bank, Kybbe saw the Imperial Palace of Ingelheim on a hill a little inland. The emperor stayed here regularly. The imposing structure overlooked the valley. Fortunately, he had nothing to fear from the proximity of an imperial castle. Darra had probably informed the emperor by now that the refugees had drowned after diving from the ship into the Rhine.

He was told that the best grapes grew here on the rolling hills. "You should definitely taste the wine when we arrive in Mainz," the captain told him, after he heard Kybbe tell a crew member that he had never drunk wine before.

A mixture of rain and sleet fell steadily from the leaden sky as they reached Mainz. The city looked gray under this thick blanket. So this was the capital and the seat of an archbishop, Kybbe thought. The river after which the city was named merged here with the Rhine. He had heard that Boniface had been the first Archbishop of Mainz. That was the same man about whom stories circulated in Frisia. The company of three crew members from the ship 'de Speijer', on which he had come here, accompanied Kybbe to an excellent inn. At least, that was the opinion of

the three men. He relied on their knowledge of the city, which they had already visited several times.

The inn certainly lived up to the expectations that Hans, Bertold and Wolfgang had raised in him. It was comfortable there in contrast to the icy cold outside.

“No Kybbe, no beer for you,” said the oldest of the three. “Now that you're here, you have to try the wine.” The shipmates laughed when Kybbe emptied the wine goblet in one go.

“I did tell you, no beer for you. You ought to drink wine in smaller sips. You have to taste it. Hold it in your mouth for a moment. Let it tickle your tongue before you swallow it,” Hans taught.

Bertold clapped Kybbe on the shoulder. “You're a beer drinker, Kybbe, just like us. Real men drink beer.” At the last comment, Bertold looked at Hans with a smile.

He may not have been doing well according to Hans, but Kybbe found the new drink a revelation for him. This certainly wouldn't be the last time, if it were up to him.

### **The party river**

The three crew members had returned to their ship. They left Kybbe behind on his personal discovery of the spirit-rich liquid of the region. Kybbe decided he wanted to stay in Mainz a little longer after he heard the group next to them talking about Fulda Abbey and the enormous library that the monastery's monks had built.

After the departure of Hans and his buddies, he sought to join that company. These told about the work of the former Archbishop of Mainz, Hrabanus. He was a great scholar and had ensured that Fulda had developed into the spiritual and cultural center of the Frankish Kingdom. Under his guidance, the monks created the most beautiful works. After a political conflict with Louis the German and his subsequent flight to Fulda, a reconciliation took place between the two and Hrabanus became Archbishop of Mainz. Eleven years ago this great scientist died. When the group moved on to discussing the scholar's figure poems, Kybbe dropped out. His interest lay in architecture and construction technology. He

wanted to see books that dealt with this. But when he learned where Fulda was located, he decided to travel to Constantinople rather than take a detour via Fulda. Perhaps the monastery was the same as the library in Cologne and did not store the kind of knowledge he was looking for. That is why he decided to return to the Speijer and continue his journey as planned.

That decision brought him back to the Rhine the next day. He continued south. They reached the fishing village of Mannheim on the day the winter festival began. The captain had stocked up on extra food in Mainz for the festival they were going to celebrate here with the residents. It turned out that this was an annual ritual of the skipper and crew. They were welcomed like family.

Kybbe was familiar with the components of the festivities. He had grown up with Yule. A decorated wooden block was set on fire, with the adults making all kinds of promises and swearing to keep them. At the end of the celebration, which lasted twelve days, the remains of the Yule log were burned to ring in the new year. As it turned out, there was as much eating and drinking here as at the Yule festival in his youth. When his mother started going to church, the party took on a slightly different face. It still started on December 24, but the Christians called this Adam and Eve Day. They believed that the primeval father and mother were expelled from paradise on that day. His father let Marzoeta be in her faith. After all, the party remained a party and that was what Aeijolt was all about, a party in a family atmosphere. His mother then attended midnight mass to celebrate the birth of Christ. Most of their family and friends did not participate. He did go with his mother, but Kybbe stayed away from church for the rest of the year. Only its construction interested him and during his journey he could not resist entering the churches he encountered to see what construction had been used and how the church was decorated.

Kybbe celebrated the evening at the side of the captain, Hans, Bertold and Wolfgang. He started talking to many residents of what they called a 'vlek' in Kinhem. It was just a small place, just like the Vellesan of his youth. There was also a big difference with his hometown and that was that they were all Christians here. Could this now also be the case in Vellesan? What awaited him there if he ever returned?

The priest of this place drank just as loudly with the rest of those present. It was a cheerful lot. But it was inevitable that at some point the cleric started talking about the murder of Pope Nicholas. "Have you heard more about that?"

The skipper said that he naturally heard about the murder when he was in Bonn. A search had been launched for the murderers. This search group had spotted them on the Rhine as they fled south.

The priest turned to Kybbe and said: "You have a rather strange accent. I think you come from somewhere in the coastal area of the North Sea, don't you? Do you know more? I was told that one of the killers also comes from that area."

Kybbe choked on a piece of bread and turned red. The priest patted him on the back to help. Finally Kybbe could breathe again and it dawned on him that the man did not suspect him himself. Doubly relieved, he finally answered the clergyman's question. "Don't know. In the stories I heard, it involved a Frisian from Ostergo. That's a long way from where I live. I come from the dune area on the North Sea."

Shaking his head, the priest said: "Those Frisians stubbornly continue to believe in their pagan gods. They do not shy away from the murder of a clergyman. Our own Saint Boniface was also murdered by them when he was 80 years old. But enough of that. Today is a joyful day. Let's celebrate and hope that a new pope will be elected soon."

For the first time in years, Kybbe attended a midnight mass.

The festivities would continue until January 6 and Kybbe was already afraid that there would be no shipping on the rivers. The captain smiled at him. "Of course there are ships sailing. The trade always continues. There are poor devils who can never have a party. Always working." He laughed. "You'll find a boat to Heilbronn."

After two days Kybbe had his transport to Heilbronn. Hans said it was an ewer, a small flat-bottomed boat. It had a small mooring and was completely open and was sailed by two men. A square sail with stay jib was used. Kybbe met the two men and they agreed on a price that seemed reasonable to Kybbe.

The trip went well. The boat sailed across the Neckar in stages. The locals celebrated at every stop along their route. They arrived in Heilbronn on Epiphany. The royal court was located on a hill in the center of the city. This elevation in the terrain provided protection against flooding from the river. Kybbe had already seen the basilica before arriving. This church was dedicated to Saint Michael the Archangel. The building did not provide Kybbe with any surprising insights and he decided to move on quickly. From here he would have to travel overland for a long time before reaching Ratisbon. He hoped that the weather gods would make the

passage possible. At Ratisbon he was able to travel further by boat and cover a large part of the road to Constantinople via the Danube. That would go a lot faster downstream. The Black Sea was the final part of the journey to the capital of the Byzantine Empire. This was the route as Brother Basil had shown him in Cologne.

It was the day that the midwinter festival ended, but also the day that, according to Christians, the three wise men from the east arrived in the stable in Bethlehem. Kybbe started his hike. From Heilbronn a larger road ran through the forest to Halle, where salt was extracted. Here he was lucky to be able to travel with a salt transport, which had sold its cargo in Heilbronn and was now returning to the salt source. From Halle onwards, however, he had to rely on his own two feet. The climb out of the valley gave him the first calf cramp of his life. He frantically shook his right calf to make the cramp go away. After some time he was able to continue.

The many watercourses and larger streams in this mountainous area slowed his progress considerably. Moreover, he regularly found himself soaking in his shoes. Very often he was forced to take a detour or retrace his steps to look for a new road to the east. His only luck was that the weather was clear for a long time. The skies turned blue with some sparse clouds. The terrain was difficult in this Franconian Alb. This mountain range stretched from north to south between the river Main and the Danube.

His second night in the forest was restless. The howling of wolves woke him. He had heard them before in Kinhem, but the animals stayed away from people. He had never seen one himself. The second time he was woken, however, they had gotten much closer. He saw eyes lighting up in the moonlight. Dark shadows darted past. It became ominously quiet. Kybbe decided to climb a tree and wait for dawn. He spent the night between two forked branches. Every now and then he would doze off and startle again. He didn't want to fall asleep and risk tumbling out of the tree. Devastated, he lowered himself from the tree at the first rays of sunlight. There were many paw prints visible around the trunk of his overnight spot. After this he had no new encounters with wild animals. He knew there were bears in this forest too. The day's marches were of great monotony, broken only by the search for a crossing of the river Altmühl.

After all his efforts, he arrived in Ratisbon with his calves increased in size. There he saw the complex of an abbey. Just the place he needed to recover from his fatigues. He walked through the gate. A monk approached him and thought he recognized a pilgrim in him.

Kybbe told him that he was not a pilgrim, but a builder in transit to Constantinople. That piqued this brother's interest.

“To Constantinople? In these uncertain times? You know that we are very close to a war between the Byzantine and Bulgarian Empires, right? Why would you risk your life there?”

“Yes, I've heard of that before. Of course I try to avoid that. Brother Basil told me that it would be best to go to Constantinople for interesting buildings and literature about them. He also mentioned the library of Alexandria. If I have to move out because of a war, I plan to go there.” The monk, who introduced himself as Brother Benedikt, turned out to share Kybbe's interest in buildings. He had copied several books from antiquity and told Kybbe that he had just finished copying *De Architectura libri decem* by Vitruvius.

Kybbe was delighted. He unexpectedly found knowledge of Roman architecture here in Bavaria, which he would like to make his own. Benedikt turned out to be a great conversationalist. In the following days he was told everything about the history of Ratisbon, the abbey and the political relations in the area.

“The Abbey of Saint Emmeram already existed before Saint Boniface founded the diocese of Ratisbon 130 years ago,” Benedikt began. “Under the authority of a duke, this was the first capital of Bavaria, until Charlemagne took over the business and took possession of the palace for his own use.” He provided insight into the history by telling the stories behind the frescoes of the monastery and took Kybbe to the palace and to the cathedral of Saint Peter and told part of the story while they looked at two islands in the Danube.

The abbey in Ratisbon proved to be an educational resting point on his journey east. Kybbe was grateful to Brother Benedikt for his lessons and the wonderful conversations on almost every conceivable subject. After a few days of wonderful rest, Kybbe decided to set sail. He left while the mist shrouded the valley.

## Part 4

### Departure from Parisi

#### **868 AD**

The search for Kybbe had come to nothing. Moussa Bennani had deployed his entire network. It yielded nothing. Anna and Fatima's personal investigations were also not successful. It became increasingly clear that Kybbe had not taken this route. But if Parisi hadn't been his goal, what was? Where had he gone?

Anna consulted with Moussa and Fatima. Moussa stroked his beard thoughtfully. "From your stories about him, I gathered that your Kybbe is quite ambitious. If his thirst for knowledge is so great, he may well have gone straight to its source."

Anna looked at him expectantly: "And where is that source?"

"Córdoba, of course!", Moussa replied. "No city houses as much knowledge as Córdoba. I think you will find your beloved there."

At the start of her journey, Anna had been fearful of a culture that seemed so far removed from her own. Her long conversations with both Moussa and Fatima during the months she had spent in Parisi had largely allayed that fear. Their first conversations had mainly been about religion. Anna wanted to know whether people believed in Islam the same as in Christianity. Moussa then told her that the two faiths had much in common. Thus the prophets of Allah had come at different times to tell the true story. Musa was called Moses among the Christians and he had brought the main commandments of Allah to man. But Ibrahim, Yusuf and Issa had also proclaimed their message of the one true God. Issa turned out to be the Arabic name for Jesus.

Moussa had added something very interesting. She literally remembered his words. "However, when the Christian church decided some 500 years ago that Issa should be seen primarily as the son of God, it misled the people. We Muslims see Issa as a prophet who brought the word of Allah to the people, but of course a person cannot be the son of Allah. Allah is great and above all. Man can only submit to his greatness."

Anna had experienced long ago that man was powerless against the violence of nature. She also knew from experience that as an individual

there was little you could do against powerful rulers and armed gangs. But the uprising in Kinhem had also made it clear to her that you could resist mismanagement and abuse as a group. And she had taken her own destiny into her own hands by starting the search for Kybbe. Her mind was made up. She was going to Cordoba.

She had to promise Fatima, with whom she had spent the last months almost constantly in her search for Kybbe, to return to Parisi. "When you find him, you will come back here and we will have a big party," her friend said with tears in her eyes as she said goodbye.

Anna was able to complete the first part of her journey with one of Moussa's caravans, which passed through Gaul. This would provide her with safety as far as Turon. If she would wait a few days there, she could go to Poitiers with a delegation from the city council. From there she would have to arrange the remainder of the journey to Córdoba herself. During this first part of the journey, Anna gradually changed the image she had of the Caliphate. She had expected to encounter almost exclusively Muslims and especially Arabs, but they turned out to be a minority in this part of the Caliphate. Most people were Christians or adhered to the old faith.

Christians were by far the majority and the city of Turon confirmed that image. She was told that the Arabs were mainly in Parisi, Poitiers, Bordeu and in the army camps near the borders and at the estuaries.

Turon was one of the most important Christian religious centers of Wilaya Gaul. Because she had to spend a few days here, she visited the grave of Saint Martin, who had been one of the city's first bishops and was now venerated as a miracle worker and saint. Gregory of Turon had reported on this centuries ago. Those books were in the library of the monastery. The importance of the city as a center of Christianity in Gaul lay mainly with one man, she heard. It was Alcuinus, who, as abbot of the abbey of St. Martin, had improved education and built a beautiful library. A resident of the city proudly said that their abbot had taught Charlemagne and his children and that he had set up the palace school in Aachen.

Anna was amazed at the religious tolerance of the Caliphate. She remembered how the Christian church in Kinhem had treated the followers of the old faith. There had been no form of tolerance there.

In the company of some members of the city council, Anna left for Poitiers. The trip went almost without any problems. The crossing of the Vienne River was also not very exciting. Here they used a bridge that had already been built by the ancient Romans. The biggest problem was the rains that

constantly fell on their heads. It was impossible to stay dry. Even the horses seemed sad. They trudged on with heads bowed.

The consequences of the prolonged rain were visible in Poitiers. Houses stood in water and people waded up to their waists with household goods on their heads and children on their backs. They sought higher ground, away from the rising water. There were several rivers that contributed to the malaise, but it was mainly the Clain that caused the nuisance. This tributary of the Loire could not handle all the water that fell in the valley. Especially not because the Boivre also spewed its flooding into the Clain. The amount of water was just too much. Apparently shelter had been arranged on the higher ground for the people who had been driven from their homes by the rising water. Large tents had been erected.

The rider next to her told Anna that the city's Islamic government had made plans to dig a canal around the city so that excess water could be diverted during periods of extreme rainfall. That would put an end to the periodic flooding.

Anna was reminded of the ditches that the Wieringers dug for Claes van Hoeleyde to drain the land. This was a completely different kettle of fish. The heavy showers gradually turned into light rain. Suddenly the sun broke through the cloud cover and a beautiful double rainbow appeared. Now that Anna looked up she saw the city in all its glory. A wall, 9 cubits thick at the base, 16 cubits high, and 400 cubits long, encompassed its entirety.

Here too, Anna was surprised by the tolerance of the Umayyads. Church buildings could be seen everywhere. The Baptistery of Saint John had been in the city for about 500 years and there were several churches, all of which had their own educational institution. Poitiers lived up to its name as an 'important center of Christianity'. The city's inhabitants even claimed that the Abbey Monastery of the Holy Cross was the first monastery founded in Gaul. Yet the contrast with Turon could not be greater. While that city exuded Christianity, in Poitiers Muslim places of worship were in the majority. Completely different with their sturdy yet elegant minarets.

Now that the sun had finally driven away the cloud cover, it seemed as if the water was starting to subside. However, it took another three days for the rivers to flow back into their beds. The damage was significant. There was a resigned atmosphere among the population affected by the water. Cleaning up took place in silence. Some elderly people hung around apathetically, others looked after the small children. The young parents seemed more decisive in making their homes habitable again. The older children cooperated earnestly and diligently. Residents everywhere were

busy sweeping the rubbish out of their homes and letting all kinds of things dry. The rescued items that were still usable were left to dry in the open air separately from everything that could not be saved. It was mainly children who scrounged among the rubbish in the hope of finding something they liked.

Carts came along on which the waste was piled, after which it was removed outside the city walls. It turned out to be an initiative of the city council, which had set up a clean-up service.

Not only those affected were outside trying to recreate their lives, many more people were out and about looking at the damage their city had suffered. Many did so with wide eyes and shouting oh and woe. There were entire families there. They walked hand in hand with the children, as if it were a public spectacle.

While Anna was studying the inhabitants and their activities, she received a big push in the back. She barely managed to avoid a fall. She looked around in astonishment. A young man apologized for the collision and walked away from her, but as he did so Anna saw another boy running away in the same direction. With a start she realized that something was wrong here. Her hands automatically went to the two pouches of money under her clothes. Gone! She had been robbed. The young man looked back and saw that Anna understood what had happened. He now ran after his companion.

“Stop the thief!” Anna shouted as she desperately gave chase. Walkers looked in amazement at the sprinting young woman. An Arab family consisting of a mother holding two daughters, a father walking in front of them hand in hand with a son, followed by two young men turned their heads as the two pickpockets ran past them. After this they saw a young woman running past, now calling in Arabic to stop the thieves. Soon after this, Anna was overtaken on both sides by the two young Arabs who had started chasing the pickpockets.

She fell further and further behind and realized she had lost. She sank to the ground, panting. Tears rolled down her cheeks. She now pinned all her hopes on the two pursuers who had rushed past her.

That hope turned out to be in vain. She saw them return. But the slumped shoulders already made it clear to her what she had feared. The young men recognized her and spoke to her. “We're sorry. We didn't manage to catch the thieves, but all is not lost. We go to the city guard and you describe the villains. They will find them and their punishment will be severe.”

Anna had already heard that according to Islamic law, a thief's hands could be cut off. She shuddered at the idea.

She had been well prepared for her journey. She herself had attached a pouch with sceattas under her clothing and Moussa had given her another pouch with silver dirhems. She had lost both of those now.

The men urged her to come with them to their parental home. At least she could spend the night with their sisters. Their parents would certainly want to help her.

When she saw the house, Anna could already see that this was not an impecunious family. She was warmly welcomed. The mother of the family and her two older daughters immediately took matters into their own hands. Anna's clothing had become soiled during the chase. Without objection, she was provided with a new robe and taken by the women to the bathhouse that was located in the original Roman baths. She received the complete treatment. The women were amazed at Anna's command of Arabic. Of course they wanted to hear her life story. They were deeply impressed. A woman alone, without any family, who did everything to pursue her happiness and had experienced setback after setback. Something like that was unheard of, against all applicable rules, but also admirable. The daughters were in adoration. They returned home chatting excitedly. In the home environment, they bombarded their father with parts of Anna's history and the desire to help her. At first, the family patriarch hoped that the thieves would be caught quickly. Until then, Anna would be their guest. But after a few days it became clear that the bandits had escaped from lawful authority. Anna would leave on foot. The two sons felt burdened. They believed they had failed in their hunt for the pickpockets. They urged their father for compensation for what was taken from Anna. Finally, somewhat grumblingly, he gave in and had a purse filled with several dirhem pieces. The daughters made it impossible for Anna to refuse this gift. Yasmia whispered in her ear: "If you refuse my father's gift, his honor will be tarnished. He then loses face. So please, accept it." Anna understood and thanked the man very graciously and wished him God's blessings in his own language. The grant turned out not to be the only gift. The second was a ride with three mail riders to Angoulême. The patriarch appeared to manage the postal service throughout Gaul. Finally, Yasmia, Amirah and their mother, accompanied Anna to the postal service. They said goodbye to each other at the Roman aqueduct that still served the city as a water conduit.

It was a very fast ride. The mail riders allowed themselves only one break for everything necessary, so they arrived in Angoulême within a day. They recommended Anna a good place to stay for the night and then said goodbye. She was alone again. But a solution could be found. She would not continue traveling alone, because she wanted to seek the protection of a group again. It was clear that both Christians and followers of the old faith continued to follow the pilgrim routes in this Caliphate to places where saints had performed their miracles or places that were important to the 'pagans', as they were referred to equally by Muslims and Christians. Their pilgrimage, like that of the Christians, continued as far as Cape Finisterre in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula. The Christians because this was the place where the apostle James first entered Iberia, the followers of the ancient faith to see the sun disappear through the door to the other world at the end of the world. As the sun disappeared they followed the ritual of burning their clothes. They then started the journey back home as new people.

Angoulême probably had a history of one or more miracle workers, who attracted pilgrims, so finding such a group would not be that difficult

## The bear



### *Anna's Journey*

1. Parisi (Paris); 2. Turon (Tours); 3. Poitiers; 4. Angoulême; 5. Bordeu (Bordeaux); 6. Irún; 7. San Sebastian; 8. Cape Finisterre; 9. Pamplona; 10. Toledo; 11. Córdoba; 12. Sevilla; 13. Granada; 14. Marseille.

The city was located on higher ground than the place where the Charente and Anquienne rivers split. The residents never got their feet as wet as those of Poitiers. As it stood here on the northwest point of a plateau overlooking the rivers, the city offered a pleasant sight. Of course there was a monastery. The presence of Christianity was felt everywhere here. The pilgrims flocked like moths to the light and that light shone here in the person of Eparchius of Angoulême. Three centuries ago this saint had held the office of abbot.

Anna mingled with the pilgrims present and was treated to the story of this holy monk. Apparently his fame as a miracle worker quickly preceded him. The people gave him food and all kinds of things. He used this as ransom to free prisoners. Another pilgrim told Anna that Eparchius chased away evil spirits from poisoned cups by simply making the sign of the cross over them. His prayers brought healing and he was apparently so charming that no one could deny him anything. A Germanic pilgrim, who introduced himself as Sigmund, told the most special story from this saint's life. A confirmed criminal would be tortured and sentenced to death.

Eparchius requested the count to let the man live. However, the sentence was carried out under popular pressure. The saint then sent a monk to the place of execution with orders to lift the criminal after his fall on the scaffold and bring him to him. "If the people refuse to hand him over to me, the Lord will give this man to me," said the abbot. Before the eyes of the monk he sent, the gallows collapsed, the chains fell from the prisoner and he fell to the ground. The monk then brought him to Eparchius. Then followed a confrontation between the abbot and the count. The saint reprimanded him: "You did not listen, but God wanted to listen to me." After this he showed the bewildered count the criminal, who was believed dead, in the flesh.

It was a wonderful story, of course, but why the criminal needed to be saved was beyond Anna's comprehension. A repeat offender who was proven in court was forgiven, so that he could commit crimes again. The Christian world never ceased to amaze her. However, now that she had started talking to these pilgrims, she used the rest of the day to get to know them better.

They were mainly Gauls and Franks, both men and women. Almost all of them were on their way to Cape Finisterre. Their next target was Bourdeaux. The city in the estuary of the Garonne was home to a multitude of soldiers. All major estuaries along the Gallic coast were fortified against marauding Vikings. The dragon ships mainly caused problems for the monarchs, cities and monasteries in the British Isles, but also focused their profitable raids on the European coastline. Dorestad had been repeatedly plundered, but also Honfleur and Saint-Nazaire and even ports in the Mediterranean. However, the Caliphate had increasing success in combating these fighters from the north. The establishment of garrisons in vulnerable places had contributed greatly to this.

A few days later, the group of pilgrims that Anna had joined found themselves back on the Camino to Bourdeaux. They wanted to follow this pilgrimage route to Irún at the foot of the Pyrenees, where they would continue on the northern camino to visit the tomb of the apostle James the Greater in Santiago de Compostella.

This disciple of Jesus had preached in Iberia and his bones had been found in a Roman cemetery in Santiago during the battle between Alfonso II and the expanding Caliphate in 811, one of the pilgrims told Anna. It was yet another fantastic story that she had to hear in this group. It didn't matter much to her, because somewhere on the northern camino she would have to leave the group to cross Iberia to Córdoba in the southwest.

But for the time being they first had to cross the plateaus of the Perigord, where several bodies of water were on their way. Finally they ended up in a large forest.

She shuddered. The group of pilgrims she had joined in Angoulême had disappeared from view. However, she couldn't hold it in any longer. Spasms shot through her body and she finally crouched behind a thick tree. The group walked at a brisk pace through this dense forest. But a dispute arose when the road turned east. Not everyone had agreed with the choice of a smaller road a few hours earlier. It was unclear to anyone why they had actually deviated from the usual pilgrimage route. The road they were now walking on became narrower and narrower, until a game trail remained. They had lost speed as a result and Anna thought she would be able to catch up with them again, but she was disoriented. Voices drifted in, but it was hard to tell which path led to them. The sound of a breaking branch startled her. She became aware of a presence and turned around. There was a huge bear standing there. Her startled reaction caused the animal to move. Anna stumbled in her haste to run away. A deafening roar rang through the forest. She felt a searing pain in her back and then nothing.

The two brothers called on the group to stop. They had become aware of the fact that Anna was missing. It took a while before the front runners understood that there was a stop. The group formed a long line, forced as they were to follow the game trail. A number of pilgrims wanted to continue, but the Franks reacted strongly to this. "What's the point of traveling in a group for your safety if the group doesn't take care of the participants? It's not like we're in a hurry, is it?" The opponents closed in and gave in with a grumble. The group retraced their steps to look for Anna.

They walked along the track again at a goose pace, afraid of losing each other and getting lost among the trees. Sigmund led the way, followed by his brother. They almost all stopped at the same time when they spotted a bear. They stood perfectly still. The primal beast sniffed a body lying on the ground. Suddenly it raised its head in the air and snorted loudly. The men crept even closer to the trunk behind which they hid. They smelled the bear and that was a relief because that meant he probably couldn't smell them.

With gestures they had made it clear to the group not to make a sound. The creature lowered itself again, unaware of the pilgrims, and without another glance at the body shuffled away and disappeared among the trees. It took a while before the men dared to look at the body that lay still on the mossy ground. It was Anna. They sensed a breath. She was alive! But she was unconscious and her back showed ugly marks left by the bear's claw. That wound needed to be treated. They carefully lifted her off the ground and headed back the way they came.

"We won't make progress fast enough like this," Sigmund puffed after a while. "We have to make a stretcher for her so we can make faster progress." Anna was carefully placed on the moss carpet. Four pilgrims started looking for sturdy branches. The stretcher was put together successfully and covered with some blankets. After this, Anna was lifted up again. Although it went faster, Sigmund was afraid that they would not be able to get help for her in time.

They finally emerged from the forest and reached a larger road. It was one of the highways that had already been built by the Romans to quickly move their troops. They changed porters once more, when the sound of wheels and horses' hooves came behind them. They were overtaken and a chariot came to a stop next to them.

"Do you have a sick person?" the man asked with a strange accent.

"No, she was attacked by a bear and has been unconscious ever since," Sigmund replied.

The man got off the cart and onto the ground. "Put her in the back of the cart here and I'll examine her. "Be careful," he added.

It turned out to be a Jewish doctor who was on his way to the Arab fortress in Bordeu.

After placing a folded blanket under Anna's head, he started an examination. He carefully lifted her eyelids to see her pupils, grunted something and felt her head, where his fingers found a swelling at the back. He turned her on her side and then examined the injuries the bear had caused her. "Hmm, the wound is infected. As a result, she has an elevated temperature. I can treat the wound itself well and she should not be left with any significant scar. However, I don't know why she hasn't recovered yet. I don't see any external damage to her head."

He turned to the young man who had driven the horse and told him what he needed to do to treat the injuries. You could see that the two were attuned to each other. In the blink of an eye the young man had put together what the doctor had asked for. Thereupon he got to work.

The pilgrims stood somewhat indecisively next to the chariot. "What do we do now? We can't take her with us like that."

The doctor looked up. "Does she have family or friends in your group?" Anyone want to be in charge of her? I have to say that it will probably take a few days for the fever to subside. I don't know if she has suffered any internal damage and therefore cannot say anything meaningful about her awakening or even whether she will awaken."

One of the women stepped forward. "We don't really know her. Her name is Anna and she has joined us in Angoulême. We don't know where she wants to go. A few in this group do not go further than Bordeu, others go to Santiago and the majority continue to Cape Finisterre."

The doctor thought for a moment and then said, "Then I think she should come with us." I can take better care of her than you and where I am expected there are better facilities to speed up her recovery."

The pilgrims breathed a sigh of relief. Happy to be freed from a burdensome obligation. Only the two Franks still seemed to hesitate. The doctor saw this and said: "Leave her to my care. You can't do anything for her."

And so their pilgrimage continued.

"Come, Joshua," said the doctor, "we will continue, but try to avoid the worst potholes, so that our patient does not have to suffer even more."

After arriving in Bordeu, the doctor reported to the camp of the Umayyad defending unit, which had recently been established 145 cubits outside the city, along the Gironde. The army hospital had already been prepared. David was assigned to the army unit here as a doctor. Anna was the first patient in the new building.

David was concerned that she still hadn't woken up. He didn't like the fact that his patient was lying there so quietly. She was breathing regularly, the wounds healed faster than expected. However, it seemed as if she was no longer in her earthly shell.

An urgent call tore him from his reverie. There was an invasion via the Gironde. Three Viking ships had landed near the city. There they had robbed horses and started plundering farms in the immediate area. Upon hearing this news, the Arab soldiers immediately jumped into the saddle to drive away the plunderers. A number of them were sent to locate the ships, kill the remaining Vikings and set the ships on fire. The largest part would attack the main force of the Vikings. Presumably it involved about 100 Normans in chain mail armed with short swords and axes. Every Viking fully mastered his weapon. They were also excellent archers. In this they were virtually the equal of the soldiers of the Caliphate. On horseback

they were formidable opponents who, due to their agility and speed, had no resistance from any foot soldiers.

The group of Vikings had not encountered any resistance in the meantime. After their victory, they had dismounted to plunder the port town of Blanquefort. At that moment the Umayyad soldiers arrived. The Vikings tried to form a shield wall as quickly as possible, but the Arab cavalry easily broke through and the battle was quickly settled in their favor. Only two of them had died, fallen under the heavy axes of what were apparently berserkers. These fought as if the devil had entered into them, but ultimately fell under the scimitars of the cavalry. There were also five other injured, including 3 seriously. They were immediately taken to the hospital at Bordeu and entrusted to the care of David and Joshua. The doctor managed to save the leg of one of the wounded soldiers. By the evening, the situation of the wounded was stable in the eyes of their doctor. The expectation was that all would make it. Rest was the most important thing now for them. Joshua was able to begin the now daily ritual of caring for their first patient.

Kybbe stood at the edge of a large forest. Knights on horseback appeared behind him. One of them raised a sword. It was Darra. Anna shouted a warning to Kybbe. He half turned as the sword landed. A long cry escaped her lips. Her eyes flew open and she looked around wildly. No Kybbe, no knights, no fear, but a bare space. She was lying on a bed. There was no one else there. It had only been a dream. Kybbe was still alive. She was firmly convinced of that. Then the recent memories came flooding back. She had been attacked by a bear. She shivered as she felt the intense pain again. How had she survived that? And who had saved her? The pilgrims? Had they come back? She didn't remember anything after the attack in the forest.

A boy came in with a water jug. He looked surprised when he saw her with her eyes open. "You're awake!" His face started to shine. His words stumbled over each other in the rush to ask and say everything at once. She concluded that she had been unconscious for a long time. That his father had healed her. That he himself had taken care of her, by regularly holding a wet cloth to her lips. That she must be hungry.

The latter made her realize how much she craved food. She nodded and her voice cracked: "Food, please."

"I'm going to get it and I'll call my father right away." He ran away

## Music

Anna had seen mountains during her trip, or so she thought. The spectacle that now unfolded before her eyes was hallucinatory. It was unbelievable that the earth could rise so high. She saw peaks still covered with snow. She was assured that they would not have to cross such mountains. Close to the coast the terrain was uneven and would be difficult enough, but the high mountains could be seen further to the east. The group of pilgrims she had joined in Bordeu after her healing nevertheless made slow progress, also because of the many water streams and rivers. Surprisingly, there were a number of rest points where the pilgrims could care for their sore feet and recover from the fatigues. Occasional climbing was required. That was tiring for an inexperienced lowland dweller, but the descent proved to be increasingly taxing on the knees. However, the landscape compensated for a lot. In the distance snow, the clear water streams, the green meadows and the blooming flora of the foothills of the Pyrenees stimulated all the senses. She had thought this would be an empty land, but there were signs of human presence everywhere. Huts were regularly visible and one day she saw a shepherd with a flock of sheep.

One of the Iberian pilgrims in her group said that the migration to the summer pastures in the mountains had begun.

Carlos said: "Until the Umayyads achieved the final victory, Iberia was for a long time divided between Moors and Christians. King Alfonso II of Asturias fought fiercely with the Caliphate. Only the herders ventured into the area between the warring factions. By that, you can see how important the wool trade was and is for Iberia. The caliph even issued a decree that the cañadas may not be built on, so that the sheep herds have free passage over these strips of land. Right now it is the 3rd Jumada al-thani. The shepherds drive their sheep, goats and cows from their winter homes in the south to their summer homes in the north."

Anna interrupted him: "The 3rd Djoema-something? What do you mean?"

Carlos laughed. "That is today, 3 Jumada al-thani in the year 254."

Anna blushed. She knew that the Muslims had a different era, but she had never been confronted with that until now.

Carlos ignored her embarrassment and said, "To make it clearer for you, according to your calendar the herding of the sheep starts in late May or early June of every year. In October they go the other way, back to their winter home."

Anna asked if she could get to Córdoba via those cañadas. Carlos laughed again. "That is of course possible, because they go all the way to Seville. But why would you? The caliphs significantly expanded and renovated the Roman road system. You will progress considerably faster on this route than on the cañadas. You can even travel part of the way by boat, if you want."

Of course, Anna thought, the Umayyads had started developing their caliphate here. Al-Andaluz must therefore have been more developed than the parts of the empire through which it had so far passed.

In Irún she had felt the fatigue drain from her body in the warm mineral springs. She came out feeling reborn, impatient to leave for Córdoba. Not long after this, she left the group of pilgrims who continued on their journey to Cape Finisterre. Her destination was south.

After a tough, lonely journey, she reached Pamplona. She decided to use her purse with dirhems for a comfortable overnight stay and a good meal. The next day she was drawn to singing. It was a completely different way of singing than she knew in Kinhem. There were three singers in the marketplace, accompanied by three men. One of them played a pear-shaped instrument with 5 strings, another blew a kind of flute made of two reed pipes of unequal lengths and the third drummed on an instrument with a wide top and a tapered stem, which he clasped under his left arm. With his right hand he produced different sounds to support the singing. Anna looked on with delight. She only knew the flute made of swan bone and the drum made of stretched animal skin, which was played in Vellesan. The vocals vibrated and sometimes sounded very thin and other times full and deep. Now she began to pay attention to the text. It was a love song. At the end of the song, that love was reciprocated. There was applause. The drummer went around with a cup, into which the spectators threw one or more coins. Anna also put a coin in the cup. This left her wanting more. Her interest was piqued, so she started a conversation with one of the singers, a woman with a deep brown complexion. Her name was Ssany and she said she came from a village far away in Africa. To Anna's surprise, she turned out not to be a Muslim. "This music is mainly sung by what the Arabs call mawali, or non-Muslims from abroad. We are the singing girls, the gaynat. But I have to go. We have finished our performance and are going to freshen up. Singing and playing makes you thirsty."

Anna didn't want to end the conversation yet. She said hurriedly, "May I offer you something? I still want to ask so many questions."

The girl called happily to her companions. They answered something unintelligible with cheerful faces. They took Anna in their midst and headed to a funduq, their word for inn.

An animated conversation developed there, in which Anna was told that not everyone was happy with their music. Some associated the gaynat with prostitution. The ulama concerned with the question of music generally agreed that ghina was objectionable. They saw this as haram and as malahi, or forbidden pleasure.

On the other hand, the wealthy upper class in the cities sought relaxation in their salons. They enjoyed the gaynat and the mukhannathun, male singers who pretended to be women. Music was given a high status under the Umayyads. Caliph Al-Walid II had himself been a gifted musician a century earlier. Poetry was set to music and a complete music system was developed by the famous musician Ibn-Misja.

The men talked about their instruments. The stringed instrument was called oud. The flute player called his instrument an arghul and talked about how difficult it was to play. You played the melody with one pipe and a constant fundamental note with the other. You needed a very special breathing technique for that. The drummer played a doumbek.

Ssany also talked about their annual tour of various cities in this part of the Caliphate. They had a fixed route and thought making music was the most fun and beautiful thing to do, but not as a permanent employee of a wealthy family. It was also about meeting new people and gaining new experiences. Edfu and Cebren often incorporated those experiences into new songs. Cebren was the oud player and the arghul was owned by Edfu.

A tall blonde woman traveling alone like Anna therefore aroused their interest. There must be a good story in there. It was her turn to speak. They listened breathlessly to her story.

“Now that's a love story if there is one. There is beautiful poetry and music in it”, sighed Cebren.

“You live up to your name, Anna,” Yakini said.

Anna looked at her not understanding. “What do you mean?”

“Your name means favor or favored in Hebrew. When I hear what happened to you and how you always come out strong, that makes sense.”

“Ah,” said Anna. “I didn't know that, but that name won't be correct until I find Kybbe again. Do all names mean something? What is the meaning of Kybbe, Yakini?”

“That name is strange to me. I've never heard of it. I can tell you the meaning of our names. Ssani here means with joy. You can see that in her

too. She always laughs and cheers us up when things aren't going well. Ssani, Tamu and I all come from different regions of Africa. Tamu means sweet. My name means truth.”

“Does your name also have a meaning, Cebren?” Anna turned to the oud player.

“Not so much of a meaning, Anna. It is the name of a river in Anatolia and the place where my grandparents lived,” he replied.

Edfu told them that his ancestors came from Egypt and that there was an ancient city there that bore his name. He added that his instrument originated in Egypt.

Finally, Bogdan had a Slavic background. Yakini said that his name meant gift from god.

They then proceeded to discuss their future plans. It was the time of year for the music group to tour the cities of Castile. They would first perform in Alcalá de Henares. It turned out that that city was also on Anna's way to Córdoba.

Cebren urged Anna to go with them at least this far.

“No matter what you did on your long journey, Anna, traveling alone is and remains risky. Accompany us to Alcalá. Maybe we can arrange something for you there. In any case, after our performances in Alcalá we will go to Toledo. So if you decide to stay with us longer, our paths will only part there.”

The first part of their journey went too slowly for Anna. She had already been in Iberia for a month. It was now Rajab, the 7th month of the Islamic calendar. She was impatient to get to Córdoba. The days passed in a routine as they made difficult progress over uneven terrain. They spent the nights around a campfire with music. The women sang a lament. According to Ssani, this was *huda*, a caravan song, which was sung during the long journeys.

The group of musicians crossed the Ebro River, keeping the Moncayo on their right. They were able to avoid the mountains by following the Henares river valley to Segontia. Overlooking a valley, this ancient city was dominated by a *kasbah*. This was a Moorish fortress. Here, as on previous trips, the group took a boat to Alcalá de Henares. That sped up the journey considerably and Anna's mood visibly brightened. The thought of *Kybbe* made her heart flutter.

In the most important market town of Castile, the *gaynat* could earn a lot of money with their music during this period. That is why they continued to visit this city at the foot of an Umayyad castle regularly.

At first, Anna had wanted to wait until the musicians were on their way to Toledo. She walked around the city for a few days and looked at the wide range of all kinds of items in the marketplace. The city had originally been founded on the north bank of the Henares, but the Umayyads had built a citadel on the south bank and there the new city had grown. She heard bits of history like this during conversations with locals. She visited a library and spent the evenings with her musical friends. Edfu said that in any case they stayed in Alcalá to commemorate the commemoration of isra-walmiraj, the ascension of Mohammed on the 27th day of the month of Rajab, with their sung poetry. In their experience, the Muslims would be even more generous on this day.

That took Anna too long. She decided to go to Toledo alone. After some sputtering, Ssani gave in. "But then go across the river. In any case, it is faster than on foot and it is a lot safer. We know a skipper here who commutes between Alcalá and Toledo. We will inform you when he sails. It may take you a few more days, but you will save on your travel time."

Two days later, Anna had boarded the ship and was on her way to Toledo. On the boat over the winding Henares she had time to think about her journey so far.

The Caliphate was vast, especially compared to the empire of Lothair, to which Kinhem belonged. She had passed through all of Gaul, but this part of the empire seemed to be even larger. Luckily she spoke Arabic, because the languages spoken locally were too diverse and rarely sounded vaguely familiar. Most of it was unintelligible. The fact that the Umayyads had introduced their language made her journey somewhat easier. At Irun she had been addressed in a language that made no sense. Fortunately, there was always someone who spoke Arabic, although she had the impression that most Basques she encountered pretended not to understand the language. In this part of the Caliphate however, a language was spoken of which she had quickly picked up the words since her arrival in Pamplona. In many ways it resembled the spoken language of Gaul. She did not always understand it well, but fortunately people were not reluctant to speak to her in Arabic. Moreover, there were many Muslims for whom it was the normal spoken language. From the Henares they sailed up the Jarama and finally the Tagus, which wound along the hillside of Toledo on the south side. She looked up and saw a huge fortress towering over the city. The captain said that the building was a fortress and also a palace, the Alcázar.

They moored on the shore near an over 100-year-old bridge of Al-Quantara. Anna entered the city through the gate of the same name in the old city wall.

Her feet took her up towards the Alcázar. She climbed a series of stairs and was forced to walk through increasingly narrow passageways. It made her disoriented. Some winding streets seemed to lead nowhere. Soon she was lost. She looked around in despair. Above her, a woman leaned out of the window. "Are you lost?" she shouted.

Anna nodded.

"Wait a minute and I'll let you in."

There was some commotion and a moment later the friendly smiling woman stood in her doorway and invited her in. She turned out to be extremely hospitable and poured Anna a large cup, after which she brought a tasty snack. Anna quenched her thirst and enjoyed the food. Of course she wanted to know what that delicacy consisted of. The conversation continued after they told each other's names and a bit of background. Garbine kept serving Anna something different and almost all of it was delicious. Ultimately, Anna had told her entire life story. Her hostess was stunned. "So young and already experienced so much and a love story like the beginning of a legend. Too bad I have to miss the outcome."

Anna then promised that she would let Garbine know the rest of the story once she found Kybbe.

Now she started asking her hostess questions. "What struck me, wherever I went in the Caliphate, is that everywhere you see Christians, Jews and Muslims living peacefully together. I also saw mosques, churches and synagogues here during my short walk through the city."

Garbine replied: "That is correct, because this city has 10 mosques, 7 churches, including 1 cathedral and 2 synagogues. According to the Christian era, an important council took place here in 539, after which the then residents accepted the Christian faith. When the Moors conquered the city in 711, the archbishop was able to keep his seat here. Toledo was the capital of the Visigoths and we now have great independence as a city under the supreme command of the Caliph. But don't be fooled by the appearance of the city. There are plenty of contradictions underneath. Some simply believe more fanatically than others and then they usually exclude those who believe differently. At best they ignore them. A famous legend is told here. The legend of the Bitter Well. This shows that not everything goes smoothly and that not everyone gets along so well."

After this she began to tell Anna the legend.

“Rachel was the daughter of Levi, one of the most powerful and influential Jews in Toledo. Levi hated the Christians and their religion. Rachel and Levi had lost their mother and wife shortly after giving birth and lived in a small palace near the cathedral.

Levi's only weakness was his daughter, whom he put on a pedestal. Levi raised her alone. He lived for his daughter.

One beautiful spring day, a Christian young man walked past her window and caught her attention. This repeated itself every day. Rachel fell madly in love with this beautiful young man. She kept her feelings secret so as not to be reprimanded by her father.

On a rainy day, Reuben, a family friend who was in love with Rachel, arrived. He knew about her romance with the Christian young man. Reuben told Levi that his daughter was in love and that she was secretly with a man. The powerful Jew, had difficulty seeing his daughter in the arms of another man, but he accepted the situation when he realized that his daughter was happy.

However, when Reuben told Levi that this mysterious young man was in fact a Christian, the Jew flew into a great rage.

At night, when the mist covered the city, a shadow walked through the garden of the mighty Jew, who hid in a thicket near the spring. It was Levi himself. Warned by his friend, he wanted to check Reuben's truthfulness, because he did not actually want to believe that his daughter had fallen into the hands of a Christian.

As he was about to give up and come out of hiding, he heard footsteps approaching behind the wall. Levi sprang up from his hiding place and pierced the young man's body with his knife. It collapsed next to the well. Rachel, who came to her appointment like every evening, saw the body of her loved one lying with her father's dagger in his chest. A cry of sorrow went up in the city as the young woman sank down on the body of her lover.

At her cry, Levi came running to comfort her, but Rachel pushed him away.

From that day on, the young Hebrew woman went crazy, her life became sad and lonely. From then on, every day, at the same time, she went to the well where she would meet her beloved and let her tears flow freely there. Until one day the young woman, thinking that she saw her beloved at the bottom of the water, threw herself into the well and her dead body was lifted out by her father's servants.

According to legend, Rachel's misfortune was so great that the water of the well became bitter because of the tears shed by the young woman.”

Anna clapped her hands. "That was a beautiful story. Thank you. You're right, where there are people there are differences and sometimes they can talk about it and sometimes they fight about it. I have seen in our country how rigid the proclaimers of Christianity can be. People of other faiths are forcibly converted and often accumulating wealth seems more important to these Christians than their faith."

Garbine laughed approvingly. "Yes, if you are sure that your faith will get you into heaven anyway, you might as well get a taste of it during your earthly life."

Anna was Garbine's guest for three days. When saying goodbye, she had to promise again to let her know the outcome of the legend of Anna and Kiebe, as she called him. "And be careful on the road to Córdoba. Not everyone has good intentions."

## **Yago**

Walking through the mountains of Toledo was difficult for her. She made little progress in the hilly area with its high peaks. She did not want to cross the high points and therefore had to make a detour regularly. From the direction of the streams she could tell when she had passed such a mountain ridge. The first streams flowed north and as soon as she came through a valley and saw a stream flowing south, she knew she had succeeded. She was exhausted and worried that her provisions would run out before she reached civilization. There was plenty of drinking water, that was no problem. She crossed another mountain ridge and finally managed to reach the other side of the Milagro River.

The country wasn't as empty as she thought. The residents gave her food and absolutely did not want any dirhems for it. After a journey on foot that seemed to drag on and on, she finally reached a larger town called Cardeña. She could finally catch her breath here. How far would it be to Córdoba?

After a hearty meal that Anna was able to enjoy in silence, she was suddenly surrounded by several residents, who were curious about this woman traveling alone, who had entered their city from the rougher north. It was almost impossible to satisfy their curiosity.

Anna gradually got a picture of this area during these conversations.

Mining was done here and there were transports to Córdoba. There was a good road through the Pedroches Mountains, along which these transports

took place. It was also possible to follow a stream valley south to the El Arenoso swamp, where it was possible to sail onto the Arenoso River, which flowed into the Guadalquivir and then you could reach Córdoba. The question was: would she go by road, which would take 6 days or would she sail the river, which would cost her 3 days. Only 3 more days and she would be in Córdoba! The choice was aptly made. At last she would find him. How would he be? What had he been through? She had to calm herself down.

Puffing and panting, Anna climbed yet another height. There seemed to be no end to it. In Cardeña she had been optimistic, perhaps too optimistic. A stone shot out from under her foot and she tried to keep her balance, causing her foot to half step on another stone. Her ankle doubled, a flaming pain shot through her foot. She cried out. The pain slowly subsided, but as soon as she tried to stand on her foot, a new shaft of pain shot through her ankle. She sank to the ground and started to cry. How stupid she had been. In her haste to get to Kybbe, she had chosen the route over water. Now she saw that it was a bad choice. Was there even a port? Was there even a boat? And what now? She was stuck here as long as she couldn't stand on her foot. She looked around for a large branch to use as support and looked straight into the eyes of a big cat. She was shocked. Stay calm, she reminded herself. The animal was more than a cubit high and probably had rabbits on its diet. There was no danger. The animal stood motionless on its high legs. It had an ocher-colored coat with many small, brown-black spots. The head was framed with long whiskers. The tail was short and ended in a black tip. Suddenly the animal fell down, an arrow protruding from its flank. Anna's eyes flew in the direction from which the arrow had come. There stood a tall bearded man with a bow in his hand, which he slung over his shoulder. "There, girl, you won't have to worry about that lynx," he said in an easily understandable Latin dialect. Anna replied, "I don't think the animal was a threat to me." "No," the man laughed, "but I do have a nice coat now. By the way, you also have beautiful fur on your head. Judging from your accent and your blonde hair, you're not from here. Where are your origins?' As he said this, he drew a knife and began to expertly strip the skin of the lynx. "I come from Kinhem, in the far north," Anna replied. "Are you a Viking woman then?" he asked with raised eyebrows. Anna laughed: "No, the Vikings live even further north. Although they even attack places like Bordeu."

“Bordeu? Ha! They even sail into the Mediterranean Sea and dare to attack the port cities of the Caliphate. And where are you going, apparently on your own, so far from home?”

“I am on my way to Córdoba and hoped to get there via the Arenoso River.”

“Then you're lucky that you met Yago. I have my boat in the El-Arenoso swamp. I was only chasing this boy before I went to sell my wares in Córdoba. So I'm Yago, what's your name?”

“Anna and I would like to come along, but I can't walk. I sprained my ankle.”

“Let me see.” Yago grabbed her foot and carefully felt the swelling in the ankle. Anna cringed. He carefully moved her foot back and forth. “Hmm,” he grumbled, “this will pass with a few days of rest. Nothing appears to be broken. Come, lean on me.”

After tucking the lynx's skin into a bag over his shoulder, he helped Anna up and they set off together.

Many rest stops were necessary, but at last they reached the spur of the swamp where Yago had moored his boat. As he steered the small boat through the swamp, he told her all about the area. He had clearly grown up here, because he knew everything about the plant and animal life in this region. Once out of the swamp and onto the river, the Sierra Morena range extended first on the western side of the Arenoso River and later on the Guadalquivir on the north.

Yago told her about the vastness of Los Pedroches. It was an area where granite was extracted for the construction of houses, churches and mosques. There were meadow areas with cork and holm oaks and granite rocks. As soon as they entered clearer water in the great marsh, Yago had erected a small mast and hoisted a sail. The current of the river and a gentle breeze pushed the boat forward.

Anna couldn't really get to know Yago. One moment he was talking full-throated and enthusiastic, the next moment he fell silent and she felt uncomfortable under his gaze. A cruel grimace towards her quickly turned into a laughing look when she looked up unexpectedly. It happened so fast that the first time it happened she thought she was imagining it. Who was this man anyway? He had helped her when she got stuck in the rugged terrain of Los Pedroches. Could she actually trust him? He called himself a hunter and trader. She saw more skins in the boat besides that of the lynx, and there was also merchandise covered with blankets. She remembered Garbine's words in Toledo at her farewell. But what could he do to her? He had had ample opportunity to dishonor her when she was powerless from her sprained ankle. She doubted his intentions, but he had done nothing to

harm or hurt her. On the contrary, he had helped her. She had leaned on him on the journey to his boat and he had gently placed her in it. He gave her food and drink. Then why did she have such a bad feeling?

Anna woke up with a very heavy head. Her eyes could only be opened a crack and her mouth was very dry. She was lying in a bed and it was dark. She tried to get up but fell back onto the bed, groaning. What had happened? Her last memory was of sailing on the Qualdalquivir River with Yago in his boat. She had eaten some fruit and a dry piece of bread with a cup of wine. That was the last. She had no other memory. Was she in Córdoba? Had Yago carried her here? Where was here?

She got up with difficulty. She wanted to drink and she wanted to know where she was. There was a light under the door. It was daylight. She heard all kinds of noises coming from outside. They were the sounds of a city. Now she also smelled the pungent smell that tanneries give off. She tried the bolt. The door remained closed. Had Yago locked her up? She rattled the door and screamed. There was no response. She shuffled back into the room. Her eyes were now accustomed to the darkness. In the dim daylight that filtered through the cracks in the door, she could now see that there was a jug of water next to her bed. She drank the thirst-quenching liquid greedily.

There was some tapping at the door. The lock creaked, the door opened and Yago entered. The noise from the street grew louder for a moment before the door closed again. Yago lit a lamp. "I'll keep the shutters closed against snoopers, if you don't mind."

"What do you mean? Why is that door locked and what am I doing here in the dark?" Anna responded.

"It's dark here, like I said, to avoid prying eyes. As you probably guessed, not all of my business is appreciated by the government. Fortunately, there is enough rivalry among the big families and that means I can go about my business."

"Thanks for the information, but that doesn't interest me. I'd like to go outside now."

"But that's not possible, dear Anna," Yago fumed. "I can't let you go, because I have visitors coming for you soon."

"W-what do you mean?" Anna stammered.

"Your mother probably warned you when you were a child not to go with strange men. Well, that's exactly what you'll be doing later on. Look on the positive side. You have neatly paid off your debt to me." A booming laugh rang out. Anna struck out with the water jar.



Qurtuba is the Arabic name for Córdoba. Al Medina is the walled heart of the city, where the great Mezquita (mosque), the Juderia (Jewish quarter) and the Alcazar are situated. This was the emir's castle and palace built by the Umayyads on an old Visigothic fortress. The Uad-El-Kebir is the Guadalquivir River.

## **In the harem**

This Arabic word was unknown to her. She was now saqaliba. Since her arrival in this palace, she had only seen women. These had bathed her and rubbed her with oils. Then they dressed her in oriental clothing. Her attack on Yago had led to nothing. He had forced her to drink the stuff, which he had probably put in her wine on the river. She had been only vaguely aware of her arrival in these lavishly dressed spaces.

The women were surprised that a Northern European woman spoke Arabic. When she told them that she was a free woman and had been overpowered by Yago, they shrugged. All saqaliba were once free, they said. But war and slave collectors often put an end to that. But it was good that she spoke Arabic because that would make the learning process for what was needed for a woman in the harem easier. Anna understood that she had been made a slave again.

She got lessons. From this she learned that she was not an ordinary slave, but a concubine. As a concubine, she would have a sexual relationship with the master of the house. The lord was none other than the 45-year-old Caliph himself, Mohammad I.

The thought of having to share a bed with this leader of the Caliphate made Anna feel nauseous. According to her teacher, the female saqaliba were valued for their light skin color. The lord thought it was important that they were trained and that they learned all kinds of skills so that they were attractive and useful to him. The teaching material had a wide reach. It ranged from medical knowledge to music knowledge.

Several days passed during which the Caliph did not appear. Life in the harem had a quiet pattern. This consisted of study, care, court and religious rituals and relaxation. She was not forced to convert to Islam. The female members of the family lived in this harem, with their sons, who were allowed to stay here until their 6th birthday. There were also the unmarried daughters, female domestic servants, other female relatives and concubines.

One day there was a rumor among the women that the Caliph would come into the harem that night. Panic struck Anna. Aisha saw it and grabbed her shoulders. "Calm down Anna. Take a deep breath. Listen, the caliph isn't

coming for you. According to the laws, the master must abstain from sexual activity with the new concubine for an entire menstrual cycle.” Anna breathed a sigh of relief. For now she was safe.

Aisha turned out to have a special status. She was *umm al-walad*. Concubines who had a child were called that. This status was expressed, for example, in the fact that she could not be sold after the death of her master. Children of concubines were considered free and given the same status as the children of the man's wife.

Aisha also said that according to the Koran, a man was only allowed to have sexual relations with his wife or with his concubine. However, there seemed to be no limit to the number of concubines a man could take. Anna hoped that many new *saqaliba* would come at once, so that she would be overlooked by the great man.

That evening, however, Mohammad devoted all his attention to Anna. He talked to her for some time and made her dance for him before he left their chambers with Aisha.

The next day Aisha was back in the harem. She played with her son for some time until it was time for his lessons.

Anna also continued her lessons in the harem of the Alcázar. This building was built more than a century ago as a castle palace by order of Abd ar-Rahman I, the founder of the caliphate. It became the official residence of Al-Andalus. This is where the power of the Empire resided. It included the largest library in the West, several baths and lush gardens. Watermills pumped water from the Guadalquivir to the gardens. *Saqaliba* were also working here, just like in the caliph's household. They worked in the kitchen, but also at the mint, in the textile workshops, in the administration and as guards.

There was nothing she could do to prevent the caliph's lust. She had to submit when Mohammad came to her. However, she would endure it patiently. She refused to use all the lessons in seduction that she had learned here. She hoped that the Caliph would soon tire of her and she would be further spared from his erotic desires.

She was prepared for his visit. First a bath, then massaged with scented oils and wrapped in a silk robe. Then she was taken to a sleeping room, where a large, soft bed stood in the center of the room.

Anna was shaking like an aspen leaf. Nerves were rushing through her throat. Harald, the Viking who once kidnapped her, had been a brute. He

had brutally forced himself on her. The memory she thought she had hidden far away returned. Could this powerful man also be so brutal? The door was opened and the ruler of the Umayyad empire entered. With a gesture he ordered Anna to take off her clothes. He quickly undressed and looked down at her lustfully. He appeared to be in a state of great excitement. Her eyes automatically went to his erection. The head of his circumcised member was shining. Anna held her breath and remained motionless. Apparently the ruler had no need for a foreplay. Her passive body on the bed was apparently enough. He lowered himself on top of her and started to penetrate her. It was impossible. She couldn't keep quiet. She couldn't passively endure this. She placed her hands defensively against his chest and shouted in Arabic: "I am not a slave. I am a free woman and promised to Kybbe. He's the one I'm looking for. He is the one I long for."

Something flickered in the ruler's eyes. It looked like he was going to take her by force.

But suddenly he deflated. His member went limp and he withdrew from the bed. His sexual excitement had given way to anger. He put on his dress and strode out of the room, leaving Anna in fear.

She had angered the Caliph. She had figuratively emasculated him, at the height of being a man. She had seen his penis shrink. How great were his feelings of revenge? How would he punish her?

An hour later she was picked up by Aïsha. The fear made her vomit. The umm al-walad took her by the hand and gently pulled her along, calling over her shoulder to a girl to clean up. She sat down with Anna in the corner of the large harem room and spoke to her. "I don't know what exactly happened between you and our lord, but he came to me fuming. When I talked to him to calm him down, he said that he should have been told that there was already a man in your life. Is that correct? Are you married?"

Anna replied, "Not exactly." We were about to get married when the soldiers of the lord of Vellesan came and set fire to the brewery where we were. I'm the only one who survived that. In the uprising that followed, the lord was expelled and my Kybbe, thinking that I had been burned, left our hometown. I've been trying to find him for almost a year now. I left the lowlands in the north to look for him here. But on the last stretch to Córdoba I was viciously attacked and imprisoned, then drugged and delivered here."

A deep frown crossed Aisha's face.

"What will the Caliph do now?" Anna asked her anxiously.

“Listen Anna, you have to tell me your whole history. Then I can tell you what will probably happen.”

That's what Anna did. She talked about her childhood and her move to Vellesan. About her violent father and how Kybbe stood up for her as a boy. About their blossoming love and how she was cruelly taken away by the machinations of the evil lord of Vellesan and a Viking, who kidnapped and abused her. About her escape and finding her family and Kybbe. About the fire, the uprising and her journey to the Caliphate. She ended up being drugged by Yago.

When Aisha had heard it all, she sighed, “Poor girl. Now I understand and I can tell you how it is. A master cannot enter into a sexual relationship with a concubine if her status as a slave is questionable because she became a slave under questionable circumstances. The same applies to women who were already married before the purchase. This can be read in Quran 4:22. I think both rules apply to you. I'm going to talk to Mohammad about you and then we'll see what his decision will be.”

### **The search with Inaya**

It was unbelievable. Not only had Aisha convinced the caliph of the illegitimacy of Anna's status as a concubine in his harem, but he had even released her to search for Kybbe.

Before she left, Aisha told her that the city consisted of 5 parts. They all had their own walls and you could find shops, inns, markets and public baths everywhere. There was a multitude of crafts. From the palace, Anna walked north, ending up in a maze of small narrow streets. This was the Jewish quarter.

Anna was stunned by the size of the city. It was many times bigger than Parisi, that had already made such an indelible impression on her. It exceeded her wildest expectations. It was so incredibly busy in the streets. Indeed, she saw bazaars, shops and inns everywhere.

It was a wonder that such a big city, where so many people lived so close together, was so clean. It was nothing like Vellesan or other places she had passed on her journey after Kybbe. She also saw the views to patios. Everything was so different here. Kybbe would enjoy it here, because

there was so much to study and learn. But where should she begin her search for him in this immense city? It seemed impossible. She decided to ask the whereabouts of the largest construction site in the city. Knowing Kybbe, she had the best chance of success there.

While thinking, she had ended up at a book market. She bawled her eyes out. Here it was mainly women who were busy copying books. She expressed her surprise to one of them. The woman laughed and told her that about seventy copyists were working here and that the women were specialized in copying the Koran. "Are women allowed to do that?" Anna asked in disbelief, because she had noticed in the Islamic area through which she had been traveling for months that women usually devoted themselves to caring for husbands and children. "Yes," said the woman. "There are also highly educated women who work as secretaries, librarians or teachers and women who study medicine or law. But if you don't mind, I'll continue with my work now."

"Wait, I have one more question. What is the largest construction site in the city right now?"

"Then you should of course go to the Mezquita, the great mosque, where an expansion is currently taking place on the authority of our Caliph Abû `Abd Allah Muhammad ben `Abd ar-Rahman. Look, there you see the mosque sticking out above the houses." And she pointed in the direction from which Anna had come. The afternoon sun was high in the sky. Anna looked with narrowed eyes at the contours of the building in the sunlight. She thanked the woman and hurriedly walked into the sun.

She spoke to a stonemason at the construction site. He shook his head. He didn't know Kybbe. It was like this every time she approached someone.

How could that be? She had been so sure that she would find Kybbe at the largest structure in the city. With her high hopes evaporated, she hung her shoulders and head as she trudged aimlessly into the medina. She sank down at a beautiful fountain. All the pent up emotion came out. Tears streamed down her cheeks, her shoulders shook, and her hands shook uncontrollably. At first the voice didn't reach her. A young woman touched her gently and asked again, "Why are you so sad, stranger?"

Anna slowly raised her head and saw compassion in a pair of intense brown eyes.

She swallowed a few times and said, "I'm looking for my lover." He is a young, blond builder and his name is Kybbe. I inquired at the Mezquita,

because that is the most prestigious building and if there is one thing he is attracted to, it is special buildings. However, no one seems to have seen him," she added.

"Masa'u Al-khair Anna, my name is Inaya. What a coincidence. My father is the master builder of the renovation of the Mezquita, commissioned by the caliph. How come you're looking for your Kybbe here?"

"Al-khair An-Nur Inaya," Anna greeted back and then told her about the search for her loved one.

The young woman was impressed and took Anna to the part of the mosque where her father was.

However, the master could not bring her good news. Kybbe was unknown here. In any case, he had never applied to work on this Mezquita.

Anna's disappointment was great.

"Couldn't it be that he's connected to one of the other construction projects in town, Dad?" Inaya asked her father.

He shrugged his shoulders. "That is of course possible. But if he is as passionate as Anna says, he would certainly have contacted me."

"Do you mind if I take Anna and ask around the city?"

The master gave her permission and the two women left the mosque to search for indications of Kybbe's presence in the city.

"As a Muslim woman, are you allowed to just walk through the city alone?" Anna asked.

"What makes you think I'm a Muslim?" was Inaya's response.

"Your name is Inaya. That's an Arabic name, right?"

"That's right. But that doesn't mean I'm a Muslim. My mother just thought it was a beautiful name."

As they walked crisscross through the city, Inaya pointed out the many mosques, baths and various homes and shops to her companion. Anna continued to be amazed during Inaya's tour. "How many people live here?" she wondered out loud.

"Oh, it's probably more than 300,000," Inaya answered her.

"Unbelievable! And all those people have jobs here. I saw booksellers, shoemakers, weavers, butchers, jewelers and that man there, what does he do?" "Ah, he cuts ivory. There is a lot of demand for it and its export is large, just like that of crystal. Did you know that crystal making was invented in this city?"

"That doesn't surprise me at all. Today I saw that women here can read and write and that they can pursue important professions. What about non-Muslims?"

“As you may have noticed, everyone here is pretty much bilingual. We now speak to each other in the Latin dialect of this area. That, together with Arabic, is the official language. Arabs, Christians and Jews speak it both. Many Christians are civil servants, financiers, doctors, artists and master craftsmen. My father is one of them.”

“How can so many people live in one place without going hungry?” Anna asked in bewilderment.

“When you traveled to the city, you must have seen how much farmland there is here. This is possible because there is a huge irrigation system with water mills and na'uras. Intensive trade takes place on the river and on the many roads. Products from all over Europe, Africa and Asia arrive here.”

While talking, they came through the city gate to the river and Anna saw the Ponte Romano. She looked in amazement at the enormous stone bridge with arches that spanned the river. “That's huge! I've never seen anything like it before.”

“This bridge, just like the gate behind you, was built centuries ago by the Romans.”

“Great. Kybbe would love that too.”

She was exhausted from a week of searching for Kybbe in this huge city. She and Inaya went out every day. They did this from her father's house, where Anna had received hospitable accommodation.

“We need to think about a more systematic approach,” Anna said around noon, after asking questions everywhere again. It had achieved nothing. Inaya said very carefully, “Anna, I think you have to face the fact that Kybbe never arrived in Cordoba. We really have been everywhere where he could have been working. What we need now is some relaxation. In any case, I would like to take care of my tired limbs in a bathhouse.”

Anna then thought back to her months in Parisi with Fatima and to Poitiers with Yasmia and Amirah. The memories of those visits to the bathhouses made her long for a renewed acquaintance with the phenomenon. She might be able to get other information there. There was a lot of gossip in the bathhouses, especially concerning handsome men. Perhaps it gave her new insights into how and where to look for Kybbe.

When they entered the bathhouse there was no gossip, but some older women were giving sex education to the girls present. They talked about different seduction arts and techniques to please men. Anna understood that women could also practice with each other. “Is that allowed?” she whispered in Inaya's ear in surprise.

"It's an open secret. It is only discussed within women's circles. The men know it, but ignore it."

"And what about men who date men?" was Anna's next question.

"That is forbidden. There is the idea that such tendencies arise from whisperings of jinn, evil spirits. A man caught with a man can be stoned if he is married. Unmarried people face a flogging. Minors receive a reprimand from the judge. To prevent such behavior, it has been determined that boys over the age of 10 are not allowed to sleep together in a bed. But I think the danger of flogging is regularly braved. Believe me, boys do practice together," Inaya replied.

When the conversations in the hammam turned to gossip about people, Anna tried to find out if Kybbe had been spotted in town. The result was disappointing. She now had to admit that he had apparently never come this way.

"Maybe he's in Seville," Inaya suggested. "That is also a fast-growing city and one of the most beautiful in the Caliphate."

Could that be possible? Anna's mood visibly brightened.

"Come on," Inaya interrupted her train of thought, "let's scrub our skin with a kese. It makes it shine so beautifully. Then we rinse ourselves and then it's time for a skin mask with rhassoul."

The rhassoul turned out to be a kind of paste that was spread on the skin, dried and later rinsed off.

It had been a good idea on Inaya's part. Her whole body tingled with renewed strength and resolve. She would go to Seville.

To her surprise, Inaya went along. She had persuaded her father to give permission for a family visit. Her uncle would return to his home in Seville two days later, after completing some business in Córdoba. Inaya and Anna were able to go with him and were thus assured of accommodation, from which they could visit the various family members and resume the search for Kybbe.

They didn't have to search for long, because after a few days Anna saw a familiar face in the souk of Seville. It was Moussa Bennani, the man who had made her trip to Córdoba possible. The owner of the merchant house in Paris had a widespread network for his trading ships and caravans throughout the Caliphate and beyond, even into areas of North Africa.

The news he gave her about Kybbe was shocking.

Now Anna was told that her childhood friend from Vellesan had traveled to Cologne, where, according to Moussa, he was wanted for the murder of Pope Nicholas. "I suspected it was your friend, because his name was

mentioned and the fact that he came from the Low Countries. Since I had no idea where you were, I couldn't give you this news sooner.”

“Has Kybbe been convicted, Moussa?” Anna asked.

“I don't think so, because I heard explicitly that he was wanted. I don't know if he has been arrested and I haven't heard anything about a lawsuit. That would be big news and would undoubtedly be spread throughout Europe in no time. I'm sorry, Anna, but things don't look good for your Kybbe.”

Tears welled up in Anna's eyes. She brushed them off her face brusquely and said, “I'm going to Cologne at once.” I need to know what happened. Kybbe is innocent. I'm sure.”

## Part 5

### On the rivier

#### **868 AD.**

Word about the battle for Constantinople gradually reached the stopping places along the Danube. It was unclear who dominated there. Basileios I had been the new emperor of the Byzantine Empire for a year and defended his capital with a number of extremely skilled warlords. Rumor had it that he had gotten rid of his predecessor and friend, Emperor Michael III. He had already done the same with his uncle and councilor Bardas. He then married his predecessor's mistress. The ruler of the Bulgarian Empire now besieged Constantinople. Basileios had a hard time because the east of his empire was simultaneously attacked by Caliph Al-Mu'tazz of the Abbasid Empire.

Kybbe had left Ratisbon some time ago. The journey across the fast-flowing river was uneventful and without incident. They reached Linze, a city that had been under the authority of the Duke of Bavaria for a century. It seemed that he was not looked for in this part of the German Empire. After Sake's deception, Darra had come back onto their trail, after which they had jumped into the Rhine in an attempt to escape. It had cost Gerhard his life.

Perhaps the chase had been given up because it was thought you couldn't survive a fall into the Rhine, or perhaps people were still searching for him

towards the Caliphate. In any case, Kybbe was happy that he had continued with his plan to go to Constantinople. They sailed over the green surface of the water past beautiful densely wooded hills, interrupted only occasionally by a community clinging to the few pieces of flat land that were located directly on the river. At Linze the view from the river became wider, the hills seemed lower. Kybbe slung a sewn leather bag with wine and a knapsack with food over his shoulder and began to climb the high hill outside the city. At a height of about 800 cubits, it offered a beautiful view of the surroundings. He looked down at the brand new castle, which was located on the market square in the city. It illustrated the important position of Linze as a local government city of the Bavarian princes and as a major trading post. The ship he sailed on unloaded a lot of merchandise here and took on board new products for Mautern further downstream. That gave Kybbe time to visit the new structure. As always, he was curious about the expertise of the local master builder and the craftsmen. So after his meal he went down to the city. It was very busy. Basket weavers practiced their craft in the open air in front of their home. The sounds of labor were everywhere; from the forge, the bakery, the dock, the rope shop and the stables. From the river, the sound of human activities drifted into the city. On the square, the merchants' voices competed with each other. His way to the castle was blocked by a disturbance. There was shouting and screaming and suddenly he was surrounded by a crowd of fighting men. Kybbe received a fist on his jaw and a punch in the ribs. He staggered and fell, after which he became a stumbling block in the chaos, causing several fighters to fall. Suddenly the noise stopped. The compact fighting group scattered at the appearance of the city guard. Many fled, some were arrested.

When Kybbe came to and took a deep breath, pain shot through his ribcage. At first he was therefore only concerned with himself. He took shallower breaths. He probably had bruised ribs. He felt his sore jaw before looking up. Only one eye functioned normally and he could see that he was in a room with several people. Keys rattled, then a door was opened and a container pushed inside. "Here bums, feeding time." The door closed again. A number of people crowded around the box. One of them lay down next to Kybbe with a piece of bread in his hand, which he quickly gobbled up. "You're too late man, the bin is already empty," he said with his mouth full.

Kybbe shrugged. Eating was the last thing he was interested in right now. "Where am I and why am I here?" he asked his temporary conversation partner.

"You're in jail. The guard threw everyone in prison they could get their hands on after the fight," was the response.

"And now? What's going to happen now?"

"Oh, they'll let us out in a day or two. That's normal."

Indeed, a starving Kybbe, together with the others, was released a few days later. The boat he was supposed to sail on had left. The vision in his closed eye had already improved considerably, but he was suffering a lot from his bruised ribs. That would surely bother him for several days. He tied a cloth tightly around his upper body to make the pain more bearable and set out to satisfy his hunger. The guards had not returned his bag, so he was now broke. Could he do some work for a meal? Perhaps his two current needs could be combined, he thought. Those were food and transportation. The best thing he could do for that was to go to the harbor. A new ship had just arrived and Kybbe made sure he was at the front when it docked. He darted forward to offer his services. He was hired to carry the goods off board and stow a new load. Despite his bruised rib he worked at such a fast pace that the captain's eye fell on him. Luck smiled on him, because a place had become available due to the illness of a crew member. A hard worker was welcome. This way he could finally stop the rumbling in his stomach.

It was hard work, but at least he was back on the road to Constantinople. The ship's final destination was Beligrad. Kybbe planned to look for work there in construction, so that he had money in his pocket for the rest of his journey. Beligrad meant white city. That sounded challenging to his ears. Perhaps they used other methods of construction here that he was not yet aware of. His curiosity was aroused.

The journey continued. The next transshipment point was Mautern, the easternmost trading station in the Bavarian Eastland. Unloading and loading went quickly here. Matters were arranged efficiently and a few hours after sailing they reached Tulln, where an old horseshoe-shaped tower jutted into the Danube. The tower was once part of a Roman camp and was now used to secure this piece of land on the Danube. Kybbe heard that there were castles along the Danube that were skilled at robbing passing ships, but since the expansion of the Frankish Empire to the east, that only happened outside the empire. Especially in the Bulgarian areas, his shipmates said.

The valley of the river had become much wider since they sailed from Mautern. No densely wooded high hills here, but more flat land. Rivers

regularly joined the Danube. The side streams varied from streams to full-fledged rivers. He noticed how the current was affected by this. He learned the names of many of these rivers. At Komárno the rivers Ván and Nitra flowed into the Danube, and a little further on the Hron and a few yards further the Ipel. The Danube made a sharp bend at Vác and shifted its course from east to south, towards Buda, the border city of the East Frankish Empire.

In this part of Europe there was actually a constant battle going on. Louis the German had deposed the Moravian monarch in 846 and appointed a vassal as duke. This Duke Rastislav acquired new territories in the east and a border was established with the Bulgarian Empire. There were a number of military expeditions by the Frankish army against Rastislav, because he turned out to be not such a reliable vassal.

A new passenger had come on board at Buda, who was well informed of the political developments in this area. This Dragan was of lower Slavic nobility and had fought on Rastislav's side against the Franks several times. After the meal he got to speak on what was clearly his favorite subject.

"In 855 we managed to stop a major invasion of Louis' army. We defended the city of Mikulcice with such success that the Frankish army retreated. You should have seen that great army before our walls. They were powerless against our stubborn resistance. It then became apparent that they were unable to mount a long siege and they turned back. We opened the gates and went after the army. We pursued the Franks and plundered many of their possessions along the Danube."

One of the sailors commented: "I seem to remember though that Emperor Louis then destroyed a large Moravian army that attacked his camp."

Dragan looked up at the man, disturbed by the interruption of his story in such an unwelcome manner.

"What matters is that we successfully drove out those Franks. We were happy to make sacrifices for that. By the way, three years later our strength showed again. Karloman, Louis' son, then led another expedition against us, but this too was a great failure. It's time we broke free from those damn Franks. The Pope is trying to impose the yoke of his Church on us. That is why, five years ago, Rastislav requested the emperor of the Byzantine Empire to send clerics to spread the Orthodox faith. Cyril and Methodius have achieved great success in this since then. That was of course against the wishes of both Pope Nicholas and the emperor. The Pope thinks he is the representative of God on earth, but that is of course Patriarch Ignatius."

At these words another traveler jumped up. Kybbe had seen the effect Dragan's words had on him. The man had been sitting stiffly upright and it seemed as if something was starting to steam in his head. With wide eyes flashing with anger, he lunged at Dragan.

"You self-righteous bastard, a lesson in humility is what you need." He pounded the surprised Moravian with his fists.

"Nicholas is the only successor of Saint Peter. It's him..."

He got no chance to go on. Dragan recovered and landed a huge fist on his jaw.

"Stop!" the captain shouted, "or I will have you both thrown overboard."

"That won't be necessary," grunted Dragan, pointing to the motionless figure at his feet. "Besides, he can't swim in this state. Oh yes, will someone please tell him that his beloved Pope Nicholas is no longer alive when he comes to his senses."

Disaster struck before they reached Opaty in the swampy area. Since Tulln he had heard stories of piracy on the river. Nevertheless, the river pirates' attack was completely unexpected. The crew had little chance against the skilled fighters, although Dagan managed to take down two opponents before he was overpowered. A large knife protruded from his back.

Kybbe saw that the situation was hopeless and he dove overboard. It was difficult to orientate oneself with the bright light of the sun high in the sky, reflecting in the water. It was already hot in the last week of May. It seemed like there was no end to the waters he swam. His arms felt heavy. All energy was drained from his body and his swimming stroke became slower and slower. Exhausted, he reached the shore. He was unable to get up. Dazed, he let his body dry in the hot sun. He was no longer aware of anything until strong hands pulled him up. He looked into the face of a rugged, bearded fellow, who said something unintelligible to him. He shook his head. The man spoke to him again and again he shook his head. Then a fist of the brute shot at him and his mind went black.

## Ali

### ***Summer 868 AD***

It was a beautiful countryside they passed through. Duke Salan's lands contained very fertile lands, forests with plenty of game and an abundance of fish in the swampy areas. It was the westernmost part of the Bulgarian Empire. However, all that was not for Kybbe. The day's marches of the slavers were long and the fact that the prisoners were tied together did not contribute to an easy walk. He cursed the day he went from misery to misery. First it was the river pirates who had put him to flight and when his escape seemed successful, the Bulgarian slavers had jumped on him. Worse still, they had been walking west for days, getting further and further away from Constantinople. On his journey across the Danube he had been excited by the prospect of the great city and the buildings that awaited him there. The city, located at the passage from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, was already important in the time of Alexander the Great and became one of the largest cities of the Roman Empire. That is why Kybbe was confident that the city would repel the attack of the Bulgarian prince Michael. He had to escape, but the daily routine offered no possibility. It wouldn't work when he was on his own, so Kybbe looked for a possible ally to make and implement a plan. The evening meal was the only opportunity to talk to other prisoners. They would sit in a circle around a wood fire under the supervision of their armed guards.

The Bulgarians did not relax until the meal was over and the prisoners, bound two by two, tried to sleep in an attempt to be rested for another tiring day's march. Then Kybbe heard the slavers' loud voices and a booming laugh when one of them told a joke.

At the start of the meal, Kybbe moved up a few places to a young man who seemed like a suitable candidate. He had observed him before. The man had a certain attitude about him. He was not dejected like many in this group and he held his head high during the walk. Kybbe was unable to get the man to talk during the meal. He didn't reveal anything other than his name.

The next evening, Kybbe made sure he sat next to Ali again. During the day he had decided that to gain Ali's trust, he would tell him his own story. He started and could see that the man was thawing somewhat. When he ventured out and spoke about the events leading up to Pope Nicholas' death, Ali's eyes widened. "You are the Pope's murderer."

"No, Ali. I'm just telling you it was an accident that I witnessed."

"I only know that two men were wanted, suspected of having murdered the Pope. One would be a Frisian and the other a Frank."

"I am that Frisian, but the fact that I am wanted for a 'murder' is because of the man who has made my life hell for years, Darra, the mayor of Vellesan."

Now Ali wanted to hear the whole story and Kybbe started.

In the days that followed, Ali told his story.

"I know you have plans to escape Kybbe, but I think you will have a better chance when we arrive at the Adriatic Sea," Ali told him.

Kybbe responded in surprise: "Do you know where we are going?"

"Yes, we are being sold by these villains to the Narentines, who in turn will probably sell us on in a slave market. Maybe on the North African coast, but I hope in Venice."

"Why Venice and what do you mean you 'hope' for that?"

Ali started whispering. "These are villains, robbers. They do not care about any authority. That's why I didn't open my mouth. They can't know who I am or they could get rid of me. That is even very likely, because they risk being prosecuted for capturing a diplomat. They would have to fear from both the Caliphate and the Khan. It's smarter for them to make me disappear than to try to sell me or negotiate a ransom. Now we are just slaves to them who will earn them money. As soon as we are within the area of the Caliphate, we will regain our freedom, because I will certainly meet people I know there. In that respect we are going in the right direction, because we are traveling west. It's even the fastest way home.

"How can you be so sure of that?" Kybbe asked. "My clan, the Chammaryi, is the largest in Al-Andaluz. Many of my relatives hold important positions in the administration of the Caliph."

Surprised by this twist in the story, Kybbe asked: "What was your task in this area?"

"The purpose of my journey was to persuade the Bulgarian Empire and Moravia to form an alliance against the Frankish Empire of Louis the German. The Caliphate expects an attack from the Franks and wants to secure its borders. It would be nice if Louis had to divide his strength over two fronts."

Kybbe started to understand. "I know that Ratislav of Moravia fought the Frankish army."

"Exactly," Ali put in, "and both Ratislav and Michael of Bulgaria promoted the spread of the Orthodox Christian faith through Cyril and Methodius. In doing so, they reject the interference of the Latin Christian Church in their

areas. The death of the pope makes it uncertain what Cologne's line of action will be. That's why I was sent to stoke the fire.”

“And did that work?” Kybbe asked.

“Well, I've only been to the Bulgarian capital. When I set out from Pliska to Ruse with the plan to travel via the Danube to Veligrad, Ratislav's center of power, I was intercepted by these thugs.”

“But why did you, as a diplomat, travel alone?”

“Because the Caliphate's involvement in this possible alliance should not come to light untimely. This way I could carry out my assignment undisturbed.”

Kybbe laughed slyly. “Call that undisturbed.”

The Bulgarians herded them around like cattle. It became a difficult journey. They traveled through the rugged area for days. Down hill after hill, through forests, interspersed with rocky open terrain. There was no way of escape, not as they were chained together and dragged under the watchful eyes of the men on horseback. In the evening he whispered to Ali. It seemed as if they had spent their entire lives together. There was one thing that surprised Kybbe and he asked about it at one point.

“Ali, you are a Muslim, right?”

“Yes.”

“But I never see you praying. You have to do that a few times a day, don't you?”

“Be quiet Kybbe. They are not allowed to know who or what I am. If I were to perform Salah and pray several times a day, I would stand out. Moreover, there is no possibility of cleanliness in these conditions. A Muslim is also not very marketable. I will atone for this negligence and make up my prayers as soon as possible, Inshallah.”

“I understand Ali, but would you like to tell me something about your faith every now and then?” Because if we come to the Caliphate, as you say, I would like to know more about Islam and the language.”

“Of course Kybbe, because after all, all of life is Islam. The word itself means surrender and that means that you surrender to the will of Allah. You know that our holy book is the Quran. The archangel Gabriel passed on Allah's text to the prophet Mohammed, who then spread the message across our world. What is also important to us is the way of life of Mohammed himself. How he lived, what he said and what his views are. That's all in the sunnah. That is the guideline for a good life for every Muslim. That seems like a good enough start to me. I will teach you more and more about our religion and ways, but now be quiet because one of those slavers is coming to chain us up again for the night.”

One day the group stumbled over a height where they got their first glimpse of a brilliant blue sea through the trees.

“We are almost at Labineca, home of the Narentines,” Ali whispered to Kybbe. They did not speak out loud during the journey, because the Bulgarians would not tolerate that. Many people had already felt the whip for that offense along the way.

There followed one more meal and overnight stay in open terrain for their group. Apparently Labineca could not be reached by the darkness.

During the meal, Kybbe was finally able to talk to his friend again.

“You said we are being sold to the Narentines. Who are they?”

“These are pirates who have settled here on the coast. They are unbelievers. They became a problem when the Byzantine emperor, weakened by the battle against the Bulgarians, abandoned Venice in the first half of this century. The Narentines saw their opportunity and robbed the Venetian ships. But since the great Tariq Ibn Ziyad took Venice this year, their piracy has stopped. They probably won't be able to enjoy their independence for much longer. I was also sent to reach an agreement with the Knyaz of the Bulgarian Empire about our mutual area of influence. Here in the Adriatic Sea will be the new border between our possessions.”

“But that doesn't help us. We are at the mercy of their whims. What are they going to do to us?”

“I hope they will sell us as slaves on the Venetian market. But they could also take us to a market across the Mediterranean in the Abbasid Caliphate.”

“The Abbasids? Aren't those the Umayyads' biggest enemies? You are in danger there.”

“If they discover my identity, yes, but that is not very likely. You have just as big a problem as I do if we are sold into slavery there. It's unlikely we can get out of there. I hope they will go north, otherwise we must see that we can escape before we are taken to Africa.”



### *Kybbe's Journey*

1. Colonia (Cologne); 2. Ratisbon (Regensburg); 3. Linze (Linz); 4. Tulln; 5. Budapest; 6. Constantinopel; 7. Labineca; 8. Veneza (Venice); 9. Granada; 10. Sevilla; 11. Córdoba; 12. Bordeu (Bordeaux); 13. Parisi (Paris).

### **Nevena**

It became clear why they had not gone on to Labineca the day before. The delta of the Neretva River consisted of a vast swamp. The Bulgarians had been afraid to venture into it at dusk. As they passed through it, they heard the sounds of hundreds of species of birds and the chirping and buzzing of

many insects. Kybbe had the feeling that he was serving as food for all the blood-sucking insects that lived here.

Once in the town, he forgot the misery and looked around with interest. Apart from the fact that there was not a single church, the town looked quite ordinary to Kybbe. A couple of pastel-colored houses was striking, but otherwise there were no technological feats in building. They were the usual dwellings of this region, built without a common plan. Some seemed to be on the verge of collapse, others looked better maintained. There was plenty of activity. Kybbe had assumed that only pirates lived here, but before his eyes there unfolded a normal pattern of men, women and children busy with daily tasks and craftsmen, doing all sorts of work. He saw a harbor with many small ships floating on calm water.

There was a great deal of shouting as a number of armed men came towards their group. The Bulgarian leader shouted something back and then the armed men took the prisoners and led them away.

They were housed in a large barn and there they were given something to eat and drink.

Before they were led inside, Ali had taken a good look around and now he told Kybbe that they should watch out whether the routine that was developing here would offer them any chance of regaining their freedom. However, there was no question of sneaking away unnoticed.

Thus several days passed without them seeing an opportunity to escape. Had they missed their chance? Would they not get a chance before they had to embark?

One day it happened. Kybbe was roughly pulled to his feet and strong hands forced him aboard a Narentine ship. The ship looked a bit like a shell that had been opened. The future slaves were tied together and crouched down on the rafters between the planks. The man next to Kybbe was also tied to a railing above the frames. In addition to the crew, there were about 20 prisoners in the ship, but Ali was not among them.

Ali saw Kybbe being pushed into a ship in front of him. A large bearded Narentine pointed to the ship next to it. The group he was walking in was directed there. He had been separated from his friend before the crossing to the slave market and he felt sad. He had to find Kybbe again in Venice as soon as possible. The ships left the harbor. They sailed between the offshore islands of Hvar and Korcula and rounded the latter island, after which the bow, to Ali's horror, was directed south. With the island of Issa on the starboard side, they suddenly saw a number of ships appear from behind the island. The ships carried a half moon in their flag. Panic broke

out among the Narentines. They tried to turn around to reach the shelter of their home port. They had not yet completed this manoeuvre when the Muslim fleet attacked them. They were boarded by the larger and faster ships. A fight broke out in Kybbe's ship. The panic among the prisoners was great, for they were stuck and wedged between the benches on which the fighting was taking place. After a huge blow from a scimitar, the man next to Kybbe, who was stuck to the railing, lost his arm. The railing itself gave way under the blow. The slaves tried to avoid the fight and ended up on one side of the tilting ship. Since they were still stuck together, they were all pulled overboard when some of them fell out of the ship. The human tangle quickly disappeared under water, since no one could swim. Kybbe desperately tried to get free. He pulled at the knots in the rope. The air quickly left his lungs through his efforts.

The Narentines in Ali's ship had offered no resistance and had surrendered immediately. They were taken aboard one of the Umayyad ships. An officer and a clerk then came on board to note down the prisoners' antecedents. Ali produced from under his clothes the ring which showed that he was a special envoy of the court. He was immediately taken to the commander of the flotilla. There he was received with all respect, dressed in new clothes and given a meal. One of the ships would take him directly to Venice, where he could book passage to Malaga, the others would complete their mission. Namely, the destruction of the pirate stronghold of Labineca. Ali urged the commander to look out for a blond Frisian named Kybbe. If he was found, he was to be treated with all due respect and brought to the court in Córdoba as soon as possible. He felt bad leaving his friend behind, but he could not keep the caliph waiting. He had to go to Cordoba.

In a small bay on the island of Korcula, an apparently lifeless body lay on the sand along the tide line. A crab tapped a big toe, apparently curious. The leg moved and the animal quickly scrambled away. Was it a last convulsion? Apart from the sound of birds and the murmur of rippling water, there was complete silence. This was suddenly broken by a clear song. A young woman was moving along the tide line with a net and a basket. She dropped these the moment she saw the body and hurried over to it. With some effort, she turned the body onto its back and placed her ear next to the drowning man's mouth. She felt air on her cheek! Now she saw his chest move slightly too. She quickly turned him onto his side. A wave of water ran from his mouth. The body curled. He coughed and

then a pair of beautiful blue eyes opened, looking straight into hers. He began to speak in a language unknown to her. She shook her head and pointed to her ears. He spoke again and these sounds were different, harsher. She shook her head again. He made a third attempt with the same result.

When Kybbe came to, he looked into the two darkest brown eyes he had ever seen. Where was he and who was she? He asked her. She shook her head and pointed to her ears. Then he tried Arabic and then German. She kept pointing to her ears and the realization dawned on him that she might be deaf. He gestured to himself and said “Kybbe”. Then he pointed to her. She said: “Nevena”.

Someone shouted and Nevena looked in the direction of the sound. So she wasn't deaf after all, Kybbe thought. An older man came out from between the trees and called her name again.

“Tata”, the woman shouted and waved. The man came towards them and a very excited conversation ensued in a language that offered Kybbe no points of recognition. The man apparently agreed to her suggestion and he gestured to Kybbe to follow them. They walked for about an hour, with Kybbe taking the basket from the protesting young woman. With two baskets full, the three arrived in a place called Blato.

Kybbe was taken into the household of father and daughter. There was no mother present. Later he would hear the story of this couple, but before that the communication was done by hand and foot. Kybbe made himself useful in these days with all kinds of chores. The house and barn deserved some maintenance. In addition, he helped on the land.

Her father was called Juraj and he showed Kybbe how to care for the grapes. Branches and leaves had to be cut away to allow all energy to go to the grapes. He was reprimanded by Juraj if he cut away too much foliage. He understood that the grapes could then burn during a dry period. However, it should not rain too hard either, because then the grapes could be attacked by mold and the entire harvest would be lost. These were things that Kybbe had never thought about when he tasted his first wine in the lands of the Franks. It was not the life he would choose. It was therefore time to move on, but he was torn about it. He did not really want to wait until the next month when the grapes were harvested, but his feelings for Nevena had grown stronger. Could he persuade her to come with him? Should he tear her away from her roots on this island? These thoughts ended when the party night in Blato began.

The village was built on two hills that bordered a fertile valley where grapes and olives were grown. A fire was built in the clearing and they

began to prepare a communal meal. The local wine tasted delicious and Kybbe drank too much of it. He therefore retired around midnight. A little later Nevena came to see how he was doing. She kissed him lightly on the forehead, after which Kybbe threw his arms around her and kissed her passionately. For a moment she seemed to resist, but then she relaxed and kissed him back. He tried to undress her, but was so clumsy that he got tangled in his attempts. Nevena placed a hand on his chest and calmly pulled her dress over her head. She stood naked before him and desire shot through him. He could wait no longer and his member easily entered her. In a few seconds it was over and Kybbe fell asleep almost immediately. Nevena brushed herself clean, put her dress back on and mingled with the partygoers. No one had missed her.



### *Kybbe's Journey*

1. Labineca; 2. Blato; 3. Olipa; 4. Tajan; 5. Lausa.

## Goodbye to Nevena

Kybbe woke up and remembered the event of the previous night. He felt the blush of shame fly to his cheeks. Had he really done what he thought he remembered? Had he taken advantage of Nevena? Had he not been able to let her be in his befuddled state? Had he not been able to control that pure lust for a moment? How could he face her? The door opened and Nevena came in. She put a bowl of porridge in front of him. Kybbe clumsily tried to apologize for his behavior the night before. However, she held a finger to his lips. "I could have easily stopped you, Kybbe. It's not that you overwhelmed me. I like you and I don't blame you for anything. Well, nothing...? It was a disappointing experience, I must say."

His face turned bright red again. Nevena saw it and said with a smile: "There's nothing to be ashamed of, as long as you try a little harder next time."

Two days later Kybbe did more than his best and Nevena did not hold back in turn. Exhausted they collapsed next to each other in the grass. Here Kybbe declared his love for her. When she said that the love was mutual, he started talking about the future as he dreamed of it. The question that followed from this was clear. Was she prepared to go with him, to make his dream come true? For a girl like Nevena this was an extremely difficult question. She knew no other life than that on the island. She was an only child. Could she leave her father alone? Didn't Kybbe want to stay on the island with her? They could live a simple but good life together here in Blato. However she realized that Kybbe's first love was architecture and building. She was torn by doubt.

Kybbe also had a hard time. He had been focused on his ambition to become a master builder for so long that he wondered if he could ever be happy in this little corner of the world, without the opportunity to gain knowledge and participate in large building projects. He felt a deep affection for Nevena and thought of her with great warmth. She could set him on fire from one moment to the next. But a whole life on this island...

She knew she had to let him go and brought him herself to the north coast of Korcula, from where he could sail to Lausa in the southeast. Their last moments together were filled with great tenderness and melancholy. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she let him board the fishing boat. She turned

away, so that Kybbe would not see. Only when the boat had moved further away from the shore did she turn around to wave him goodbye. Kybbe waved back to the lonely figure he left behind.

The journey passed without incident. They sailed along the Peljesac peninsula to the south between the islands of Olipa and Tajan in somewhat calmer waters to Lausa.

This turned out to be a friendly port town, which played a modest role in the transit of products to and from the Bulgarian hinterland. It had a connection with Syracuse in Sicily. That was Kybbe's goal, because from that large city on there was a sail to Malaga. Kybbe hoped to see his friend Ali again in the capital of the Caliphate.

Mindful of his experiences with the Narentine pirates, he asked about safety on the Mediterranean. The helmsman of the Kadima, on which he could sail as a crew member, told him that it was generally calm on the sea. "The Caliphate has become so strong in the west that it is no longer possible for the Vikings to sail into the Mediterranean at the Pillars of Hercules. The Umayyads also control the coastal areas of North Africa. It is less safe in the eastern part. This is because there is unrest in the Empire of the Abbasid caliphs. They do not have Libya under control and from there piracy is practiced."

"And what then about the Narentines?", asked Kybbe.

"They mainly operate further north on the Adriatic. They will have a hard time now that Venice has also fallen into the hands of the Umayyads", grinned the helmsman. "It couldn't be better for us."

On the return journey from Syracuse to Lausa, they had left one of the crew members sick in Sicily. That is why Kybbe was now allowed to go along as an unpaid crew member. In Syracuse, the captain hoped to pick up his crew member healthy again. For Kybbe, this was a welcome opportunity to take a first step in his journey to the wonders of Córdoba.

However, things went wrong again. It was only at a late stage that they noticed the ship coming up behind them. The ship was faster than theirs and with their beak they rammed the ship from Lausa. Immediately after the collision they threw out the grappling hooks and a chaotic fight ensued on board the Kadima.

It was an unequal battle. Desperate attempts were made to drive the pirates off their deck. The captain had a sword and he and the helmsman rushed at some of the pirates. Kybbe instinctively ducked.

Just in time he stepped aside, so that an attack with a spear just missed him. With a quick reaction he stabbed his knife into the thigh of the attacker, who dropped his spear. He grabbed his leg and thereby threw himself off balance and went overboard. He did not enjoy this small victory for long, because shortly afterwards he received a blow to the head, causing him to collapse breathlessly on the deck. When he came to, the chaos was complete and there were shouts that the ship was sinking. The Kadima was quickly taking on water. Kybbe was picked up by two pirates. They joned him on board the pirate ship. There he was quickly and efficiently tied up. He saw that the same thing happened to other crew members of the Kadima. All kinds of orders were barked. The robbers began to transfer products from the hold to their ship in great haste. However, they had to disembark quickly so as not to go down with the ship.

The pirates were angry, that much was clear. They had lost valuable booty when the Kadima sank. They had tried to transfer goods from the sinking ship to their own ship as quickly as possible, but in the end they watched with dismay as the bulk of the goods disappeared into the depths. They abandoned the wounded and killed crew members of Kybbe to the sea. The sailors who had been transferred to the pirate ship were to be sold as slaves in Licata, Sicily. Since the Kadima was bound for Syracuse, the pirates avoided this city. The slaves were not easy to sell there because they might be recognized. That could cause unpleasant situations. That is why they headed for Licata, on the southern coast of Sicily. This city had been conquered by the Arabs in 827 and there was a market where slaves were also traded. They moored in the small natural harbor. The Libyan pirates quickly sold their captured merchandise at the market. Kybbe was bought by Ghalib al-Nasiri, an Arab merchant. He was the only one of his shipmates to be taken on board Ghalib's ship, but not the only one to be enslaved. Two women and four men had suffered the same fate. He befriended Dusan during the month-long voyage to Malaga.

Dusan came from the part of the Balkans that had been conquered by the Bulgarians. They set fire to the village where he lived and took many villagers with them, including five-year-old Dusan himself. He never saw his parents again. He grew up on the Black Sea coast and left there a year ago to seek his fortune in the West. He wanted to get away from the Bulgarian Empire in any case. Maybe he could find some family members

who remembered his parents. It was not to be. As a lone traveler, he had been an easy target for human traffickers.

“And here I am, on board the ship of a merchant from the Caliphate. For years I was used as a labor force by the Bulgarians and now I have been reduced to the property of an Arab. Will I ever be able to live in freedom?”, he sighed at the end of his story.

“Maybe that won’t take as long as you think,” said Kybbe. When Dusan looked at him in surprise, he began to write an account of his adventures up to and including his meeting with Ali. “If we can get him word when we get to Córdoba, he will certainly do everything in his power to free us.” Attempts by Kybbe to speak directly to Ghalib and to make it clear to him that he was the friend of an important official of the caliph's court, all failed. So he had to wait for an opportunity to convince the right people that he was a friend of Ali.

During the voyage Dusan and Kybbe were employed in all kinds of work on board the ship. The cargo had to be lashed down after each port visit and there was a lot of scrubbing to be done. Of course they were not allowed to go ashore when they were docking in a port. That was reserved for the crew only. As long as they were heading for Córdoba Kybbe had no need for spectacular escape attempts, as had been the case on the Rhine. Then their lives were at stake, because Kybbe had no illusions about the result of a capture by Darra. They certainly would have been put to death. Now, however, he placed all his confidence in a renewed meeting with Ali in the Caliphate.

## **Shatranjji**

They arrived in Córdoba during Ramadan. The friends were separated. While Kybbe remained the property of Ghalib al-Nasiri, Dusan was accommodated in the palace of Mohammed ibn-Abi Amir, the vizier of Caliph Mohammed.

Kybbe soon understood that two languages were spoken here. Due to his knowledge of Latin, it was clear to him that the household staff spoke a variant of it. However, the family spoke Arabic and he wanted to learn that

language as soon as possible. A meal was prepared late in the evening for Ghalib and his family.

The next day he was woken up very early. It was still dark. To his surprise, Kybbe saw that an extensive meal was ready in the kitchen and they were instructed to bring the various dishes to the dining room. Soon the various family members appeared to eat breakfast.

He expressed his surprise to Álvaro: "Why do they get up so early to eat? In the fields the day also started early for us, but never this early."

"Where are you from?", was the surprised counter-question of the house slave. "Don't you know that it is Ramadan? Muslims fast during this period. They are only allowed to eat before sunrise and after sunset. The morning meal is called shor, the meal after fasting is iftar. Fortunately, we as dhimmis do not have to participate in this and can eat at Christian times." Kybbe did not notice the joke and with a serious face he asked how long the Muslim fast lasted.

With a sigh Álvaro answered: "Ramadan lasts a month.

Many Muslims not only abstain from food and drink during this month, but also from sexual intercourse. Every day of the month, the sincere Muslim reads one of the thirty parts of the Quran, so that by the end of the fast, the entire Quran has been read. The period is then concluded with `id-ul-fitr, the festival that is celebrated with family and friends."

"Do all Muslims fast in this month?", was Kybbe's next question.

"A Muslim fasts from the age of twelve. The sick, pregnant women and children are exempt. They do not have to fast, but are encouraged to do so as soon as possible."

Kybbe had to think of Ali, who wanted to fulfill his daily obligations at a later time, when he saw no possibility of doing so in captivity.

He had to learn the customs of the Muslims as quickly as possible and of course learn their language. He asked Álvaro about it. He agreed with him that it was easier to move around in an environment if you were aware of the rules that were used. He also told him that there were a number of people in the household who would like to help Kybbe learn the Arabic language.

The days passed by while Kybbe found his way in this, for him, new world. It soon became clear that he had added value in the household. Originally, he was mainly used for simple chores and carrying. However, when a defect occurred in the water supply to Ghalib's house, Kybbe had taken an interest and managed to solve the problem. He delved further into the technology behind it and became aware of the enormous ingenuity of the Arab scientists and engineers. He discovered that the water supply system

covered the entire city. Hydraulic technology ensured the supply of drinking water. Large quantities of water were also needed for ritual washing in mosques and for the hamams. He also discovered that the city had a sewerage system of interconnected sewers. This gave him new insights into the functionality of buildings.

Kybbe gained the trust of the Nasiri family more and more and he moved freely through the city. During the fasting month, Ramadan mubarak was heard everywhere when greeting people. The majority of non-Muslims in the city did not have to abstain from eating and drinking during the day and although swearing, cursing and badmouthing was considered extra bad during Ramadan, there was a lot of gossip in the places where people met. From this gossip Kybbe gathered that everything was not as harmonious as it seemed at first glance. There appeared to be different factions in the city, who were disputing each other for positions of power. This was confirmed when he met his friend Dusan at such a place. After they had been separated during the sale, Dusan had ended up in the palace of the current Vizier. Dusan was able to dish up some juicy details about the relationship between the clans.

The end of Ramadan had been celebrated and a new month had passed. Kybbe quickly got used to life in the city. Everything went faster here. The food was varied and the facilities were excellent. It was common practice to go to a bathhouse here. The hamam was open to everyone. It didn't matter whether you were poor or rich, master or slave. This is where people met and cleaned themselves. There was always clean running water and your skin was thoroughly cleaned by the steam. Álvaro had taken him with him the first time and explained everything. Kybbe had hesitated to undergo the ritual that was strange to him. He was full of questions about how the system worked but when he had undergone the beneficial experience, he thought that he would never want to miss it again. He learned everything there was to know about the functioning of a hamam and spoke to people from different parts of the world about the differences with their bath rituals. He had to laugh when he thought about the washings that his mother gave him in Kinhem. The memory of the cold water of the stream in the winter made him spontaneously get goose bumps.

He looked around in amazement at the wonderful mix that Córdoba represented. There was a fusion of all kinds of ethnic and religious-cultural groups. There were the Arabs and the Berbers, who seemed condemned to each other, because there was an underlying animosity between the two. Moreover, they were already falling apart into different factions. The

pro-Arab policy of the caliphs had already provoked numerous uprisings in the past, and Berbers played a role in them. There were also black Sudanese. They had originally come in as slaves, just like the sagaliba from Central Europe. They mainly functioned as mercenaries. However, the majority of the inhabitants consisted of muladies, the Islamized indigenous Iberian population. Then there were the dhimmis. They included the Christians and Jews. The relations between the groups were often very tense. Álvaro pointed out members of the different groups to him when they were walking on the street. In this way, the class differences became clear to Kybbe. He saw the nobles, who were called al-khâssa. Below them were the landowners and the merchants. Finally, at the bottom of the ladder were the plebs.

He spoke regularly about these matters with Dusan, who knew himself to be the property of one of the highest nobles and the man with the highest position after the caliph.

Kybbe's master belonged to the class below and to a family that had strong ties to the tribe to which Caliph Mohammad belonged.

“Do you know what's so difficult, Dusan? Now I'm finally here in the most beautiful city in the Caliphate and now I have no way of making my wishes come true. Oh, I'm free enough in the service of Ghalib al-Nasiri, but my hands are itching to be allowed to work on the Mezquita, or some other great building and that's impossible as long as I'm seen as someone's property.”

“Yes Kybbe”, sighed Dusan, “I would also prefer to be my own boss, but I don't see any way of achieving that. In fact, I've never known any better my whole life. Only in the last few months when I started my journey did I finally feel liberated. Then those f... Bulgarians had to ruin it for me again and I ended up in captivity.”

He fell silent. Kybbe was momentarily lost in his inner world and thought of his uncomplicated youth. Those memories were soon replaced by the image of a lifeless Saartje, followed by that of his fugitive father in the hut in the swamp and then the face of Darra, grinning at him, appeared before his mind's eye. Tears rolled down his cheeks as everything faded before the image of the burning brewery and the screams of his relatives locked up in it. Anna, oh Anna!

A sound from an adjacent table awoke him from his reverie. He looked to the side and saw that two men had started a game. There were several pieces on a board that contained 8 x 8 squares. All the squares were the same color. Interested parties came running to watch the progress of the game.

“What kind of game is that?” asked Kybbe.

One of the spectators turned to him and said: “That is called Shatranj. It comes from Persia.”

“And what is the meaning of those figures that they move?”

“Aha! That piece over there is the Shah. The idea is to checkmate him or to give your opponent a bald shah. That is the firzan, the councilor, who can reach 4 squares. The elephant,” the spectator pointed out, “moves diagonally and may jump over other pieces. Then there is the horse, the rukh, or the chariot and the foot soldier. If a foot soldier manages to reach the other side he is promoted to firzan.”

It all went a bit too fast for Kybbe and he decided to follow the game attentively. The game was coming to an end and now Kybbe understood what the man meant by a bald shah. The player with the white pieces had captured all of his opponent’s pieces except for the shah. The black player was apparently allowed to make one more move, but he decided against it.

Kybbe looked questioningly at the man who had tried to explain the game to him. He explained: “If only the shah is left on the board and he can also make the shah opposite him bald with one move, the game ends in a draw. That was not the case here, because white still had several pieces on the board.”

Two other men took their places at the board and set up the pieces. They also followed this game to the end and increasingly understood the nature of this extremely strategic game. Kybbe got into conversation with other spectators and was told that the game was quickly gaining popularity among all levels of society.

“The caliph himself plays it. They even say that he is addicted to the game”, said one of the men.

Kybbe could understand that. After this he learned to play the game step by step and both Dusan and he played it regularly from then on. At first just with each other, later on also with others.

## The conspiracy

Something special was going on. Domestic staff had a nose for this kind of thing. The vizier had received a visit from a number of men, whose families were known to have had problems with Caliph Abd al-Rahman II and his successor Mohammad in the past. The nine men had not arrived at the same time, but one by one at intervals. The palace residents were apparently unaware of this development. But the domestic staff were all the more so. In the kitchens and other workplaces, there was always a lot of gossip about the families who lived here and their visitors. What was the vizier's intention with these enemies of the caliph? Someone reported that these families were being bribed with positions in the administration and the army in connection with the impending battle with Emperor Louis the German. He also believed that there would be fighting against the Abbasids in North Africa. Dusan listened to the rumor mill within the palace and his curiosity was piqued.

At that moment the vizier spoke: "I hope you have convinced the allied clans of the potential of our plan. They are a crucial part of it. With the support of the most important Berber families, I can push the caliph aside and promise to raise your social position. You will of course take over my role as vizier."

"I can assure you that the Riffians support us. The clans of Moudid, Bouhannouch and Bensaid are currently preparing everything. Musa ben Nusayr is ready to take over the positions in Ifriqua."

"Exactly, it is important that our actions take place simultaneously at the agreed time, on the third of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, so that we can normalize matters before the Feast of Sacrifice."

A plot! Dusan trembled with excitement. This was the chance to free himself. If the caliph could be informed of this plot, the reward for the bearer of the news would certainly be freedom from slavery. But he could not bring that message himself. He would not be believed. This Ali would have to be informed of the fact that his friend Kybbe was here. He would not doubt the word of Kybbe, and the caliph would not doubt the word of his relative Ali.

Cautiously he withdrew. If he betrayed his presence by an unexpected sound, it would mean his end. He was convinced of that. Relieved, he reached the kitchen. No one had seen him.

With this conviction, he stepped out into the street. He wanted to inform Kybbe as quickly as possible. But first he rushed to a professional writer. He paid him to write and deliver to the palace the following sentence in Arabic: "Your friend Kybbe is here in Cordoba, in the house of Ghalib al-Nasiri."

Then he hurried back to the palace to report that he had finished his task for the day and that he was going into the medina to play shatranj. The caretaker nodded to him that it was okay.

Dusan was oblivious to his surroundings, focused as he was on one thing, namely that Kybbe had to be informed of the plot and the letter to Ali.

A shadow followed him

When the vizier's guests left, he was addressed by the caretaker. "Forgive me, sir, but during your meeting with the worthy gentlemen, I saw one of your slaves slip out of the adjacent corridor. What do you want me to do?"

The vizier thought for a moment and said: "Track him down and have him followed. I want to know where he is going. However, he must not speak to anyone under any circumstances. In that case, let our man use a knife and take his pouch, so that it looks like a street robbery."

The caretaker left, bowing, and went in search of Dusan. He did not find him where he was supposed to be according to his task. But after a short time, Dusan himself reported to him with the request to be allowed into the medina because his day's work had been completed.

Dusan hurried to his appointment through the narrow streets with relief. There he was stopped. An elderly man greeted him with "Masa'u Al-khair" and saw to his horror Dusan collapse in front of him. A bearded man ran away. Blood ran over the cobblestones as the old man screamed for help. In the commotion the killer had slipped into a side street and returned from the other side. As people gathered around the victim, he led the elderly gentleman away.

Kybbe was on his way to the inn to play shatranj with Dusan when he noticed the great excitement.

"What's going on?" he asked a boy, who was peering eagerly into the side street. "A man seems to have been stabbed there," the boy replied.

Curiously, Kybbe made his way to the unfortunate man.

His eyes widened as he looked down at the body. "That looks like... damn it, it is Dusan!" He hastily knelt down by his friend.

Dusan opened his eyes and tried to speak, blood running from his mouth. Kybbe brought his ear close and caught the faint whisper. "Conspiracy vizier... murder caliph... tell Ali." Dusan's head dropped to one side. His breathing stopped. Kybbe realized that his friend was dead and something else...if there was a plot and Dusan had been killed for that reason, then he himself was now in danger. He looked around hastily and then slowly withdrew from the group of curious people.

The paper was taken to the vizier's office by the scribe upon delivery. "Do you know anything about a person called Kybbe who is friends with Ali, the cousin of the caliph?"

"No, I have never heard that name."

The vizier then read the single sentence again.

"Mmm, I can't find anything special about it. It doesn't seem important. Who brought this message?"

"A scribe, sir."

"Did you ask him who gave him this order?"

"No, sir."

"Hmm, I see no objection. Just deliver it to the nubilin Ali ibn Muhsin."

Kybbe had immediately returned to Ghalib's house. Dusan had said that there was a plot by the vizier to assassinate the caliph and had asked him, he thought, to report it to Ali. But how did he get in touch with Ali? He had thought about this before and had always come to the conclusion that he would not be allowed into the palace. He had tried to find out if there was a chance of meeting Ali in a public place. But no useful information had come forward in the gossip circuit. It seemed as if Ali was not in town. Should he then inform Ghalib al-Nasiri of the plot? He suspected that the merchant would laugh it off. How could Kybbe be in a position to have such information? The slaves were all telling each other exaggerated stories about the great families. No, Kybbe was too insignificant in his eyes.

While Kybbe was thinking how he could bring the plot to the attention of the caliph, Ali did a little dance of joy. He had seized his brother and shouted: "Kybbe lives, he lives! And he is here! In Cordoba!"

His whole family knew the story. How he met Kybbe and that they had been taken by Bulgarian villains to the pirate's den Labineca. How they had subsequently been separated and he had seen Kybbe's ship disappear into the deep.

"I am going at once to the house of Ghalib al-Nasiri."

Excited at the prospect of seeing his friend soon, he left the palace. He refused to be accompanied, for he did not wish to wait a moment longer. The merchant was immediately informed that the caliph's nephew had been admitted. He hurried to the reception room. "Lord Ali, what a surprise and pleasure it is to receive you here. How can I be of service?"

"I want the person Kybbe brought to me immediately."

"You...you mean my house slave, Kybbe?" Ghalib stammered.

"Slave? There is only one Kybbe and I want to see him immediately."

Ghalib al-Nasiri clapped his hands and the house master hurried to fetch Kybbe. The merchant stood there in amazement as Ali and Kybbe fell into each other's arms.

"I thought I would never see you again. And that you had drowned in the attack on the pirates. I want to know everything about you. Come with me and tell your story."

"Erm...", Ghalib interrupted, "but he is my slave, Lord Ali."

Ali looked at him witheringly. "This man must be set free immediately. I will compensate you for your loss."

Once they were outside, Kybbe said: "Ali, first I have to tell you something very important. Another friend of mine was murdered in the medina a few hours ago because he had important information about a plot to depose and possibly kill the caliph."

"Whaaaa! Are you sure?"

"Yes, he told me with his last breath. He said Plot vizier... murder caliph... tell Ali. I think with the last he meant that I should inform you. He knew we were friends. But as a slave I could not reach you, so... what a coincidence that you were looking for me!"

"That is no coincidence at all. Now I understand. That clever friend of yours sent me a message. In it he wrote where I could find you. But now the thing is to inform the caliph as soon as possible."

When that had happened and they had convinced Mohammad that it was not gossip, but deadly serious, the wheels were set in motion.

The plan was the caliph's own. In a small, trusted circle he gave his order. "We arrest the vizier and interrogate him without any scruples. In this way we let the conspirators know that we are aware of the plot. Then a few traitors who feel they are in trouble will leave the city. We arrest those men and interrogate them as well. The circle of conspirators that will become

known to us in this manner will expand in this way, until we have caught everyone.”

In this way the coup was nipped in the bud. The conspirators were punished severely without exception and, at Ali's intercession, Kybbe was rewarded with an appointment to the expansion work on the Alcazar. He had finally arrived at his long-dreamed-of destination.

## **A voyage by sea**

### **869 AD**

A period of almost a year, which he spent with Ali outside of his work, came to an end. The death of Lothar II and the question of his succession increased the tensions that already existed between the great powers in Europe. A congress was planned in Strasbourg. The presence of Ali as a diplomat for the Umayyads was desired there. Without Ali, Kybbe threw himself even more fervently into his studies and work. Another few months passed. The congress had not been able to prevent a new war. Reports reached Córdoba of fighting in the Low Countries between the Frisians and the army of Rorik. In Africa, clashes occurred between the Umayyads and the Abbasid Empire. The Bulgarians looked from their newly conquered Constantinople at an army camp of the Abbasids on the other side of the Bosphorus.

The next day after their farewell, Kybbe strolled through the Medina. At first he mused about his newfound knowledge and the differences between a modern city like Córdoba and the town of Vellesan. The architecture and the building processes were quite a far cry from the traditional building in Kinhem. There, the floors in their first homes were made of lime, clay, manure, sour milk, eggs and slime. If you compared that to the beautiful mosaic floors in these Arab buildings, there was still a lot of catching up to do in his home country. How much he would like to apply all these new techniques and insights in his own region. Oh, if only Anna were still here. How great would his happiness be then. He doubted

whether it would ever be possible for him to find a new love. No woman would be able to release that same intense feeling in him. Tears welled up in his eyes as he sat down by a beautiful fountain. His gaze was so focused inward at that moment that he did not notice her beauty. He was only vaguely aware of the person who sat down next to him. He was startled when she spoke to him. He looked into the eyes of a beautiful dark-haired woman.

“Why are you so sad, stranger?”, she asked.

Kybbe shrugged his shoulders: “Isn't everyone sad who loses their loved one?”, he asked in return.

“Of course. I must apologize for my boldness, but I had a *déjà vu*, because more than a year ago I saw the same image of such great sorrow in exactly the same place. And the reason that young woman was grieving was the same as yours. She also had blond hair and her northern origins were just as clear as yours. Perhaps you come from the same region. Her name was Anna.” Kybbe looked at her, dumbfounded. “Anna? But that is also the name of my beloved. She died in a conflagration.”

“That is indeed a great coincidence. This Anna became my friend and we shared our heart's secrets. She recently left for Cologne, when a merchant from Parisi told her that he had heard of a young builder from Frisia, who was suspected of murder. This builder had been promoted to assistant to the master builder very soon after his arrival in the city of Cologne. She had exclaimed that it must be her beloved Kyppe.” Kybbe stared at her in disbelief. “How can this be? My name is Kybbe, but I saw that my Anna... How is it possible? Could it be that...?” The excitement was too much for Kybbe. Tears were streaming down his cheeks.

The woman put her arm around him. “Are you Kybbe? Are you the man she travelled after to find? This is truly unbelievable. You must come with me. My father will want to hear your story too, because he let me go with Anna to Seville to look for you.”

Her name was Inaya and her father was Kybbe's boss, the master builder of the Mezquita.

Inaya was indignant when she heard that Kybbe was currently her father's assistant. “How is it possible, Daddy, that you didn't even realize that this was the man Anna was looking for.”

Her father felt ashamed: “We never talked about it. His name didn't ring a bell with me and our conversations were limited to construction matters. I never connected Kybbe with your wayward friend.”

Inaya shrugged and asked: "Tell me, Kybbe, what's the deal with that story about the Pope? It is said that you murdered him. Moussa Bennani, the merchant from Parisi, told us in Seville that you are wanted for that."

Kybbe pulled a painful face and said: "That is mainly due to the actions of the mayor of Vellesan. From the moment he came to Kinhem he has harmed, terrorized and murdered my family members. The terrible apotheosis was when he had our brewery set on fire, in which everyone present including my aunt, my mother and Anna perished in the blaze." Not Anna," Inaya interrupted him.

"No, I don't understand it. How could she have survived that inferno? Could my mother have...?"

"No, Anna was very positive in that. Everyone died there. She said she was incredibly lucky surviving. But what about the murder of the Pope?"

Kybbe continued his story. "It was an accident. The Pope lost his balance on top of the vault. Cornelius, the architect, tried to keep him from falling and was then dragged down by Pope Nicholas into the depths.

Darra was there like a shot and claimed that he had seen me push the Pope and that I had planned the murder together with a friend. He was then ordered to capture us, and we managed to escape twice. The second time, my friend Gerhard drowned in the Rhine."

Kybbe then told the whole story up to the denouement of the plot in Córdoba and his subsequent release as a slave by Ali.

"What an amazing story," said Inaya's father, looking at Kybbe with new respect.

"But now that I know Anna is still alive, I want to go after her as soon as possible. I'm sorry, master, but I have to leave Córdoba and the Mezquita." Inaya and her father nodded simultaneously. "I understand that completely," they said in unison.

The preparations for departure began. The plan was to board a ship from Malaga to the mouth of the Seine.

It could not go fast enough to Kybbe. He did not have many possessions to take with him. The most important thing was his well-filled purse. Apart from Inaya, there was no one he had to say goodbye to. He promised to send her a message if he found Anna.

In a few days he reached the coast. Several days passed before he found a captain who was willing to take him on his journey to Honfleur.

Although Kybbe paid for his passage, he could not just sit still. He did not feel too good to do odd jobs and was therefore soon seen as a part of the crew. He helped with cleaning, made a small repair to the tiller and helped with hoisting and reefing the sail. Arturo, the helmsman, was quick to change his mind, after having initially had reservations about taking

passengers. "That boy is not lazy", he told the captain. "He is also handy and has a keen eye for what needs to be done. I do not need to explain everything. If we could count on every passenger being like that, we wouldn't need a crew and we would make a lot of extra money." They laughed at this absurd idea.

Halfway through the trip to Lisbon, Kybbe noticed that there was water in the hold and reported it to Arturo.

"That's normal, Kybbe," he replied. "There's always some water leaking through the seams. That's why the ship has to go into dock from time to time."

Once they had passed Jabal Tariq, the sea became rougher, but the storm didn't break until they were safely moored in Lisbon harbor. Since the captain didn't want to sail any further until the storm had subsided, Kybbe had three days to explore the city. The Umayyad army had taken Lisbon early in the 8th century. New mosques were built on top of Roman temples and the city was fortified with a wall, the Cerca Moura. Under the new government, crafts and trade flourished. Catholics, Berbers and Jews alike settled in the city. All the amenities that Kybbe had enjoyed in Córdoba were also to be found here.

Despite his impatience, he managed to relax. He visited a bathhouse, studied a day in the great library and looked at the architecture of the latest buildings, realizing that it was impossible to reach his destination any faster. The city was buzzing with rumors. It was said that Lothar II had died and that his children were being denied their inheritance.

"Louis the German is taking the whole area," said one of the sailors. "Yes," added another, "and I heard that this Norman, Rorik, has marched to the Low Countries with an army to claim the area for Louis." Kybbe left the inn with gloomy feelings. He had gone inside in the hope of being able to play a game of shatranj, but the news from his homeland depressed him. If Rorik was back, Darra could not be far away. Would he claim Vellesan again? Before his eyes appeared the image of a grinning Darra. Those poor Vellesanners!

At last the storm died down and Kybbe hurried to the quay to embark again. The new cargo bound for A Coruña was brought on board.

The coast slid past on the starboard side. It was a calm voyage to the peninsula in the northwest of Iberia on which the city was situated. The Torre de Hercules could be seen from afar. The ancient lighthouse looked out on three sides at a rough sea, whipped up by the wind, which had free play here. Lying on a hill, it towered 260 yards above the water's surface.

The Maravilla was quickly unloaded here and supplied with new merchandise.

The ship seemed to be taking on more water and Arturo expressed his concern about this.

The captain said that there was nothing they could do about it in A Coruña. "But from what I see, we'll make it to San Emeterio and we can dock there."

The Maravilla was quickly unloaded and restocked. Kybbe witnessed an argument that broke out between the captain and the loader. Eventually the captain shrugged his shoulders. When he arrived at the ship, Kybbe heard him say that there was nothing for it but to sail to San Emeterio with less cargo and find a shipyard there. It turned out that the ship was taking on more water than usual. It would have to be re-caulked. The same day the Maravilla was able to set sail for the city on the northern coast of Iberia.

Although the sea remained calm, it was hard work to keep the cargo dry. They had to bail out constantly and were relieved when the port of San Emeterio came into view.

After unloading the cargo at the harbor, they sailed up the river to the large shipyards, where the Maravilla was pulled into the dock.

While the rest of the crew went into town in search of relaxation, Kybbe hung around the shipyard. He struck up a conversation with some of the shipworkers.

"Look," one of them said to the interested Kybbe. "You have to put the same amount of fiber everywhere and not use too much pressure." He pressed the fibers into the cracks by hitting a caulking chisel with a wooden caulking hammer. Kybbe noticed that the chisel had a round groove. The worker told him that the chisel was so blunt to prevent the fibers from being cut off in the work.

"If you put too little packing in a crack, it will still cause leakage, and if you put too much fiber in one place, the ship's hull can be completely dislocated."

He then covered the work with pitch, which he liquefied by heating. Kybbe thanked the workers at the shipyard and went to look for the crew of the Maravilla. He saw that San Emeterio actually consisted of two districts. The Puebla Vieja and the Puebla Nueva were connected by a bridge over the Río de Becedo. The shipmates had found their amusement in the old part and welcomed Kybbe as the comrade who had

to be initiated into the pleasures that the city had to offer. It was a bit of relaxation that he could well use. For a moment his thoughts were not with Anna.

The Maravilla was in excellent condition again. The captain had not been idle during the time that the repairs had taken. All kinds of products were ready in a warehouse on the quay. These goods would certainly be easy to sell in Bordeu. In this way the loss that had been suffered due to not being able to use the full loading capacity in A Coruna and the costs of the repairs would be nicely compensated.

From Bordeu they would then sail directly to Honfleur. However, a new surprise awaited them as they sailed up the Gironde. A shout rang out across the sunlit waters of the estuary: "Behind you Viking ships!" Everyone on the ship turned and there appeared the characteristic dragon ships.

"All hands," the captain shouted. "Into the harbor as quickly as possible." The harbor of Blanquefort lay straight ahead of them. They sailed in hastily. "Let's hope they sail on to Bordeaux," the captain said to his helmsman and said a quick prayer.

The dragon ships, however, followed the Maravilla into the harbor.

"Disembark, boys. Seek shelter on shore. Quickly!", shouted Arturo. Kybbe gathered his meagre belongings and fled onto the shore. He saw that the inhabitants had lit a large fire, from which thick clouds of smoke were drifting upwards.

In the meantime, the ships had reached the shore and a horde of Vikings jumped ashore. Brandishing their short swords and axes, they ran into the town. The inhabitants fled into their houses. A number ran to the church and a single rider galloped out of the town in great haste. Kybbe hid behind one of the large wine barrels in the square and from there had a good view of the Viking horde as it began its plundering.

Men were cut down without mercy. The short swords did their work.

Women were taken screaming from their homes and herded together like sheep. The children held their mothers' hands in fear and tried to hide behind their skirts as much as possible. The stories that Kybbe had heard from his father and uncle about the raid on their village in Wieringen were illustrated by the images he now saw. He watched helplessly. A small boy ran towards him and dove behind one of the barrels. A large Norseman ran after him and, bending over the barrel, caught him. He hit the boy on the head with the back of his axe. Kybbe was just too late. He had risen to protect the boy and stabbed his knife into the Viking's neck. The man went down with a roar. Two other Norseman were alerted by this and came

closer. A thundering sound of hooves could be heard as an Arab unit rushed towards the Vikings. On foot the raiders were no match for the Arab horsemen. The two assailants of Kybbe fell under the arrows they shot. The issue was quickly decided. No prisoners were taken, and the Vikings who had remained to guard their ships saw that it was impossible to rescue their comrades and sailed away from the harbor.

Kybbe took the unconscious boy in his arms and asked the commander of the unit in Arabic if there was a doctor to look at the wound.

“There is a hospital in Bordeu, where a Jewish doctor and his son can look at him”, the soldier replied.

Around him, chaos reigned. People sat dejectedly on the street, parents were looking for children and vice versa, some just stared into space, unable to move. But some organization was also starting to happen. A group of men and women were busy collecting the bodies at the church. Kybbe weaved between them and was joined by Arturo.

The boy was brought on board the Maravilla. The entire crew had survived the adventure and a course was set for Bordeu.

“How lucky those soldiers were there so quickly”, said the captain.

Arturo said it was no coincidence. He had heard that the town had also been raided by Vikings a year earlier. The Wali had previously stationed a permanent force at Bordeu to protect this part of the coast. The inhabitants of Blanquefort lit a fire when an attack threatened and the riders knew from the clouds of smoke that their presence was needed. Because they were already on patrol they could respond quickly to the distress signal.

In Bordeu Kybbe was quickly referred to the hospital and he brought the boy there.

The doctor had him lay the boy down and examined him. Kybbe felt a great sense of responsibility. If he had attacked the Viking earlier, the boy would not have been injured. He felt guilty about that. “Will he be all right, doctor?” he asked.

“Well, at first glance he seems to be fine, but a blow to the head can manifest itself in many ways. About a year and a half ago I treated a young woman from the north who had been attacked by a bear. Her traveling companions had saved her, but did not know what to do with the unconscious woman. I took her to Bordeaux, but had no idea whether or how she would wake from her long sleep. This case seems very similar.”

Kybbe’s interest was aroused. “From the north, you say? Do you know her name?”

“What was it again?” the doctor mumbled thoughtfully. He looked up and exclaimed: “My son must know. In any case, he was madly in love and took care of her for weeks while she was in that sleepy state. Where is that

boy?" He brought his hands to his mouth and called through the funnel he had formed: "Joshua, come here."

A clumsy young man with a bushy beard appeared in the doorway.

"What is it, daddy?"

"That girl you took care of last year, what was her name again?"

The boy's face began to beam. "That was Anna, a beautiful woman from Kinhem. Oh, how happy I was when she finally woke up."

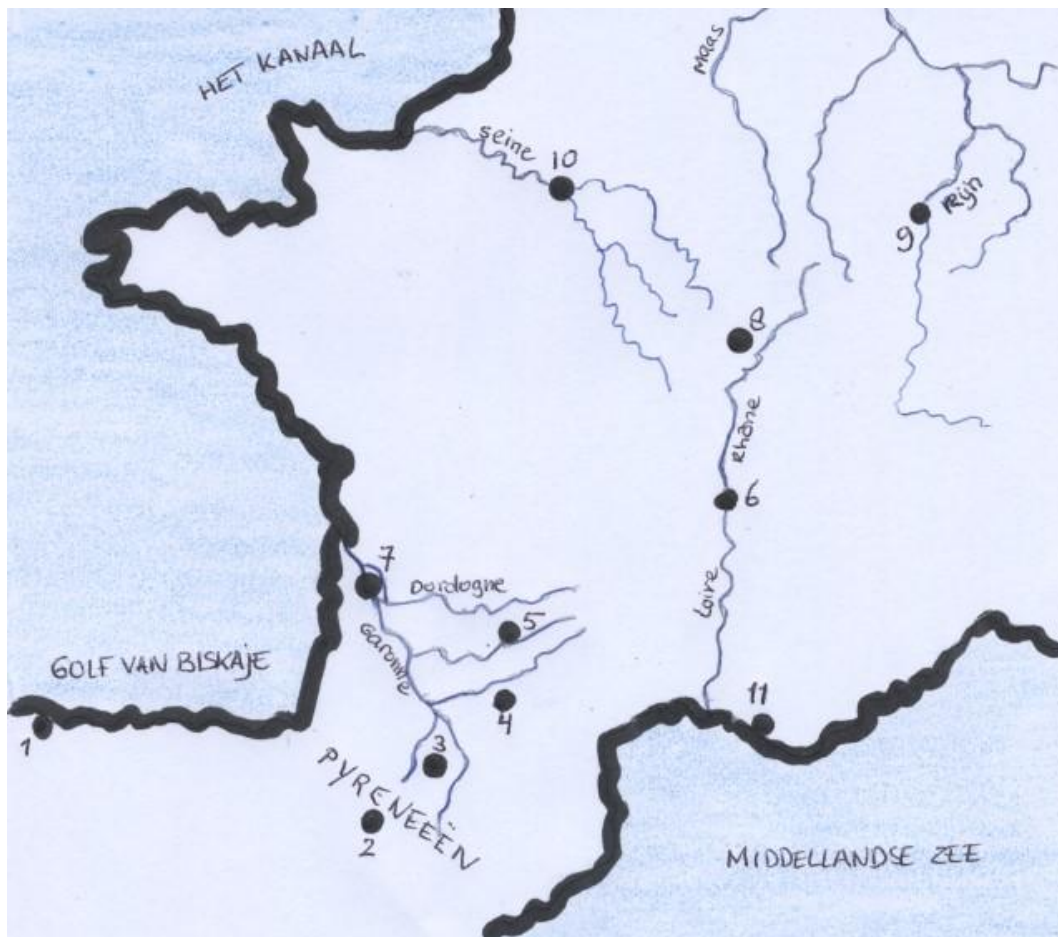
Kybbe's mouth fell "Anna? My Anna?"

The boy responded immediately: "Your Anna? But... then you are Kybbe, the man she was looking for. She was convinced she would find you in Córdoba. Did you find each other?" he asked eagerly.

"Unfortunately, no. I only heard that she had been in Córdoba when she had already left, after she had received information that I had been seen in Cologne. Now I am going to look for her there."

The doctor remarked. "Then I hope you will not continue to miss each other. Besides, it will be very difficult now that the chance of war with the Frankish Empire is increasing."

## The convent of Moissac



1. San Emeterio; 2. Jaca; 3. Lourdes; 4. Toulouse; 5. Moissac; 6. Lyon, 7. Bordeu; 8. Dijon; 9. Strasbourg; 10. Paris; 11. Marseilles.

Anna had traveled northeast from Seville to Saraqusta with a trading caravan. Since that was the final destination, she discussed the best route to the Frankish Empire from there on. She finally decided to take the pilgrimage route at Jaca through the Pyrenees to Lyon and on to Strasbourg, where she would take a boat on the Rhine to Cologne. In Jaca she met some pilgrims who planned to enter the mountains via the Canfranc Valley and descend on the Gallic side. It was a difficult journey, especially since a storm broke out. It was impossible to find shelter. An icy rain chilled the pilgrims to the bone. They reached Lourdes greatly weakened. There they took time to regain their strength and continued their way to Moissac. Dense forests, stream valleys and highly uneven

terrain made progress difficult and Anna was exhausted. She persevered, but the days came together in a monotonous trudge. She did not know how she had managed to bridge the great distance to the stopping place. She was supported by her fellow travelers for large parts of the journey. In the evening she fell down exhausted and the next morning she dragged herself along again.

She felt short of breath, her breathing became increasingly difficult and she produced a wheezing sound when she inhaled. She felt weak and had chills. She was coughing and knew she had a fever.

The pilgrims took her to the monastery of Moissac and entrusted her to the care of the nuns.

Sister Lucilla was in charge of the herbarium and was therefore the most suitable person to help the exhausted guest get back on her feet. She heard the coughing and rattling, tasted the sweat on Anna's head, felt her pulse and grunted something. She was not a woman of many words. Only among her plants and in prayer did she feel at home.

"How can we help her, Sister Lucilla?" asked the novice, who had been assigned by the Mother Superior to assist the nun.

Sister Lucilla counted off on her fingers: "Fluid, soup, fenugreek, garlic." The novice looked at her uncomprehendingly, but the nun had already turned to get fenugreek from the garden. The girl watched her dumbfounded. Mother Superior looked at her with pity. So she said, not unkindly: "Come on, Sister Berenice, make sure our patient is kept cool with wet cloths so that the fever decreases. Then feed her whatever Sister Lucilla brings you. Change her regularly and pray for her between these tasks."

Sister Berenice's face lit up and she immediately fetched wet cloths to cool the young woman entrusted to her care. Sister Lucilla brought fenugreek tea. Another nun came to look and explained to the novice that this tea would expel the poison that caused illness from the body.

"And the garlic, sister?" Berenice asked.

"Ah, that soothes the cough. She needs to get a lot of it, because it lowers the body temperature and she will get more air because of it. A sick body needs a lot of rest to heal. So make sure she doesn't exert herself. She also needs a lot to drink."

The weeks passed before Anna regained some of her strength. The fever had finally broken, but all her muscles ached and the coughing remained. She also tired easily and her caregivers forced her to stay in bed. There was no chance of resuming her journey. Eventually she resigned herself to it. However, she needed to do something. The novice had an idea: "You

shouldn't tire yourself too much. Perhaps the best activity is reading a book. You can read, don't you? Then you have some distraction and you can stop if it gets too tiring. Shall I bring you the Bible?" Sister Berenice asked.

"Do you have any other books?"

"Of course," the novice laughed. "We have quite a large library. There is even an Arabic book, but no one can read it."

"Oh, but I'd like to try that," said Anna.

"Can you read Arabic?" Berenice asked in disbelief.

"Yes, I learned that in Córdoba."

She clapped her hands excitedly: "Mother Superior must hear this! I'll go get the book."

A short time later she returned with Mother Superior and presented Anna with a book. Anna opened it.

Sister Berenice exclaimed, "You're starting from the wrong side."

Anna smiled and said, "No, sister, the Arabic reads from back to front and from right to left."

"Can you tell me what this book is about, Anna?" Mother Superior asked.

"It is a work of the Persian scholar Al-Khwarizmi. The book is called *Zij al-Sindhind* and, I read here, is about astronomy." Anna explained while leafing through the pages. "It contains all kinds of tables. Here the movements of the sun and there those of the moon are described. He also mentions five planets."

Mother Superior raised her hands in an incantation and said, "Just stop, Anna. This smacks of wickedness. The Bible says that the Lord created the earth and man in His image as the center of creation. That is my basis. There are many wicked ideas behind what scholars in this Islamic empire come up with. That's strange because in Islam God also puts man at the center of creation just like us.

It is a pity that the Muslims do not recognize the Holy Trinity. They see Jesus as a prophet, but not as the son of God. The Council of Nicaea was clear on this. In our church the trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is paramount.

What is being said by these scholars is a continuation of the thinking of the time when the message of God was forgotten. Fortunately, Jesus brought that message back to the people."

Anna thought that was a rather limited line of thought and there was a slight protest in her voice. "Time marches on, Reverend Mother. God has given us brains and with that we develop further. When I was in Córdoba,

scientists were developing new ideas in many areas and many discoveries were being made. Like this....”

Mother Superior made a dismissive gesture. “No Anna, our mission is to live in the service of the Lord. Such a book is not above the word of God.” She turned and left the room, followed by Sister Berenice.

Anna sighed. During her journey she had become acquainted with different interpretations of faith and decided that none of them gave her the freedom she needed. Kybbe thought along the same lines. He had broken away from the old religion, nor had he embraced his mother's church. As far as religion was concerned, his interest lay only in the buildings in which the faiths were practiced. She started reading. However, Al-Khwarizmi's explanation was so complicated that she quickly put the book aside. She wanted to read a story or some beautiful poetry. She hoped something similar could also be found in the monastery library. The days stretched into months before she had recovered enough to continue traveling.

In June of the year 869 the time had come. Anna said goodbye to the sisters she had gotten to know so well during the months she spent in the convent.

She joined a traveling group whose final destination was Lyon. Once there, she found a town dominated by two hills separated by the Saône valley. There were ancient Roman theaters on one of the hills. She wanted to make up for the time lost due to her illness as quickly as possible. Who knows, a trial against Kybbe may have already taken place! She had to go to Cologne. Fortunately, she was able to find a boat that sailed the Saône towards Strasbourg. Two months after leaving the convent she arrived in Strasbourg.

There was a lot of activity there. Soldiers could be seen everywhere. A huge camp had been erected outside the city. Anna had never seen so many horses together. The riders were very different from those she had seen on her tour in Bordeu, Cordoba and Seville.

What was going on here? She soon found out that Lothair II had died and that war was looming between the Frankish Empire and the Caliphate over his inheritance. That is why such a large army was concentrated here. An attack from Louis the German, the emperor of the Frankish Empire, was expected. The unknown riders were Seljuk Turks. They were devil artists on the back of a horse. They came from the far east and fought as slave soldiers for the caliph. Muhammad had copied the success of the Abbasid army, which was dominated by this Turkish tribe.

It proved impossible to travel east. The main roads were blocked, as were the waterways. She decided to go outside these routes. Of course it would take longer before she reached Cologne, but she had to get to Kybbe. A few days later she found herself in Alsace in the watery delta of the Sauer. She had not seen anyone here for a long time during her walk. This was her chance to enter the German Empire of the Franks, across the water. But how did she get there? There were two problems to overcome; she needed a vessel and more than her general sense of direction. It looked like Waterland, where Aeijolt had hidden for so long and the swampy areas she had sailed through after her flight from Hallem. She started looking for human activity. Those who lived here lived from fishing and hunting. She had seen plenty of signs of game on her journey through the delta and the sounds from the animal kingdom were not to miss. You definitely needed a boat to live here. A loud scream startled her and made her take a step back, causing her to stumble and fall backwards into a mud puddle. It had not been a human cry, but must have come from an animal. There was no need to be afraid. Large predators were probably not here. Maybe a bird of prey. She looked up and saw a plume of smoke above some low trees on the other side of a wider stretch of water. Now that she was already wet and dirty, she decided to swim to the other side and waste no time finding a path overland. Swimming was worse than she expected.

Shivering, she pulled herself out of the water onto the shore. Water dripped from her clothes. She thought wryly: At least I'm clean again. Directly in front of her was the source of the plume of smoke. It rose from a simple hut of branches and reeds. Bearing in mind previous experiences, she positioned herself behind a bush waiting for a resident. A woman came out humming. She carried a toddler on her hip and emptied a pot into the water a few meters away. Relieved, Anna got up to greet her.

During her first good meal in days, Anna talked about her search, much to the enthusiasm and surprise of the woman and her husband, who had since returned. Now they enjoyed a fresh fish meal, prepared from the catch he had arrived with.

When Anna asked if they could help her get to the country of Louis the German, the man seemed reluctant, but his wife silenced him and he gave in. He turned to Anna and said:

"I can take you tomorrow to the point where the Sauer flows into the Rhine.

Further on is a ferry across the Rhine. If you cross the river and then continue north, you will arrive in Neuburg. There you can board a ship that will take you further to Cologne.

Anna was woken at the crack of dawn. She was served a bowl of porridge and her drinking bowl was filled with fresh water. After a short but cordial farewell, she sailed with the fisherman through the vast delta, where the Rhine finally came into view. Here she was put ashore and set off on a difficult journey to the ferry, where she could expect passage. The next day she reached Neuburg on the Rhine. She found several small boats along the river. Each of these took her a little further north until she arrived in the festive fishing village of Mannheim. Anna did not know that Kybbe had participated in this winter festival here two years earlier. She was also unaware of the presence of the crew members of the ship 'de Speijer', on which Kybbe had come here on his journey to Constantinople. They traditionally spent the winter festival in Mannheim. Despite the wintry weather, she wanted to go to Cologne as quickly as possible. So after the festivities she left on a ship that would sail down the river all the way to Cologne. Along the way she cautiously inquired several times about the murder of Pope Nicholas, but it seemed as if this event had already sunk too far into the perception of the residents of this area. A crew member told her that the killers were thought to have drowned in the river at the time. However, Anna did not want to believe this. She felt deep inside that Kybbe was still alive.

Cologne came into view. The ship docked at the quay and Anna walked into town. She now had enough experience to look for a safe place to stay in a city. A monastery was therefore the first option and was preferable to an inn. Moreover, it was very likely that Kybbe had stayed there, or at least had spoken to the monks. He would not have missed the opportunity to gain knowledge. When she reported to the great abbey and spoke about Kybbe, a monk named Robertus was immediately brought in. He turned out to be the brother of a friend of Kybbe. Now Anna was told the story of the accusation of papal murder against Kybbe and Gerhard and their subsequent flight from the city. Robertus had hoped that Anna could give him more information, but she only knew what she had heard in Seville. Moussa Benani had not spoken about a fellow refugee at the time. This was the first time she heard the name Gerhard.

“After Kybbe came to the city, they worked together on the construction of the new basilica and became friends. When the Pope died and the building collapsed, they tried to rescue people trapped under the rubble.

Gerhard told me that two men had come from Kybbe's hometown and reported him to the emperor for the murder of the Pope. One was a nobleman and the other a clergyman."

Anna responded to these words of Robertus with a whispered sigh: "Darra and Anselm".

"Precisely! Those are their names. Darra was ordered to chase down Gerhard and Kybbe and take them back to be sentenced. Anselm has fully integrated himself into the entourage of Archbishop Gunthar, a powerful person in this city and also an opponent of our abbot. Apparently my brother and his friend managed to stay out of Darra's hands, but since the latter returned empty-handed, nothing has been heard from the two friends since."

"So Anselm is still here?" Anna asked.

"Yes, as I said, he can be found not far from Bishop Gunthar."

"And Darra?"

"He and his liege lord Rorik regularly visit the emperor himself. The high lords are preparing a war against the Caliphate, it is said."

"I think that is correct, because the border crossings to the caliphate are closed and I passed large groups of soldiers in the border area," Anna informed the monk.

Abbot Tatwin himself also spoke to Anna and he appeared to be well informed.

"The war will probably start when a new pope is finally elected. Due to the struggle between Gunthar and Rimbert, the Archbishop of Bremen-Hamburg, it has so far proven impossible to choose a pope. The emperor will only venture into war if he feels supported by the church. He hopes for Gunthar."

The conversations with the monks meant the end of Anna's plans. She no longer had any business here in Cologne and certainly did not want to bump into Darra or Anselm. Oh, she had toyed with the idea for a moment, but it was clear that Darra had nothing new to say about Kybbe. Besides, it was better to let him believe that she was no longer in this world.

Submerged in her thoughts she didn't notice anyone addressing her. Only the second time did she hear her name spoken questioningly. "Anna? Is that you?"

She looked up into the face of the Frisian merchant Sake, from a life that seemed so long in the past.

"Anna?" Kybbe said you died in a fire at the brewery. How is this possible?"

"Sake! Have you spoken to Kybbe?" Anna exclaimed breathlessly.

Sake told then told her of his meeting with Kybbe along the Rhine.

“So he fled south?” Do you know more? Brother Robertus told me that Darra was unable to arrest Kybbe and his friend. Where is he now? Did he go to Cordoba?”

“Whoa, Anna. Stop. Not so fast. To answer your last question first. Yes, I know Kybbe came to Córdoba. There he was released by the caliph himself, because through him a plot against the caliph could be nipped in the bud. The conspirators were tried and Kybbe became the assistant to the city’s master builder.”

“In Cordoba? Kybbe in Cordoba? That’s where I come from! I looked for him there.” Anna didn’t notice the bewilderment on Sake’s face and continued. “And what do you mean by freed by the Caliph?” Was he in jail? Then what for? For the murder of the Pope?”

Sake took a deep breath and raised his hand defensively. “No, Anna. Kybbe was enslaved on his way to the Caliphate, if I understand correctly. I don’t think the Caliph thought much of Pope Nicholas, but Kybbe is certainly not guilty of his death. He assured me it was an accident and that he witnessed it.”

“Come,” said Anna, “Let’s sit down somewhere. You must tell me all about it.”

“That’s fine, but I’m also very curious about your story. Did you go all the way to Córdoba? But how? And how did you get here, now that the borders to the Caliphate are closed?”

It became a long conversation, in which they told each other the whole story as far as they knew.

It was a relief that Sake confirmed what she had felt in her gut all this time, that Kybbe was still alive. It was good to hear that he had achieved his dreams and took an important position in Córdoba. But, she wondered, should she return to Córdoba? Would she have to undertake that very long journey again?

Who could help her? Who could advise her? How could she get in touch with Kybbe? Would he still be in Córdoba or had he already moved on to another destination? If he worked for the master builder, was he aware that she was still alive? Had he spoken to Inaya? In that case he would know and he would go after her. Could he follow her trail all the way to Strasbourg and Cologne? He certainly shouldn’t be looking for her here. That was life-threatening for him. He would be put to death immediately. Think Anna! What’s the best thing to do? Kybbe had to get a message that she was alive and that he should not go to Cologne.

She brought up her fear for Kybbe's life in the conversation with Sake. "When Kybbe hears in Córdoba that I went looking for him in Cologne, he will follow me. That shouldn't happen! How can I get this message to him?" Sake rubbed his chin and asked, "What would you do if you were together again?"

Anna immediately replied: "Then we would resume our lives in Vellesan." Sake made a decision: "I have to settle some matters upstream first. This means that I will be back here at the end of March and travel on to Frisia. Sail with me to Dorestad. There we can contact Moussa Benani's trading house. He has contacts throughout the Caliphate and therefore also with Córdoba. If anyone can reach Kybbe, it is him."

Anna had hoped to be able to travel immediately, but understood that it would be faster and at least safer to sail with Sake. She would no longer travel to Kybbe and risk missing each other. Instead, Kybbe would come to her. She would be able to make preparations for his arrival in Vellesan. She beamed at the thought.

Anna felt at home in the monastery's scriptorium. Brother Basil experienced how valuable Anna could be to him. When he understood that Anna knew the Arabic script, he took a book from the large cupboard. "I was told that this Arabic book is about the ideas of the great Greek philosopher Aristotle. Is that correct?", he asked. Anna took up the book and studied the first pages for some time, after which she replied that it was indeed about Aristotle. She allayed the monk's subsequent enthusiasm with the remark that it was probable that all kinds of thoughts were mentioned in the book, of which she did not know the Arabic terminology. She agreed that she would attempt a translation. However, Brother Basil should not set his hopes too high. It was hard work and, as Anna had already thought, there was a lot she could not understand or put into words. After a few weeks she felt the need for some of the simpler things in life and went to the market square in the city. She needed a new comb. While paying, her eye was struck by a familiar figure. She looked straight into Darra's face. It seemed as if her legs realized the danger before her brain, because she immediately started running. A stunned Darra started moving much later. Anna glanced over her shoulder and saw her old enemy begin to run. Panic gripped her throat. She looked left and right for an opportunity to escape. She increased her efforts and ran for her life. Fixed as he was on the running woman in front of him, Darra bumped into a cart of barrels in his path. Cursing, he rolled on the ground. He got up as quickly as he could and looked in the direction of the fleeing Anna. She was gone! He looked in all

directions. Where was she? How was it possible? No one had left the brewery in Vellesan alive. It was impossible. First Kybbe had escaped him and now there was this phantom.

Panting, Anna looked from her hiding place at the searching Darra. She moved backwards, step by step. She had to return to the monastery. She was safe there. She would stay there until Sake's return.

## Part 6

### War

Kybbe had said goodbye to his friends on the Maravilla in the port of Honfleur. They had experienced an adventure together and therefore felt strongly connected to each other. The events in Bordeu had strengthened their bond. Now for some time he had been in a ship bound for Parisi, the capital of this Wilaya. The great city emerged from the mist. His search, of course, began at Moussa Bennani's house. Inaya had told him how this businessman had helped Anna in her search for him. His fingers drummed impatiently on the railing.

Finally the ship docked and Kybbe immediately went to the Toll House to ask for information about Moussa Bennani. The merchant turned out to be very well known there and, after a few directions, it was no trouble at all to find his home. Kybbe used the hand-shaped knocker and after just a few moments the door swung open. A young man asked him the reason for his visit. Kybbe started a story about the search for his lost love and that his Anna was friends with Moussa Bennani's daughter. The young man smiled and invited him inside. He was taken to the merchant himself, where he told his story over again. Moussa responded enthusiastically and shouted: "What a great story! Wait a minute Kybbe, she needs to hear this."

He clapped his hands and shouted, "Fatima!"

A moment later a beautiful girl appeared in the room. Her father beckoned her and whispered in her ear. Her eyes widened and she looked at Kybbe.

She covered her mouth with her hand. Then she started talking excitedly: "Oh, if Anna only knew you were here." The two of us looked for you everywhere in Parisi. She was convinced that you had come here to discover the secrets of new structures. We have visited all the construction sites and looked for you in the libraries. Finally she decided to go to the capital. Actually, my father and I set her on that path through her questions. She concluded that you would only go for the best. That meant going to Córdoba."

"But, do you know where she is now?" Kybbe asked. "Did she reach out?" "No," Moussa replied. "I didn't hear from her after the meeting in Seville. She wanted to go north to Cologne as quickly as possible. She must have taken the land route north and then traveled to Cologne via the Rhine. That must have happened before the troop reductions. Now you can't cross the border anymore. The great war with the land of the Franks could break out at any moment."

"Hmm," Fatima mused. "If she arrived in Cologne several months ago, she must have looked for you there in vain."

"Yes," Moussa added, "that means she has lost track, because no one there can tell her that you went to Córdoba."

"What will she do then?" Kybbe asked almost desperately.

"Well, that's difficult. She needs information."

Excitedly, Fatima interrupted her father: "Then she will definitely come to us, daddy!" She shouted with joy: "Anna is coming back to Parisi."

Moussa urged her to calm down. "Calm down, Fatima! If Anna wants to go this way, she will have problems crossing the border. When the war starts it becomes virtually impossible to get past the lines. Then again, perhaps enough time has passed for her to be back in Gaul already. If I were you Kybbe, I would first wait a while to see if Anna shows up at my doorstep." In the time that followed, Kybbe remained Moussa's guest. Fatima walked with Kybbe through the streets of Parisi. She wanted to show him everything and do everything she had done with Anna at her side. A visit to the hammam was also on the program. Kybbe of course knew that phenomenon from Cordoba. He was taken by Moussa. They came to the conclusion that they had a lot in common. Moussa talked for a while with an old friend while Kybbe took a soothing bath. When they met again in the rest room, Moussa was still full of the conversation he just had. "That insidious German emperor has not only unlawfully taken the empire of his cousin Lothair, but has also made an alliance with the Danes, who are currently attacking our coastal defenses in various places," he said. Kybbe was disturbed. "That's bad news. Does this mean that the Umayyads can lose this war?"

“No, certainly not. Because even if the empire is attacked from two sides at the same time, the striking power of our army is superior. The new Turkish cavalry has already proven its worth on battlefields in the east.”

“What makes the Caliphate army so effective?” Kybbe asked.

Moussa thought for a moment and then replied, “I think our time-honored method of erecting a spear wall when the enemy cavalry charges will ensure the greatest gain.”

“A spear wall?” Kybbe asked. “What should I think of?”

“This means that the infantry is in a combat formation with the lances pointed towards the enemy. If the enemy cavalry wants to break through, it will be annihilated.”

Three weeks later, word came from the eastern border.

Moussa said: “These are difficult times, Kybbe. We don't have much trouble with it here in Paris, but on the coast they have to deal with a multitude of raids by the Vikings. War has now broken out on the eastern border. I don't think Anna got past the lines, because then she would have appeared here by now.”

What will she do now, Kybbe wondered. He had an inspiration. It was just a straw he was clinging to. However, anything was better than nothing.

That is why he asked: “What is the situation in the north, on the border between the German Empire and Lorraine? Do you know that Moussa?”

“Louis appropriated that area after the death of his cousin Lothair. He sent Rorik there to bring the Frisians under his thumb.”

“Then it is easy to travel from Cologne to Dorestad,” Kybbe concluded.

“Yes,” Moussa admitted, “I think so.” Suddenly, it dawned on him. “Do you think she is going to contact my cousin in Dorestad?”

“That seems like a possibility,” Kybbe said. In fact, it's a straw I'm clutching at. I don't have much else.”

Preparations were made to travel to Dorestad. However, Kybbe had to wait another week before one of Moussa's ships could leave for the port city, but the Vikings had thrown that plan into disarray. Moussa had lost 3 ships to them in the North Sea and was forced to revise his schedule. Even for someone like Moussa this was a huge loss. For Kybbe it was a disaster. How could he go to Dorestad now? He would have to go north overland. His train of thought was interrupted by new messages. After Count Rorik invaded Frisia with an army, the battle was not quickly resolved. Every time a fire flared up somewhere in the area, when Rorik thought he had everything under control.

"According to my sources, the Frisians are fighting hard for their freedom," Moussa said one day to a restless Kybbe. "Rorik has a firm grip on Dorestad, but he also has to deal with riots and uprisings again and again. I will first wait to see how things develop there before I send another ship in that direction."

Kybbe was convinced by Moussa to wait until there was more clarity about the situation in the low countries.

As the days passed in a deceptive calm, tension built up at the front. It had been expected that the Viking attacks in the west would be paralleled by a large-scale attack by the Franks on the eastern border. However, that had not happened. One could only guess at the reason. That attack finally came in the new year.

The battle lasted only 1 day.

Kybbe and Moussa were in a bar where they were playing shatranj. A group gathered around a soldier who gesticulated violently as he spoke. "Come on, let's listen" said Moussa. "He's talking about the war."

They pressed forward to hear the story. The soldier spoke: "The Frankish army was arranged in a classical manner: The infantry was positioned in different lines in the center and the cavalry was to the side, on the wings. The rearguard was commanded by Karloman, the emperor's son. Louis himself commanded the vanguard.

When the battle began, the Seljuk archers retreated from the enemy's advancing center and positioned themselves in a crescent shape while continuing to fire at the advancing army. The enemy failed to maintain discipline. Soldiers, panicked by the constant rain of arrows falling down on them and they began to break away from the main force. The enemy cavalry attacked thoughtlessly, falling into our trap in the hilly landscape. Louis then ordered a general retreat.

Our generals then decided on a large-scale attack. Louis foresaw the destruction of his army and the only thing he could do to prevent that was to attack again. Karloman did not follow his father's orders. He ordered a return to the base camp convinced as he was of the emperor being killed. The vanguard and the rearguard were therefore separated from each other. An entire wing was destroyed by us. Louis barely managed to save his life. And finally the rearguard was also shattered. In short, we achieved a fantastic victory and Louis had to walk away with his tail between his legs."

The audience started cheering and clapping.

A big surprise awaited them when they returned home. "Ali!", Kybbe cheered when the newly arrived guest got up from his chair. Kybbe and Ali grabbed each other's shoulders and shook them as if they were dropping apples from trees. They grinned and clapped each other on the shoulders. "How did you end up here in Parisi?"

"Well," was the dry answer, "by ship." Fatima laughed at the serious face Ali made. Then Ali could no longer keep himself serious. He laughed uproariously. "I am on my way to Aachen for a bilateral meeting with Louis and thought I might be able to find news about you from Moussa Bennani. So I wait here for the master of the house and look, I find you here myself. How is it possible. But you knew, Fatima, and you didn't say anything when you let me in!"

The young woman laughed: "No, I was curious how the surprise would turn out." Ali then laughed indulgently.

Of course there was a lot of discussion. To Kybbe's surprise, Ali was able to tell him about Anna's escape from the Caliph's advances. Ali was aware of all the ins and outs of the court. Although he wanted to spend more time with his friend, Ali was only able to stay for a short time. After the victory of the Umayyad army, it was important to start peace talks as quickly as possible and he had a leading role in this. They said goodbye with the promise to see each other again after peace was signed.

## **The inn**

### ***870 AD***

Kybbe had escaped him just as he thought he would strike. The arrest and conviction of a papal assassin could have given Darra a lot of prestige and the opportunity to rise, probably acquire a title and be included in the high nobility. Now he remained dependent on Rorik and the personal alliances that the Dane managed to forge. But Rorik was also dependent on the wishes and whims of his lord, Emperor Louis. It took a very long time before the plans made in 868 could be implemented. Louis had disposed of the Moravian prince Ratislav, but now had problems with his successor

Svatopluk. His own son Karloman played a role in this because through him Svatoopluk was able to seize power in Moravia.

A second part of the grand plan also did not go well. Rorik was unable to get other Danes interested in a coordinated attack on the west coast of the Caliphate. The great pagan army of Ivar the Boneless and Halfdan Ragnarsson was busy taking the English kingdoms one after the other. It was thwarted by Ethelred and Alfred of Wessex. The king and his brother offered fierce resistance in alliance with the king of Mercia.

Only when the conquest came to a standstill and Alfred paid a ransom to the Vikings did Rorik convince his Danish compatriots. The reluctance of the Danes also lay in the fact that Rorik had twice tried to take the kingdom of Denmark. Those campaigns had ended in failure. However, many Vikings still looked askance at Rorik and his cousin Godfred.

For the war against the Caliphate to be successful, a quick choice of pope was also necessary to gain the support of the church. A strong pope could play a leading role in a conflict with Islam. He could make a moral appeal and thus increase support for the war. However, the choice of a new pope had become a long-term affair.

The problems that Louis encountered in Moravia also caused major delays. While Rorik advanced in Frisia and the Vikings bombarded the coast of Gaul, an attack by the Great Frankish army failed to materialize. Rorik's goal, to quickly subdue Frisia and then attack the Caliphate from the north, could not be achieved due to the unexpectedly fierce resistance of the Frisians.

The Umayyad army easily defeated the Vikings in the west by stationing mounted units along the coast. The Danes then turned back to Britain, which was more lucrative for them. From the north the Umayyads had nothing to fear, because by the time Rorik had finally subdued the Frisians, the Frankish army had already been defeated on the battlefield.

“The plan went horribly wrong in the south, but now we have control over Frisia again, we need to consolidate our position,” Rorik told Darra.

As a vassal of Louis, he was in a stronger position after his Lord's defeat. The increased importance of Dorestad's trading position provided more scope in the relationship with his feudal lord. However, he did have a problem here that he could not solve quickly. The harbor had been silting up for some time. Larger ships had problems docking here. The dredging work that Rorik had carried out was defective and not carried out properly. Nature soon canceled out the work.

Darra was reinstated as mayor of Vellesan and surrounding area. He was hated by a large part of the inhabitants, but after the Frisians were subjugated again, he immediately violently suppressed any form of protest. The punishments were severe and often resulted in the death of anyone who dared to oppose him. He had gathered a new group of faithful around him. His riders were feared.

Anselm had come with Darra. Through his bond with the Cologne Archbishop Gunthar - who had been restored to honor through his support for the newly elected Pope Ioannes VIII - he managed to be sent as titular bishop. His task was to give the church in Kinhem a more solid foundation and to further expand it.

His former informer, the chaplain Wolfsfroyde, had managed to maintain himself in Vellesan after the failure a few years earlier. However, he was not popular in the area. You could say that he was tolerated because no other cleric was available. With his return, Anselm was able to take control again. Wolfsfroyde did as he told him.

From Hallem, Rorik had to extinguish new hotbeds of Frisian resistance again and again, until finally in October 870 everything seemed to have calmed down and the feudal system had been restored.

In Vellesan, Floor had viewed the latest developments with apprehension. Since Darra's flight, life had gotten better for her little by little. The Mayor's return revived the painful memories of the terrible fate her friends suffered. She had already lost her daughter and husband before that. Clauwaert had wanted to defend himself against that wretch, who was now back in the village. His end had been sad. Finally, she had picked herself up and thought she had put all this behind her. Finally, luck had smiled on her again. A new man, a successful business.

She thought about Anna. What would have become of her? She thought back to the day that Anna had appeared at her door like a phoenix from that terrible fire and asked about Kybbe. How would he have fared? Had they finally found each other? It seemed to her an almost impossible task that Anna had taken on. How many dangers would befall her as a woman in a violent world with men like Darra? But Anna didn't really know any different with a father like Roef, she thought. She hoped that everything would work out for the couple. In any case, Roef had taken his cue from an argument in his inn. After Darra's flight he had become even more unruly and grumpy. A customer did not like the treatment he received from the innkeeper. A struggle ensued and Roef suffocated. The bystanders did not feel called to intervene. In fact, almost everyone hated the rude

innkeeper. His funeral was arranged by Wolfsfroyde and only Fergus, the brewer, attended the ceremony.

One of the newcomers from Dorestad had taken possession of the inn and renovated it. No one objected, not even Fergus, because Abe became a major customer of his brew. The inn received more and more customers and Abe could not manage it on his own. Floor had gained experience in the brewery at Duna and Marzoeta. When she heard that Abe was looking for help, she took the plunge and reported to the inn. There was an immediate click. Floor had thought she would never be able to love again and had armored herself against the outside world, but Abe had broken down her defensive wall stone by stone and had finally penetrated to her core. A year later they were husband and wife. Which was sealed in the church by Wolfsfroyde.

Now, however, she was afraid. The returned, vengeful Mayor might remember her as the wife of Clauwaert and the friend of Marzoeta and Aeijolt. What would be going on in his sick and perverse head? Would he take their lives? She shuddered in horror at the thought.

For the time being, however, Darra was oblivious to her. His hatred was mainly directed at Kybbe. On the one hand, he wanted to believe that Kybbe had drowned in the river, but on the other hand, he thought up all kinds of scenarios for revenge, in case the cub was still alive, to get his hands on it. Kybbe had after all been the cause of his forced departure. He had ridiculed Darra with his escape at the Rhine. As a result, Darra had lost the opportunity to join the high nobility. He felt he deserved much more than this poor misery, as a vassal of a flawed Viking. A big surprise had also been the appearance of Anna earlier that year on the market square of Cologne. He couldn't believe his eyes when he saw her. When he lost sight of her, he had given orders to keep an eye out for her. He personally went by all his possessions and interests. The serfs had to be watched. Darra was convinced that everyone was trying to cheat on him. He would make sure that he got his rightful share of the proceeds and that the publican did not withhold too much. It would be nice if he could get a right to mint coins. That would drastically improve his position. Vellesan had grown since his departure, but unfortunately it was still a blot and not a significant trading town like Dorestad.

So one day he ended up in Abe's inn. He had heard about the popularity of the establishment before and wondered whether the innkeeper might owe him a larger fee. It was worth taking the time to find out for himself. Together with his new aid he decided to eat there and take a good look around.

A group of ten pilgrims traveling to the chapel of Saint Adelbertus were having a meal. They were cheerful and provided themselves with plenty of barley liquor to lubricate their throats. You could hear that. They planned to spend the night here. There were also some traveling merchants, a group of Vellesanners, some of whom Darra recognized, and some loose runners.

The food he was served was not bad and Fergus' beer was of course of excellent quality. That had been a good plan on Guy's part, he thought. What a pity that he was felled by that smooth-talking Aeijolt. He still missed his friend almost every day. As he left the inn, a woman caught his eye. She watched him with a strange look and quickly lowered her eyes when they met his. "There's something about that woman," he told Alubert. "There's something familiar about her, but I can't put my finger on it. Why don't you inquire and see what you can find out about her."

When Floor saw Darra enter the inn, she said to Abe: "That man can do us harm. He is the one who maimed and killed my previous husband, my friends and their entire family. He is evil personified. I hate to think about what he could do to us. I don't want to go into the taproom when he's there. Imagine that he remembers Clauwaert when he sees me."

Abe tried to calm her down. "Calm down, Floortje. Why would he want to harm us? We have a successful business and that is also to his advantage."

"Don't think that matters a thing to him, my darling. Marzoeta had a successful brewery and what did that bastard do? He stole her recipe and burned her business down. I'm not going to serve him."

"You just stay here, out of his sight, if you're so afraid. I'll serve them." Abe entered the great room to take the Lord of Vellesan's order.

Two days passed before Alubert came to report his findings to Darra.

"That woman is known in the area. Her name is Floor and she became a widow after her husband died in an attempt to kill the Mayor. She recently remarried the innkeeper. He came to Vellesan quite recently and took over the inn when the previous owner died in an argument. The people I spoke to had nothing good to say about the previous innkeeper and the then mayor".

"Hmm," Darra responded, somewhat disturbed.

He understood now.

Naturally! She was the wife of that tongueless villain. At the end of their journey to Vellesan, he and his men had allowed themselves some

relaxation when they saw something enticing in the stream. That was a gentleman's right. The common people had to do what their lord told them. The father had made a lot of fuss, together with that Wieringer clan of Aeijolt. Of course, a gentleman could not allow himself to be insulted and made suspicious. That would affect his position of power. However, the plan that Guy, Anselm and himself had devised to suppress the rebellion had caused more problems than they could have imagined. The slobs were stubborn and only seemed to get stronger. Ultimately, there was no other option than to eradicate the problem from root and branch. That didn't quite work out. Kybbe had escaped him and now Clauwaert's wife also appeared to be alive. Now he understood that the look she had given him was one of hatred. If she was as stubborn as her former husband, it could cause problems in the future. Moreover, she had a new man at her side, who was successful and popular among the Vellesanners. Darra racked his brains about what he could do. Would putting Floor aside be enough? Or would he have a new enemy in Abe, the innkeeper. He scratched his chin. He had to think about this carefully.

An idea matured in his mind. He thought it was actually brilliant. He sent Alubert to get Fergus. When the brewer stood before him he said, "Dear Fergus, what do you think of the idea of taking over the inn?"

Fergus started to mutter: "That's way too much work. I have my hands full with the brewery as it stands now and Abe is a good customer."

"Listen dumbass. Of course you're not going to do it on your own. People come to help you and you pay them. That's easy, because you will earn a lot more. Imagine. You buy your own beer and earn money from sales in the inn. You also have income from accommodation and food."

"Yes, but I can't cook at all!" the brewer protested.

"What a loser you are. We'll find someone who can cook."

"But I..."

"Enough! I tell you what to do. I want you to do it. I will let you know when you can take over and I will also provide people who will help you. And now, cheer up. Back to your brew kettle."

Startled, Fergus flew outside as fast as he could.

Meanwhile, Darra rubbed his hands. So, one potential problem would soon be solved and through Fergus he would get a bigger share.

He did not aim his arrows at Floor, but at the innkeeper.

One day Abe was arrested and brought before the mayor. The accusation came from Fergus. To his astonishment, Abe was accused of non-payment. He allegedly did not pay for dozens of deliveries. The second

complaint came from the Mayor himself. He is said to have paid too little to the board. Payment had to be made for guests to stay at the inn.

No matter how much Abe protested, it didn't help him. Of course he had paid Fergus for delivering the kegs of beer. De Mayor sentenced Abe to pay a hefty fine. Fergus had only been used by Darra. The fine disappeared in its entirety in Darra's coffers.

Abe returned to Floor dismayed and very angry. "They're thieves. That mayor is the biggest of them. I can't even prove it's a false accusation. Everyone dances to his tune. I don't have any coin left to buy supplies," he fumed.

Floor threw her arms around him. "I told you so. Darra is a villain who takes down anyone who gets in his way. He has seen me and remembered who I am. It was not enough to kill Clauwaert. Everything that reminds him of protest must disappear. Now he's attacking you because you're with me. His goal is to destroy me, I am convinced of that. You are carried along in that process."

Abe protested, but Floor silenced him and continued. "You must divorce me. You must throw me out if you want to keep the inn."

Again Abe protested and again she put a finger to his lips. "Hush, my darling. It's either that, or we can build a new life together elsewhere."

"I am not going to do that. You stay with me and we stay here in Vellesan. Now I am going to prepare the meal for our pilgrims. You continue to take care of the customers." He stomped angrily away to the cooking area. With a deep sigh, Floor watched him go.

## Dorestad



1. Hallem (Bergen); 2. Limbon (Limmen); 3. Vellesan (Velsen); 4. Beverhem (Beverwijk); 5. Heiligerloo (Heiloo); 6. Haralem (Haarlem); 7. Litte (Leiden); 8. Dorestad (in the vicinity of Wijk bij Duurstede); 9. Daventre (Deventer); 10. Numaga (Nijmegen); 11. Bryggia (Bruges); 12. Gand (Ghent); 13. Antwerp; 14. Loven (Leuven); 15. Cologne.

Anna no longer had to be afraid. Both Darra and Anselm had left. Rorik had started the reconquest of Frisia to restore his authority. All feudal lords had returned to the Low Countries in his wake. She could now move freely through the streets of Cologne and helped Brother Basil while waiting for Sake's return.

Her long wait was rewarded when at the end of March she boarded a ship with the Frisian merchant with Dorestad as final destination. Two weeks later they arrived at the junction of the Rhine and the Lek where the port city was located. Here they took leave of each other, after Anna had assured Sake that she would immediately go to the home of Sahin, the Moorish merchant, whom she had asked for advice on her first visit to the city.

Sahin knew about Anna's stay with Moussa and was intrigued by the young woman, who had traveled half of Europe to find her lover. He still remembered the conversation where she asked him what was the best place for someone with architectural interests to go.

Her intensity had really appealed to him. Of course, her friendship with his beloved niece Fatima meant that he welcomed her hospitably. An order was given to prepare a room for Anna. She discussed with him the letter she wanted to send to Moussa. Kybbe was definitely not allowed to follow her to Cologne. Sahin was surprised that Kybbe was suspected of the murder of the previous pope. Anna assured the merchant that it was an accident. This had also been confirmed to her by several sources, she said.

“These are uncertain times,” Sahin said. “Although it seems quiet here in Dorestad and people are dredging the harbor again on the orders of Count Rorik, the threat of war continues to hang over our heads.”

In the following months, a new pattern emerged for Anna. She made herself useful to Sahin by maintaining his trade register. This only required a few hours a week, which gave her plenty of time to walk and visit the abbey, where she became friends with the monks. The library was not very extensive and could not be compared to that of Basilius in Cologne. However, the few copies were worth it. The monks were surprised by her request to be allowed draw capitals. Hesitantly, the librarian agreed. He quickly regretted that. Anna turned out to have no talent for this art. Being able to write was one thing, but painting capitals was something completely different. The vellum was too valuable to be wasted by an amateur.

It seemed to her as if the jetty system in the port had been expanded even further. The scaffolding and platforms were even longer. Sahin told her that it was necessary to extend the jetties because the river seemed to be shifting its course further and further to the east.

The city had no defenses, but there was a refuge with a system of moats around it. Not all residents would be able to find a place of refuge here in times of emergency. This had become apparent during Viking raids in previous decades.

Anna had the sense not to go into the neighborhood where she had been robbed two years earlier. Gijs may be dead, but the pimp wasn't the only lowly bastard in town. The seamy side in a port city was always big, she had learned.

When could her letter reach Moussa? Would Kybbe have gone to Parisi and had he met Moussa? She hated to think that he had picked up her trail in some other way and followed her to Cologne. However, there was nothing she could do but wait and that was difficult for her.

In November, the residents of Dorestad saw the flags and banners of Rorik's large army, which took up a position south of the city.

“Now it's getting tense,” Sahin said. “I heard there's an army of the Caliphate coming this way. If Rorik is defeated, the city will be open to them. I hope with all my heart that that happens. It would provide much more security. We would then in any case be better protected against Viking raids and you can count on it that it will benefit our prosperity. It has deteriorated here over the last twenty years. The importance of Dorestad decreased during that period. The river recedes from the city. The engineers of the Caliphate are able to provide hydraulic engineering improvements so that the port can flourish again.”

Anna had seen what the caliphate was capable of and agreed with Sahin on that basis. How would things go in Vellesan now? Was Darra among Rorik's men, out there on the battlefield to be? Of course that had to be the case. After all, he was obliged by his oath to the count to fulfill his military task. How wonderful it would be if he stayed on the battlefield and Rorik lost the battle.

The army of the Caliphate had arrived and was taking position opposite that of Rorik. The battle would in all likelihood begin at the crack of dawn. The next day the sounds of the battle could be heard in the city. Anna quickly went to the refuge to have a view of the battle that was unfolding further away. To the untrained eye the battle looked chaotic, but some time later it appeared as if part of the Frankish army was retreating. The lines broke! Rorik's army fled. Anna saw it happen and she cheered. She ran down and ran all the way back to share the victory of the Caliphate with Sahin. More people than usual seemed to be leaving the city.

“The people who have to fear the arrival of our soldiers are fleeing,” Sahin said scornfully. It will mainly be the scum from the neighborhood behind here. The thieves fear the laws of the Caliphate.”

Anna was excited. Her energy needed to be channeled. She couldn't sit still. She decided to take a brisk walk in the afternoon to clear her head. She walked east through the harbor and while walking fantasized about Kybbe's arrival to Dorestad and their joint journey to a free Vellesan. She wandered past the long stretched development along the river and noticed that she was almost at the end of it. It was already getting dim. So she turned back hastily. It would be better to be back at Sahin's house before dark. Now that she looked around, she saw that no one else was outside. The darkness deepened. Anna quickened her pace. A large dark figure stepped out from behind a tree and grabbed her. She panicked and tried to struggle free. However, there was no escape from the iron grip. A second shadow clamped a hand over her mouth. Her feet were swept out

from under her and she felt herself being lifted up as the dark figures gasped to maintain their grip on her writhing body. A moment later she was put down. Grass tickled her neck. Rough hands pressed her firmly to the ground as another pair tore the clothing from her body. A heavy weight sank down on her. To restrain her, the second man had to move his hands. Anna screamed now. The man, who lay on her with his full weight, cursed.

The other said: "I can't do anything about it, Koos. She continues to struggle free."

"Then keep her-" He interrupted himself as running feet sounded and shouts were heard in an unintelligible language.

The smaller man shouted, "Koos, get out! It's the Moors. They're here in town." The pressure on Anna increased as the big man hurriedly stood up and shifted his weight. She rummaged around desperately, looking for her clothes. A huge scream rang out and steel whizzed through the air. Warm fluid flowed over Anna's body. Her captor collapsed next to her. A rude face appeared above her and fear seized her again. Then it sounded in Arabic: "Do not be afraid. I won't hurt you. I just want to help you." He draped a cloak over her shoulder after helping her to her feet. In the light of several torches, Anna recognized the attacker, who lay dead at her feet. A shrill scream sounded from a distance away. Another Arabic voice sounded from the darkness: "I've got that other bastard too." Anna trembled all over. "Of course you don't understand me," the Arab growled, "but it's over. Don't be afraid."

Anna couldn't stop crying. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she took the Arab's hand and sobbed as she thanked him in his language.

The man was astonished. "You speak my language. Unbelievable. But first let's make sure you get shelter safely. Where can we take you? Do you have a place to stay here?"

Sahin was excited and elated. The battle was won. Rorik's army had lost the battle. The end of the day was approaching and the warlords would soon arrive in the city. He wanted to receive them and offer them shelter. He hoped they would come soon, while there was still daylight.

That hope was in vain. Dusk was already falling. Sahin lit torches. If they had decided to enter the city today, they would certainly head for the light. It could of course be that they had decided to face the city council tomorrow. Those administrators had not shown themselves again after the battle. Sahin did not know whether they had fled the city in fear of the conquerors.

The sound of several voices reached his ears. Excitement seized him. They had come after all.

When the men came within the circle of torchlight, one of them approached Sahin. He waved aside Sahin's formal greeting as he spoke: "We will skip the introductions for the moment. First, this woman needs to be taken care of."

Two soldiers came forward with the battered Anna, whom they had taken care of.

Sahin was shocked: "Anna! What happened?"

Anna was still crying and unable to answer.

The warlord spoke again: "Answers will come later. Have a doctor look at her injuries and then put her to bed. Rest seems best."

Sahin made sure that Anna got what was requested. He was shocked and full of questions. The warlord now demanded his attention.

He introduced himself as Abd al-Mutarriif, general of the northern army and wanted a meeting with the city council as soon as possible. Sahin accompanied the soldiers to the administrators. However, they could not be found. Al-Mutarriif then ordered all the enforcers to gather. The city guard were told that they had to continue their work as they were used to until a new board was formed.

Only now was there time for the reception Sahin had in mind. He was told what situation the general had encountered when he arrived in the city and how they had freed Anna from the clutches of criminal elements. Sahin was moved and told to Al-Mutarriif's great surprise that Anna was known in the Caliph's court.

In the days that followed, Dorestad rapidly underwent major changes. In the wake of the soldiers, administrators, engineers, workers in all fields and businessmen reached the city. Gradually the lethargy Anna was in disappeared. Kybbe no longer occupied the prominent place in her thoughts. She wanted to leave Dorestad as quickly as possible. The memories of events here had to be completely erased from her mind. She couldn't bear the sight of it anymore. No matter how much she owed Sahin, she couldn't stay. She decided to return to Vellesan.

## Home

### **870 AD**

Negotiations between the Caliphate and the Frankish Empire were difficult and continued until late in the year.

This was mainly due to Louis' stubbornness. He continued to hold on to his cousin's legacy. What also did not help him achieve results at the negotiating table was the fact that he saw his culture as superior to that of Islam. Based on his mission for a peace settlement, Ali mainly wanted clearly defined and well-protected borders in the east and north. The Caliphate decided to shift the war to the north to put pressure on Louis. The army advanced unhindered to the great rivers that cut through the low countries. Rorik was there with his men ready to offer resistance. He had hoped that Louis' army would attack again after the Caliphate had crossed the border. He feared that his opponent would be too strong for him. That's why he delayed. But the loss of Dorestad would be unacceptable. That danger forced him to deploy his army. The Umayyad army turned out not to be as large as expected. When he saw the enemy army, Rorik felt his self-confidence increase. He decided to rely on the numerical superiority of his cavalry armed with long swords and lances. He had them carry out charges several times. The knights wore coats of mail and their horses were protected with armor.

Once again, however, the Turkish armed forces performed gymnastic feats on horsebacks. The majority of Frankish knights could not compete with this artistic efficiency.

The Turkish soldiers were trained from an early age in horse riding and archery from the back of a galloping horse. They were more mobile than any other soldier and easily covered great distances in one day. They decimated the Frankish army at a rapid pace.

Rorik fled the battlefield. He saw that the battle was lost. The flight of their warlord caused chaos in his army. Foot soldiers surrendered or tried to flee. The remaining riders spurred their horses and quickly disappeared from the victors' field of vision. Many fled to the east.

During the advance of the Caliphate to Dorestad and the mobilization of Rorik's army, the Frisians armed themselves. They now harassed the count's remaining vassals everywhere. The feudal structure was immediately abolished. Because the sovereign authority had ceased, the

residents formed the government themselves. Land ownership was decisive for this.

The monastery of Hallem therefore became a local power factor. Anselm saw his role as bishop thwarted by the abbot. Instead of being the ecclesiastical leader of Kinhem, he was forced back to a position in Vellesan due to the loss of the count's power and the absence of Darra. But that position was also precarious, given the fact that many Vellesanners did not like him.

As in the rest of Frisia, farmers mainly practiced livestock breeding and arable farming, which they combined with trade. The money from the coinage in Dorestad was used throughout the area, but also the sceatta and other European coins. With the arrival of the Umayyads, the dirhem naturally became the most used currency in Dorestad.

Ali had returned to Parisi. The peace negotiations in Strasbourg had stalled. The response from Córdoba was short. He was ordered to go to the capital of the Wilaya and from there to maintain contact between the caliph and the army leadership. The army was ordered to advance north. The idea was to exert such pressure that Louis would still agree to the proposed peace settlement. The emperor needed time to gather new strength after his defeat. He could not respond to the attack. His negotiating position would become weaker. With the capture of Dorestad, the Caliphate would control the river delta and thus trade routes that were important to the Frankish Empire.

Kybbe looked openmouthed at Ali. "The low countries in the hands of the Caliphate? No more Rorik as Count of Frisia?"

"I don't know about that last part," Ali replied. "Our troops are currently advancing towards Dorestad. When they take control of the city, they'll stop. The river area will be our new external border."

"So the army will not come to Kinhem?" Kybbe asked.

"No, the army leadership has been ordered not to proceed any further."

"So I can finally go to Dorestad to look for Anna?"

A deep frown appeared on Ali's face. "That seems unwise to me. Wait until the city is taken by our troops. I'll send word to army command to keep an eye out for her once they get to town. Wait for that. Don't do anything rashly."

The long-awaited news still came unexpectedly. A delighted Ali came to visit them in the hammam after finding Fatima alone at home. She told him to go to the bathhouse and there he told Kybbe and Moussa that Dorestad had been taken. "The Franks have been defeated and Rorik has fled."

Moussa and Kybbe clapped each other on the shoulders with joy. "We'll go with you right away, Ali. We must celebrate this," Moussa said. When they were seated they raised their cups. "There's nothing like a good glass of wine," Moussa said. "The Prophet, hallowed said his name, has forbidden distillates. Rightly so, because it can drive you crazy. Fortunately, beer and wine are pure. Cheers my friends." They had no choice but to agree with these words.

Preparations for the last part of Kybbe's journey were now being made. One of Moussa's trading ships on its way to Ribe would call at Dorestad en route and drop him off there. The farewell was difficult for everyone. Even Moussa looked affected. Fatima let her tears flow and hung around Kybbe's neck. He said: "When the war is over and your duties permit, you must come to Vellesan, Ali."

His friend hugged him: "I will certainly come that way when peace has finally been made."

Moussa also foresaw a reunion in the future. "Fatima will keep nagging at me until she can go to Kinhem. I will only allow that under my direct care," he laughed baring his teeth.

With a final firm slap on the shoulder from Ali, Kybbe got on the boat. He sailed away to his homeland.

Now that he was finally on his way, everything seemed to go more smoothly. The sea remained calm and empty. Only a few ships came into view and none of them had malicious intent. Apparently all the Vikings had concentrated on the British Isles. The dreaded dragon ships were nowhere to be seen.

As a traveler, Kybbe had encountered several setbacks and carried few possessions with him. Now, towards the end of the year, he was dropped off at one of the Dorestad jetties with a bag containing some clothing and toiletries. He had a big purse under his clothes with a large amount of coins. Ali had insisted he take it. "It is only a meager reward for the service you have rendered to the Caliph," he had added.

Kybbe replied that his freedom and the upcoming reunion with Anna already meant the greatest reward possible. Of course he had accepted the money, because Ali said with a stern look: "Otherwise, in accordance with my position as representative of the highest authority, I will forbid you to set sail."

At the end of the year, Anna walked into Vellesan. It didn't take long before she was recognized. And there was a whisper of wonder. "That's Anna, isn't it? How is it possible?"

The story of Anna's miraculous resurrection spread like wildfire.

Floor heard it. She quickly walked out and ran to meet her when she saw that the rumor was true. "Anna! How is it possible!"

Tears of happiness streamed down both their cheeks and they fell into each other's arms, sobbing.

She immediately took Anna to the inn. Abe stood there waiting, stunned that his wife had rushed out the door.

Floor wanted to know everything at once. Too many questions fell from her lips to be answered immediately. Anna shouted: "Calm down Floor, calm down. Let's sit down and have a drink, and then each of us can satisfy the other's curiosity."

Floor gathered herself together and ordered Abe to immediately get some of the light brew.

After the refreshment had been set up and Abe had curiously joined the two women, she wanted Anna to be the first to talk. As a resident of Vellesan, she had never been more than a few yards outside the city. So she listened with red ears and full disbelief to Anna's experiences on her search for Kybbe. Anna told her story up to the return to Dorestad and the outbreak of the war. She left the painful episodes in Dorestad unmentioned.

"But you haven't found Kybbe," Floor noted.

"No, but I know he is alive and probably in Parisi." Sahin sent a letter to Moussa, stating that I arrived in Dorestad. I don't know if that letter will reach Kybbe. But when he gets to Sahin he will be able to follow me here."

Floor had listened to her story in suspense. Her face reflected the events, which contained fear and joy. She let out cries of horror when she heard how the two had missed each other in Córdoba and during the episodes of Anna with the bear and with Giselbert's sons in Turnhout.

Abe said, "It'll be a miracle indeed if you two end up finding each other."

Now Floor had to tell her story. Anna was pleased that she had found a new anchor in life in Abe and was curious about developments in Vellesan since her departure.

She couldn't hold back any longer and asked: "Did Darra come back here? I last saw him in Cologne and then he left with Rorik."

Abe replied that Darra had indeed resumed his position as mayor, but that he and his knights had left for the front with Rorik. "That was quite a shock

here in Vellesan when that large army arrived from Hallum via the Heerweg. We were relieved that it stayed out of this town. After Darra and his men had driven out, they continued south. Since then we have lived under the rule of a chieftainship. I must say we really like this Frisian freedom.”

Floor agreed: “Everything went well after Abe and I got together. The inn was doing great and we made a lot of friends. When Darra came back everything changed. He came up with all kinds of things to spite us and I already told Abe that we had to leave Vellesan. Fortunately for us, the Caliphate then entered these countries and Darra had to go with Rorik to the battlefield.”

Floor clenched her fists: “I was so hoping that Rorik would lose and Darra would be left behind on the battlefield.”

“But what do the Umayyads do now that they have won? Have we exchanged what was bad for something even worse when the Caliphate takes Vellesan?” Abe asked.

Anna responded to this. “I don't think you have to be afraid of that, Abe. I am sure the Caliph will not take the area above the major rivers. Dorestad will become its northernmost city. I heard that from a conversation between Sahin and the general of the Caliphate. As a border, the course of a river offers better means for protection.”

“Then we only have to fear that Rorik will again enter into battle with the free Frisians. In that case, Darra will also return,” Abe concluded.

Naturally , Anna had to move into the inn with them. Floor insisted that she would stay with her until she could find her own home with Kybbe when he returned. She could already see it in her mind: “Once the two of you have settled in, you can undergo a ceremony to finalize your bond. Of course there will be a big party to celebrate that bond.”

To this Abe interjected: “But first comes the celebration of the winter festival. All of Vellesan is looking forward to the coming days.”

## **Return**

### **871 AD**

Kybbe arrived in Dorestad in the month of Safar of the year 258. Although the Muslims did not celebrate Christmas, the predominantly Christian city was in a festive mood. The new era was not used by most of the inhabitants. For them it was December 870. Sahin welcomed Kybbe as a family friend and he was introduced to General Al-Mutariff. The general knew the story of the attack on the caliph and the subsequent release of the slave in question, who had befriended the court's most important diplomat. He knew Ali personally and was immediately charmed by Kybbe. The fact that Kybbe conversed with him in Arabic and could play the game that was close to Al-Mutariff's heart contributed greatly to this.

Kybbe was told by Sahin how Anna had been looking forward to his arrival after sending the letter to Moussa. The aspiring master builder's heart jumped when he heard this story. However, the sequel hit him like a jump into an icy winter river. He shuddered in horror as he heard the horror that had befallen her on the night of the victory over Rorik. She no longer wanted to stay in Dorestad, Sahin said. She then left for Vellesan. He would have preferred to follow her directly to Kinhem, but a message had arrived that morning from Ali asking him to await his arrival to Dorestad. The general and the merchant urged Kybbe to grant that request.

A few days later he was able to greet his old friend in the city's harbor. Ali had expected that Kybbe would have been reunited with Anna by now and was under the impression that she had been waiting in Dorestad. Al-Mutariff quickly informed him of the developments since the victory on the battlefield.

Ali put his hands on his friend's shoulders and said: "What a sad thing to happen, Kybbe. I sympathize with you and Anna. Go to her, comfort her and try to heal her wounds. I wanted to meet you and Anna here. Unfortunately that is not possible. I also wanted to inquire how I can help you start construction plans that you probably want to realize in Vellesan." Kybbe told him that he wanted to make a modest start with the construction of a hammam. He could use two good craftsmen. Ali promised to send some masons and a skilled carpenter. As much as Kybbe appreciated being with Ali, the magnet that was Anna pulled him harder. He had to go to Vellesan. The next day they said goodbye and Kybbe left for Kinhem.

Upon his entrance into Vellesan he was soon surrounded by a number of enthusiastic residents. The story of Anna and Kybbe was eagerly spread throughout the city. Those who had known the pair before their departure and remembered the terrible fire and Darra's flight told anyone who would listen. The enthusiastic reception was therefore not surprising. Kybbe was immediately escorted to Abe and Floor's inn. These came outside when they became aware of the commotion. Their eyes widened when they saw Kybbe in the middle of the group and Floor shouted excitedly: "Anna, come! It's Kybbe!"

Anna came running outside. She saw Kybbe and threw herself into his arms. The crowd whooped and cheered. Spontaneous dances were done in the street. When the young couple went inside, the residents entered the inn after them. Floor made sure to close the door to the private area, leaving Abe to tend to the crowd. There would be something to drink while telling great stories. She had no doubt that all kinds of tall tales would soon be buzzing through the place.

Floor watched as Anna and Kybbe fell into each other's arms again. Tears streamed down their cheeks, while Floor watched with satisfaction the reunion of her young friend with the man she was willing to go to the ends of the world for. She decided to help Abe and leave the loving couple alone to tell each other what they had been through since they were separated by the terrible events in Vellesan.

When Floor had left the room, an elated Anna wanted to know how Kybbe had fared since he left Vellesan.

Kybbe started to tell as he took her hands in his.

"I didn't know what to do when I saw the brewery going up in flames. My father dragged me and stopped me from walking into the inferno to try to get to you.

"That would have been pointless," Anna said. "It would only have meant your death."

"But how did you survive that inferno?" Kybbe asked.

Anna said she would tell him later, but first she wanted to hear his story in full. Kybbe continued with the flight of Darra and Anselm and how his father was killed. Anna was shocked, but then urged him to continue. So Kybbe talked about his trip to Cologne and how he earned a living along the way. His impressions of the landscape and the appearance of the first real city he saw were also discussed. He described Cologne as a large port city with interesting remains from Roman times. He was relatively happy there, as far as that was possible with the image of the burning brewery in mind. There was a huge library in the city, which he liked to

visit, and the work on the cathedral taught him a lot. He found a good friend in Gerhard. After the accident with the Pope, he warned him that Darra presented it to the emperor as murder and that Kybbe was the murderer. Gerhard had fled the city with him.

Of course Anna knew that story from the mouth of Brother Robertus. However, she did not interrupt him, but let him continue. There would be plenty of time to ask questions later on. Kybbe told her about the chase by Darra and the escape that cost Gerhard his life. His eyes moistened at this part of the story. He collected himself and continued with the story of his lonely walk to Regensburg.

Anna exclaimed: "I recognize that well. How many days have I seen nothing but trees and everything in my body ached from the long day's marches." Kybbe wanted to know more about that, but Anna waved an arm impatiently and said, "No. I want you to keep going."

That's why he started talking about the happy times on the Danube. He then imagined himself beyond the reach of imperial power and looked forward to a future in Constantinople. Finally he would be able to devote himself to the construction of large structures. It wasn't meant to be. In retrospect, perhaps it was fortunate, because the city was captured shortly afterwards by the Bulgarian monarch. Moreover, he would probably never have been informed that Anna was still alive. They wouldn't have been sitting here together in their new found happiness.

Due to the pirate raid on the river, Kybbe ended up in a swamp. However, the attempt to escape them had caused him to fall into the hands of Bulgarian slave collectors. A cry escaped Anna's lips. However, she otherwise kept quiet.

So he talked about his meeting with Ali and the long conversations they had together. They thought they would be sold together by the Narentines, to whom they were handed over. However, they were separated and taken aboard different ships.

"As we were leaving the port we were attacked by a caliphate fleet. The ship I was chained to was sunk."

Anna reacted with dismay. "How did you survive that?"

"I really have no idea. At one point I came to on the beach of an island called Korcula. The first thing I saw there was a young woman catching shrimp and shellfish with her father. They took me to their village. I spent a month there."

"Were you with that woman, Kybbe?"

"What can I say, Anna? Yes, she was the first to really connect with me. All this time all I could think about was you and mourn for you. I didn't look at any woman. With Nevena it seemed like I could let go of the past. I

started making plans. However, Nevena had other plans. She could not leave her home and her father. I knew I could never stay happy on that island and I left. She took me away herself and arranged passage to Lausa. Everything seemed to go well on the way to Sicily. However, things went wrong again. Before we knew it we were rammed from behind by a much faster pirate ship. There was a chaotic battle aboard our ship. We didn't stand a chance. I was hit on the head and sold into slavery in Licata to Ghalib al-Nasiri, a Córdoba merchant in whose house I worked since arriving in the city. Aboard his ship I made a new friend along the way, Dusan. He ended up as a slave in the palace of the vizier of Córdoba. We usually spent our free time together. He heard of the plot against the Caliph and made sure my friend Ali got to know about it. Dusan paid for this act with his life. He was stabbed in the street and died in my arms. Ali made sure everything was in order and the caliph, out of gratitude, released me and got me a job with the master builder. That was Inaya's father, but I only found out much later.

I heard from Inaya that you were still alive. She said that you went with her through Córdoba and searched for me in every corner, until you decided to continue the search in Seville, where you heard that I had been seen in Cologne. When I heard that, I packed my things and immediately took a boat to follow you to Cologne. Vikings caused a massacre at Bordeu when we moored there. Luckily we were spared and were rescued by cavalymen of the Caliphate. After the battle I brought a boy who had been struck down before my eyes to a Jewish doctor in Bordeu and there I learned to my astonishment and happiness that he had treated you there with similar symptoms, or rather, his son had. There's not much more to say. We arrived in Honfleur. I found a boat to Parisi; inquired after Moussa on the quay and was forced to remain in the city until the battle had played out. I wanted to follow you to Cologne, but fortunately that was prevented by the war. Fatima thought you would come to her house from Cologne, so I waited there for you. Over time it became clear that it was actually impossible for you to come to Parisi and we decided that you would probably visit Sahin. Later your letter arrived. At the end of December the time had finally come and I could go to Dorestad. From there I left for Vellesan and found you here, to my unspeakable happiness."

Anna's heart jumped and she rewarded him with a wonderful kiss, but stepped back when she heard Abe's voice saying to Floor: "We've left the lovebirds alone long enough."

The couple entered the room.

Now Kybbe was told what had happened in Vellesan during the years of his absence and he repeated in a concise form what he had told Anna

about his adventures. By the time sleep overcame them, he realized that Anna hadn't told him anything yet.

Abe saw that the young people were exhausted. Emotions were running high and rest was needed. As a man of regularity, he signaled to Floor and said: "We are going to bed. Anna, will you show Kybbe where he sleeps? Good night."

The young couple soon fell asleep, tired as they were. It remained quiet for a long time, but at one point Kybbe was awakened by a soft sob. "What?" he started.

Anna pressed her finger to his lips and a soft "Shhh" sounded in the darkness of the room.

Her warm body snuggled against him.

"Finally, after all this time," she sighed.

Their faces were turned towards each other and a spark flew between them when their lips touched. The passion deepened. Kybbe's member swelled. He turned Anna onto her back and placed his hands next to her to reduce his weight. At that moment something inside her blocked. She placed her hands against his chest and pushed him away. "No, Kybbe...I can't...Not yet." She cried. "Just let me lie against you, feel you and cuddle you a little." She didn't understand it herself. She longed to feel him and at the same time there was something holding her back.

Kybbe relaxed and fell back next to her. He was disappointed that her passion had disappeared so suddenly.

"What is it Anna? Please tell me. What am I doing wrong?"

"It's not you, Kybbe," she whispered, sobbing. "It's me. My head is acting strange. Things have happened that..." She stopped.

"Tell me, Anna. What happened?"

She shook her head. "Not now, Kybbe. I can't tell you now. Be patient. Let's just kiss and caress each other. Then we fall asleep together and the demons will disappear."

Kybbe didn't insist. He knew what had happened in Dorestad and wanted to talk to her about it. He now saw how difficult it was for her and did not dare to take the initiative. Even though he was full of questions and eager to help her, he would have to be patient. He gently stroked her hair. Maybe a detour would help? They lay next to each other in the dark and Kybbe started with a question: "The doctor in Bordeu talked about you and an attack by a bear. Will you tell me what happened?"

Apparently this was a safe topic because Anna started to talk. Her story lasted until the small hours and, beginning with the bear attack and her awakening in Bordeu, it ended with her long stay in the monastery of

Moissac and her subsequent journey to Cologne and Dorestad. Overwhelmed with sleep, they slept through the night.

## **The attack**

Their life in Vellesan soon followed a set pattern. Anna helped at the inn and Kybbe started implementing his plans to modernize life in Vellesan and make it more pleasant. He was able to apply what he had seen in Córdoba here on a small scale. Imagine a water supply that went directly to a hammam. Never have to wash yourself in a cold stream or puddle again. During his journey he had also gained plenty of ideas from old books in the libraries of monasteries. The Romans also knew running water and used it everywhere.

Having your own place to live was no problem. The new captaincy agreed to Anna and Kybbe moving into the former Mayery. Kybbe was also appointed as a representative for the Upstalsboom, the meeting of the free Frisians.

Kybbe started building a hammam at his own expense. A piece of land was made available on the west side of Vellesan. It cost him a lot of headaches regarding the heating system and the water supply system. They couldn't manufacture everything by themselves. Clear instructions had to be sent to Moussa so that the correct components could be delivered to Vellesan. The building itself was not a problem. He based his work on the Egyptian layout and a Córdoba facade of brick. For this purpose he first installed a field oven. It consisted of two walls, between which the stones were stacked and then fired. He left holes in the side, through which stokers could throw fuel between the stones. After several weeks of baking, the fire was extinguished so that the bricks could be removed from the kiln.

Every evening Anna snuggled up to Kybbe. He suppressed his rising feelings of lust over and over again. Something bothered her so much that she was unable to give herself to him. He would have to be careful

because he certainly didn't want to lose her again. That is why they had long conversations about Kybbe's plans, about a shared future and about life in Vellesan and its inhabitants. They avoided the tough topics. Only sparsely did Anna talk about her experiences.

Actually, she knew, but had not dared to tell Kybbe that she was pregnant. She was afraid of his reaction. Afraid that he would reject her, that he would turn away from her. But she couldn't hide it any longer as her belly started to swell.

That, Kybbe thought, he could of course have expected with the knowledge he had of what had happened to Anna in Dorestad.

When Anna finally told him, sobbing, that she was pregnant, he soothed her. "Don't cry, Anna. I will not abandon you," he swore to her fear.

Astonishment and joy took turns over her. "But how?...Why?...What?..."

"Don't worry," Kybbe continued. "I will always be with you and the child will be our child."

Anna's heart jumped. Her fear that Kybbe would leave her because she was pregnant by someone else had been unfounded. Her chest swelled with love for her husband.

Two months after the start of Kybbe's project, three men from southern regions appeared in Vellesan. It was clear to the residents that they came from the south. One of them had olive skin and the two others were noticeably darker. There was great excitement at their arrival, because although there were plenty of people from outside, Franks, Normans and occasionally one of the British peoples, no one had ever come from the Caliphate. They had never seen anything so exotic.

They spoke an incomprehensible language. They were sent to the inn in the belief that they were pilgrims.

Floor saw Abe's unfortunate attempts at communication and said to him: "Give them something to drink and I'll get Kybbe. He can probably understand what they say." She ran away and returned with him a moment later. The men turned out to have been sent by Ali. They were two masons and a carpenter.

The message they delivered, on behalf of Ali, was that he expected to be able to take a normal bath when he came to Vellesan.

Kybbe laughed exuberantly. He shouted to the clouds "That will be so, my friend."

Kybbe found a chest in the back of the basement room. Inside was a smaller chest full of coins. This was apparently Darra's private treasure. The income of the Mayery consisted largely of goods. Part of the harvest,

for example. A large part of this had to be paid to the count. Apparently Darra had skimmed the tolls and who knows what other businesses he had. Kybbe hesitated as to what to do. Ultimately he decided that it should benefit the Vellesan community. He would use this money to build the hammam and other facilities. A distribution of the money among the Vellesanners would only cause problems. After all, no one needed to know of its existence.

The masons processed the bricks at a rapid pace. They closely followed Kybbe's design.

During construction he himself was mainly concerned with the water and heating systems. He recreated the system with which he had become familiar in Córdoba.

Everything went smoothly until he wanted to lay the lead pipe in a previously dug trench. He felt a stab in his back and then the warm fluid running down his body. He turned around and was able to partially parry a second stab with a raised arm. Another cut colored that arm red with blood. He saw his attacker, who was dressed in rags. His right arm with the lead pipe swung and he hit the hand with the knife. The man stepped back, turned and fled with the help of a crutch, dragging a useless leg behind him. Kybbe's knees buckled. He didn't have the strength to give chase. Idriss found him bleeding from two wounds. With the help of Emran, he brought Kybbe to Floor and they warned Anna. The two women cleaned his wounds. Floor knew which herbs should be used. Anna knew that water had to be boiled. She had learned that lesson in the harem. It took some time for the wounds to heal to such an extent that Kybbe could continue his work on the hammam. Fortunately, he could rely on the men Ali had sent. They had continued unabated.

The work was therefore only slightly delayed. It would certainly be ready and running for the summer festival of 872.

An evening walk had taken them to the edge of the dune, where Kybbe had survived a sandstorm as a child. Anna saw him standing still and staring without seeing. She touched him gently. "You're so far away Kybbe. What are you thinking about?"

The sharpness returned to his gaze as he focused his eyes on Anna. "Oh Anna, I thought about that day that I stood here with Saartje in the pounding wind and that Jannes saved us. Then I saw her again standing naked in the stream, whereupon I fled because of her nakedness. I promised to protect her, but I walked away when she needed help."

Anna said: 'You realize that as a little boy you could not have done anything against Darra and his men when they committed that atrocity. You would have been killed by that scum without any qualms.'

"I know," sighed Kybbe, "but I will never get rid of that image. They walked back to their home and went to bed.

That evening, Anna snuggled close to Kybbe again. He suppressed his rising feelings of lust. Anna needed more time. He would wait as long as necessary. Besides, she was now over five months pregnant and he was afraid of hurting her. He still felt just as clumsy and awkward as he had as a 12-year-old.

Kybbe came home at the end of a long working day. Unlike all the days since they lived together, Anna was absent. He thought that she would probably be with Floor to help her with something or other. It would be nice to eat at the inn tonight, he thought. He cheerfully left the former Mayery and walked to the inn to have a drink with Abe.

However, Anna was not there. Floor said she hadn't seen her all day. This caused Kybbe's concern to grow. He thought about where Anna might be and went from one place that came to mind to another. Abe was also sent out by Floor. He soon gathered a number of residents, who willingly joined in the search. One group went into the dune area, another explored the first part of the peat area east of Vellesan. Anna remained untraceable. Forced by the gathering darkness, the search had to be postponed until the next day. Kybbe was unable to fall asleep. All kinds of scenarios ran through his head and at the crack of dawn he wandered through the landscape again in search of his pregnant wife. Images of Anna somewhere in labor appeared before his mind's eye. He saw her lying in a pool of blood. He wiped the tears from his eyes, shook those images from his head and continued searching with a grim expression on his mouth. Abe had assembled another search party and they headed into the swamp.

## The bum

Like Rorik, Darra believed that the battle would go in their favor. The enemy horsemen were only lightly armed and outnumbered in terms of foot soldiers. When the agreed on attack signal came, his horse sprang forward. He managed to find himself covered on the flanks by his own men. However, things turned out completely differently than expected. In horror, Darra saw four of his best men fall under the arrows of the swirling Turkish horsemen.

The lightly armed horsemen proved elusive and sowed death and destruction.

The army broke into pieces. Many fled in panic. Seeing Rorik retreat, Darra turned his mount and attempted to flee the battlefield. It remained an attempt, because his horse was hit. The animal went down and Darra saw the ground coming rapidly towards him. Then everything went black. He regained consciousness at the sound of crows. His head hurt when he lifted it to look. The battlefield was littered with corpses. There was no movement whatsoever. The battle was over. He tried to move. He was stuck! His left leg was trapped under the horse's body. The attempts to break free caused him unbearable pain. It took hours before he finally managed to wiggle free from the dead weight of the horse. He was in excruciating pain. He found sticks to support him while he put only his right leg down. How did he get back to Vellesan? Could he take his position as mayor again? Had any of his men survived? Could Rorik still maintain his position as count with his decimated army? First he had to see if his leg could be treated.

It took months before he found his way back to Kinhem. His shattered leg was just a useless appendage. It caused him constant pain. Leaning on a crutch he carved from a large piece of wood, he staggered into Kinhem. His ragged clothes hung loosely around his emaciated body. A gray shapeless beard added to the image of a vagabond. He was not recognized. How much had changed in the months leading up to and after his accident.

He went to the church to find out what happened to his old ally.

Anselm was busy at the altar when he saw the bum stumbling into the church. His aversion to such people was many times greater than his Christian charity. He was about to chase the man out with his own stick when he heard the vagabond say, "Anselm, it's me, Darra!"

Startled, he took a step back. "Darra? My god man, what happened to you?" He looked around. There was no one to be seen. He quickly took him to his own home. There was a nauseated stench coming from Darra and Anselm could barely hide his discomfort. After Rorik left for the battlefield, it had become more difficult for him to realize his ambitions. Fortunately, he was not chased away under the new Frisian freedom. Apparently people accepted him in his position. It was still possible to strengthen the position of the church in Kinhem. However, this was only possible if the Caliphate left the area alone. Darra's presence meant a complication in his efforts. He no longer wanted to associate with him. Every attempt by the former mayor to regain his position was doomed to failure. Anselm understood that. He listened to Darra's bitter report in silence. He had to get rid of the man as quickly as possible. When Darra started complaining about his misfortune and placed all the blame on Kybbe, Anselm understood that it was better for him to say nothing about Kybbe's new role in Vellesan. He made it clear to Darra that he had no intention of offering him any help and advised him to get to safety. "Go back to Cologne and make something of your life there. There's nothing for you here. If the people here recognize you, you are doomed." With these words he sent Darra away.

In the days that followed, the vagabond had watched Vellesan from various hiding places. One day he saw Anna. So his eyes didn't belie him so many months ago in Cologne. She had not been a chimera. Somehow the witch had survived the fire and gone the same way as Kybbe, that brood of vipers. And then he saw that Kybbe was also back and that the couple occupied his house. Anger flared up inside him. They were responsible for his flight from Vellesan. They were to blame for his current state and handicap. He failed to see that this was a completely irrational line of thinking. He was furious. He wanted revenge on Kybbe. No one had recognized him until then. The people didn't even look at the beggar. He spied Kybbe at the construction site and saw that he was surrounded by Muslim workers. He spoke to them in that strange language of theirs. They laughed together. That piece of misfortune concurred with the enemy. He would end it, he swore to himself.

After Anselm had sent him away, he had found refuge in what appeared to be a long-disused hut in the swamp area. He knew he would never be able to play a full role in Cologne again. The elite would not accept an invalid like him into their circle. All he had left was the chance for revenge. His life was over, but not before he had avenged himself. In his hut he

hatched a plan. Kybbe didn't know he was here and was aware of no danger. Taking his lame leg into account, he had to be able to get close to him unseen to carry out his plan. It was best to do that on Kybbe's turf, when the cause of his misery was preoccupied with his work. In the fifth month of the year he saw his chance but his plan failed because his stabbings were not immediately successful. He was no match for a healthy young guy and with Kybbe's friends around, he didn't dare finish the job. Even at half strength, Kybbe might rob him of his ability to take revenge. That's why he fled before they could catch him. He hid again in his refuge, where he soon became aware of searches, which were of course the result of his attack. Fortunately, they decreased after about two weeks and then stopped completely. They were no longer looking for him.

Several weeks had passed since his unexpected meeting with Darra. Anselm thought he had followed his advice. But when he heard about the attack on Kybbe, he knew better. The man had been invisible all this time. It was difficult to say where he was. At least no one had talked about him yet. Anselm knew how much Darra hated Kybbe. However, he decided that he was not in a position to inform the Vellesanners of the presence of their hated mayor. The game should play itself out.

Darra had now come up with a new plan to take revenge. He was blinded by his hatred for Kybbe, he realized. However, there was a better way to deal with his tormentor. During his spywork, he had seen how the young couple interacted. The fact that Anna had followed Kybbe to Cologne opened his eyes to a new possibility. If he managed to take Anna away from Kybbe, he would hurt him more than a purely physical attack, as he had already tried. The uncertainty about her fate would probably affect him more than if he were to kill her in Vellesan. Getting hold of Anna would be possible, but how could he transport her here to the peat area? First he had to get his hands on a pack animal.

Anna was now more than 6 months pregnant. Her moods fluctuated constantly. Sometimes it was disgust when she thought of Koos' sweaty, dirty body on top of her. It was the same bastard as the one who had abused her during the first period in the brothel in Dorestad. She knew it not only because his comrade had called him by name, but she also remembered the pungent smell of his body during the previous encounter. How could she ever forget that! Then again she thought of the life growing inside her and longed to see it. She did the laundry by the stream while

she thought about the near future. When she bent over she was overcome by a deep darkness.

A blow to her head with a thick stick caused this. Darra dragged her unconscious body across the ground to a donkey that he had stolen. He managed to lift her over the donkey's back and tied her hands under the animal's belly to her feet, so that she would not fall off the donkey on the way. After this he led the animal into the peat area and the swamp, to his hiding place.

When Anna came to, she was disoriented. The first thing she felt was the hard, damp ground on which she lay. She tried to get up, but noticed that her hands and legs were tied. With her eyes she registered the bare interior of a dilapidated hut. Panic gripped her throat. Where was she? Who had brought her here? What would happen? Cramps shot through her entire body. She couldn't do anything about it. She tried to make the pain go away by lying still. Very slowly her muscles relaxed. The rickety door opened and a grotesque shadow momentarily blocked the sunlight that came in. A ragged man entered, staggering and leaning on a crutch. He saw that she had regained consciousness and started talking. Then Anna heard it, a hated voice from the past, Darra!

"You!", her breath caught.

Darra started laughing hysterically and cackled: "Hello Anna, hello bad girl. Aren't you happy to see me? That I have become a poor wanderer in a wrecked body? The fact that I lost everything and now live as an invalid, hiding in a miserable hut in the swamp, is your fault. Of you and of your boyfriend and his entire following. I have seen how you are now playing nice in Vellesan and play the inhabitants like puppets. You probably don't like that I dragged you out of there. But, I am so pleased to see you like this. Finally I can put right what you did to me. We're going to have fun. Oh no, I better say I'm going to have fun." He laughed again, showing his gray teeth.

Darra grabbed a whip hanging on the wall and brought it down hard on the defenseless body. Anna screamed in pain. Darra, laughing maniacally, continued to use the whip until her clothes were in tatters and her skin torn in several places.

"That was nice, Anna. We're going to do this often," the bum said, panting. The pain was so intense that Anna lost consciousness. It was a small mercy that she didn't hear Darra's last words.

The search for Anna continued. The desperation grew, but Kybbe, Floor and Abe did not want to give up. Many friends remained loyal to them. The

dune area had been searched as well as the woods. The most difficult to search was the swampy peat area. Their progress here was slow. If Anna were dead, they would certainly not find her in this landscape. Little did they know that they were being watched by feverish eyes during this search.

Darra watched with dismay as the search parties zigzagged their way closer to his hiding place. He would have little time left to torment Anna. She had already lost consciousness twice during the beating. Each time he had given her something to eat and something to drink. The second time he had torn the rags from her body and taken pleasure in the stripes and wounds he had inflicted on her. After this he had torn open the wounds again with whip and crutch. He had left her shivering feverishly. He would punish her one last time and then end her life and that of her unborn child.

When Darra entered the hut two days after the last beating, a cloud of flies came towards him. He looked at the scene before him in disgust. Anna lay in a large puddle, in which Darra saw a fetus and afterbirth, surrounded by flies. Shivering, he fled the hut again. It was over. He placed the dry wood and twigs he had hoarded against the hut and lit it. After this he fled further into the swamp. He heard the donkey bray behind him. The animal was tied to a post behind the hut. Stupid that he had forgotten such a valuable asset. He heard voices approaching. No, he couldn't go back and get the animal. He looked back and saw thick clouds of smoke rising.

A braying donkey! Abe looked up in the direction of the sound. Someone was there. He saw a plume of smoke. Yep, someone was there! The men immediately changed course to that point. Something was on fire. They quickened their pace. Abe sprinted forward. The donkey was pulling on its rope in panic. As one of the men cut the rope with one stroke, a faint whimper came from the burning hovel.

"Someone's in there!" Abe shouted. He rushed in, heedless of any danger to himself. The men saw him come out again just as the entire roof collapsed. He had Anna's limp body in his arms and ran past them straight into the water.

Back in Vellesan, Anna and Abe were cared for. They both suffered burns. Anna's condition was critical. In addition to her burns, she had had a miscarriage and suffered extensive blood loss. Her body was covered in wounds. Kybbe sat at her bedside and refused to let go of her hand.

Finally Floor persuaded him to eat and drink something. She took care of Abe and had some success in combating his pain with her herbs. From him she heard about the horror at the hut. Abe was horrified by the image he saw after storming into the hut. Without thinking, he picked Anna up and carried her outside, the flames licking at them. "I thought she was dead, Floor! That little creature that lay there on the floor with her. Terrible!"

Floor comforted her husband, whose tears represented much more than his own pain.

Little by little, Anna's situation improved. For weeks she lived in a twilight world, but at a certain point a turning point seemed to have been reached. She would survive. In August, Kybbe was able to gently hold her in his arms for the first time and Anna told what horrors had overcome her. "It was Darra, Kybbe. After he attacked you, he wanted to torture you through me. He intended that neither of us would survive."

"So it was Darra! He has been hiding all this time. We are in danger as long as he lives."

Kybbe talked about this with Abe and they decided to patrol the peat area at regular times.

More weeks passed before Anna fully recovered. Her body would remain violated forever. Her stomach, arms and back now showed permanent scars from the flogging. Here and there the skin was, as it were, translucent as a result of the deeper burns she had suffered during the last stage of her kidnapping. The miscarriage had left other scars. Her mind should heal too. Fortunately, she and Kybbe still had each other.

For the first time after Anna's ordeal in the swamp, the couple snuggled together in bed again. Kybbe had made it clear to her that the lasting consequences of her injuries did not pose any obstacle to his love for her. Anna had a very hard time with the fact that she would be scarred forever. Kybbe gradually managed to convince her and she regained her self-confidence.

Now Anna lay comfortably in the crook of his arms. She felt happy. She was finally really back in Vellesan. They kissed and explored each other's bodies with lips and fingers. Kybbe caressed her scars. He had accepted them as part of her and she now felt liberated.

The desire grew during these caresses. The inhibitions in her mind were gone. There was no delay possible. She no longer had any obstacles to receive Kybbe and when it happened the door of heaven opened. The emotions that ran through her alternated at a rapid pace. She laughed, she

cried; joy and melancholy filled her in a strange mix of all kinds of emotions.

Kybbe felt her body shake and her tears ran down his chest, which she clung to tightly.

"Dearest, dearest Anna, why are you crying?" he asked softly.

"Oh, Kybbe, it's so wonderful to be with you. Now I can finally feel again." And while he gently caressed her, she was finally able to tell the story of the events in Dorestad. About the pimp who had her locked up and forced into prostitution. The disgusting Koos, who tore her clothes off on the street and then brutally took her inside. "I was made available to his friends as a gift by that pimp. I felt so dirty! I kept telling myself I wasn't guilty. Djurre, Haio and Ulbo saved me. They took me away from Gijs' brothel. They later rescued me from the clutches of Count Giselbert's high-born sons. Yes, high-born, but of the basest kind. I hoped never to have to suffer such humiliations again. That's why I tensed up when I was selected for Caliph Mohammad's harem and I was afraid that I would have to suffer the same fate again when Yago drugged me. When I returned to Dorestad, I felt safe with Sahin. However, on the evening after the big battle, I was surprised by two bastards. One held me down while the other entered me. I felt so small and powerless. A moment of inattention and the bastards of this world see their opportunity."

This night they were closer than ever. It felt good.

## **Friends**

### **872 AD**

The storm had been fierce. The driving sand had found its way across the fields and into the streets of Vellesan. The harvest would be poor this year. It was only a short time until the summer festival would take place. Anna had a very big belly and Kybbe walked around her constantly worried. She was forced to send him away with some regularity. Now that the hammam was ready, his only goal seemed to be to get in her way. He meant well, but Anna wasn't about to lie down and wait for the baby to arrive. She wanted to keep busy as long as she could. She just hoped that the friends they had made during their travels would make it to Vellesan in time for

their ceremony. Every day that passed they worried even more. On the day of the summer solstice, a ripple went through the town. Excited shouts rang through the streets. They had come. Ali, Fatima, Moussa and Sahin got off their horses in front of the former Mayery. Three days before the 24th of June, the day on which the ancient celebration of the solstice took place. The festival had more or less become detached from its origins with the arrival of Christianity. It was also the day of the birth of John the Baptist. Most residents didn't care what they celebrated, as long as there was a party.

It was a warm reunion between the friends.

“Ah, the woman who despised the Caliph because she preferred a poor slob from Frisia.”

Kybbe turned around and said, “Anna, this is Ali.”

Anna turned red while Ali served up the tasty story. She regained her composure: “Without the umm al-walad I would not have known what to do. How can you resist such a powerful man? Aisha saved me.”

Of course they were very excited about the fact that Anna was pregnant. Fatima immediately started mothering her. Anna told her that she already had someone for that position in Kybbe. The friends from the south had a good laugh at this. The bystanders did not understand this merriment, because the entire conversation was conducted in Arabic. They went into their house, after which stories were exchanged. All were housed in the old Mayery.

After this, Ali took Kybbe aside and said, 'You have told me in the past about the sandstorms that occur here and can destroy crops. You also told about your father's hiding place in the swamps, which seem to be quite extensive here. Given the growth of Vellesan, it seemed important to me to ensure that the unpredictable nature of the harvest would come to an end. In Egypt I was able to see how they convert swampy areas into fertile fields. That is why I arranged in Parisi for technicians to come to Vellesan. That is my gift to you. They will ensure that the swamps are drained. They supply the knowledge they gained in Egypt and the tools. You have to provide manpower. Before you know it you will have a fertile area with grassy meadows.

Kybbe looked at him in surprise. “How so, Ali? Why such a gift? This is a huge gift!”

“First of all, dear friend, I am truly your friend,” he said with a joyful face.

“Second, we cannot reward you enough for saving the Caliphate. Third, it is good to have people on our northern border who are friendly to us.

Enough reasons to develop this country. And now I want to see your

hammam and chat with you about all your ideas and how you are doing here.”

Kybbe explained his design and the problems the installations had caused during implementation. As they enjoyed their bath, Ali said he had never known how complicated such a bathing arrangement was. “I’ve always taken it for granted. I enjoyed my bath and conversations with friends in a hammam. I have never delved into how everything works. It’s great that you came up with all this, Kybbe.”

Kybbe protested, laughing. He was flattered by his friend’s praise, but felt it necessary to say that he had not come up with it, but others who had written books about it in Roman times. “I just applied the knowledge from books and what I saw in Córdoba in Vellesan.”

When they told each other in the rest room about their experiences in the past year, Darra’s attacks were also discussed. When Ali heard that story, he responded with concern: “You were cared for by two women with no medical knowledge? You could have gotten wound fever. And the fact that Anna survived without proper medical attention is a miracle!”

Kybbe protested and said that Anna had learned a lot in the harem and that Floor knew a lot about medicinal herbs. Ali waved that aside and said, “Now that more of my people are coming here, an expert doctor is also needed. I’ll make sure there’s one coming with the engineers. If you want to build a modest mosque for them, then as far as I’m concerned the matter is settled.”

Kybbe was completely taken aback. “That won’t work, Ali. I cannot have enough bricks fired in that short a time and build a mosque in just two months.”

“It doesn’t have to be that complicated, Kybbe. Build something out of wood. Keep it simple. There will be not that many Muslims here to go into our house of worship.”

The beautiful summer weather had persisted, making it possible to hold the festivities on the market square. All kinds of sports and games were held during the day. In a corner of the market, space had been made for the children to jump and play with rectangular bones. Some children made a lot of noise with whistles and drums. The little ones imitated the older children with their rattles. In another corner, groups of men were demonstrating their strength and agility in tug-of-war competitions. Just outside Vellesan a game was played with a sheepskin ball filled with goat hair. The ball was hit with the fist. The intention was that the opponent could no longer return it.

At noon, many Vellesanners gathered at the stage that had been built in the middle of the market square. The two most famous inhabitants of the village would hold their own ritual here. Anna and Kybbe had wanted to confirm their togetherness in front of their friends and acquaintances. They had talked about implementing this for a long time. They were not religious. That does not alter the fact that they would certainly have opted for a ceremony led by a clergyman like their old disappeared friend Bruno. However, it was anathema to them that Anselm or Wolfsfroyde would officiate their ceremony.

While the market filled up with interested parties, music sounded. On the stage were Ali, Moussa, Sahin, Fatima, Abe and Floor. The couple took the stage, where they made a promise to each other. Kybbe looked deep into Anna's eyes and promised her and their future baby his continued love and protection, after which Anna did the same, saying, "I love you and will always watch over you."

Then Floor and Abe stood up and put a necklace on both of them. Their union was sealed with a kiss amid cheers.

Now the musicians took their place on stage. Their music mingled with the flutes and drums and the enthusiastic shouts and screams of the children as they returned to their games.

Two game boards were set up for the adults. Ali and Kybbe sat down at the board to play shatranj. Moussa and Sahin took their places behind the other board. The game attracted a lot of attention. A man pushed forward through the spectators and shouted, "I want to learn that too."

Kybbe looked up, disturbed. His eyes widened and he stammered, "Jabik?"

The game was instantly forgotten and under the eyes of a stunned Ali, the two men fell into each other's arms.

"I'll take over from Kybbe, Ali," Anna said and sat down on the other side of the board. "Kybbe will first want to know everything about his childhood friend."

Ali's eyes twinkled, "Are you sure you can compete with me?"

Anna laughed and patted her stomach: "I certainly believe so, because I play for two."

Jabik said that he had heard about the fire in the brewery upon returning from Limbon and saw the blackened remains. From an old man he heard the gruesome story of the death of so many acquaintances. He ended up with Floor and heard from her that Kybbe and Anna were alive. Both of them had left for an unknown destination.

Jabik then decided that there was nothing left for him in Vellesan and to try his luck in Dorestad. That's where he ended up at the coinage. "I had to remove the minted coins there and replace them with a coin plate. Then the top punch was placed on the bottom punch and the coin was struck. I learned a lot there and eventually became a stamp cutter. A lot has changed in Dorestad in recent months under the Umayyads, but I was able to keep my position. Now we no longer mint sceattas, but dirhems. Much has changed for the better. Trade has multiplied and prosperity is increasing again.

Then I heard that an important official from the Córdoba court had arrived, on his way to Vellesan. That of course piqued my interest. And what was my surprise when the name Kybbe came up in the conversation. After further inquiring, I found out that a special event would take place at the summer festival in Vellesan. I packed my things as quickly as possible and stood in the crowd just in time to see how Anna and you were given a chain by Floor and a man unknown to me."

Of course, Kybbe also had to tell what had happened to him since their last meeting.

In the evening there was music again and there was exuberant dancing. First in daylight, then fires were lit. The party continued until after midnight.

## **Revenge**

### **872 AD**

When they came for Anna, he quickly hid. It would have been pointless to face such a large group. He would never have been able to fight back in the dilapidated state he was in. He set his hut on fire and then fled. He had had to find a new hiding place and once again residents of Vellesan had been looking for him. However, he was able to avoid them all. Now, however, there were new developments in the swamp. How much longer could he avoid the newcomers? Groups of workers were digging every day. Hidden in the reeds, Darra spied on them. Among them he saw people dressed as in the Caliphate. He gritted his teeth. So the bastards were already in charge here. He knew how to move through the swamp and how to get food. He had learned that the hard way in the period after

his attempt to kill Kybbe. He had been very afraid that they would find him and regularly had to duck when another group of Vellesanners entered the swamp. After a while the searches stopped. They had been looking for him. He was sure of that. His life was over. He didn't really care if they caught him, but not before he could get revenge on Kybbe. Until then he would remain hidden. But he knew he had to hurry now. They were getting too close. It was hard to think that he would no longer be able to achieve his last goal. That could not be. He was at peace with the fact that this last act would mean his death. That didn't bother him, but first... his revenge!

The wood came from the immediate area. The other supplies for the construction of a mosque were with the help of Ali supplied by Moussa and Sahin through the port of Dorestad. Jabik had previously told Kybbe about the major undertaking by the Arabs and Berbers to deepen the port of Dorestad so that large ships could moor there again. The port had been silting up for years under Rorik. Jabik now helped Kybbe as much as he could with the building of the mosque. Together with Emran, the work progressed smoothly. Despite the assignment to build a simple mosque, Kybbe still wanted to leave his mark on it. He did this by designing a much slimmer minaret than was usual. He wanted to give the small building an elegant appearance. That would have been impossible in stone, but this minaret was made of wood. When the Egyptian hydraulic engineers saw it, they spoke to Emran in amazement. The carpenter was beaming and winking at Kybbe. Thanks to Emran's craftsmanship, Kybbe's plan succeeded brilliantly.

As Kybbe was putting the finishing touches on the eaves the next day, the simple wooden ladder slipped from under him. He landed hard on the ground and broke his arm. A shadow leaned over him. Kybbe raised his good arm and his attacker's knife made a deep cut. Darra saw revenge within his grasp.

Just as he was about to strike in triumph, he saw a movement out of the corner of his eye. Although Darra half turned towards her and raised his crutch, he could no longer parry Anna's blow. With superhuman effort, she let out a horrifying scream and brought down the heavy hammer. Horror painted Darra's face just before the hammer made a crater in it.

Hearing Anna's cry made some Vellesanners rush over. They saw her attack a vagrant with a hammer and then collapse, panting. She sobbed loudly as her water broke.

"It's Darra," Kybbe shouted at Abe, who just came running.

The residents stared at the surreal scene in amazement. A shout from Abe brought them back to consciousness. "Get the doctor for Anna."

As a boy ran to get the doctor, Abe knelt on the ground next to Kybbe. He tore a strip of Kybbe's shirt and tied it tightly around his arm to stop the bleeding. Floor had also come running. She spat on Darra's corpse before she took care of Anna.

Afterwards, both Kybbe and Anna were entrusted to the doctor's care. Fortunately, there were no complications during the delivery. They named the girl Pytske, after Kybbe's sister, who died so unfortunately. Kybbe longed to take her in his arms, but with only 1 usable arm that didn't seem wise.

It took some time for the fracture to heal, but fortunately the mosque was almost ready. The temporary housing of their prayer room in the Mayery could now be exchanged for their own mosque. The Muslims in Vellesan were very grateful to Kybbe.

The fertile lands that became available after the draining of the swamps resulted in an influx of people. More food was soon produced and trade increased in volume as a result. More and more pilgrims also came to Kinhem. The town grew faster than ever. The sandstorms that could wreak havoc in the dune area and spoil the food crops lost their destructive effect on the new soils. The sand didn't extend that far. Many trees were cut down for the construction of new homes.

Anselm had great success with the relics and statue of Saint Engelmundus. People came from far and wide to see the miracle. The income was correspondingly. The success caused Anselm to plan to build a larger church. The pace at which Vellesan grew and the increasing number of pilgrims who wanted to see the image of the saint and the relics made it necessary to build a church with more prestige, according to Anselm. The order for the construction of this Engelmundus Church could only be entrusted to one person. Anselm was well aware of that. He was much more practical than his old ally Darra. The question was whether Kybbe had the same attitude, or whether he could not let go of the past. After all, as a boy he had pointed an accusing finger at Anselm, and although Darra was responsible for the deaths of his relatives, he may have blamed Anselm for it too. After all, Kybbe and Anna had avoided him and the church like the plague during the long time they had been back in Vellesan. Their bond with each other had known no Christian ritual and had not been sanctified by Wolfsfroyde or himself.

However, Anselm's question was so tempting for Kybbe that he was willing to talk to the clergyman. This was his chance to build a large and beautiful

building in his own hometown. He would use techniques he had learned in Córdoba. Construction would take years. He could put his heart and soul into it and live a life of peace and comfort in the place where he grew up and found his love.

The chieftaincy had reached agreement on the establishment of its own coinage, now that Dorestad was in the hands of the Umayyads. Jabik had spent a lot of time convincing them of the usefulness of a coinage of their own. As a result, he was appointed mint master. It became a busy time, because a suitable building had to be found. The delivery of materials had to be assured. A force was needed to hammer the metal plates to thickness and someone who could cut them to size. The most important things Jabik needed were the punches and an anvil. It would also be difficult to find a good stamp cutter. To mint a generally accepted coin, it was necessary for an assayer to be able to check the raw material for fineness. He had to be appointed and sworn in by the captaincy. An independent inspector had also to be found for the final inspection of the minted coins.

Vellesan was well on its way to being promoted from village to city. The game that Kybbe had introduced was now often played in Abe and Floor's inn. He had played it often in Parisi. His first student in Vellesan had been Anna, followed by Abe and Jabik. In the meantime, more Vellesanners had become addicted to the game. After a few games of shatranj they sat and chatted with a cup of beer. Another group of pilgrims had arrived at the inn. Kybbe said, "There is no trace of evil in the pilgrims. They are just so terribly gullible and that is exploited by clergymen like Anselm. Don't get me wrong. The Christian faith strives for good. I was able to see this, among other things, from the monks I met. Their work is important and valuable. My mother was converted and truly believed. She was betrayed by church clergy. There are weak and wicked people in the church. People who only think of their own self-interest, like Wolfsfroyde and Anselm here. The latter raped my childhood friend and later laughed about it with Darra and his men, with whom he had formed a bond. However, the wind has changed, Darra has disappeared and Anselm must now take our Chieftainship into account. Though I am convinced that he still only thinks about his own interests. Just look at how he cultivates the lie of the image of Engelmundus. When I was in Cologne I saw the wickedness in church officials who sought power over the heads of the common people. Pope Nicholas was the exception, I must say. He struck me as an honest person. Just like my

sister's husband to be, Chaplain Bruno, who disappeared without a trace in an attempt to catch the bad guys.”

"Why are you going to build that church for Anselm if he is only looking for his own gain?" Jabik asked.

"The faith and the church are not the problem. Given the growth of Vellesan, it is desirable to have a larger space for Christians. I would also build a large mosque for the Muslims if they increased in number. My mother believed in good and she believed in God. However, my father impressed upon me how the church operated in the time of Charlemagne and how it forced people to become Christians. He respected my mother's choice, but he didn't want to know anything about it himself. Uncle Rium was still of the old faith and he regularly sacrificed at the pool in the swamp. At that time there were still quite a few Vellesanners who sacrificed in the swamp and practiced other old rituals. I don't know if the old gods or the new exist. I haven't seen any evidence of it yet. I prefer to trust myself and my friends.

"That's how I think about it too," Anna said, casting a warm look at Kybbe. The baby in her arms seemed to agree as well, because she burped. The three adults burst out laughing.

## **God's judgment**

### ***277 AD***

The Greater or Saint Engelmundus Church was far from finished, but could already be put into use. The nave and side aisles had a roof and were therefore suitable for Christian services. The statue of Engelmundus had been given a central place and the relics were now displayed in beautiful boxes. A market was held in the church once a week. The rain could no longer be a spoilsport for the stall owners and their customers. Little Pytske pulled at her mother's skirt. "Mommy, can I play with Tijn and Saartje?" Anna shifted the toddler on her arm and looked at her daughter. "That's fine Pytske, but don't go too far away."

The girl happily walked away with little hopping steps, looking for her friends. Anna wanted to do some shopping before she started her work for the day. She had to write some letters for residents of Vellesan who could not do so themselves and she also started giving reading and writing lessons to children. Her aim was that all children would be able to go to school. She knew it was impossible to achieve that goal. The children were allowed to go to school and play as long as they could not yet work. Their labor was often desperately needed in the families.

She herself was now blessed with two beautiful children. Pytske was an intelligent child and learned quickly. The new Kybbe would certainly do no less in the future. Anna had insisted that their second child be named Kybbe. "I spent an important time in my life looking for you. You shaped my past and my present. A new Kybbe shapes the future."

Kybbe senior stood at a distance watching the procession, of which Anselm had made an annual spectacle. Now for the first time from the Greater Church. It was an impressive procession that attracted many Christians. They eagerly watched as the statue of Saint Engelmundus was brought by the bearers to the site of the relics and to the well that the saint had once struck. Here the leading Anselm performed a ceremonial act. After two rounds through Vellesan, the procession returned to the church. When the bearers wanted to put the statue back on its pedestal, it started to wobble. Anselm, who had turned to the crowd to pronounce a blessing, was struck by the falling saint. The statue was hurriedly lifted up and the cleric was pulled out from under it. Kybbe had been walking through an aisle and saw the statue fall. It quickly became clear to him that Anselm had had to leave earth at the moment of his greatest triumph.

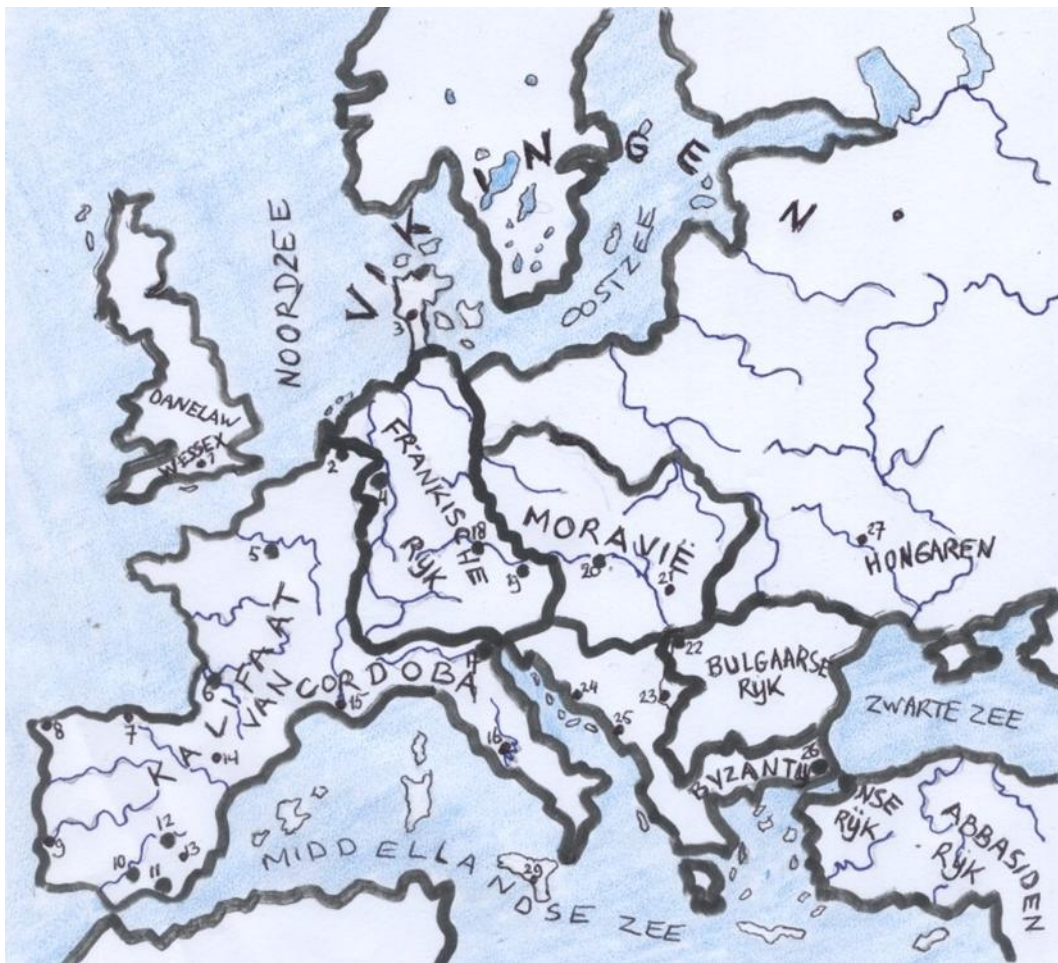
If there really were a heaven and a hell, he hoped Anselm would have ended up in the latter. A smile slid across his face.

Life was good. Finally everything had turned out as it should with their little family in blooming Vellesan.

However, new threats were lurking. In the east there was a rebirth of the Byzantine Empire. Emperor Basileios managed to regain control of Constantinople. The Abbasid Caliphate was weakened by the Zanj Rebellions, creating room for the Byzantines in Asia Minor. Due to an agreement with the Magyars and Moravia, the Bulgarian Empire was attacked from several sides. Grand Prince Álmos had moved with his Magyars to the west of Ukraine and imposed tribute on the Slavic tribes there. Patriarch Photios of Constantinople had previously been the opponent of Pope Nicholas. They both felt that they had primacy over all

Christians. Now he sought cooperation with the new Pope in Cologne. They found common ground in an alleged threat to the Christian church by Islam. They then unfolded a plan for a Holy War. Karloman, the new Frankish emperor, saw such a battle as an opportunity to restore the empire over which his great-grandfather had ruled. Europe would be shaken to its foundations.

-The End-



1. Winchester; 2. Dorestad; 3. Ribe; 4. Cologne; 5. Paris (Paris); 6. Bordeu (Bordeaux), 7. San Emeterio (Santander); 8. A Coruna (La Coruna); 9. Lisbon; 10. Sevilla; 11. Malaga; 12. Córdoba; 13. Granada; 14. Saraqusta (Zaragoza); 15. Marseille; 16. Roma (Rome); 17. Veneza (Venice); 18. Ratisbon (Regensburg); 19. Linz; 20. Tulln; 21. Veligrad; 22. Boeda (Budapest); 23. Belligrad (Belgrade); 24. Labineca; 25. Lausa; 26. Constantinopel (Istanbul); 27. Kiev; 28. Holmgard (Novgorod); 29. Licata.

### **Changes in history made in this book:**

- The battle of Poitiers was lost to the Umayyads.
- Louis the German never held the title of emperor. His brother Charles the Bald did, but in this book Charles never gained power in West Franconia, because the Caliphate conquered it. Karel has been removed from history by me.
- In my view, Venice will not become an independent city-state, but part of the Umayyad Empire.
- Constantinople was not conquered by the Bulgarians and the Byzantine Empire survived for centuries. It was not until 1453 that the city was captured by the Ottomans.
- Muhammad ibn-Abi Amir was the Vizier of Umayyad Caliph Hicham II. I have placed him in a much earlier time, namely the time of Emir Mohammad. Through intrigue and successful military campaigns he gained power in al-Andalus until his death in 1002.
- The Caliphate of Cordoba only came into being when Emir Abd al Rahman III proclaimed himself caliph in 929. The Iberian Peninsula was never completely in the hands of the Umayyads. In the north, Christian areas, including the kingdom of Asturias, continued to exist.
- Musa ben Nusayr was the governor of Ifriqua in 711. I use his name for a character who occupied that position 157 years later. Moudid, Bouhannouch and Bensaid are real Riffian names, but they were not involved in the coup d'état that I made up in 868.
- Ioannes VIII became the new pope in Rome not in 869, but in 872.
- It is true that Alfred the Great bribed the Danes not to attack Wessex. However, there was no agreement between the Vikings and Louis the German. The Danes then concentrated on conquering the kingdom of East Anglia, a goal they achieved in 870.
- In reality, Rorik returned to his position in 870 and remained count until 873.
- I have also brought the period of Frisian freedom forward in time.
- Under Emperor Basilius I (867-886), the Byzantine Empire flourished. During this period, an ecclesiastical schism led to a deep rift between Christianity in Western and Eastern Europe.
- The Zanj Rebellions in the Abbasid Empire actually began as early as 869 and lasted until 883.
- It was not until 895 that the Magyars allied with the Byzantine Empire and defeated Simeon I of Bulgaria.

## **Frisia**

Frisia already existed in Roman times, but when did the Frisians arrive there? The first written sources about Frisians are from the first century AD. In the seventh century, the Franks adopted the Roman name for this area. Here they came into conflict with regional warlords such as Radboud, who was called king of the Frisians. The wars that followed partly resulted in the Christianization of the Frisians.

In the 6th century, the population began to grow. There were settlements such as Vellesan on locations where the first dunes were formed and at the estuaries.

When Charlemagne took this area in 785, he introduced the Lex Frisonum. This was a record of local laws and customs. This shows that there were three estates in Frisia in the 8th and 9th centuries: noblemen (noble freemen), frillingen (ignoble freemen) and letslachta (semi-freemen or serfs). Slavery was also known.

The political organization in Frisia only changed when there was a power vacuum in the period called Frisian freedom.

The Utrecht Bishop Koenraad of Swabia was murdered, as well as Count Hendrik of Northeim. Emperor Barbarossa then determined in 1165 that the count of Holland and the bishop of Utrecht should jointly arrange the appointment of a Count of Friesland.

When Floris IV of Holland died in 1234, Frisian freedom was created in the vacuum, in which chieftains exercised authority within Friesland. This is a local form of government. Larger political issues are then decided on in regional consultation bodies in the form of land days.

The period of Frisian Freedom ends with the victory of Emperor Charles V of Habsburg in Friesland in 1524.

## **The Emirate of the Umayyads**

Under Abd ar-Rahman II (792-852), art and culture flourished in al-Andalus. Medicine, astronomy, poetry, philosophy and music received a boost. Córdoba was glorified as the 'Jewel of the World' and had a population of 300,000 in its heyday. There were hundreds of hamams and mosques. It was also 'the city of books' and it had many libraries. There

were also several hospitals. The city had street lights, water pipes and paved streets. It was the most developed city in Europe.

In 822 Ziryâb arrived in Córdoba. As a renowned musician, composer, poet and singer, he founded a conservatory. Not only Córdoba, but also the other cities in al-Andalus had concentrations of doctors, lawyers, poets and scientists. People came from all over Europe to attend classes at the established universities in these cities.

### **The Frankish Empire of Louis the German**

In the ninth century, the Carolingian Empire increasingly weakened after the death of Charlemagne. His only remaining son, Louis the Pious, later divided the empire among his three sons, who then fought each other out. In 843 they finally accepted the division. The imperial title ended up in the Middle Kingdom (Lorraine) of Lothair I. Louis the German inherited East Franconia and brother Charles the Bald West Franconia. Eastern Franconia consisted of the duchies of Saxony, Franks, Thuringia, Allemannia (without Alsace), Rhetia and all the eastern marks. Regensburg became the capital. In 865 Moravia accepted the authority of the East Frankish Empire. After his death, Louis was given the name 'Germanicus' (the German), because most of his territory consisted of the former Germania.

### **The Middle Empire – Lorraine**

When Charlemagne's empire fell apart, after the death of his son Louis the Pious, Lothair became emperor and obtained the middle part. He was able to expand this in 843 with Frisia and ran from what is now a large part of the Netherlands, southwards via Luxembourg and far into Italy.

After his death in 855, that area was divided among his three sons. Lothair II inherited the part that included the Dutch area, which later became known as the Kingdom of Lorraine.

He died in 869, after which the area was divided between his uncles: Louis the German and Charles the Bald. This is how two great empires emerged: Germany and France. The Low Countries became part of the German Empire.

## **Vikings and the Danish Kingdom**

The Vikings are often known as plunderers. But that is a one-sided picture. They came from the Scandinavian areas and spread south far into the Mediterranean Sea, west through Iceland and Greenland to America and east along the major rivers as far as Ukraine to the Black Sea. There they were called 'Roes'. The conquest and plunder campaigns began in England in 793. The Norsemen started colonizing from 840 onwards. There was a large surplus of young men and a shortage of girls. Since only the eldest son inherited, many were forced to look for another source of income and joined trading and plundering expeditions. Their landholdings in England were called the Danelaw.

In the 9th century the kingdom of Denmark was embroiled in a series of dynastic problems. An example of this is Harald Klak, whose nickname was 'the defiled'. He was king there a number of times between 812 and 827 and allied himself with the Frankish emperor Louis the Pious. In 814 he was chased out by his cousins and again after his return in 823. His rivals were against an alliance with the Frankish Empire. In 827 he was chased away again. He was probably murdered in 852, but by then he was long out of the picture. He was not the only Danish king murdered in the 9th century.

The father of the new king, Horik I, also suffered that fate in 810. Intrigues abounded among those in favor and against an alliance with the Franks. Thus, Rorik and Godfred returned to Denmark in 855, when King Horik I died. These vassals of Lothair tried to seize power there. This failed.

## **The Great-Moravian Empire**

In the 7th century, the Western Slavs settled in present-day Moravia and western Slovakia. The precise boundaries of Mojmir I's empire at the beginning of the 9th century are not known.

The monarch recognized the kingship of Louis the German and Moravia was converted to Christianity from Bavaria. There was also anti-Frankish sentiment in the area. He called in the help of the Byzantine Empire. The national Slavic Church was inspired by Orthodox Christian teachings in Constantinople. In 864, Louis wanted to bring Moravia back into line. The Franks were first expelled, but in 874 an agreement was reached, after

which Moravia gained a lot of territory. In the 10th century the empire fell apart and the principality of Hungary was created.

### **The Bulgarian Empire**

The Bulgarians came from Central Asia and, together with the local Slavic population, formed the first Bulgarian state in the Danube Delta in the 7th century. It stretched from the Adriatic Sea to present-day Ukraine. This Empire worked with the Byzantine Empire in the 8th century to keep the Arabs out of Europe. In fact, Europe was also protected by the Bulgarians during the second wave of the Migrations, by stopping the nomadic peoples from Asia. In 1018 it was captured by the Byzantine Empire, but in the 12th century the Bulgarians managed to break away and found a second empire.

### **The Byzantine Empire**

In 330, Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium, the city being renamed after him. From the 7th century onwards, Constantinople faced a triple threat: the Frankish Empire from the west, the Bulgarian Empire from the north and the Arab Empire from the east.

In the 8th and 9th centuries the Empire was weakened by internal religious strife and losses on the borders. However, it managed to maintain its important economic and military strategic position on the Bosphorus. A rift between Western and Eastern Christianity arose in 867. Under Emperor Basilus I, a new period of prosperity began in 876. The Empire came to an end in 1453 when the Ottoman Turks captured the city of Constantinople.

### **The Republic of Venice**

As a duchy, Venice was part of the Byzantine Empire after the collapse of the Roman Empire. It became a plaything between the Franks and the Byzantines in the 8th century, but in 841 it managed to become independent. The city's patricians elected a doge as supreme administrator. It possessed the largest trading fleet in the Mediterranean.

Venice was economically and militarily very strong and innovative. Through the trading city, Europe came to know exchange and credit banks, as well as accounting and bond markets. Shipbuilding was also innovative. The boom would continue until the 17th century.

## **The English Kingdoms**

From about 500 AD, with the arrival of various Germanic tribes, a number of Kingdoms developed in what is now England, including Essex, Sussex, Lindsey, Surrey, Middle Anglia, Hwicce, Mercia, Wessex and Northumbria. Wessex became the most important state under King Egbert (770-839). The Danes and Norwegians came in waves and seized power in large parts of England. They were opposed by Alfred the Great, who in 897 managed to gain control of almost all of England. His grandson Athelstan was probably crowned the first king of all England in 925.

## **The manufacture of stones in the Middle Ages**

The manufacture of stones has been around for centuries. The first handmade stone comes from Mesopotamia. The first stones were made there around 3200 BC, between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. They were formed from clay and dried in the sun. About 50 BC brick was manufactured in Rome. Stones were first found here in 13th-century Friesland. Over the next two centuries, Friesland would become the largest producer of brick. In the other parts of the Netherlands we not see ovens built before the 17th century, especially along the major rivers. The bricks were often fired in field ovens, in the open air. Such an oven consisted of two walls between which the stones were stacked. Then they were baked. The stokers threw the fuel through holes in the side. Baking the bricks could take several weeks. The fire was extinguished, after which the stones were removed from the oven.

## **Glossary:**

**Abbasids**, the ruling dynasty in the Islamic region of the Middle East and North Africa.

**A Coruña**, the city of La Coruna.

**Al-Andaluz**, the Umayyad Caliphate in Europe and North Africa.

**Al-khair An-Nur** means something like 'Have a good day to you too'.

**Almari**, Aelmere, Flevomeer. After the major breakthrough between the North Sea and Lake Flevo, it became the Zuiderzee in the 12th century and the IJsselmeer in the 20th century.

**Arg hul**, a type of clarinet originating from Egypt. It is made of two wicker pipes of unequal lengths tied together with colored thread.

**Beligrad**, Belgrade. At the time part of the Bulgarian Empire.

**Blótfeest**, a sacrificial festival of the Vikings, held in a longhouse.

**Buda**, Frankish border town on the west bank of the Danube. With the part of Pest on the eastern bank, it is now the capital of Hungary.

**Bonn**, became a Roman legionary fortress in 35 AD. built and grew in the following centuries into an important trading city on the Rhine.

**Bordeu**, Bordeaux.

**Brécia**, Brač is one of the islands off the Dalmatian coast.

**Cañadas**, wide strips of land in much of Spain, where flocks of sheep have been moving from summer to winter pastures for centuries. These strips may never be built on.

**Council of Nicaea (325)**, the Roman Christians or Trinitarians knew the Trinity. God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are identical and equal to each other. Arianism, which claimed that Jesus had only human character, was labeled a heresy.

**Dhu al-Hijjah**, the twelfth and last month of the Islamic calendar. It is the month of the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

**Dirhem**, the most important silver coin in the Umayyad empire since the 7th century. It had divisions of  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{8}$  and  $\frac{1}{16}$ .

**Dorestad**, the most important trading city in the coastal area. Located near Wijk bij Duurstede.

**Doumbek**, a North African drum of very ancient origin.

**Finisterre**, literally the end of the world. The westernmost point of Spain, which was already the end point of pilgrimages before Christian times.

**Fli**, river that ran from Lake Flevo to Borndiep between the isles of Terschelling and Ameland, where it flowed into the sea.

**Frisian freedom**, the period from 1234, when Floris IV of Holland died, to 1524, when Emperor Charles V of Habsburg was victorious in Friesland. In this period of power vacuum, local authorities take over the tasks of the ruler.

**Gaynat**, singing girls.

**Ghina**, secular art music within the Islamic world.

**Haralem**, Haarlem.

**Hallem**, the current Egmond-Binnen.

**Halle**, Swabian Hall, place east of Heilbronn.

**Hammam**, bathhouse.

**Heiligeloo**, Heiloo was a Germanic holy place. The preacher Willibrord built here around 720 AD. a church.

**Heimezen**, Heemskerk.

**Hoofdmanschap**, a local form of government during the period of Frisian freedom.

**Huda**, caravan song that developed as a lament on long journeys.

**Iberian Peninsula**, present-day Spain and Portugal.

**Ifriqua**, Africa.

**Isla Frisia**, part of West Friesland located in and near present-day Wieringen.

**Issa**, Vis is one of the islands off the Dalmatian coast.

**Jabal Tariq (the mountain of Tariq)**, the Strait of Gibraltar. It is named after the Moroccan army leader Tariq ibn Ziyad. In 711 he crossed from Morocco to Spain via Gibraltar with 7,000 Berber warriors.

**Jaca**, town at the foot of the Pyrenees. Here an army of mainly women is said to have defeated the Moors in a battle in the 8th century. This is re-enacted every year on the first Friday in May.

**Kerpina**, town located on the road from Cologne to Aachen.

**Kese**, a scrubbing glove for use in the hammam.

**Kinhem**, Kennemerland.

**Korcula**, island off the Croatian coast.

**Labineca**, a pirate town of the Narentines on the Dalmatian coast.

**Lausa**, town founded by Illyrians in the 7th century on the peninsula of present-day Dubrovnik.

**Lesina**, Hvar is one of the islands off the Dalmatian coast.

**Lex Frisorum**, the law of the Frisians, was written by Charlemagne around 800. Largely recorded and also applied in Kennemerland.

**Licata**, port city in Sicily.

**Limbon**, Limmen was probably founded by Willibrord or one of his followers. This makes it one of the oldest villages in North Holland.

**Linze**, Today's Linz in Austria.

**Litte**, Leiden.

**Lincesce**, under this name Linz am Rhein was first mentioned in 874.

**Malahi**, forbidden pleasure.

**Mansus**, the homestead of a serf farmer. This included as much land as could be cultivated by the farmer and his family.

**Maravilla**, the ship on which Kybbe sails from Malaga to Honfleur.

**Masa'u Al-khair**, a greeting that means Good Day.

**Mautern**, city in Austria, which was already an important trading place in Roman times (Favianus). After its conquest by Charlemagne in 803, it became the easternmost trading station in the Danube region.

**Mawali**, not Muslims from abroad.

**Medina**, Arabic word for city.

**Mezquita**, the Great Mosque of Cordoba.

**Mohammad I (Abû `Abd Allah Muhammad ben `Abd ar-Rahman)**, Caliph of Al-Andaluz from 852-886.

**Mozaraab**, a Christian in areas under Muslim rule.

**Mukhannathun**, male equivalent of the gaynat.

**Muladi**, from the Arabic muwallad, meaning adapted or mixed breed. This could be a Christian who had converted to Islam or the son of a mixed Christian-Muslim couple.

**Neuburg am Rhein**, was located on the right bank of the Rhine until 1590; due to natural changes in the streambed it finally came to lie on the left bank.

**Nubilin**, Arabic term of address.

**Na'ura**, water wheel.

**Numaga**, Nijmegen.

**Oed**, five-string instrument with a pear-like shape.

**Ulama**, Islamic legal scholars and scribes.

**The Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha)**, is celebrated on the tenth day of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah.

**Umayyad dynasty**, the ruling dynasty in the European Islamic area.

**Oncale, today's Unkel**, a town on the east bank of the Rhine, south of Bonn.

**Opaty, Apatin, city in present-day Serbia, located on the left bank of the Danube.**

**Pagus**, shire (The Kennemerland shire has not had any fixed border).

**Palatinate**, royal residence. There was a whole network of palaces throughout the Frankish Kingdom. The king/emperor traveled with his court from palace to palace.

**Parisi**, Paris.

**Petten**, here one of the first churches was built near holy sources.

**Pliska**, the capital of the Bulgarian Empire.

**Qurtuba**, Córdoba.

**Ramadan Mubarak** means blessed Ramadan.

**Ratisbon**, Regensburg.

**Rekere**, river that flowed into the sea near Egmond.

**Rhassoul**, type of clay used as a care product.

**Rheinbach**, city in Germany, first mentioned in 761. One of the longest Roman aqueducts, the Eiffel Aqueduct extended into the center.

**Ribe**, the oldest city in Denmark. Founded in 710 as a marketplace for Frisians and Norsemen.

**Riffians**, Berber Muslims originally from the Rif Mountains in Morocco.

**Salah**, one of the five most basic religious obligations of every Muslim. This ritual prayer is performed five times a day.

**Sama**, religious music.

**San Emeterio**, Santander. The city consisted of La Puebla Vieja and La Puebla Nueva, which were connected by a bridge over the Río de Becedo.

**Saraqusta**, Zaragoza.

**Saqaliba**, Arabic term for European slaves.

**Sceatta**, silver coin, which was in circulation from 650. Frisian traders brought the coin into circulation here. One of the mints was Dorestad.

**Schenk or mondschenk**, the medieval title of the noble who served his master's table. He was also responsible for the administration of part of the territory. The title disappeared in the Late Middle Ages.

**Segontia**, present-day Sigüenza in Spain. The city was founded in the 4th century BC. and then lay a little further away.

**Shatranj**, precursor of chess. It was popular among all walks of life and enjoyed great prestige. It reached a peak at the end of the ninth century, when the caliphs fanatically supported the game.

**Snebbe**, sharp metal point at the prow, with which a ship could be rammed.

**Torre de Hercules**, ancient Roman lighthouse in La Coruna. The tower is 55 meters high and is located on a hill, so it towers 120 meters above the sea. It is the oldest functioning lighthouse in the world.

**Tullina**, Tulln on the Danube. The residence of the Babenberg House.

**Turon**, the city of Tours in France.

**Umm al-walad**, concubine in a harem, who is given a special status after the birth of her child.

**Veligrad**, the power center of the Moravian Empire.

**Vellesan**, Velsen.

**Visigoths**, Germanic people who played an important role in the fall of the Roman Empire. In the early Middle Ages, the Visigoths had their own kingdom in Spain and southern France.

**Vlek**, settlement with urban characteristics. It is 'het vlek' as opposed to the modern meaning of 'de vlek'. 'De vlek' translates to 'the stain' I translated it alternately as village or town.

**Waterland**, swamps and wetlands between the current Markerwaard/IJmeer and Kennemerland.

**Wilaya**, administrative division under a governor, a Wali.

**Xaintonge**, (Double saintongeaise). Forests in southwestern France.

### **Measures and weights:**

A foot is a length of approximately 30 cm, divided into 12 inches (approx. 2.5 cm). A cubit is approximately 69 cm.

A dagwand is a surface area. It is the area that one farmer, helped by an ox for the plough, can plow in one day. This is approximately 330 square meters.

A morgen is the area that could be plowed in one morning. The land tax was paid every morning (the morgenbede).

A stoop is a volume of two and a half liters. It was made of earthenware or metal and had an ear. A stoop is divided into two mingelen. A pint is approximately half a liter.

### **Characters in this book:**

Abd al-Mutarrif, general of the northern Omajjaden army.

Abe, innkeeper in Vellesan and Floor's second husband.

Aeijolt, father of Kybbe and Pytske.

Aïsha, the umm al-walad in the harem of calyph Mohammad I.

Ali ibn Moehsin ach-Chammariy, Kybbe's friend. Scion of an important family in the Caliphate of Al-Andaluz..

Alubert Darra's aid after his return to Vellesan.

Álvaro, servant in the household of merchant Ghalib al-Nasiri.

Anna, the great love of Kybbe in Vellesan and daughter of Roef the innkeeper.

Anselm, archdeacon.

Arturo, helmsman on board the Maravilla.

Atze, son of Duna.

Barteld van Davetre, mayor of Vellesan.

Basilius, a Benedictine monk in Cologne.  
Benedikt, a monk at the Abbey of Saint Emmeram in Ratisbon.  
Berenice, novice at the monastery of Moissac.  
Bogdan, doumbek player who meets Anna in Pamplona.  
Bruno, chaplain in Vellesan, husband of Pytske.  
Burk, leader of a gang in the Grotenhoutbos near Turnhout.  
Carlos, Anna's traveling companion on the Camino.  
Cebren, oud player who meets Anna in Pamplona.  
Claes van Hoeleyde, meliores from Vellesan.  
Clauwaert, carpenter, builder and later brewer in Vellesan, father of Saartje.  
Cornelius, master builder of the new basilica in Cologne.  
Darra (Darragh) van Alveringem, mayor of Vellesan.  
David, Jewish doctor in Bordeu.  
Dieke, girl from the group of children during Kybbe's youth in Vellesan.  
Djurre, one of three young pilgrims traveling with Anna.  
Dragan, Moravian nobleman.  
Duna, sister of Marzoeta and brewer.  
Dusan, friend of Kybbe after they were enslaved in Sicily.  
Edfu, arghul player who meets Anna in Pamplona.  
Emran, carpenter in Vellesan.  
Fatima, friend of Anna in Parisi, daughter of Moussa Bennani.  
Fergus, brewer from the south.  
Floor, wife of Clauwaert and mother of Saartje. Later together with Abe.  
Fried, member of Burk's gang.  
Garbine, hostess of Anna in Toledo.  
Gerhard, friend of Kybbe in Cologne.  
Gijs, pimp in Dorestad.  
Gustav, one of Darra's armed men.  
Guy de Monclosse, Darra's aid.  
Haio, one of three young pilgrims traveling with Anna.  
Harald, a knight of Rorik and kidnapper of Anna.  
Idriss, mason in Vellesan.  
Ignatius I, Patriarch of Constantinople from 847-858 and from 867-877.  
Inaya, Anna's friend in Córdoba.  
Jabik, boy who spies for Guy.  
Jannes, cousin of Clauwaert and hunter.  
Joukje, girl from the group of children during Kybbe's youth in Vellesan.  
Joshua, son and assistant of the Jewish doctor in Bordeu.  
Juraj, father of Nevena on the island of Korcula.  
Koos, resident of Dorestad.  
Krijn, one of the original villagers in Aeijolt's company, deaf.  
Kybbe, son of Aeijolt and Marzoeta, brother of Pytske.

Lucilla, sister who manages the herbarium of the Monastery of Moissac.  
Marzoeta, mother of Kybbe and Pytske, wife of Aeijolt and brewer.  
Moussa Bennani, merchant in Parisi, father of Fatima.  
Nef, member of Burk's gang.  
Nevena, young woman who helps Kybbe on the island of Korcula.  
Oeds, free farmer. Neighbor of Claes van Hoeleyde.  
Pytske, daughter of Aeijolt and Marzoeta, sister of Kybbe, wife of Bruno, mother of Stilgar.  
Riuum, one of the original villagers in Aeijolt's company.  
Robertus, brother of Gerhard, monk in the monastery of Cologne.  
Roef, innkeeper and father of Anna.  
Rorik, count in Frisia and therefore also lord of Kinhem.  
Saartje, daughter of Floor and Clauwaert.  
Sahin, Moorish merchant in Dorestad.  
Sake, Frisian merchant.  
Sigmund, one of the pilgrims Anna meets in Angoulême.  
Simon van Litte, church builder in Vellesan.  
Ssani, one of the singing girls Anna meets in Pamplona.  
Steinar, knight in the service of Count Rorik, captor of Pytske and father of Stilgar.  
Stilgar, son of Pytske and the Viking Steinar.  
Sven, Danish master builder.  
Tamu, one of the singing girls Anna meets in Pamplona.  
Tatwin, abbot of the monastery in Cologne.  
Ulbo, one of three young pilgrims traveling with Anna.  
Wolfsfroyde, chaplain in Vellesan.  
Yago, hunter, poacher and tout in Córdoba.  
Yakini, one of the singing girls Anna meets in Pamplona.  
Yasmia and Amirah, two daughters from the Arab family that hosts Anna in Poitiers.

### **Historical figures:**

Abd ar-Rahman I (?-732), emir and leader of the Moorish army in Spain, lost the battle of Poitiers in 732 AD.  
Abd ar-Rahman II (792-852), Emir of Cordoba.  
Alfonso II (c.760 – 842), king of Asturias.  
Alfred the Great 848/49-899, king of Wessex and of the Anglo-Saxons from 871-899.  
Alfried, bishop of Utrecht (ca.867-879).

Al-Khwārizmī (Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī c.780 – c.850), Persian scholar who wrote influential works on mathematics, astronomy and geography.

Al-Mu'tazz (847-869), Abbasid caliph.

Bardas (?-866), uncle and counselor of Emperor Michael III of Byzantium.

Basileios I (827-886), emperor of the Byzantine Empire. Under his reign the Slavic world came under the firm grip of Byzantine Christian culture. He restored imperial authority on the Dalmatian coast and in southern Italy and extended his influence in Asia to the upper Euphrates.

Boniface (675-754), Anglo-Saxon missionary and bishop in the Frankish Empire. Killed near Dokkum.

Cyril, inventor of the Cyrillic script in which the Bible was translated into Slavic (c.827-869).

Eparchius of Angoulême (?-581), hermit at Angoulême, abbot.

Ethelred I (c. 837–871), king of Wessex and Kent from 865 to 871.

Giselbert I, count in the Maasgouw and the Lommegouw (ca. 825-885).

Godfred Haraldson, cousin of Rorik Yngling.

Gunthar (?-873), Archbishop of Cologne.

Hadrian II (792-872), Pope and successor of Nicholas I.

Hrabanus Maurus (780-856), Archbishop of Mainz, Abbot of Fulda and leading scholar. Wrote, among other things, *De laudibus sanctae crucis*, the well-known Pentecost hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*. His work was so appreciated that he was given the title *Praeceptor Germaniae*: 'Teacher of Germania'.

Halfdan Ragnarsson (?-877), one of the three brothers who invaded Britain with the Great Pagan Army from 865.

Hunger (?-866), Bishop of Utrecht (854-866).

Ioannes VIII, Pope in Rome in 872 and died there in 882.

Ivar the Boneless (794-873), one of three brothers who invaded Britain with the Great Pagan Army from 865.

James the Greater (?-44), one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ.

According to tradition, James preached in Spain after Jesus' death.

Charlemagne (768-814), emperor of the Frankish Empire.

Charles Martel (689-741), mayor of the Frankish Empire, wins in 732 AD. the Battle of Poitiers of the Moorish army.

Karloman (c.830-880), Duke of Bavaria, King of East Francia and Italy, eldest son of Louis the German.

Livinus van Gent (ca.580-657), an Irish monk, who left for Ghent and Zeeland after 600 to preach Christian doctrine there. He was canonized in 842 by Pope Gregory IV.

Louis the German (806-876), also known as Louis II or Louis the Bavarian, a grandson of Charlemagne and the third son of the succeeding Frankish emperor Louis the Pious. Duke of Bavaria and King of East Francia.

Lothair I (795-855), son of Louis the Pious and Ermengarde of Haspengouw, Roman emperor from 817 to 855.

Lothair II (c.835-869), King of Lorraine.

Methodius, translator of the Bible into Slavonic and Archbishop of Moravia (c.815-885).

Michael I (?-907), Knyaz of the Bulgarian Empire.

Michael III (840-867), emperor of the Byzantine Empire. He was murdered by his successor.

Mohammad I, in full Abû abd Allah Mohammad ben abd ar-Rahman (852–886), emir of Córdoba.

Muhammad ibn-Abi Amir (937-1002), the vizier of Caliph Hichâm II (976-1013). He gained all power in al-Andalus from 978 until his death in 1002.

Nicholas I, the Great (820-867), Pope in Rome.

Pepin, Count of Vermandland (Vermandois) (817-877).

Reinier I of Hainaut (850-915), son of Giselbert I.

Rastislav (846–870), prince of the Great Moravian Empire.

Richwin of Verdun (848-923), son of Giselbert I.

Rimbert of Turholt (830-888), Archbishop of Bremen-Hamburg (865-888).

Rorik Yngling (825-880), Count in Frisia.

Salan, Bulgarian Duke. After 896 his territory was occupied by Hungarians. The existence of the figure of Salan is not certain, because the historical source is not entirely reliable.

Svatopoluk I the Great, ruler of the Great Moravian Empire from 870 to 871 and from 871 to 894.

Tarik Ibn Zyad, Umayyad leader, who conquered Spain (711-718) after crossing with a large army from North Africa.

Vitruvius (c.85-20 BC), Roman soldier, architect and engineer.

**Contents:****Part 1**

The Vikings	p.4
The storm	p.10
Krijn's secret	p.17
The lawsuit	p.24
The spring miracle	p.30
The Mayery	p.36
The kidnapping	p.41
Anselm's confession	p.47
The brawl in the moor	p.55
The gathering	p.62
Jannes' plan	p.66

**Part 2**

On the road to Dorestad	p.71
The brothel	p.77
Liberation	p.84
The search for Moussa	p.90

**Part 3**

Meeting with a monk	p.98
Darra and Anselm	p.103
The pope	p.108
The flight	p.113
Overboard	p.119
The party river	p.125

**Part 4**

Departure from Parisi	p.130
The bear	p.136
Music	p.142
Yago	p.149
In the harem	p.154
The search with Inaya	p.157

**Part 5**

On the rivier	p.162
Ali	p.167
Nevena	p.171
Goodbye to Nevena	p.176
Shatranj	p.179
The conspiracy	p.184
A voyage by sea	p.188
The convent of Moissac	p.196

**Part 6**

War	p.205
The inn	p.230
Dorestad	p.216
Home	p.221
Return	p.226
The attack	p.231
The bum	p.235
Friends	p.241
Revenge	p.245
God's judgment	p.249

Changes in history made in this book	p.252
Frisia	p.253
The Emirate of the Umayyads	p.253
The Frankish Empire of Louis the German	p.254
The Middle Empire - Lorraine	p.254
Vikings in the Danish Kingdom	p.255
The Great Moravian Empire	p.255
The Bulgarian Empire	p.256
The Byzantine Empire	p.256
The Republic of Venice	p.256
The English Kingdoms	p.257
The manufacture of stones in the Middle Ages	p.257
Glossary	p.258
Measures and weights	p.262
Characters in this book	p.262
Historical figures	p.264